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EDITORIAL

Sustainable Academia: Open, Engaged, and Slow Science

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As we take stock of our new responsibilities to the *Journal of M@n@gement* and its various contributors, from authors to reviewers, editors, and readers, we also acknowledge the broader challenges that science and society face today.

Academic communities have multiplied critics about science's 'health' and ethics in general, or those of management and organization studies in particular. From the institutionalization of imposter syndrome in our fields (Bothello & Roulet, 2019) and a pandemic of burnout (World Economic Forum, 2019), to increased scientific misconducts and threats on scientific integrity (Honig et al., 2018) and to the inadequacy of commercial scientific publishing models with the view of science as a global public good (Willinsky, 2005), academics individually and collectively face major struggles that even connect to wider challenges like climate change or 'datafication'. In that context, we believe that we need to reflect upon, define, and identify means to achieve 'sustainable academia'.

By sustainable academia, we mean individual, collective, and institutional practices and behaviors that contribute to train researchers and produce scientific knowledge in a manner that is responsive to current and future generation needs, in a collective commitment to care for the 'Other', whether it be human or nonhuman.

As we walk into the steps of the inspiring teams of chief editors that have created and shaped *M@n@gement* as a purely free and open access scientific journal, we feel the need to express ourselves on this idea of 'sustainable academia'. We offer to outline the core values that will, hopefully, guide our mandate as co-editors-in-chief of the journal. No doubt that the pathways to sustainable academia are complex and multiple. The definition itself can be enhanced, and we hope it will be continuously and collectively developed and performed with in our community and beyond. But as a starting point, we have centered our editorial statement on the three pillars of 'sustainable academia': openness, engagement, and slow science.

Openness of science

In line with *M@n@gement*'s historical philosophy, we view science as a global public good that can and should be free and open access to all (Willinsky, 2005). Opening science is needed for at least two crucial reasons: science first and foremost gives us the ability to be critical about the world, that is, to challenge information, the way the world is presented to us by politics or media, and, more generally, the status quo. Second, science helps us to build a better world because we need to understand biology, sociology, mathematics, and organization theory to change things.

In parallel, capitalization of science is preventing people around the world, especially in emerging countries, to access knowledge, which is a profound tragedy. The current dominant regime in science, that is, the commercial model of scientific publishing, hides and controls knowledge behind paywall and produces several devious behaviors. Obviously, opening science means finding alternative funding models, to allow small journals or small publishing houses to survive. *M@n@gement* embodies the purest model of open access, the diamond one: it is free to submit, free to publish, and free to read (Daudigeos & Roulet, 2018). This would not be possible without the main financial support of the Association Internationale de Management Stratégique (AIMS) and that of the Institut National des Sciences Humaines et Sociales (CNRS InSHS). In a context where individual performance and its assessment are becoming more important than collectives and solidarity, we are extremely grateful for the ongoing support of our sponsors and our community.

Openness is not just about free accessibility. It is also about inclusiveness. *M@n@gement* has always been and will remain inclusive of different methods, theories, approaches, and voices in management and organization studies. More generally, we also call for more interdisciplinarity, a challenging endeavor to implement, but that is much needed for cumulative research that can draw on various disciplines' insights. Our

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new editorial team indicates, we hope, our attempt to remain inclusive and open.

This is also the reason why we moved away from Bepress, which was bought by Elsevier, and why we started a partnership with Open Academia, to use the open platform Open Journal System (OJS), developed by the open science initiative Public Knowledge Project (PKP). PKP is a multi-university-based initiative, a meta-organization some might say, developing free, open access software for academic communities to manage journals, conferences, monographs, and edited volumes, among others.

Making science open access and inclusive means not only that we seek to be read and used, but more broadly that we want to engage with society.

Engaged scholarship

By engaged scholarship, we mean that we view management and organization studies as forms of performative 'intervention' in the world (Aggeri, 2017). This might mean developing 'mission-oriented research' that looks at contemporary problems, like organizing alternatives to capitalism (Cruz, Alves, & Delbridge, 2017) or hybrid organizing (Battilana, 2018). But as some attempt to make higher education more precarious, we believe that research should not only retain its liberty but also possess the resources to explore a diversity of topics that might not directly seem 'relevant' (Carton & Mouricou, 2017). The 'projectification' of research and domination of invisible technologies (Berry, 1983) are destroying the possibility of serendipity, innovativeness, and long-term unexpected effects of organization studies.

In that context, academia can engage with society in a number of ways.

First, as management and organization scholars, we can challenge 'business as usual' both in practice (Wright & Nyberg, 2017) and in academia, including in teaching (O'Doherty, De Cock, Rehn, & Lee Ashcraft, 2013). Management and organization studies can no longer ignore major socio-environmental issues (see, e.g., Ouahab & Maclouf, 2019; Taupin, 2019). In that perspective, we can collectively explore and rethink concepts and theories, as the AIMS 2020 conference is doing with 'inclusive strategy'.

Second, by engagement we also mean dissemination towards broader audiences than just academia through conferences and peer-reviewed publications. We do not contend that the classic view of the 'ivory tower' (Baron, 2010) applies to all management and organization studies scholars. On the contrary, our colleagues and their initiatives show how engaged with society our community already is: the Conversation, social networks, podcasts like Spla$h or Talk about Organization, initiatives like En direct du labo and science coffees, practitioners, or general press, are all examples of the many forms of dissemination we collectively explore and use.

Third, by engaged scholarship, we ultimately mean caring for one another, whether it is master or doctoral students and their supervisors, colleagues, reviewers, and reviewees, etc. This more generally implies that for us publication is not the end but rather a brick in a research life. For us, research is about more than publishing peer-reviewed articles; it is also about engaging with society through action research and field work, or helping decision-makers, students, citizens, and managers making as informed, sustainable, and responsible decisions as possible. In that perspective, we see our tasks as editors to help give as much visibility to your works as we can. To that purpose, and due to the help of PKP and Open Academia, we will make your works available on several repositories, and we encourage you to do the same. However, as this requires time and energy, this also means that we need to develop slower research.

Slow science

If we need to achieve all this, in the purpose of fulfilling 'sustainable academia', then we want to put forward slow science and, more generally, sobriety as values. Slow science means taking time to write and publish high-quality papers, to value reflection, dialogue and polyphony, and variety of canals of dissemination, and also writing books, reading them, and synthesizing them in book reviews (Mintzberg, 2015). Slow science also means to us reducing the number of (generally extremely polluting and irresponsible) conferences we fly to (#OS4future) and finding alternative ways to connect with our communities, while reducing our footprint. This position is all the more relevant to defend since a recent study showed that air travel had little effect on academic success (Wynes, Donner, Tannason, & Nabors, 2019).

Sobriety, in science as in daily life, means to detoxify ourselves from overproduction and overconsumption. Let's take time to research, to read books, to talk, to walk, and to nap. This is also why *M@n@gement* is open to Unplugged articles that explore iconoclastic forms of showing and telling ideas.

Yet, sobriety in what we write implies no more and no less words than what is needed, and no more and no less theories and concepts than what is required. This also signifies using our resources with sobriety. In the case of *M@n@gement*, benevolent reviewers are our most valuable resource. We cherish the work you have done for the journal and the community, and we hope you will continue to conduct careful and constructive reviews. However, we cannot overuse our colleagues, so potential authors must understand that not all papers can be sent to review. Taking the time to develop a robust research question and design, to reflect, to write and edit a manuscript, to send it out to friendly reviews, and to

present it in a seminar or conference ensures that the first submission is of enough quality that it will be sent out for a first round of review.

Ultimately, slow science also requires us to invent new ways, less polluting ways, of conducting our work as academics. We acknowledge the complexity and inherent contradictions of achieving sustainable academia, and the fact that there is no simple solution does not mean that we should not thrive to do better.

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Opening Fields: A Methodological Contribution to the Identification of Heterogeneous Actors in Unbounded Relational Orders

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Abstract

Institutional scholarship studies how individuals coexist and interact with social structures. Organizations and inter-organizational relations within industries are a central focus of these studies. Hence, empirical research has so far largely relied on the observation of individual actors identified by their organizational attributes, and organizations identified by their industry characteristics. The flourishing of new types of social structures has sent an invitation to observe a broader range of actors beyond organizations *stricto sensu*, and to define the arena of interest beyond the boundaries of industry membership. However, in practice, these remain a favorite starting point of empirical investigations. In this article, we present a new method for the study of organizational fields that facilitates the identification of a large number and varied types of actors in a given field, provides a characterization of the relational structure of the field, and offers a content analysis on different sub-regions of the field. We test the method by replicating a previous study in the field of 'social impact of nonprofits', and show how it can contribute to operationalize mechanisms at play in the field. We conclude by noting that the principles of this method can extend beyond the dataset it is originally built on and facilitate a comparative approach to the study of fields. This contribution should enhance the value of the field as a theoretical construct by extending its operational reach.

Keywords: *Fields; Methodology; Curation; Classification; Online social networks*

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Organization studies experience some soul-searching regarding the central object of their investigations. The traditional focus on firm-centric organizations structured in industries is challenged by the explosion of network forms of organizations (Clegg, Josserand, Mehra, & Pitsis, 2016). In the digital age, a variety of new types of actors contribute to collective action, coordinating outside traditional organizational perimeters (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2017; Powell, Oberg, Korff, Oelberger, & Kloos, 2017). The concept of industry suggests a distribution of distinct roles (producers, distributors, and consumers) which have become more fluid in recent years (Furnari, 2020; Porter & Heppelmann, 2014). The relevance of organizations as a theoretical construct is put into question (Davis & Marquis, 2005), and the 'field' as an arena of heterogeneous actors (formal organizations or not) is found to offer an alternative point of theoretical focus, able to capture many types of collective actions (Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017). Fields characterize unbounded local social orders: the web of relations between heterogeneous actors considering one another in their daily activities (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; McAdam & Scott, 2005).

Regarding fields, we concur with Powell et al. (2017) that "a conceptual transition alone, however, does not suffice. We need new methods to accommodate a wider focus, which requires asking how to identify the members of nascent fields". "In order to capture the diversity and dynamism of an organizational field, the analyst must shift attention from the role of particular types of organizations to the interactions and relations among many participants" (Powell et al., 2017, p. 314). The authors offer an interesting methodological innovation in this direction; however, empirical studies in institutional scholarship

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while embracing the field as a useful theoretical construct still tend to follow methodological procedures, which:

(1) Focus on firm-centric organizational forms, not giving its full due to the heterogeneity of actors and organizational forms that the notion of field invites to accommodate;
(2) Take industries or sectors and listings of their members as a starting point to delineate the field and identify its members. This tends to preset boundaries on the number and types of actors that will be amenable to observation;
(3) Adopt a definition of actors based on their attributes which tends to hide away the relational structure that the notion of field should have contributed to put into view.[1]

In this study, we make a methodological contribution to the empirical investigation of fields by providing a procedure that seeks to make progress on the following three fronts:

(1) The procedure identifies actors of a given field without imposing any precondition on their organizational form, industry, or sector membership (the analyst can add any of these conditions but they are not built-in).
(2) Actors identified as relating to the field are drawn from a very large pool of candidates which encompasses a much wider scope than the field itself, and no hard limit is set on the population size of the field. This removes limits set on the perimeter of a field deriving from the use of sector-based or industry-specific data sets.
(3) The identification of actors of the field under consideration is based on their relations to a couple of preselected key actors presumed to be central to the field. This puts the relational dimension of the field to the fore.

With these three features, the methodology we develop would 'open the field' by lifting some limiting conditions to the empirical investigation of local social orders.

The methodology rests on the exploitation of the informational value of individual acts of classification for identifying the actors of a field of interest. Classification schemes have long been identified as central to the structuration of fields either as acquired dispositions to differentiate and appreciate (Bourdieu, 1984 [1976]), artistic classification systems producing genres (DiMaggio, 1987), contests (Rao, 1994), and academic forms of classification such as examinations (Bourdieu, 1996 [1989]) or rankings shaping the identity of business schools and the field they form (Dubois & Walsh, 2017; Wedlin, 2007).

The 2000s have witnessed a multiplication of online platforms delivering a vast array of goods and services, and an associated proliferation of mechanisms for the classification and curation of this content. "In 2017, Netflix offered over 8,000 movie and television titles, Apple offered 2.2 million 'apps,' Amazon offered 33 million fashion-related items, Etsy offered 35 million craft-related items, and Spotify offered 30 million songs". This abundance has caused "a shift in the relative importance from those who create products to those who curate products" (Jansson & Hracs, 2018, p. 1603). Curation can be performed by intermediaries (Jansson & Hracs, 2018; Saxton & Ghosh, 2016) and by the users of the platforms themselves. These classification acts have lasting and reinforcing effects:

> Classifications are tools in strategies of inclusion and exclusion: whom to relate to and whom to isolate. They symbolize and consolidate patterns of inclusion and exclusion because they transform them into identities, which are taken for granted later on. In this perspective, classifications reinforce patterns of relations, which reinforce the classifications thereupon. (De Nooy, 2003, p. 323)

When considered in the aggregate, these individual acts of curation could amount to 'social curation': the accumulation of personal acts of curation, far from creating a cacophony of categories and diverging judgments, could reveal local orders, products of the 'collective rationality' of their constituents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). An emerging literature in consumer culture, media, and communication is showing that social curation is "based on the culturally shared or collective understandings (ideas, norms, and values) that give meaning to and thus regulate the activity […], [individuals engaging in curation] reflect the social and cultural context in which they perform the activity" (Villi, Moisander, & Joy, 2012, p. 492). Collectively, a series of users who create lists of their peers are akin to *social curators of local orders*. They reveal and mirror prevalent perceptions on how different actors group into distinct webs of relations. This mechanism – curation acts by observers or participants leading to the characterization of a local order – lays the foundation of the method we develop to identify actors in fields. While the mechanism is of general applicability, we developed our approach using Twitter as a prime ground of investigation because it includes such a curation device. For this reason, our methodological contribution is presented with Twitter as a prime use case.

In the rest of the article, we proceed by presenting the specificities of the Twitter data set before detailing the procedure leading to the identification of actors in a given field.

[1] See Wooten and Hoffman (2017) for a list of empirical studies on fields, the vast majority of which fits this characterization.

We then demonstrate the effectiveness of the method by replicating and expanding on a previous study. We conclude by highlighting limits and perspectives for further research.

The case of Twitter lists: Engines for social curation

Twitter is a social media platform created in 2006, which enables its 326 million users to write and publish short messages ('tweets'). Twitter is an example of 'big data' application, with an average of 500 million tweets sent per day in 2014.[2] To make it manageable for any Twitter user to read a selection of tweets in this enormous stream of publication, a basic curation device provided by the platform allows users to choose which other users to 'follow', with effect to display the tweets of these users, not the rest. Academics have relied on this feature to infer communities of users based on their follower/followee connections (see, e.g., Menichinelli, 2016) but with limited generalizability because of strict restrictions of access to this 'who follows whom' type of data imposed by Twitter.

Another device offered by Twitter to facilitate the curation of tweets is a feature called a 'list'.[3]

Lists can be created by any user on Twitter, and they are used to group other users (and the tweets they publish) in a convenient way. This feature facilitates the categorization of users in sub-topics, which makes for an easier curation of content. Lists are characterized by a name (25 characters long maximum) and an optional description chosen by the creator of the list. Once a user has created a list, it can add to it any Twitter user (up to 5,000 users per list). The consent of the user is not required to add it to the list. Lists can be private or public. While the number of private lists is not known, there are enough public lists available for a large-scale analysis: as of 2011, close to 90 million public lists could be identified (Sharma, Ghosh, Benevenuto, Ganguly, & Gummadi, 2012).

At the aggregate level, lists happen to offer an unintended service: taken together, they are akin to a curation device effectively delineating millions of Twitter users in different groups and their associated topics. A study in computer science has shown that lists reveal rich and diverse sets of highly specialized and focused topical groups, spanning a variety of niche topics, at scale. This informational value could be leveraged to identify the topics of expertise of a given individual by scanning the names of the lists it is a member of. Lists also help identify top experts for a given issue by counting the Twitter users most frequently added to lists related to the topic (Bhattacharya et al., 2014). In this study, we leverage the informational value of lists in a novel way for the purpose of identifying the actors of a field.

Data collection

The point of collecting data and storing it in a database, rather than accessing it directly from Twitter when performing the different steps of the methodology detailed below, is to speed up computation time. Access to Twitter data in large volume is conducted through Twitter's API, which is throttled – meaning that only a limited amount of Twitter data can be retrieved over a given period.[4] Fetching user profiles or list memberships 'on the fly' from the Twitter API (when the procedure is launched) would lead to running times lasting for weeks or months. Taking the preliminary step to collect user profiles, lists and list memberships allow our procedure to run in minutes, not days.

As of January 2019, 53,150,075 full user profiles were collected and stored in ElasticSearch (a database specialized in the storage, indexing and querying of textual records). At the same time, we collected 3,692,097 Twitter lists, also available through the Twitter API. We also store information on the memberships of users in these lists, using a Redis database which is very efficient at storing and querying key-values.

Methodology: A six-step procedure for the identification of actors in fields

The objective of this procedure is to identify actors of a field without imposing restrictions on the type or number of actors to be considered while putting the relational structure and contents of the field in full view. The procedure relies on the classification of Twitter users in lists by fellow users, and is summarized as follows:

(1) Pick a small number of Twitter accounts ('seeds') which should be actors with a high relevance and visibility in the field of interest.

2. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/twitter-announces-third-quarter-2018-results-300737803.html https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2014/the-2014-yearontwitter.html

3. https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-lists

4. In the following, we use interchangeably 'Twitter account', 'user profile', 'user account', and 'account' for short to designate a person's or organization's account on Twitter. An Application Programmatic Interface (API) allows distant computers to connect and exchange information. Major service providers such as Twitter create APIs to facilitate and control access to their data in higher volumes, with more precise queries and at greater speed than a human could possibly download via a website. The documentation of the Twitter API is available at https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/api-reference-index. We used Twitter4J to connect to the Twitter API. The table of 'rate limits' on different endpoints of the Twitter API is available at https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/basics/rate-limits.html

(2) For each seed, a network of similar Twitter users is identified because they are members in the same lists.
(3) 'Denoising' of the seed networks: Removing Twitter users which tend to be less strongly connected to the seed than the average.
(4) The networks obtained from each seed are merged: The outcome is a larger network, providing a vision of the actors populating the field and its surroundings.
(5) Visual exploration: Using an algorithm developed in the field of information visualization and network analysis, the network is laid out as a map to facilitate its interpretation.
(6) Sub-regions of the field are identified based on the patterns of connectivity between actors (actors densely connected with each other form a sub-region). Content analysis is performed on each sub-region to identify the topics of interest characterizing the actors of this sub-region. The analyst decides which sub-region(s) characterize the field, and which other sub-regions are better qualified as neighbors to the field. Sub-regions deemed to capture the field of interest can then become the new focus of analysis, while surrounding regions are ignored in subsequent steps.

The analyst iterates on step 6 until all sub-regions in view are judged to be constitutive of the field of interest.

Steps 2 to 4 are performed with custom code written in Java and Python for the purpose of this study, and made available publicly (See Appendix I). Step 5 is conducted with Gephi, an open-source desktop software for graph visualization and exploration. Step 6 is conducted with Gephi (for the identification of sub-regions) and with custom code (for the content analysis), See Appendix I.

Selection of 'seed' Twitter accounts

The departing point for the identification of actors of a field is the selection of a small number of Twitter accounts which are deemed to be core participants in the field (see Powell et al., 2017 for a similar seeding procedure). The outcome of the analysis would be sensitive to the selection of seeds, since they determine the discovery of similar Twitter accounts through an iterative process (see next step). Sensitivity to seed selection is an assumed choice in the design of the method. It allows for the reproducibility of the procedure (select identical seeds to reproduce results), and preserves room for human expert judgment and exploration (select different seeds to explore the same field from a different vantage point). In any case, sensitivity is mitigated by the fact that since several seeds are selected, the associated groups of actors would scan the field of interest from many angles, leading to a global overview relatively independent from a single seed (see below for a sensitivity analysis on a given case).

Twitter accounts used as seeds can be of different sorts: individuals, organizations, brands, etc. This richness of types of actors fits well with the diversity of actors in fields, which include organizations but not only: we can remain "agnostic about whether it comprises organizations, individuals, or other combinations of actors" (Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 337). While there is a great degree of freedom at this step, a number of guidelines should be followed:

(1) The selection of seeds should be made by a group of experts of the field of interest: Participants or observers of the field with a sufficiently broad outlook that they can arrive at a consensus on a group of core participants.
(2) The seeds should be at least moderately active on Twitter, or enjoy some notoriety so that other Twitter users would actually include them in the lists they create (from experience, a rough estimate would be that a seed should belong to at least a few dozens of lists).
(3) The seeds should be 'spread apart', meaning that they should not be too similar in their identities so that each of them relates to different kinds of actors expected to populate the field. This helps to capture the field in its diversity.
(4) The seeds should be specific to the field of interest to the largest extent possible: Since they condition the discovery of the rest of the field through their similarities with other Twitter accounts, seeds which have unfocused, multifaceted roles would lead to a discovery of a corresponding large diluted network. For instance, choosing Arnold Schwarzenegger (@Schwarzenegger) as a seed for the analysis of the US Republican Party is not judicious as he would probably not only lead to connections with Republicans but also with Hollywood actors and users with interests in bodybuilding. Similarly, while picking an organization as a seed for the analysis of an industry (say, perfumes), the Twitter account of the dedicated branch should be chosen (e.g. @CDiorParfums for Dior perfumes), rather than the Twitter account of the group (@Dior), to enhance the focus.

Discovery of Twitter accounts related to seeds

Each seed is used to identify Twitter accounts which relate to it. Two Twitter accounts are said to be related if they are registered in a number of lists in common. In other words, two Twitter accounts are connected if several third parties (the creators of lists) had a reason to register them together in the

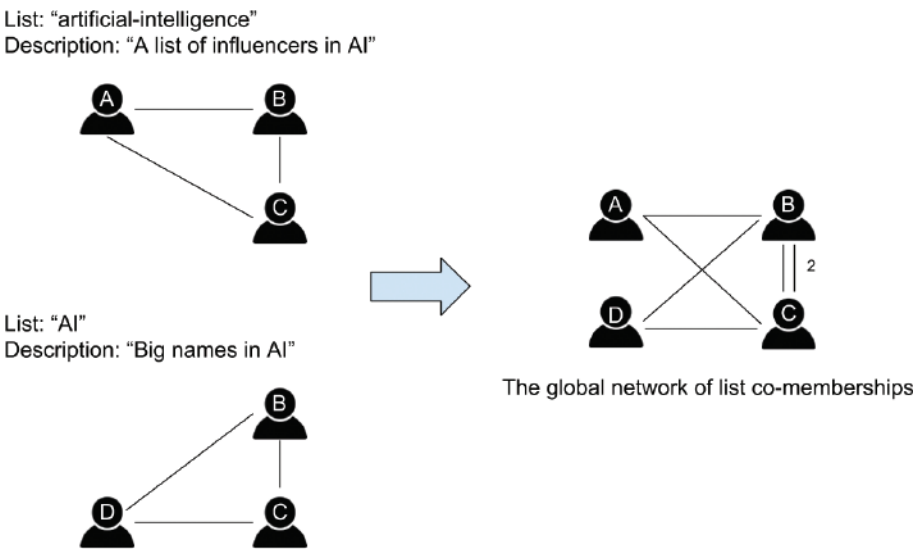

Figure 1. Using lists to discover Twitter users related to seed accounts. We consider the lists of which the seed user (here, 'B') is a member. Here, B is a member of lists 'artificial-intelligence' and 'AI'. We collect all members of these two lists (A, B, and C for the list 'artificial-intelligence' and B, C, and D for the list 'AI'). We consider that a connection exists between any two Twitter accounts if they belong to the same list. If they belong to several lists in common, then the weight ('strength') of their connection increases (if two Twitter accounts belong to two lists in common, the weight of their connection is equal to 2, etc.). Here, B and C belong to two lists in common, so the weight w of their connection is equal to 2. If we set $k = 2$ (see the main text), then only actors B and C and the link between them will be included in the field

same lists. Our methodology remains blind to the reasons leading to the inclusion of two Twitter accounts in the same list. However, if any two Twitter accounts are repeatedly picked together in lists by third parties, the odds are that they relate in some sense. We proceed in the following two steps:

(1) The lists to which the seed belongs are collected (this information is in our data set). Only lists with less than 500 members are considered, as we established through trial and error that lists with a larger membership did not have a strong specificity in relation to the topic of the list.[5] Then all the Twitter users who are members of these lists are examined. These Twitter users are considered further in the analysis if they have at least k lists in common with another Twitter account (see Figure 1), k being a parameter set by the analyst.

Through trial and error, we set a minimum threshold of $k = 3$: two Twitter accounts need to belong to at least three lists in common for a relation between them to materialize. A lower threshold would add noise (two users might be included in a couple of lists in common, without this reflecting a strong similarity of interests so that connecting them would be misleading), while a larger threshold would unnecessarily ignore meaningful connections. Also, any user with less than k lists in common with the seed user will not be included. Some seeds belong to a large number of lists, which could lead to the discovery of a very large number of users (up to millions). For this reason we cap the number of lists retrieved per user (default value: 100 lists), keeping in priority the lists the user has in common with the seed and also cap the number of users included at this step (default maximum value: 10,000 users).

(2) We repeat this procedure for each Twitter account n identified in the previous step. The lists which n belongs to are identified, and the members of these lists are collected (default capping parameters at this stage are 100 lists per user and 100,000 users). These members need to have at least k lists in common with n to be included. A relation is formed between n and each of these members, with the weight $w \geq k$ reflecting the number of lists of which they are joint members.

The result is a network with two rings of users around the seed user (see Appendix 1 for the code). The first ring contains Twitter users with at least k co-memberships in lists with the seed. Similarly, members of the second ring share at least k lists

[5] Lists with thousands of members tend to be created by the so-called 'bots', not humans. A bot is a computer program running autonomously, following the instructions given to it by its designer. A bot could create a list and follow the instruction to 'include in the list any Twitter account which mentions a given hashtag in their tweets'. Lists curated this way tend to include a large number of Twitter accounts with no strong meaningful relations between them.

in common with a member of the first ring. The identities of the users included in the network, and the patterns of their relations, should carry valuable information about the field from which the seed was selected, since the users are connected by relations representing at least *k* numbers of lists in common.

Denoising the seed networks

The actors identified from the seed and their relations exhibit different patterns of connectivity: some actors are more distant than others from the seed. Actors which are densely connected to the seed are more likely to be relevant to the field because dense connections mean that a relatively larger number of creators of lists have placed the seed Twitter account and these other Twitter accounts in the same lists. At this step, we aim at keeping the actors most connected to the seed in the results, and removing the actors which are less connected to the seed.[6] We simulate a large number of two-step random walks starting from the seed and weighted by the strength of the relation (the strength is the number of lists of which two users are joint members). Then we compute for each actor the number of times a random walk has passed through it. We remove those actors that belong to less paths than the average number of visits of such paths per actor. The result is a reduced group made up of actors which should have the strongest connections with the seed (see Figure 2). Each actor is characterized by an 'intensity' score measuring its distance to the seed: the previous computation is equivalent to computing the traffic of a stationary random walk from the seed (see Appendix A).

Merging the actors identified from each seed, into a single network representing the entire field

Seeds were selected as departing points for the discovery of the actors in the field and their connections. *n* seeds lead to the identification of *n* seed networks, which can now be merged into a single network representing the field of interest. Networks produced from each seed should presumably have many actors in common: since the seeds were chosen to belong to a common field of interest, their networks have a strong probability of overlapping. Hence, we expect that joining the networks of all seeds should produce a connected network (networks should not be 'islands' separated from each other). We define an 'intensity' score for each actor in the global network, corresponding to the sum of the values of the intensity scores in each seed network where this actor was present. Hence, the resulting intensity score for an actor represents a measure of its proximity to the seeds.

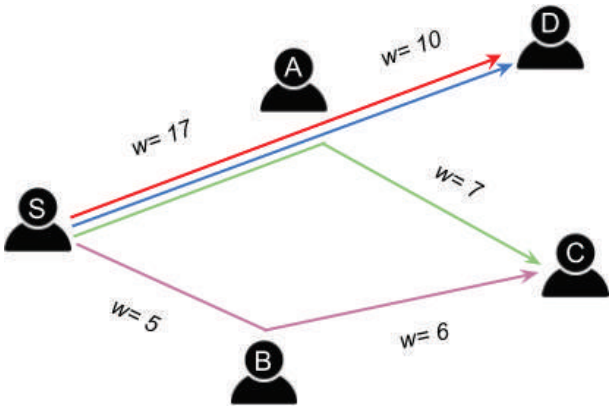

Figure 2. An illustration of the denoising process. **S** is the seed Twitter account. **A** and **B** are actors with lists in common with the seed. **C** and **D** are actors with lists in common with actors **A** and **B**. Colored straight lines are paths of length 2 ('two hops') starting from **S**. *w* is the number of lists in common between any two actors. **A** sits on three paths of length 2 from the seed. **B** belongs to one path, **C** belongs to two paths, and **D** belongs to two paths. The average number of paths is two. In the denoising process, **B** is removed as it belongs to less paths than the average. **C** and **D**, even if they are further of **S** than is **B**, are not removed in the process

Visual representation

The resulting network can take a pictorial form of representation following the principle that the visual exploration of data sets is an efficient tool for the detection of complex, unanticipated relations and patterns (Tukey, 1977), especially for large unstructured data sets (LaValle, Lesser, Shockley, Hopkins, & Kruschwitz, 2011). Beyond their usefulness to direct users, visualizations travel farther while keeping compact and intact the matter they purport to report about ('immutable mobiles'; Latour, 1986; Maire & Liarte, 2018). The representation is performed with Gephi (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009), a software that improves significantly on the previously developed packages (such as Pajek and UCINET's NetDraw) for the visualization and exploration of large networks (see Heijmans, Heuver, Levallois, & van Lelyveld, 2016 for a comparison):

(1) The network is 'flattened' in two dimensions to be represented as a map. Actors are positioned following the logic that connected actors tend to get close to each other, while actors without a connection spread apart. The computation of the position for all pairs of actors is performed by the ForceAtlas2 algorithm implemented in Gephi (Jacomy, Venturini, Heymann, & Bastian, 2014).
(2) The size of the actors can be scaled to represent the intensity score of the actor.

[6] See Powell et al. (2017) for a similar step in their procedure, where they 'remove noise' from the list of actors they initially collect. In practice, they rely on the qualitative assessment of five members of their research team to remove irrelevant actors.

(3) The name of each actor (the Twitter account) can be displayed directly on the graph, or can be inspected by clicking on the actor.

Taken together, these visual cues provide a view on the relative relevance of the actors for the field (size of the actor), on their relation (distance between any two actors on the map), and the structure of the field (number, size, and relative positioning of sub-regions).

Identifying sub-regions in the field with network and content analysis

The steps of the procedure followed so far have resulted in a list of actors which entertain some relation to the seeds, in reason of the number of lists of which they are joint members. A fine characterization of field should, however, go beyond and explore the relational structure of the field – who relates to whom? Can the field be decomposed in sub-regions, and how are they positioned relative to one another? The identification of sub-regions consists in delineating groups of actors that tend to be relatively more connected to one another than to the rest of the actors. Interestingly, this definition of sub-regions in network analysis converges with a definition of organizational fields, which includes the condition that "participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" (Scott, 1995, p. 56). This step can be performed with the 'Louvain' algorithm (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008), which relies on connection patterns between pairs of actors to proceed to the identification of sub-groups of actors. This algorithm leaves open the number of sub-regions to be detected (the analyst does not predetermine the final number of sub-regions the algorithm must identify). A parameter allows for tuning how selective the algorithm should be for a group of connected actors to be identified as a sub-region. We do not modify the default value of this parameter. The algorithm partitions the entire network in disjoint sub-regions, guiding the analysis on the structure of the field. The number and relative sizes of the sub-regions inform on the heterogeneity of the field: is it made up of many separate sub-regions or, at the other extreme, is it a densely connected whole? The exploration of these questions is facilitated by the visual representation of sub-regions: actors of the network (Twitter accounts) belonging to the same sub-regions can be painted with the same color, which draws the field into a patchwork of sub-regions.

The identity of each sub-region can be further explored with content analysis performed on short profile descriptions ('Twitter biographies') (255 characters or less) which users write to describe themselves on Twitter. We conduct a series of classic text-cleaning operations (such as removal of punctuation signs) and more complex operations specifically drawn from quantitative content analysis (which tends to merge with computational linguistics; Mitkov, 2005):

(1) Language detection on profile descriptions (is the Twitter profile of a user written in English, French, etc.). This improves the efficacy of text-cleaning and also offers the possibility to identify the most frequent terms *per language*, *per sub-region*, which preserves a view on the diversity of languages in a sub-region, instead of considering only the most represented ones.
(2) We detect sequences of words in user profiles in order to preserve multi-word expressions which can carry richer meaning than isolated terms.[7]

These operations prepare for a final step, which is conceptually straightforward but gives rich results: which terms appear most often in the biographies of the Twitter accounts in a given sub-region? To illustrate the usefulness of the detection of sub-regions, content analysis, and of the methodology in general, we apply it to an empirical case drawn from a published study.

Gauging the methodology: A test case

To test the merits of this method, we use it to explore the issue field of 'social impact' in the US context, studied recently by Powell et al. (2017).

Powell et al. (2017) use a website-crawler technology to draw a network of organizations active in the issue field of 'social impact' (mostly related to nonprofit organizations), which is in a state of proto-institutionalization. The authors draw a parallel between the "highly fluid system" that is an organizational field in its early stages of formation, with the "flow of ideas and concepts between disparate domains", which is the hallmark of the World Wide Web, "allowing broad and open access to multiple sources of information" (Powell et al., 2017, p. 308). The authors start by drawing a list of 36 'seeds': core participants in the field, engaged in the

[7] These sequences of words are called '*n*-grams'. We develop an example of an n-gram to illustrate the usefulness of the notion. If considering only single terms within a text, the expression 'consultant for nonprofits' would be processed and turned into 'consultant, for, nonprofits': the three terms would be considered independently from each other and the sequence of the three terms would be lost in the analysis. Considering tri-grams (n = 3) allows the text-processing algorithm to consider the frequency of sequences of terms, up to three terms: 'consultant for nonprofits' could then be counted as a single entity and its frequency in a text could be measured. Introducing *n*-grams in the analysis is not trivial to implement, as a number of language-specific rules must be introduced in the algorithm to rule out frequent but irrelevant *n*-grams to appear in the results (e.g. 'consultant for' and 'for nonprofits' in the above example).

assessment of the performance of nonprofits. Then the crawler (a computer program) collects the outgoing hyperlinks from the respective websites of these 36 participants in two iterations. After removing noise (irrelevant websites such as Google, software providers, newspapers, etc.), due to a qualitative assessment of 1,394 websites produced by the crawl, the resulting sample comprises 369 entities (with 32 unidirectional connections on average), which they categorize along their institutional forms, with nonprofit organizations being divided into subcategories (foundations, social movements, etc.). The resulting map offers a list of actors and a view on their relations. Based on the structure of linkage (outdegree, indegree, and reciprocal degree), the organizations populating the field are categorized in three roles in relation to social impact: proselytizing (large outdegree relative to indegree), convening (relatively large indegree), and strengthening (large number of reciprocal links relative to incoming links). We now proceed to mapping the same field with the methodology laid out above.

Mapping the field of social impact of nonprofits

Powell et al. (2017) identified 369 actors in the field of social impact. We start by identifying the Twitter accounts of these 369 actors to evaluate the overlap with the actors that our method will identify. Lacking access to the original data set listing these 369 actors, we referred to Figures 4a–d of the published study where the names of the actors appear, without being all legible. Through visual inspection, we could retrieve 254 names out of 369 appearing in the figures. For these 254 names, we identified by manual search the corresponding websites and the 227 corresponding Twitter accounts (e.g. the name 'sunfoundation' referred to the website https://sunlightfoundation.com/, from which we matched the Twitter account @sunfoundation). This shows that for the field of 'social impact' at least, Twitter is a communication channel used by virtually all actors. We then queried our database for these 227 Twitter accounts: 100% of them were present. This signals that the database we created, though it contains a minority of existing active Twitter accounts (estimated at 326 million accounts in late 2018[8]), is correctly focused on accounts of at least a moderate visibility.

Step 1 of our methodology for identifying the participants to a field and their relations consists in selecting seeds relevant to the field. Since the web-crawling methodology of Powell et al. (2017) is similarly based on a seeding mechanism, we would naturally reuse the 36 actors with which they had seeded their analysis. The full list of seeds is not shared in the study, except for seven seeds mentioned to illustrate the diversity of actors chosen as seeds: *3ie Impact*, *Charity Watch*, *GiveWell*, *Rockefeller*, *Gates*, *Keystone Accounting* and *Monitoring and Evaluation News* (Powell et al., 2017, p. 315). We use these seven actors as seeds.

We run steps 2 to 4 of the procedure, which produces a list of 30,575 actors and 1,098,110 connections between them: to compare with the 369 actors and close to 4,800 connections identified by Powell et al. (2017). This operation takes less than 2 h to run on a moderately powerful server (4 cores, 64 Gb of RAM). This resulted in 127,740 Twitter lists, in the sense that a list contributed if it includes two members appearing in the final list of actors. These lists were authored by 88,184 different Twitter users, 3,633 of which are present among the list of actors of the field.

Among the 227 accounts of the Powell et al. (2017) study that we could identify and match in our database, 125 (55%) are included in the map produced by our procedure. A sensitivity analysis (see Appendix B) shows that initiating the procedure with any two seeds drawn out of the seven would suffice to discover 40–50% of accounts identified by Powell et al (2017). This shows a saturation at probably 3–4 seeds: no new account is discovered by adding new seeds from a similar topic. Conversely, removing the actors discovered through any single seed does not remove any actor from the entire network, meaning that every account (actor) in the result is discovered by at least two seeds. This is an indication of the robustness of procedure to alternate selections of seeds for a given field.

Step 5 of the procedure consists in drawing a visualization of the aggregate network. In this first visualization, we color and label the seven seeds to get a sense of their placement relative to the entire network (Figure 3).

Next, plotting the 125 Twitter accounts corresponding to the actors identified by Powell et al. (2017) gives a sense of similarities between the two methods (Figure 4):

We observe that the accounts from Powell et al. (2017) lay near the center of the network and in a given region (south of Figure 4), with a few of them at the periphery. The Force Atlas layout algorithm tends to place densely connected actors near the center of the visual, but it does not follow that actors in the periphery are less relevant to the field. It might be that the core/periphery structure denotes differences in roles, for example, with generalists in the center and specialists at the periphery. We investigate these questions in step 6 of our procedure, where the detection of sub-regions and content analysis assist in understanding the inner structure and identification of the field.

Running the Louvain algorithm on the network produces 30 sub-regions. For each sub-region, we perform a content analysis to arrive at a list of the 10 most frequent terms used in the Twitter biographies of the actors in the sub-region in order to identify the key topics characterizing each sub-region (see Appendix I for a link to the code). We draw the map with

[8] https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/

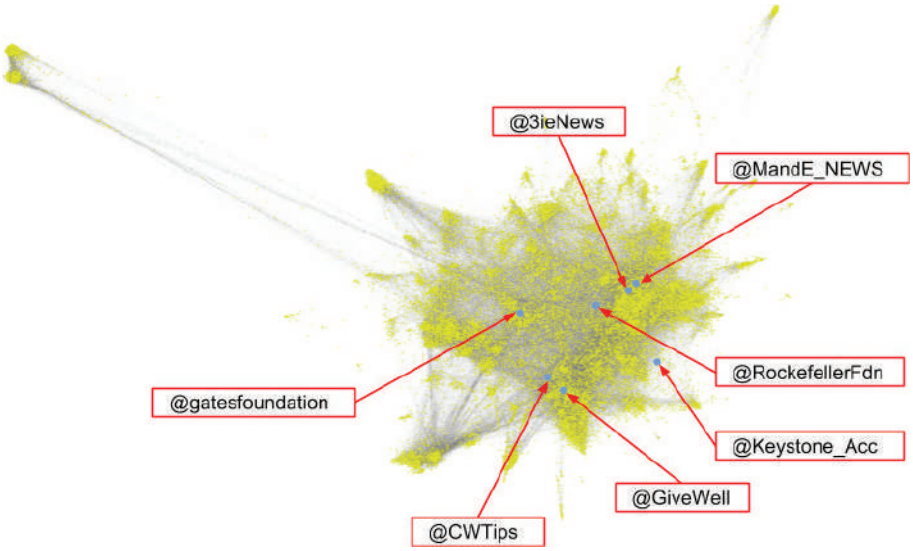

Figure 3. The 30,575 actors identified by our procedure (connected by 1,098,110 relations). These actors were identified by using seven seed accounts mentioned in Powell et al.'s (2017) study which relate to the issue field of 'social impact'

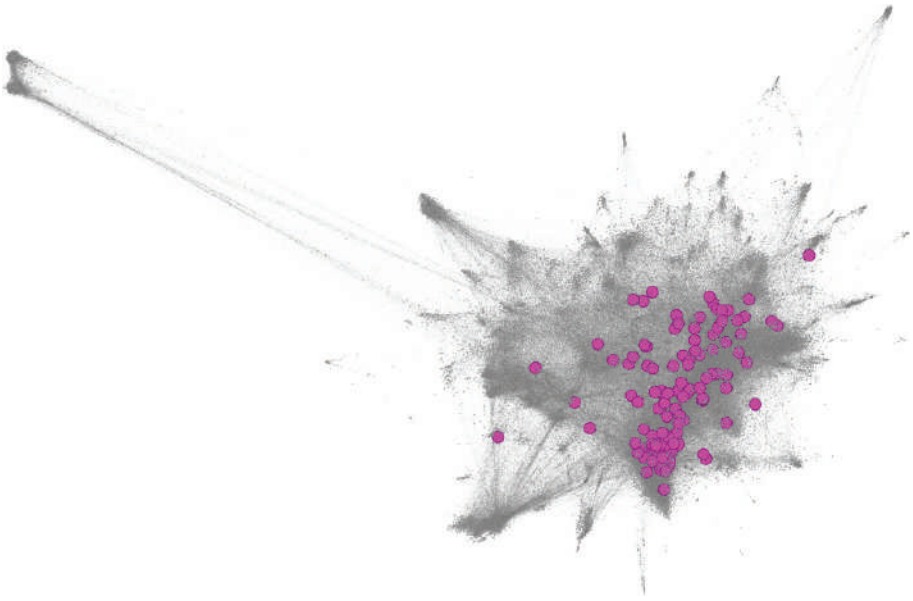

Figure 4. The 125 actors in the field of social impact retrieved from Powell et al. (2017). Colored in pink on the map

sub-regions shown in different colors, with the most relevant sub-regions and the result of their content analysis shown in Figure 5 (see Appendix C for an oversized version). A complete list of sub-regions and their 10 most frequent terms can be found in Appendix D.

This analysis invites to question the identity and boundaries of the issue field 'social impact of nonprofits'. One of the sub-regions (sub-region '27') seems directly relevant to the issue: 'Actors supporting nonprofits'. The biographies of the Twitter accounts of this sub-region refer to 'nonprofit', 'charity', 'community', 'foundation', 'philanthropy', 'change', 'support', 'fundraising', 'impact', 'uk', and 'organization'. Contrary to the rest of the sub-regions of the map, each of which focuses on the type of issue that nonprofits seek to alleviate, actors in this sub-region pursue the goal to help other organizations to achieve their goals. This resonates with the definition of an

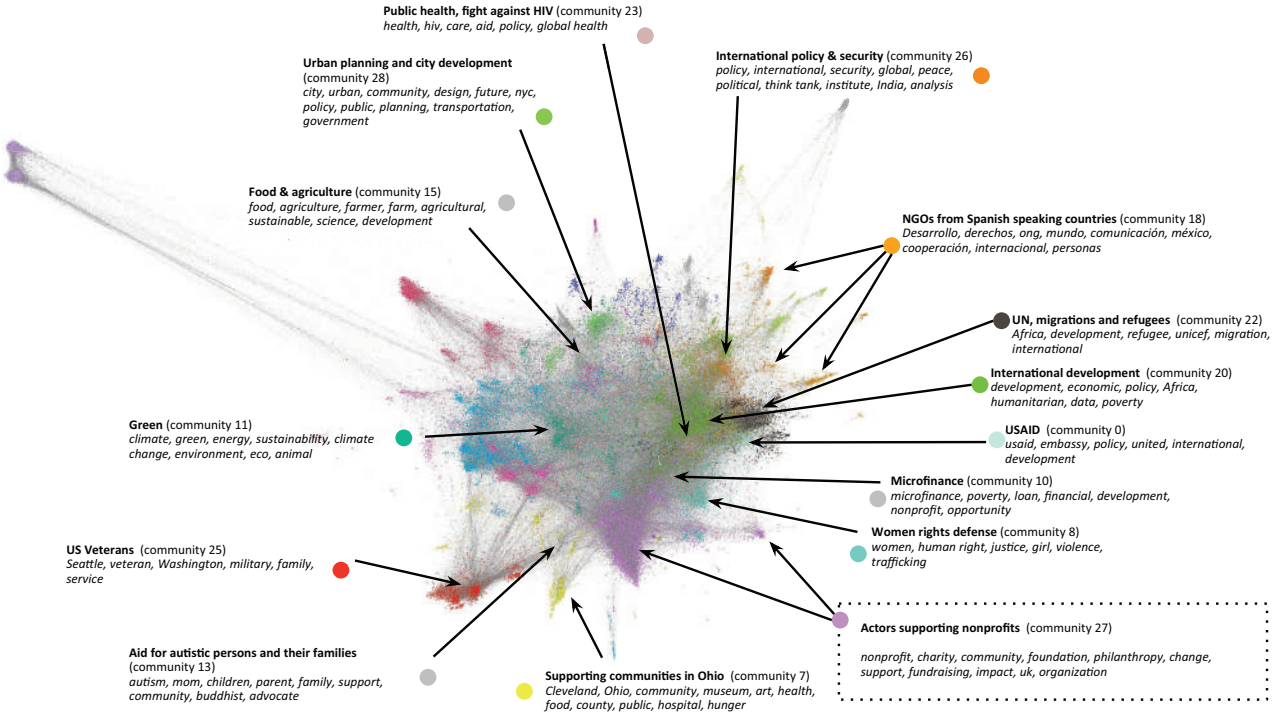

Figure 5. Sub-regions detected by the Louvain algorithm, shown in different colors. The names of the sub-regions (in bold) are inferred by the authors, from the list of the most frequent terms in the sub-region (italicized). Among the 30 sub-regions, we point to those which have a close relation to the field of interest: 'social impact of nonprofits'. Sub-region '27' is the largest sub-region (11, 74% of the actors of the entire network) and the closest to an *a priori* characterization of the field, according to the results of the content analysis. See Appendix C for a full-size version of the visual

interstitial issue field, which emerges "when an issue arises in society that people care about across several (and sometimes a broad spectrum of) social groups" (Zietsma et al., 2017, p. 401).

This sub-region should not be reified as the sole locus for actors engaged in the field of social impact. A comparison with the data from Powell et al. (2017) shows that it contains only 55 (44%) of the actors identified in their study, the others being spread in other sub-regions (see Appendix E). This suggests that a large proportion of actors engaged in supporting the performance and impact of nonprofits operate within a field of their own (their immediate neighbors being actors engaged in a similar pursuit), while the rest are surrounded by the organizations, individuals, media outlets, etc., they support. A reason for this distinction might be that this second kind of actors are concerned not only with measuring or fostering social impact but are also 'impact makers' themselves in a given area.

Examining the profile descriptions of each of the 125 actors (see Appendix F) retrieved from Powell et al. (2017) confirms this differentiation in roles, with most of the profiles included in sub-region '27' self-identifying as supporters of nonprofits and the rest being supporters *and participants* in remedying a given issue.

Sub-region '27', which focuses on 'actors supporting nonprofits', comprises 55 profiles identified by Powell et al. (2017). However, the total size of sub-region '27' is 3,589 members, which suggests that the field of 'actors supporting nonprofits' is potentially rich of different sub-groups, each with different identities and logics of action. Following the next steps of our methodology, we now iterate by focusing on sub-region '27' only, ignoring the rest of the map. We launch a new round of sub-region detection on it (with identical parameters), then we run the same routines for content analysis to characterize each of these sub-groups which altogether constitute sub-region '27' (see Figure 6).

This iteration gives a finer view on sub-region '27' and the sub-groups it is made of. In particular, it is now visible that this sub-region comprises distinct sub-groups which follow two unrelated logics. Sub-groups '1', '2', '3', and '4' gather actors according to topical or geographical dimensions, while sub-groups '0', '5', and '8' are indeed directly related to helping nonprofits achieve social impact. These sub-groups (which comprise, respectively, 538, 243, and 931 members) give a

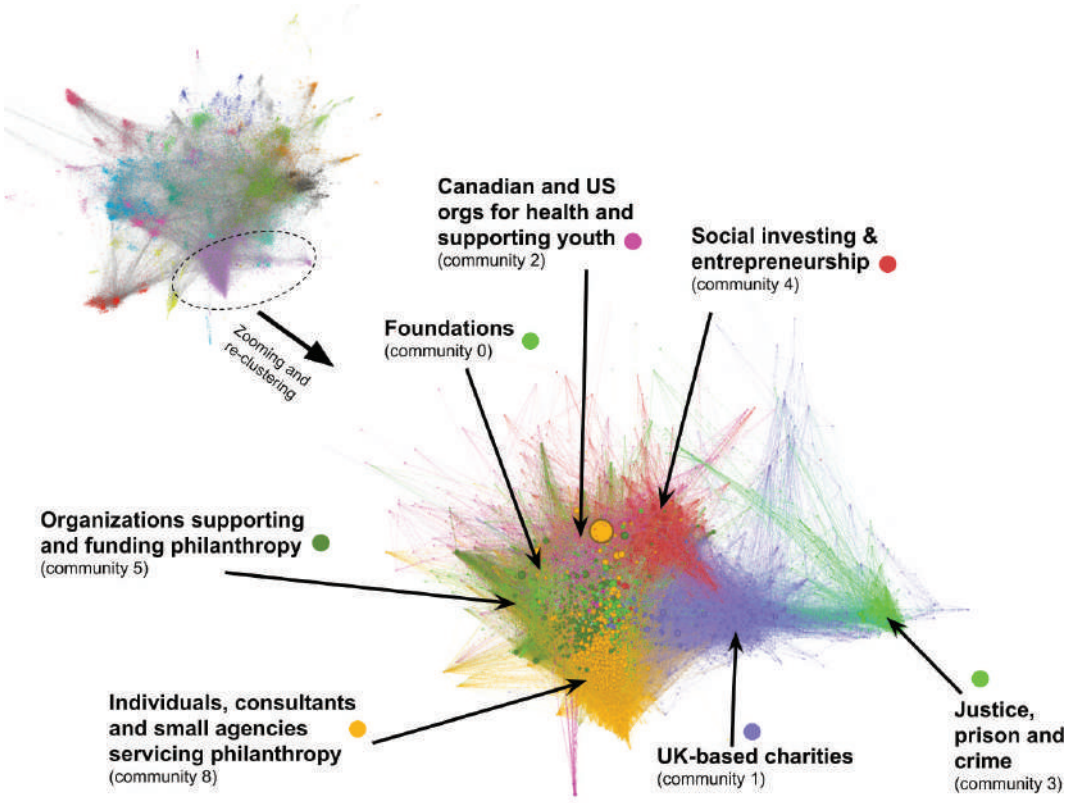

Figure 6. Using lists to discover Twitter users related to seed accounts. Iterating on step 6 of the procedure, we zoom in the sub-region 27 and ignore the rest of the map. Sub-region 27 and ignore the rest of the map. Sub-region 27 is focused on actors engaged in supporting nonprofits. The names of the sub-groups within sub-region 27 (in bold) are inferred by the authors from the list of the most frequent terms in the sub-group (full report on the size and content analysis of sub-groups is available in Appendix G)

coarse view of the following three types of actors forming the social space of 'social impact of nonprofits':

(1) Sub-group '0': a group of nonprofits comprising US donors (grant makers, foundations, funds, etc.), which is remarkably homogeneous. These actors are mostly organizations and garner a sizeable attention (average number of followers: 9,437; median: 3,602).
(2) Sub-group '5': a heterogeneous group of (mostly) for-profit organizations supplying resources and services to nonprofits. They are very visible on social media (average number of followers: 21,092; median: 5,628).
(3) Sub-group '8': a heterogeneous group of (mostly) individual consultants, media contributors, and private agencies offering their services to charities and nonprofits. This group is the largest one; however, it has a smaller footprint (average number of followers: 12,070; median: 2,457).

The map is the first sizeable contribution of the methodology presented in this study: it allows for the identification of a very large number of actors, without being bounded by pre-determined actors' types or attributes. It identifies sub-regions in the field (and the sub-groups inside them), leaving room for interpretation as to what are the boundaries of the field. It offers a view on the relations between actors, and the content analysis helps understand how actors 'cluster' around specific topics within the field.

We are well aware that such maps are several layers of abstractions away from the underlying field under investigation: Digital traces on Twitter do not reflect social interactions in the offline world, and the search for "structures should not be left to the computer program, but instead should be consistent with a theoretical view of the underlying social processes" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 197). In the final section, we discuss the social processes which underpin the field operationalized as an arena of heterogeneous actors related through their co-memberships in lists. Before this, we meet the challenge in a different way by presenting how the map is not a flat and passive device but lends itself to the conceptualization of mechanisms of use to explore problems relevant to the field (Davis & Marquis, 2005).

Design of mechanisms to identify roles in the field

Powell et al. (2017) focus on the question of the emergence of a field. Actors vying for a position in a field in the process of coalescing might adopt different strategies, depending on their identity and the kind of role they see for themselves in the field. Conversely, these actors are not in full control of their positioning, given that other actors pursue their own strategies which impact their neighboring environment. To navigate this moving space, actors engage in the tactics of 'soft power': "organizations engage in activities that enable them to influence the development and design of new institutional arrangements" (p. 311). These actions can be characterized by the following three mechanisms (Powell et al., 2017, p. 311):

(1) *Proselytizing* of information and championing alternative visions
(2) *Convening* to create spaces for exchange among dissimilar participants
(3) *Strengthening* as a means to fund and support the adoption of new practices and attract converts.

In the empirical context of Powell et al.'s (2017) study of social impact, each of these mechanisms is operationalized in terms of the signature they leave in the network of hyperlinks between actor's websites. The methodology that we have developed, based on a network of social media accounts rather than websites, affords new ways to operationalize these mechanisms, and suggests that new mechanisms might be identified as well.

Transposing the mechanisms of *proselytizing*, *convening*, and *strengthening* to the network of actors that we traced is straightforward. While our network is undirected, contrary to the web of links in Powell et al. (2017) (incoming and outgoing links from one website to another), the Twitter accounts on the map include their number of followers and the number of accounts they follow ('friends'), which provide directionality. When these bidirectional relations are examined in combination with the sub-region structure of the network, which qualifies the social space into neighborhoods with distinct identities, we can refine these three mechanisms operationally and identify new ones, such as the following:

(1) 'Conforming': the strategy for an organization to interact with peers *from its sub-region rather than outside of it*, with effect to reinforce and stabilize the identity and boundaries of the field.
(2) 'Interfacing': the role of an organization which communicates with actors outside of its field while keeping a voice and influence in its field. The effect would be to act as a conduit for external information and influence in the field leading to its enrichment, and also to contribute to position the field relative to its neighbors. The empirical study of this mechanism would be a useful contribution to the study of the relations between fields, a domain that has remained underresearched (Furnari, 2016) (see Appendix H for the operationalization of these mechanisms).

Conclusion: Limits and perspectives

This study offers a method to identify actors of a field and their relations. It allows for a multiplicity of types of actors to be considered, and does not rely on a logic of sector or industry membership, or actor's attributes, to be considered as a potential candidate for inclusion in the field. This contribution comes with a number of limits, which we identify with possible remedies, with perspectives for further work.

Who curates the curators?

It is established that the population on Twitter is not representative of the general population (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016), and the sub-sample of creators of lists on Twitter is probably also specific in many ways. However, this population can be researched, as their profile and activities on Twitter are publicly available information. It is beyond our scope to conduct a full-fledged study of list creators on Twitter. We can simply note that in the test case presented, among the 88,184 list creators, which contributed to define the field with their curation work, 4% of them are included in the field itself, and they represent close to 13% of the membership of the field.

The process of constructing the view of a field depends on list curators providing the primary material for this exercise. The data on list creators suggest that it is a large and diverse group which can itself be a subject of inquiry. In an iterative manner, it would be possible to re-run the algorithmic procedure with the same seeds but factoring in only the lists created by authors previously identified as members of the field. Alternatively, the Twitter biographies and other attributes of the list creators could be examined so that only the actors from a given geographical origin, or certain types of actors (e.g. individuals vs. organizations) would get their lists used in the algorithmic procedure. These suggestions point to the fact that the method we have presented in this study is designed to facilitate and enrich the study of fields, but it can also stimulate research in the direction of the phenomenon of classification underpinning the maintenance of fields, which is itself a complex social process.

Using Twitter (and other social media) as a data set

The data source used to illustrate the methodology is Twitter data, specifically Twitter user profiles and list memberships as accessed through the Twitter public API. Twitter data, similar to other social media data, are not statistically representative of the underlying population and phenomenon of interest that they are supposed to give an access to – in the same way that model organisms could be unrepresentative of their taxa (Tufekci, 2014). More profoundly, there is an ontological gap between maps created from digital traces, and the world they attempt to represent: what happens on Twitter does not entertain a one-to-one relationship with the offline world. We acknowledge this absence of strict correspondence, but we also believe that there is no air-tight separation between 'offline fields' and 'their digital representation', at least since the rapid development of user-based content creation on the web ('Web 2.0'). Social media such as Twitter have considerably changed the nature of the relation between 'the media' and 'what the media reports about', in the direction of field actors participating more actively in the media representations of their field to the point of blurring the distinction between actors who produce in the field, and those who disseminate (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019; Levallois, Smidts, & Wouters, 2019). Hence, while the map is not the territory, maps remain useful abstractions to advance our understanding of fields, especially when a direct access to the constituents of a field is impractical or costly.

A number of ethical boundaries prevent a number of use cases to be developed. We identify the following two important limits:

(1) User profiling and targeting. The method can be used for profiling individuals related to any topic of interest based on a small sample of individuals with a proven involvement in the topic. Even with the consent provided by users to make their identity and messages public on Twitter, individuals might still hold a reasonable expectation not to get their implicit personal attributes discovered through data analysis. Twitter's Developer agreement states that:

> [Twitter data may not be used by] any entity for the purposes of conducting or providing surveillance, analyses or research that isolates a group of individuals or any single individual for any unlawful or discriminatory purpose or in a manner that would be inconsistent with our users' reasonable expectations of privacy.[9]

In practice, developers could access content through the API without Twitter being able to examine *ex ante* the purpose and use of the data being collected, making the enforcement of these terms relatively ineffective. In the face of the spread of methods for user profiling (Piao & Breslin, 2017), individuals can develop tactics to prevent the discovery of their implicit attributes on social media (Nechaev, Corcoglioniti, & Giuliano, 2017); however, the procedure developed here would be immune to these countermeasures as it does not rely on the features of an individual's profile but on characterizations made by third parties which the individual does not control.

(2) '*Connection is not association*'. In the procedure laid out above, connections between any two individuals are not constructed from a purposeful, mutual relation initiated by them: they are inferred. A link between two individuals is defined through a decision made by multiple third parties – creating lists and ascribing users to these lists, hence tracing a connection between these users. From this connection, it can be tempting to conclude that these individuals are associated in some ways. Actually, this assumption of an association might be considered irrelevant, false, or even harmful to the users under consideration. Our method (and any method founded on co-memberships) should be read and used with these caveats in mind.

Within these limits, the method presented in this study offers several potential venues for future research.

Research perspectives

In principle, the method can be decoupled and used independently from Twitter data. The procedure, consisting in identifying relevant connections between individuals starting from a small set of seeds, can be applied to a variety of data sources which are not necessarily bound to social networks or online sources. For instance, co-memberships in professional associations, conference co-organization, and co-attendance, or co-contributions made by individuals (such as co-purchase, co-authorships, and co-memberships in teams) provide worthy data sources feeding into the six-step algorithmic procedure outlined above. These extensions open interesting venues for research – for example, the study of 'field configuring events' could benefit from such an approach (Lampel & Meyer, 2008).

We also believe that the method laid out here is a useful building block for the empirical investigation of issue fields specifically (Hoffman, 1999). The conceptualization of issue fields opened up or revived the study of organizational fields as groups of actors engaged in interactions around a given topic,

[9] https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/agreement

rather than relying on shared affiliations or identity-based criteria for inclusion or exclusion. This definition of issue fields suggested that records of interactions pertaining to a particular issue could be helpful to identify the constituents of the field (agents engaged in these interactions are the actors of the field), and assist in drawing the structure of the field (patterns of interactions reveal the underlying organization of the field). These records can be retrieved from judiciously selected data sets, such as the plaintiffs and defendants from the Westlaw environmental law database to study environmental protection in the United States (Hoffman, 1999).

However, even when it relinquishes the focus on an industry, the empirical investigation of issue fields presents at least two difficulties: first, relying on a data set which is 'field-specific' to identify the constituency of an issue field defeats the purpose of an open-ended, exploratory empirical investigation of the field. By construction, the issue field is populated by the types of actors and roles included in the database (litigants, in Hoffman, 1999). The tight coupling between the scope of the data source and the definition of the constituency of the field questions the external validity of the results: can the field of environmental protection be anything else than traversed by legal battles between its constituents when the database used for its characterization is a record of litigations? Second, field-specific data sources are exactly this: *specific*. Studying different fields requests each time renewed efforts to identify, secure access, code, and analyze a different empirical material. This leads to slow progress in empirical research, and makes comparative analysis prohibitive.

In this study, we contributed to the empirical exploration of issue fields by removing these two obstacles. We leverage a digital data set which is 'issue agnostic': users on Twitter are free to register and pursue any kind of professional or personal types of connections and communications.[10] Hence, the constituents of an issue field identified in this data set were not 'pre-constrained' in their identities or roles by the mere fact that they are included in the data set. The data set is of an international and multilingual dimension, spanning many types of actors and registering their inter-relations. This general dimension decreases the cost of exploring a large number of fields, and should foster comparative studies. For instance, unpublished studies by the authors using this methodology include the investigation of the fields of 'Formula One' and 'Artificial Intelligence' which were conducted in short amounts of time.

Finally, this methodology can contribute to areas of research in strategic management. In particular, it could prove useful in the discovery or confirmation of stakeholders engaged with an organization, that is, "any group or individual who can affect or are affected by the achievement of an organization's goals" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Organizations and individuals have different claims to the status of stakeholders based on different relational attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Our methodology is particularly well suited to help an organization chart its environment, detailed in different sub-regions. It could then help it pursue its strategic goals with regard to gaining, maintaining, or repairing legitimacy by trying to fit or change its environment, and doing so by adapting their strategies of action and communication to each sub-region (Suchman, 1995). This would open up the perspective for this methodology to be used not only as a device for exploration and explanation of a field's logic but also as a tool for reconfiguration.

[10] Other data sets with similar characteristics exist and could be considered (e.g. Wikipedia).

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Appendix A-I

M@n@gement

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES

"You Cannot Hide Forever Luke": Understanding the Strategic Use of Sustainability Disclosure in the Short and Long Term

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationships among firms' sustainability disclosure, sustainability performance, and financial performance. Based on legitimacy theory and signaling theory, it argues that sustainability disclosure participates in two distinct mechanisms: a conformity mechanism through which disclosure shows conformity to the norms and a revelation mechanism through which disclosure reveals or hides a firm's achieved degree of sustainability. In an attempt to contrast and reconcile the two mechanisms, the study assesses their impact on financial performance in the short and long term. Hypotheses are tested using longitudinal data (2002–2010), which cover 10,814 observations of firms from major indexes of stock exchanges worldwide. The results show that the conformity mechanism is effective in both the short and long terms, whereas the revelation mechanism is only effective in the short term. As a consequence, firms with poor sustainability performance may hide their detrimental impact and achieve higher financial performance in the short term by limiting their disclosure but not in the long term in which their lack of conformity is punished. In the long term, only conformity to the norms of disclosure leads to higher financial performance, even in the case of poor sustainability results.

Keywords: *Sustainability disclosure; Sustainability performance; Financial performance; Conformity mechanism; Revelation mechanism*

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In 2015, when the German car manufacturer Volkswagen (VW) was determined to have installed software designed to cheat nitrogen oxide emission tests in its diesel cars and, moreover, for incorrectly reporting its carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, the company found itself facing a sharp fall in stock price, multiple investigations, and heavy fines amounting to millions of dollars (McGee, 2017). Similarly, British Petroleum (BP) had long been praised for its investments in solar energy and was rated as one of the greenest oil companies (Röhrbein, 2010). However, when its Deepwater Horizon oil rig collapsed in 2010, BP lost all public support, which dramatically threatened its financial performance (Vaughan, 2018). What VW and BP had in common is that, for years, they had been able to mislead their stakeholders about the true nature of their environmental performance. They had adjusted the information provided to stakeholders, i.e. the disclosure of their environmental performance and had thereby reached above-average returns. Those returns suddenly dropped the day each of those two firms' misbehaviors were revealed.

Concerned by the future of our planet, as well as social problems such as income inequalities and quality of life, stakeholders are putting increasing pressure on businesses to address current social and environmental issues (Albertini, 2014; Baldini, Maso, Liberatore, Mazzi, & Terzani, 2018). Addressing multiple and sometimes conflicting stakeholder demands is not an easy task and might create organizational hypocrisy (Cho, Laine, Roberts, & Rodrigue, 2015) in firms' actions. However, businesses cannot remain unreceptive to these pressures; hence, companies engage in social and environmental initiatives at an increasing rate, while at the same time trying to meet their profit maximization goals. For the purposes of this study, we label firm initiatives that address social and environmental concerns as *sustainability*-related actions and the impact of a firm's actions in these areas, i.e. the performance of the firm as *sustainability performance*. There is a need to clearly differentiate the responsibility, actions, and performance of firms in terms of social and environmental issues. Aguinis and Glavas (2012, p. 933) define corporate social responsibility as

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"context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance". The effectiveness of those actions and policies in addressing social and environmental issues corresponds to firms' social and environmental performance or, as increasingly used in the international scene, such as by the United Nations, European Union, and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), firms' *sustainability performance.* Consequently, we define *sustainability disclosure* as the amount of information transmitted by a firm about its sustainability performance to its stakeholders.

The starting point of this study is that firms strategically use their sustainability disclosure to impact stakeholders' perceptions of the firm, thus ensuring stakeholder support. There is a stream of literature that remains skeptical about sustainability disclosure, considering it just a fad (Gray, 1992; Gray & Milne, 2002). However, we follow the opposite perspective that disclosure might help in decision-making for managers and stakeholders alike by providing useful information on the sustainability performance of firms (Burritt & Schaltegger, 2010; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2006). The VW and BP stories provide anecdotal evidence that firms might engage in selective or even manipulative sustainability disclosure (Marquis, Toffel, & Yanhua, 2016) to impact stakeholders' judgment of a firm. However, the amount of information to be transmitted to stakeholders, i.e. the extent of an 'optimum' sustainability disclosure is a difficult task for firms, especially if they have low sustainability performance. Therefore, there is a baseline question: *Do less sustainable firms reach higher financial performance via hiding their poor sustainability performance results or are they better off conforming to the norms of disclosure?*

This study investigates the links among sustainability disclosure, sustainability performance, and firm financial performance. It argues that disclosure engages in two mechanisms in line with the predictions of two theories but with paradoxical effects on financial performance: the *conformity mechanism* and *revelation mechanism*. Legitimacy theory, on the one hand, posits that sustainability disclosure itself relates to a firm's conformity to stakeholders' expectations and is used as a legitimizing tool by the firm (Deegan, 2002; Mahadeo, Oogarah-Hanuman, & Soobaroyen, 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011; Reid & Toffel, 2009). Hence, as the extent of the sustainability disclosure increases, it elicits higher stakeholder support and legitimacy, which eventually transforms into higher financial performance (Wang & Qian, 2011). Signaling theory, on the other hand, argues that disclosure plays an indirect role in eliciting stakeholder support by revealing the true nature of a firm's sustainability performance. Firms have an interest in extensive disclosure if they want to reap the benefits of their social and environmental success (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016); however, if the firm has low sustainability performance, it might be better off giving noisy signals to stakeholders (Hummel & Schlick, 2016) and leaving them in doubt by limiting their disclosure (Mahoney, Thorne, Cecil, & LaGore, 2013). In short, extensive disclosure is valued by stakeholders as a sign of conformity to the norms (conformity mechanism) but risks revealing information about poor sustainability results (revelation mechanism). Therefore, sustainability disclosure is a double-edged sword that may both benefit and penalize financial performance (Cormier & Magnan, 1999; Zhang & Wang, 2009). Thus, we look at the role that sustainability disclosure plays in the financial performance of a firm, as well as try to determine which mechanism, conformity or revelation, is most effective in the relationship between the two.

This study argues that the two mechanisms of conformity and revelation are not contradictory but do not operate in the same way and are not effective in the same time horizon. It shows that the conformity mechanism has both a short- and long-term impact on financial performance via imminent stakeholder support, legitimacy, and trust obtained, whereas the revelation mechanism only has a short-term impact on financial performance because stakeholders are eventually able to make an objective assessment of the firm either as a result of repeated interactions or from receiving involuntary signals about the sustainability performance of firms with limited sustainability disclosure. The proposed hypotheses are empirically tested using longitudinal data (2002–2010) with a sample of 2,522 firms (10,814 observations) from across 58 different countries and are supported.

The study aims to contrast and reconcile the two theoretical perspectives – legitimacy theory and signaling theory – on sustainability disclosure. It addresses scholarly work that investigates disclosure as a normative process and underlines the existence of pressure for conformity to the norms of disclosure (Mahadeo et al., 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011; Reid & Toffel, 2009), as well as studies that consider disclosure in light of the revelation mechanism as a way for a firm to reveal or hide some underlying characteristics of interest (King, Lenox, & Terlaak, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2013). By showing that both mechanisms exist and, thus, sustainability disclosure has both a direct impact on financial performance and a moderating impact on the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance but on different time horizons, the study aims to advance the emerging stream of literature that contrasts these two theoretical perspectives to understand the relationship between sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance (Cho et al., 2015; Hummel & Schlick, 2016; Mahoney et al., 2013), as well as the literature investigating the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance and its boundary conditions (Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2014; Rodriguez, Cotran, & Stewart, 2017).

Theoretical framework

Stakeholders and sustainability performance

A firm operates in an environment consisting of organizations and individuals that have stakes in the firm's realization of its objectives, namely, its stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined broadly as "any identifiable group who can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives, or who are affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman & Reed, 1983, p. 91). We thus assume that firms in the pursuit of their objectives seek certain stakeholders' support.

A firm's sustainability actions embrace social and environmental concerns and demonstrate active engagement *vis-à-vis* stakeholders (Jones, 1995), even though meeting all the demands of numerous stakeholders that influence firm activities is not possible (Dessain, Meier, & Salas, 2008). Firms adopt new policies and engage in sustainability actions to take into account stakeholders' expectations; however, whether these policies and actions are actually effective and efficient in bringing about changes remains questionable. If a firm's sustainability actions are indeed effective in bringing about a change, it may lead to positive sustainability performance, which by aligning the firm and its stakeholders' interests triggers stakeholder support. For instance, if a firm provides its employees with advantageous working conditions, those employees may accept lower-paid contracts and will not hesitate to work extra hours (Cespa & Cestone, 2007; Turban & Greening, 1997). If a firm performs well in protecting the environment, it may mitigate government pressure and attract more customers (Hillman & Keim, 2001). Sustainability performance ensures good stakeholder relations, and pleased stakeholders will be more likely to return the 'favor' to the firm by reducing its costs and increasing its revenues in both the short and long terms (Choi & Wang, 2009; Eccles et al., 2014) and help the firm eventually achieve better financial performance (Waddock & Graves, 1997).

However, regardless of whether it is environmental or social, sustainability performance is by its nature not an easily observable characteristic of firms (King & Toffel, 2009; King et al., 2005; Jiang & Bansal, 2003). As King and Toffel (2009, p. 104) state, "Customers cannot determine by inspection whether or not the cotton in a pair of trousers was grown in an organic manner, or a pound of coffee beans was grown under a natural forest canopy". To assess a firm's sustainability performance, stakeholders first look into the disclosure of the firm on its sustainability performance.

Sustainability disclosure

As previously mentioned, sustainability disclosure is the amount of information firms transmit to stakeholders on their sustainability performance. Disclosure is not of a dichotomous nature: firms do not either disclose or not, and they are not either silent or fully transparent. Aware of this, scholars often use an index to evaluate the extent of firm disclosure (see, e.g., Cho, Guidry, Hageman, & Patten, 2012; Clarkson, Li, Richardson, & Vasvari, 2008 for firm environmental disclosure). First, legislation in an increasing number of countries prevents firms from being completely silent and requires a minimum of reporting, such as in the European Union, which introduced Directive 2014/95/EU on mandatory sustainability reporting in October 2014 (Hummel & Schlick, 2016). Second, due to the cost of disclosure, firms' geographical scope of activities and organizational complexity, and conflicting stakeholder demands, full disclosure can almost never be reached (Cho et al., 2015; Criado-Jiménez, Fernández-Chulián, Larrinage-González, & Husillos-Carqués, 2008).

Therefore, firms strategically modulate the information they make available to stakeholders about their environmental or social impact (Cho, Roberts, & Patten, 2010) and either reveal an extensive number of indicators on their sustainability performance or limit the disclosure of those indicators. For instance, firms may communicate about some philanthropic activities but omit polluting emissions, and they can adopt only one or several green standards. Information may be hidden in annual reports or published as stand-alone reports. In other words, firms may disclose a varying amount of indicators of their sustainability performance and adopt more or less stringent certifications (Mahadeo et al., 2011; Roulet & Touboul, 2015). Briefly, firms adjust their sustainability disclosure and, hence, the amount of information available to stakeholders (Ullmann, 1985). For the purposes of this study, we distinguish between two levels of sustainability disclosure – extensive and limited – based on the amount of information that a firm reveals to stakeholders regarding its sustainability performance. A focal firm may either adopt an extensive disclosure, in which it discloses a large amount of information and a high number of indicators about its sustainability performance, covering all aspects of the firm's social and environmental impacts, or opt for a limited disclosure, in which it discloses a small amount of information that, for instance, limits available figures on its social performance or does not communicate regarding green certifications.

Based on this information, two questions arise: how do stakeholders interpret extensive and limited sustainability disclosure? Does a firm achieve better financial performance via extensive or limited sustainability disclosure? As previously mentioned, this study argues that sustainability disclosure participates in two mechanisms – conformity and revelation – which have contradicting effects on firm financial performance. These mechanisms are investigated in the next sections.

Legitimacy theory, sustainability disclosure, and conformity mechanism

Normative pressures from civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, and even shareholders for social and

environmental impact disclosure have risen over recent years (Albertini, 2014; Baldini et al., 2018; Flammer, 2013) along with the emergence and strengthening of stakeholder orientation in the markets (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2015). Disclosing extensively on firm environmental or social performance and, thus, disclosing on sustainability performance is considered appropriate by stakeholders (Huang & Kung, 2010; Michelon, 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011). Via disclosure of its sustainability performance, a firm conforms to the normative institutional pressures and underlines that its values are aligned with those of stakeholders, who, in return, attribute to the firm a higher legitimacy (Deephouse, 1996; Suchman, 1995). In other words, disclosure in itself relates to firms' conformity to stakeholders' expectations and is used as a legitimizing tool by firms (Cho & Patten, 2007; Mahadeo et al., 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011; Reid & Toffel, 2009). Higher legitimacy elicits stakeholder support, which eventually may transform into higher financial performance (Wang & Qian, 2011) and lower total and idiosyncratic risks for the firm (Benlemlih, Shaukat, Qiu, & Trojanowski, 2018). In this perspective, firms with extensive sustainability disclosure achieve higher financial performance than those with limited disclosure. Hence, the strategic value of sustainability disclosure relies on whether it participates in a conformity mechanism, which implies that stakeholders not only support sustainable firms but also those that conform to the norms of disclosure. Consequently, even when the sustainability performance of the firm is weak, the firm has an interest in extensive disclosure because it is appreciated by stakeholders. For instance, for environmental performance, legitimacy theory predicts that poor environmental performers under social pressure are expected to have a higher level of environmental disclosure to change stakeholders' perceptions about their actual performance (Clarkson et al., 2008). Indeed, firms in more sensitive industries, such as construction and energy, tend to disclose more on their environmental performance than those in industries that are less scrutinized, such as optical or biological sectors (Albertini, 2014; Cho & Patten, 2007), and worse environmental performers disclose more (Cho & Patten, 2007; Patten, 2002). The conformity mechanism also implies that firms limiting their disclosure lose legitimacy and suffer from negative consequences, such as the loss of stakeholder support (Hahn & Lülfs, 2014), and that, therefore, all firms have an incentive for extensive disclosure, even if it is to reveal a detrimental impact of the firm on society or the environment. This way, the firm shows stakeholders that even if a beneficial impact on society is not achieved, the company is aware of it and does not try to hide it with diversion tactics, such as greenwashing (Toffel & Short, 2009).

Signaling theory, sustainability disclosure, and revelation mechanism

An alternative perspective on sustainability disclosure considers it a means to reduce the problem of asymmetric information between the firm and its stakeholders. This involves the firm – the better-informed party – sending a signal that conveys relevant information to stakeholders – the less-informed party – to reduce the asymmetry (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Ragozzino & Reuer, 2011; Spence, 1973).

Although stakeholders seek information on a firm's sustainability performance, it is a latent construct that cannot be directly observed by stakeholders (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016; King & Toffel, 2009; King et al., 2005; Jiang & Bansal, 2003). Stakeholders thus must rely on available but imperfect signals to decide whether to support a focal firm. Sustainability disclosure is one of those signals (King et al., 2005; Mahoney et al., 2013). By inspecting a firm's green certifications, sustainability reports, and communication supports, stakeholders are able to approximate a firm's degree of sustainability performance (Akerlof, 1970; Spence, 1973). Sustainability disclosure, therefore, appears to be a key strategic tool that participates in the revelation mechanism.

The revelation mechanism refers to whether sustainability disclosure signals reveal or hide from the stakeholders a firm's actual sustainability performance, and whether the firm meets stakeholder expectations in terms of such factors as environmental protection and social welfare (Clarkson et al., 2008; Ingram, 1978; Mahoney et al., 2013). However, signals can be more or less convincing (Greve, 2011), and a firm, in adjusting its sustainability disclosure, adjusts the amount of information contained in its sustainability signals. The more extensive the disclosure provided by the firm is, the more likely the signal will assure stakeholders of the reliability of a nonobservable or not easily observable characteristic of the firm – its sustainability performance. Firms only realize the full benefits of their social and environmental efforts when these are externally communicated to key stakeholders (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016) and when firms provide detailed reports and hard indicators of their good environmental performance (Plumlee, Brown, Hayes, & Marshall, 2015). After receiving signals such as announcements of environmental or social engagements by the firm, stakeholders re-evaluate companies (Wassmer, Cueto, & Switzer, 2014).

In brief, the revelation mechanism implies two things: first, firms with high sustainability performance decrease the information asymmetry between the firm and external evaluators via extensive disclosure and, by revealing their beneficial impact on the environment and society, can reap the benefits of their sustainability performance (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016; Plumlee et al., 2015). Second, when a firm limits its sustainability disclosure, this leads to doubt in stakeholders' assessments about the firm's actual degree of sustainability performance (Akerlof, 1970; Milgrom & Roberts, 1986; Spence, 1973). Indeed, firms with low sustainability performance are found to provide low-quality information and to give noisy signals to stakeholders (Hummel & Schlick, 2016). Firms with poor sustainability results might choose to leave stakeholders in doubt

by limiting their disclosure on their detrimental sustainability impact (Mahoney et al., 2013) and may avoid losses by hiding their poor sustainability results, like BP and VW, for a limited period of time.

The revelation mechanism underlines the well-known paradox of disclosure: depending on the characteristic that is disclosed, disclosure can have opposite effects (Clarkson & Toh, 2010; Milgrom & Roberts, 1982). Extensive disclosure revealing high sustainability performance triggers stakeholders' support (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016), whereas extensive disclosure revealing detrimental behaviors triggers their defiance (Våland & Heide, 2005) and might bring negative consequences for the firm.

Contrasting legitimacy theory and signaling theory perspectives on sustainability disclosure

The two mechanisms of conformity and revelation derive from two separate theoretical perspectives, i.e. legitimacy theory and signaling theory, consider the role of sustainability disclosure in eliciting stakeholder support differently, i.e. direct vs. moderating role, and predict opposing reactions from stakeholders and, thus, different consequences for the firm in terms of financial performance. Extensive disclosure enhances firms' financial performance by demonstrating conformity to the norms of disclosure (conformity mechanism) but penalizes less sustainable firms by revealing their detrimental impact on society (revelation mechanism). Conversely, limited disclosure protects the financial returns of a less sustainable firm by leaving its stakeholders uncertain of its poor sustainability performance results (revelation mechanism). However, by limiting its disclosure, such a firm may penalize its financial performance by not showing conformity to the disclosure norms (conformity mechanism).

It is, therefore, crucial to understand the relative effectiveness of both mechanisms. We argue that these mechanisms can be reconciled as long as the boundary condition is defined. To disentangle the impact of both mechanisms, we believe that there is a need to distinguish between their short- and long-term effects. We consequently develop hypotheses that assess the existence of the conformity and revelation mechanisms over the short and long term and their consequences in the relationships among sustainability disclosure, sustainability performance, and financial performance.

Hypotheses

Conformity mechanism: The impact of sustainability disclosure on financial performance in the short and long term

Increasing attention from the public on social and environmental issues in the past few decades (Albertini, 2014; Flammer, 2013) have put firms under the spotlight regarding their sustainability performance. Facing the pressure, firms disclose their sustainability performance either extensively or in a limited way, as previously mentioned. Information on firms' sustainability performance is widely spread, quickly available and disseminated, and scrutinized by stakeholders (Marquis et al., 2016). Guidry and Patten (2010) found, for instance, that the more firms conform to disclosure standards suggested by the GRI, the more they experience a positive market reaction following the release of their sustainability reports. Similarly, abnormal stock market returns have been observed following firm disclosure of sustainability initiatives targeting a positive impact on the environment (Wassmer et al., 2014).

Stock market reactions to sustainability disclosure indicate that stakeholders are capable of assessing in a short period of time whether a firm conforms to their disclosure expectations. Stakeholder support follows when firms conform to the norms via extensive disclosure. Therefore, by showing conformity to stakeholders' expectations, firms with extensive sustainability disclosure reach higher financial performance than firms with limited sustainability disclosure. Thus, we can propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Sustainability disclosure has a positive impact on firms' short-term financial performance.

If the conformity mechanism has a positive impact in the short term, what about the impact in the long term? Whether advantages such as superior financial performance derived from good stakeholder relations persist in the long run has been a question investigated in the literature (Choi & Wang, 2009). We hypothesize that the conformity mechanism is effective in the long run for two reasons. First, extensive disclosure confirms to stakeholders that a firm possesses the attributes they desire (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992; Suchman, 1995), and this social conformity leads to higher legitimacy (Cho & Patten, 2007; Mahadeo et al., 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011; Reid & Toffel, 2009). However, legitimization is a cognitive and thus long-term process (Albertini, 2014; Navis & Glynn, 2010). There is a time lapse before this extensive disclosure transforms into legitimacy (Vaccaro, 2012) and, in turn, to higher financial performance (Wang & Qian, 2011). Second, in the field of sustainability, firms are known to use symbols and impression management tactics to improve their legitimacy without effectively conforming to the norm (Cho, Laine, Roberts, & Rodrigue, 2018; Cho et al., 2010). In this case, firms are suspected of 'greenwashing' (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Hahn & Lülfs, 2014; Kim & Lyon, 2015; Lyon & Kim, 2007). Consequently, there exists a trust issue between firms and their stakeholders (Stanaland, Lwin, & Murphy, 2011). Trust in any stakeholder relationship is only built over the long term (Barney & Hansen, 1994), but once it is built, it may help mitigate firms' operational risks (Benlemlih et al.,

2018). As stakeholders are aware and cautious about greenwashing, legitimacy is always at stake and slow to obtain and only given to firms once trust is built between the parties. It has been shown that in the long run, firms with extensive disclosure are cognitively assimilated by stakeholders as those that provide a sufficient quantity of high-quality information (Beretta & Bozzolan, 2008), which helps the firms build trust and obtain legitimacy. Consequently, firms with extensive sustainability disclosure achieve higher long-term financial performance than those with limited sustainability disclosure, leading to hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Sustainability disclosure has a positive impact on firms' long-term financial performance.

Revelation mechanism: The impact of sustainability disclosure on the link between sustainability performance and financial performance in the short and long term

The revelation mechanism assesses that a firm with extensive sustainability disclosure reveals its sustainability performance to its stakeholders, who adjust their support in return (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016). In contrast, a firm with limited disclosure leaves its stakeholders in doubt about its social and environmental impact (Mahoney et al., 2013), and stakeholders are left uncertain about their decision to support the focal firm. Consequently, when the revelation mechanism is effective, the impact of sustainability performance on financial performance depends on the extent of the firm's sustainability disclosure, i.e. whether it is extensive or limited. According to this perspective, sustainability disclosure has an indirect effect on a firm's financial performance by moderating the relationship between its sustainability performance and financial performance. However, it is uncertain whether this mechanism functions in the same way in both the short and long terms.

Firms with extensive sustainability disclosure reassure stakeholders about their achieved degree of sustainability. For example, consumers looking at a firm's certifications, such as whether its coffee beans are grown in a sustainable way or the cotton used to make its clothing is organic, are able to form an evaluation of its sustainability performance (King & Toffel, 2009). However, when a firm adopts a limited sustainability disclosure approach, its sustainability performance has a high probability of going unnoticed by stakeholders in the short term. A disclosure is only meaningful to stakeholders if it reflects some credible underlying events (Jaggi & Freedman, 1992), and limited disclosure does not allow stakeholders to assess the credibility of the sustainability performance that is presented. The noisier the signal, the less likely agents are to make a negative decision (Greve, 2011). With limited information, in the best-case scenario, stakeholders cannot decide whether to support or penalize the focal firm. In the worst-case scenario, they base their decision on signals other than sustainability disclosure, such as the firm's reputation or legitimacy (Michelon, 2011). In both cases, sustainability performance remains unnoticed and, therefore, does not impact a firm's financial performance. Hence, in the short term, firms with extensive disclosure reap the benefits of their sustainability performance, whereas firms with limited disclosure do not.

Hypothesis 3a: Sustainability performance positively impacts the short-term financial performance of firms with extensive disclosure.

Hypothesis 3b: Sustainability performance has no impact on the short-term financial performance of firms with limited disclosure.

We argue, however, that the revelation mechanism is only effective in the short term. In other words, in the long run, stakeholders can continue to clearly assess the sustainability performance of firms with extensive sustainability disclosure and are reassured of the firms' degree of engagement. For instance, a firm with extensive sustainability disclosure announcing better working conditions benefits in the long term from more motivated employees (Cespa & Cestone, 2007) or from long-term contracts with the best suppliers. Consequently, firms with a positive sustainability performance and extensive disclosure are rewarded with higher long-term financial performance.

However, in contradiction with the short-term case, in the long term, stakeholders are more capable and likely to evaluate the sustainability performance of firms with limited disclosure for two reasons. First, limited disclosure leaves stakeholders in doubt about a firm's sustainability performance, so stakeholders are more likely to form their own related opinions over the long term. Also in the long term, the repeated interactions between a firm and its stakeholders and the cumulative disclosure of information, even if limited, decrease the asymmetry of information (Cui, Jo, & Na, 2018) and allow stakeholders to form a certain opinion about a firm's degree of sustainability performance. Second, even if in the short term stakeholders base their sustainability assessment on firms' voluntary sustainability disclosure, in the long term, there is a higher probability of involuntary disclosure. Involuntary disclosure refers to information about a firm's sustainability performance that is disclosed without control from the organization. This is the case, for instance, when environmental disasters are revealed by the media, as with BP, or when information on disclosure fraud is revealed, as with VW. In the long term, due to the higher probability of NGO investigations and the leakage of information on negative incidents through third parties or whistleblowers, involuntary disclosure is more likely to occur and practices such as greenwashing are more likely to be revealed, which can create a backlash for the firm (Reimsbach & Hahn, 2015; Våland & Heide, 2005).

Hence, in the long term, stakeholders are either able to make an assessment as a result of repeated interactions or have received involuntary signals about the sustainability performance of firms through limited sustainability disclosure. Therefore, in the long run, the revelation mechanism is not effective, as disclosure no longer plays a role in revealing or hiding a firm's degree of sustainability performance, i.e. disclosure ceases to moderate the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance. Whatever the extent of a firm's sustainability disclosure – extensive or limited – sustainability performance has a positive impact on a firm's financial performance.

Hypothesis 4a: Sustainability performance positively impacts the long-term financial performance of firms with extensive disclosure.

Hypothesis 4b: Sustainability performance positively impacts the long-term financial performance of firms with limited disclosure.

Data

Regarding the data in this study, 9 years of sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance measures were extracted from the ASSET4 database (from 2002 to 2010). ASSET4 is a Swiss-based sustainability ratings agency and a subsidiary of Thomson Reuters that provides sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance ratings for 958 firms from 2002 and 3,258 firms from 2010. The data set covers major financial indexes worldwide[1] and thus includes large companies from both developed[2] and developing[3] countries. It has been widely used in recent academic literature for its granularity and limited biases (Cheng, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2014; Eccles et al., 2014; Hawn & Ioannou, 2016; Roulet & Touboul, 2015). The 2002–2010 period is most relevant to test our hypotheses for two reasons. First, it covers periods of macro-economic growth, turmoil, and standstill, when firms may have had diverging incentives to invest in sustainability rather than other strategic opportunities. Second, 2002–2010 covers a period of transition when sustainability reporting became increasingly institutionalized: KPMG (2011) states that in 2011, 95% of the 250 largest global companies published a sustainability report, whereas in 2002, only 45% did so (Kolk, van der Veen, Hay, & Wennink, 2002). Therefore, the institutionalization of sustainability disclosure that characterized this period is ideal to test our hypotheses, specifically the diverging effects of the conformity and revelation mechanisms.

Annually, ASSET4 analysts gather 1,359 indicators on firms' sustainability performance and disclosure through all publicly available sources (e.g. annual reports, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports, newspapers, and NGO websites). Raw data are then transformed through a proprietary algorithm into several ratings and sub-ratings. ASSET4 is one of the world's largest databases for extra-financial information. It is estimated that investors representing €2.5 trillion of assets use its data (Cheng et al., 2014). Although some scholars measure sustainability-related constructs using databases such as Kinder, Lydenberg and Domini (KLD) (Barnett & Salomon, 2006; Surroca, Tribo, & Waddock, 2010; Waddock & Graves, 1997), Vigéo (Cavaco & Crifo, 2014), Calvert, FTSE4Good, DJSI, or Innovest (Chatterji, Durand, Levine, & Touboul, 2016), we prefer to rely on the ASSET4 database for its granularity, reliability, and higher adequacy within our theoretical setting. ASSET4 data are more granular than other rating agencies' data in the sense that it rates firms by scaled scores (0 to 100%), whereas other agencies such as KLD only provide dichotomic indicators (0 or 1). This granularity provides greater robustness to our econometric results. ASSET4 data are also less likely to be biased because its analysts do not use self-administered questionnaires as in other agencies, which limits the risk of misleading answers from rated firms. In addition, ASSET4 ratings are computed through algorithms applied to collected indicators. They are thus protected from cognitive biases that may arise from analysts' subjectivity. Finally, ASSET4 aptly fits our framework as it clearly differentiates between firms' sustainability performance (outcome of sustainability practices) and sustainability disclosure (amount of information provided). While most stakeholders do not observe a firm's actual sustainability performance, ASSET4 analysts collect and analyze hundreds of data sets and spend hours examining primary and secondary information. In comparison with stakeholders who have limited time and access to information, ASSET4 analysts are better positioned to evaluate the difference between what a firm actually did (its sustainability performance) and what it disclosed (its sustainability disclosure), which perfectly matches the purpose of this study.

We also gathered financial performance and control measures from Bureau van Dijk's ORBIS global database (audited financials of companies worldwide). Our final data set consists of the intersection between the ORBIS and ASSET4 databases for firms having available financial and sustainability data for at least three consecutive years. Our final sample is consisted of

[1] These include the FTSE 250 (UK), S&P 500, NASDAQ 100, Russell 1000 (US), S&P Composite (Canada), SMI (Switzerland), DAX (Germany), CAC 40 (France), S&P ASX 200 (Australia), DJ STOXX (Europe), and MSCI World (worldwide).

[2] These include Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Isle of Man, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jersey, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Marshall Islands, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

[3] These include Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates.

2,522 firms that belong to major indexes from the largest stock exchanges worldwide. These firms come from all industrial sectors[4] and 58 different countries. Our final data set contains 10,814 observations between 2002 and 2010, with an average of 1,202 observations per year. Furthermore, each firm appears in the data set for an average of 6.3 years.

Independent variables

For each firm, ASSET4 provides 15 annual sustainability performance[5] ratings that cover 15 sustainability topics, including emission reduction, resource reduction, employment quality, and human rights. The 15 ratings are grouped into three general categories: environmental, social, and governance.[6] Furthermore, the 15 sustainability performance ratings range from 0 to 100% and measure the impact of a firm's sustainability policies. Among the indicators used to compute the ratings are the amount of waste recycled, the amount of CO_2 emissions, and the number of products targeting low-income consumers. The more a firm benefits its stakeholders, the higher its sustainability ratings (e.g. firms that recycle a large amount of waste obtain a higher 'resources reduction' rating, and firms with lower emissions of CO_2 achieve a higher 'emission reduction' rating). To obtain our measure of sustainability performance, we computed the average of the 15 ASSET4 sustainability performance ratings with equal weights per general category, i.e. environmental, social, and governance. We thereby obtained from the 15 initial ASSET4 sustainability performance ratings a single sustainability performance measure. We averaged the 15 ratings with equal weights for each of the three general categories so that categories with a higher number of ratings did not overinfluence the final measure (e.g. the environmental category contained three ratings, whereas the social category contained seven ratings). Therefore, an increase in our measure of sustainability performance indicates that a firm increased its beneficial impact on stakeholders' welfare equally (e.g. lower pollutant emissions, fewer health and safety issues at work, or fairer governance), regardless of whether the firm improved its impact in terms of environmental, social, or governance performance.

In the same way as the sustainability performance ratings, ASSET4 provides 15 sustainability disclosure[7] ratings ranging from 0 to 100%. These sustainability disclosure ratings cover the same 15 topics as the sustainability performance ratings and are also grouped into the same three general categories, i.e. environment, social, and governance. These 15 sustainability disclosure ratings measure the amount of information a firm publicly discloses about its sustainability performance for each of the 15 topics (e.g. Is information on CO_2 emissions publicly available? Is information on employees' injuries at work publicly available)?. More precisely, ASSET4 analysts construct the sustainability disclosure measure by comparing the maximum number of indicators a firm could have disclosed (e.g. the amount of CO_2 emissions or the number of injuries at work) with what it actually discloses. We computed our final measure of sustainability disclosure with the average of ASSET4's 15 sustainability disclosure ratings, equally weighted per general category, i.e. environmental, social, and governance. As a result, the value of our sustainability disclosure measure increases when firms disclose a greater number of indicators about their sustainability performance.

Because our hypotheses predict differing results for firms with extensive and limited disclosure in terms of financial performance, this necessitated a split in our sample between firms with limited disclosure and those with extensive disclosure. We thus computed a sustainability disclosure dummy that was coded 1 when firms performed at a level of sustainability disclosure superior to the rated median of all firms in the same year, and 0 otherwise. The baseline median was computed for every year, in which firms were split into equal size samples. We considered that firms coded with 1 implement extensive sustainability disclosure during a focal year, and those coded with 0 implement limited sustainability disclosure during the same year. By splitting firms between those with high and low sustainability disclosure using the median of all firms, rather than the median of firms from the same industry or country, we assume that stakeholders evaluate firms' absolute sustainability disclosure and not their sustainability disclosure relative to their industry or country peers. We draw this assumption from a large section in the literature that considers absolute measures of (environmental) disclosure (Cho et al., 2012, 2010) and evidence that NGOs tend to attack selected polluting industries (e.g. the energy sector and metals and mining industry) rather than the worst polluters in each industry (Reid & Toffel, 2009). However, as a robustness test, we also estimated models taking into account differences between industries and countries in normative pressure (see the 'Robustness checks' subsection).

[4] These include energy, basic materials, industrials, cyclical consumer goods and services, noncyclical consumer goods and services, financials, healthcare, technology, telecommunications services, and utilities.

[5] Labeled by ASSET4 as the 'performance' ratings within the broader category of the 'outcome' ratings.

[6] The environment category includes three subratings: emission reduction, product innovation, and resource reduction. The social category includes seven subratings: product responsibility, community, human rights, diversity and opportunity, employment quality, health and safety, and training and development. The governance category includes five subratings: board functions, board structure, compensation policy, vision and strategy, and shareholder rights.

[7] Labeled by ASSET4 as the 'transparency' ratings within the broader category of the 'outcome' ratings.

Dependent variable

In line with the literature linking sustainability performance and financial performance, we measured financial performance with the firms' return on total assets (ROA) (Choi & Wang, 2009; Hull & Rothenberg, 2008; Waddock & Graves, 1997). To measure the short-term financial performance, we considered firms' average ROA in the 2 years following the focal year when their sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure were measured. As an example, when the independent variable was a firm's sustainability disclosure in 2005, we considered its short-term financial performance as its average ROA during the 2006–2007 period; when the independent variable was a firm's 2006 sustainability disclosure, the dependent variable was its average ROA during the 2007–2008 period. In the same way, we measured firms' long-term financial performance by their average ROA over the 3rd and 4th years following the year when their sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure were measured. As an example, if the independent variable was a firm's 2005 sustainability disclosure, we considered its long-term financial performance as its average ROA during the 2008–2009 period. Measuring a firm's short-term financial performance by its forward-looking, 2-years' average ROA and its long-term financial performance by its average ROA in the 2 years following its short-term financial performance provides three things: first, consistency and comparability across our dependent variable measures (both 2 years' average); second, the ability to take advantage of the longitudinal dimension of our data (when independent variables are measured in year n, they are regressed on dependent variables measured in n+1 and n+2 or n+3 and n+4); and, third and most importantly, the capability of limiting the risk of reverse causality. Although it may be argued that a firm's current financial performance (in year n) may influence its current sustainability performance or disclosure, the causality between a firm's future financial performance (in years $n + 1$, $n + 2$, $n + 3$, and $n + 4$) and current sustainability performance or disclosure (in year n) is much weaker.

Control variables

Following the literature on the links among sustainability performance, sustainability disclosure, and financial performance (Eccles et al., 2014; Hummel & Schlick, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2017), we controlled for the major determinants of firms' forward-looking, short- and long-term financial performance, such as their size, risk exposure, industrial sector, current financial performance, country of operation, and time effect.

We measured a firm's size with the logarithm of its total assets and its short-term risk exposure with the inverse of its liquidity ratio.[8] The inverse liquidity ratio measures the risk that a firm may not be able to reimburse its debts in the short term. For models with long-term financial performance as a dependent variable, we also controlled for a firm's long-term risk exposure with the inverse of its solvency ratio.[9] The inverse solvency ratio measures the risk that a firm may not be able to reimburse its debts in the long term.

To better cope with the risk of an endogeneity issue due to reverse causality, we also included as a control a firm's current financial performance as measured by its return on assets in the same focal year as its sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure were measured (the dependent variables of short- and long-term financial performance are measured in the 4 consecutive years). By doing so, we controlled for the cases in which more profitable firms had an incentive to invest in sustainability and disclose their efforts (reverse causality) to isolate the direct effect of sustainability performance and disclosure on financial performance.

We also controlled for the industry effect with a set of 25 dummies based on the first four digits of the firms' Thomson Reuters Business Classification codes and for the country effect with a set of 58 dummies based on the firms' country of incorporation. Our data being longitudinal (panel), we also controlled in all models for the time effect with year dummies. Descriptive statistics of our variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows that firms endogenously select themselves and have a tendency to either adopt limited sustainability disclosure when their sustainability performance is low and extensive sustainability disclosure when their sustainability performance is high (0.84 correlation between the sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure variables). This supports our argument that firms play strategically with the revelation mechanism and tend to only reveal their sustainability performance when it is high. However, such a high correlation between the sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure constructs may create statistical endogeneity issues in models estimated with both measures as independent variables (multicollinearity between independent variables), which could have been a methodology to test hypotheses 3a–4b. To cope with this endogenous multicollinearity issue, we first tried to include both sustainability disclosure and performance within the same estimated models using the classical technique of instrumental variables (e.g. using the rank or differential of sustainability disclosure or performance as instruments or using financial measures as instruments of either sustainability disclosure or performance). We also tried difference-in-differences models (impact of the year-on-year difference of sustainability disclosure and performance on the year-on-year difference of financial performance). However, the results, although

[8] (Current assets – stocks)/current liabilities.

[9] Shareholders' funds/(noncurrent liabilities + current liabilities).

Table 1. Listwise Pearson correlations of variables in models with short- or long-term financial performance as the dependent variable

Short-term financial performance as the dependent variable

	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Short-term financial performance	7.54	9.83	1.00							
Sustainability performance[a]	0.48	0.05	0.03***	1.00						
Sustainability disclosure dummy[a]	0.51	0.50	0.03**	0.71***	1.00					
Sustainability disclosure[a]	0.34	0.14	−0.01	0.84***	0.67***	1.00				
Current financial performance	8.18	11.03	0.62***	0.02*	0.02+	0.02+	1.00			
Size	15.53	1.32	−0.16***	0.44***	0.34***	0.41***	−0.14***	1.00		
Short-term risk exposure	−1.42	1.92	−0.05***	0.09***	0.10***	0.09***	−0.05***	0.17***	1.00	

Number of observations = 10,814, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, +$p < 0.10$.

Long-term financial performance as the dependent variable

	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Long-term financial performance	6.76	9.86	1.00							
Sustainability performance[a]	0.48	0.04	0.07***	1.00						
Sustainability disclosure dummy[a]	0.50	0.50	0.05***	0.66***	1.00					
Sustainability disclosure[a]	0.29	0.10	0.07***	0.89***	0.73***	1.00				
Current financial performance	8.58	9.58	0.42***	0.04**	0.02	0.08***	1.00			
Size	15.50	1.34	−0.09***	0.42***	0.31***	0.44***	−0.18***	1.00		
Short-term risk exposure	−1.43	1.81	−0.03**	0.07***	0.10***	0.09***	−0.04***	0.19***	1.00	
Long-term risk exposure	−41.88	20.03	−0.12***	0.09***	0.12***	0.11***	−0.28***	0.28***	0.36***	1.00

Number of observations = 6,265. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, +$p < 0.10$.

[a] The correlation between the sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure variables may be high but these variables are never included in the same model to prevent a multicollinearity issue.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics per year for sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure

Year	Sustainability performance			Sustainability disclosure		
	Number of observations	Average	Difference in means (T-test between values in *t* and values in *t*−1)	Number of observations	Average	Difference in means (T-test between values in *t* and values in *t*−1)
2002	958	0.481		958	0.267	
2003	969	0.482	0.001	969	0.288	0.020***
2004	1,822	0.480	−0.002	1,822	0.273	−0.015***
2005	2,239	0.480	−0.001	2,239	0.296	0.023***
2006	2,252	0.480	0.001	2,252	0.308	0.011***
2007	2,429	0.482	0.001	2,429	0.395	0.087***
2008	2,920	0.485	0.003	2,920	0.439	0.046***
2009	3,350	0.486	0.002	3,350	0.457	0.018***
2010	3,258	0.490	0.004*	3,258	0.475	0.018***

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, +$p < 0.10$.

sometimes significant, were unstable (we observed strong variability of estimated coefficients when adding independent variables one by one – proof of strong remaining multicollinearity), and no strong instrument (correlated with sustainability performance but not with sustainability disclosure) could be found. To test hypotheses 3a–4b, we thus opted for a split sample methodology (Hansen, 2000; Jarque, 1987), which consisted of splitting our sample between firms with extensive and limited disclosure when running estimations that included sustainability performance as an independent

variable. This allowed us to test our hypotheses without having both sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance as independent variables in the same estimations, thereby avoiding any risk of multicollinearity (models including both sustainability disclosure and performance as independent variables are only estimated as robustness tests). Although this method eliminated most endogeneity concerns related to reverse causality and multicollinearity, the results of our analysis should be treated with caution, as minor remaining endogeneity biases may still exist.

It is interesting to note in Table 2 that firms' sustainability performance can be considered statistically stable over the years, whereas their sustainability disclosure constantly increased every year. This preliminary result is in line with previous literature (Albertini, 2014) and gives partial support to our assumption that there exists an increasing institutional pressure from stakeholders for sustainability disclosure.

Data analysis and results

Data analysis

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, we used our sustainability disclosure measure as the independent variable and estimated its impact on firms' short- and long-term financial performance via two estimated models (models 1 and 2). In testing hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b, to cope with the inherent correlation between the sustainability disclosure and performance measures, we used the sustainability disclosure dummy to split our sample between firms with extensive sustainability disclosure (sustainability disclosure dummy equals 1) and those with limited sustainability disclosure (sustainability disclosure dummy equals 0). For these two samples, we first estimated the impact of firms' sustainability performance on their short-term financial performance (models 3 and 4) and then on their long-term financial performance (models 4 and 5). The six estimated models are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The impact of sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance on short- and long-term financial performance (as measured by return on assets)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable	Short-term financial performance	Long-term financial performance	Short-term financial performance		Long-term financial performance	
Screening criteria	None	None	Extensive sustainability disclosure	Limited sustainability disclosure	Extensive sustainability disclosure	Limited sustainability disclosure
Sustainability disclosure	6.28***	6.27***				
	(0.000)	(0.000)				
Sustainability performance			9.52***	3.59	24.46***	39.73***
			(0.001)	(0.529)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Current financial performance	0.14***	0.03*	0.15***	0.22***	0.07***	0.12***
	(0.000)	(0.039)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Size	−1.91***	0.45***	−1.23***	−2.32***	−0.08	−0.75***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.574)	(0.000)
Short-term risk exposure	0.06	−0.09	−0.16**	0.15*	−0.15	−0.09
	(0.188)	(0.141)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.169)	(0.250)
Long-term risk exposure		−0.02**			−0.03**	0.01
		(0.003)			(0.002)	(0.699)
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Industry dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	35.10***		22.87***	39.90***		
	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.000)		
Number of observations	10,814	6,265	5,481	5,333	3,143	3,122
Number of firms	2,522	1,831	1,509	1,795	1,101	1,239
R-squared	0.61	0.70	0.56	0.54	0.64	0.66
Likelihood ratio Chi-square	1818***	2112***	673***	648***	775***	885***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

Robust *p*-values are in parentheses.*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, +$p < 0.10$.

In models 1 and 2 that test hypotheses 1 and 2, a firm's sustainability disclosure is an independent variable. Model 1 considers a firm's short-term financial performance as the dependent variable, whereas Model 2 uses its long-term financial performance. Therefore, the only difference between models 1 and 2 is that when sustainability disclosure is measured in the focal year *n* (as an example, 2004), the dependent variable in Model 1 (short-term financial performance) is the average ROA of a firm in years *n* + 1 and *n* + 2 (in the example, 2005 and 2006), whereas in Model 2, the dependent variable (long-term financial performance) is the average ROA of a firm in years *n* + 3 and *n* + 4 (in the example, 2007 and 2008).

Next, models 3 and 4 test hypotheses 3a and 3b. These two models contain sustainability performance as an independent variable and short-term financial performance as the dependent variable. They are estimated on two subsamples. Model 3 is estimated on a sample that only contains firms with extensive sustainability disclosure (thus testing hypothesis 3a), whereas Model 4 is estimated on a sample that only considers firms with limited sustainability disclosure (thus testing hypothesis 3b).

Finally, models 5 and 6, which test hypotheses 4a and 4b, also consider a firm's sustainability performance as the independent variable and the long-term financial performance as the dependent variable. Models 5 and 6 are also estimated on two subsamples. Model 5 only includes firms with extensive disclosure (thus testing hypothesis 4a), whereas Model 6 only considers firms with limited disclosure (thus testing hypothesis 4b).

Models 1–6 were estimated through a maximum likelihood random effect estimation, including control variables, country, industry, and year dummies, and estimations robust to heteroskedasticity. Models 1–6 all used panel longitudinal data. Due to the forward-looking component of the dependent variables, in models 1, 3, and 5, the independent variables are measured over the 2002–2008 period and the dependent variables are measured over the 2003–2010 period. Similarly, in models 2, 4, and 6, the independent variables belong to the 2002–2006 period and the dependent variables belong to the 2005–2010 period. In those latter models, we also dropped the constant terms, which were not significant. The random effect, control variables, and industry, country, and year dummies allow us to control for any sample selection bias that may arise from the split in models 3, 4, 5, and 6 between firms with limited and extensive sustainability disclosure.

Results

Model 1 underlines that sustainability disclosure directly and positively influences short-term financial performance (coefficient equals 6.28 with a *p*-value below 0.1%, which shows a very high probability of observing the effect). Model 2 shows that the extent of sustainability disclosure also positively and significantly impacts long-term financial performance (coefficient equals 6.27 and is significant with a *p*-value below 0.1%). Model 1, therefore, robustly validates hypothesis 1, and Model 2 robustly supports hypothesis 2. The conformity mechanism is effective in both the short and long run: firms gain stakeholder support, legitimacy, and higher financial performance from extensive sustainability disclosure.

Model 3 shows that for firms with extensive sustainability disclosure, the impact of sustainability performance on short-term financial performance is positive (9.52), with a high probability of being observed within the sample (*p*-value lower than 0.1%). However, Model 4 shows that for firms with limited sustainability disclosure, the impact of sustainability performance on short-term financial performance is not significant (*p*-value of 52.9%). Model 3, therefore, validates hypothesis 3a, and Model 4 validates hypothesis 3b. Model 3 shows that firms with extensive sustainability disclosure reveal their achieved sustainability performance and allow stakeholders to value their sustainability investments (positive and significant coefficient). The short-term financial performance of firms with extensive disclosure is positively impacted when their sustainability performance increases (hypothesis 3a). On the contrary, Model 4 shows that firms with limited sustainability disclosure leave their stakeholders in doubt. Thus, their short-term financial performance does not benefit from high levels of sustainability (insignificant coefficient) but also does not suffer from poor sustainability results (hypothesis 3b). Therefore, models 3 and 4 show that the revelation mechanism is effective in the short term.

Models 5 and 6, however, show that both subsamples of firms with extensive and limited sustainability disclosure have a positive and significant impact on their long-term financial performance with increasing sustainability performance (coefficients are, respectively, 24.46 and 39.73, with both *p*-values below 0.1%, which shows a high probability of observing the effects). Therefore, Model 5 validates hypothesis 4a, and Model 6 validates hypothesis 4b. In the long term, the revelation mechanism is not effective and sustainability disclosure does not moderate the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance, but stakeholders are able to evaluate the degree of the sustainability performance of all firms, even those with limited sustainability disclosure. As a consequence, firms with low sustainability performance cannot avoid being penalized for their poor sustainability results, even when trying to hide them with limited sustainability disclosure.

To illustrate the predicted and confirmed effects of hypotheses 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b on firms' financial performance, we generated the predictions of models 1–6 over the whole sample of firms and with all independent variables other than sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance set at

their mean. We generated those predictions over the whole sample of firms to provide illustrations that cope with the latent dynamic that exists in our data set: firms have a tendency to implement either a high sustainability performance/extensive sustainability disclosure strategy or a low sustainability performance/limited sustainability disclosure strategy. When Model 3, as an example, is only estimated over the subsample of firms with extensive sustainability disclosure (5,481 observations), those firms most likely have higher sustainability performance. By generating the predictions of Model 3 over the whole sample of firms, we illustrate the short-term financial performance of firms that actually adopted a low sustainability performance/limited sustainability disclosure strategy but hypothetically adopted a low sustainability performance/extensive sustainability disclosure strategy. In other words, the predictions of Model 3 over the whole sample of firms estimate the achieved short-term financial performance of firms with extensive disclosure for all potential values of sustainability performance (not just high values). The predictions of models 1–6 over the whole sample of firms and with all independent variables other than sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance set at their mean values are presented in Figures 1–3.

Figure 1 relates to hypotheses 1 and 2 (models 1 and 2) and illustrates the conformity mechanism. It shows that conformity to the norms of disclosure (increased sustainability disclosure) has a positive impact on short- and long-term financial performance. Figures 2 and 3 relate to hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b (models 3–6) and illustrate the revelation mechanism. Figure 2 shows that the revelation mechanism is effective in the short term: firms with low sustainability performance are able to mislead their stakeholders about their poor sustainability results with limited sustainability disclosure, whereas firms with high sustainability performance reap benefits by revealing their positive results to stakeholders. Figure 3 shows that both low- and high-sustainability performance firms achieve higher long-term financial performance when their sustainability disclosure is extensive, which reveals that the revelation mechanism is not effective in the long term, unlike the conformity mechanism. In other words, firms gain by conforming to the norm of transparency and cannot hide their poor results under limited sustainability disclosure.

Robustness checks

Although our models strongly support hypotheses 1–4, we further tested the robustness of the results for statistical and cognitive biases. We first checked for any multicollinearity issues. The variance inflation factor (VIF) of variables ranges from 1.03 to 9.43, and the mean VIF of models ranges from 1.56 to 3.12. Such results allow us to confirm the nonexistence of a multicollinearity bias.

Second, to evaluate whether sustainability performance may create an omitted variable bias in models 1 and 2, we estimated those models including the sustainability performance measure as a control variable (results not reported). This robustness test validates hypotheses 1 and 2 (conformity

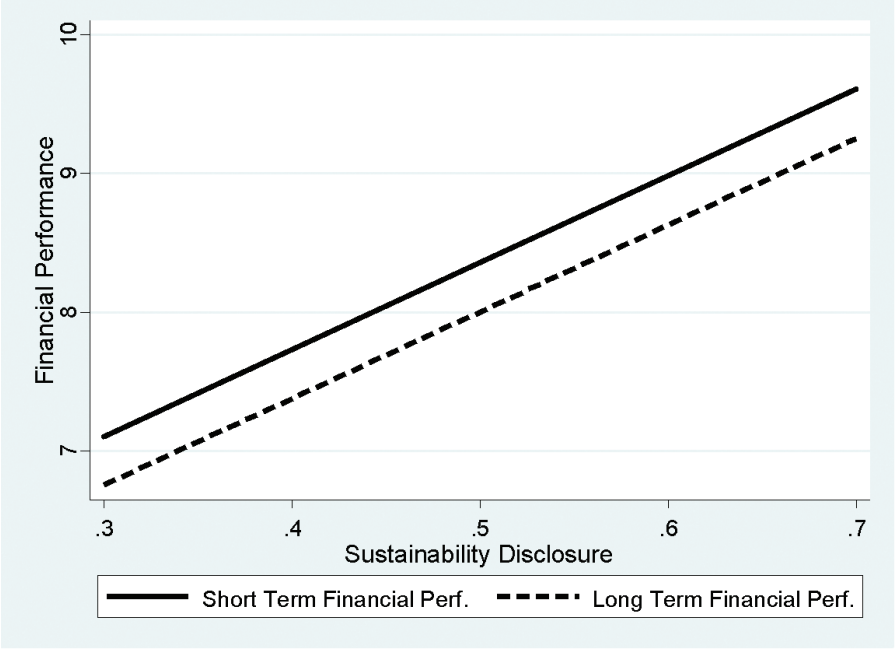

Figure 1. Predicted impact of sustainability disclosure on short- and long-term financial performance of the firm

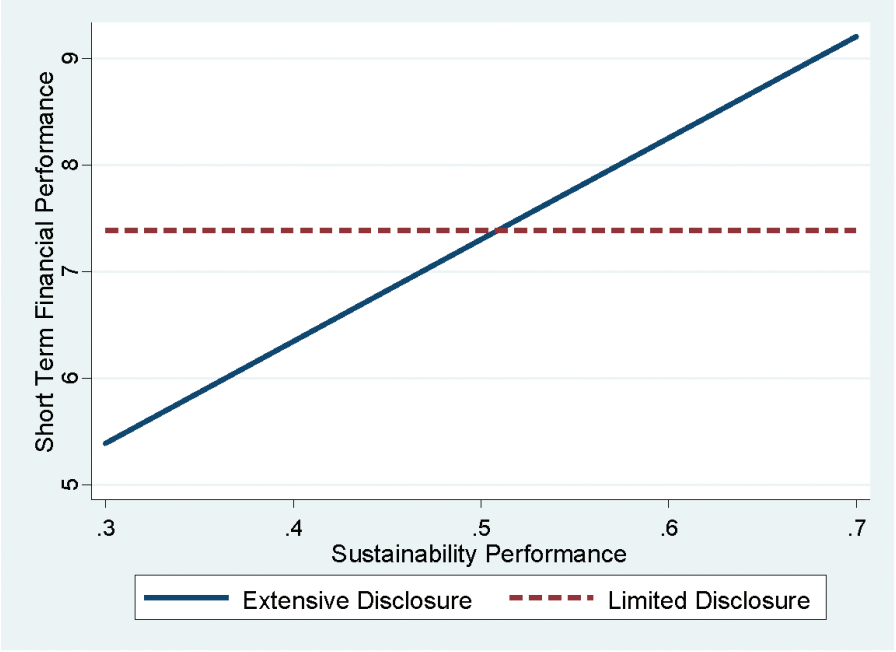

Figure 2. Predicted short-term financial performance of firms with extensive and limited sustainability disclosure

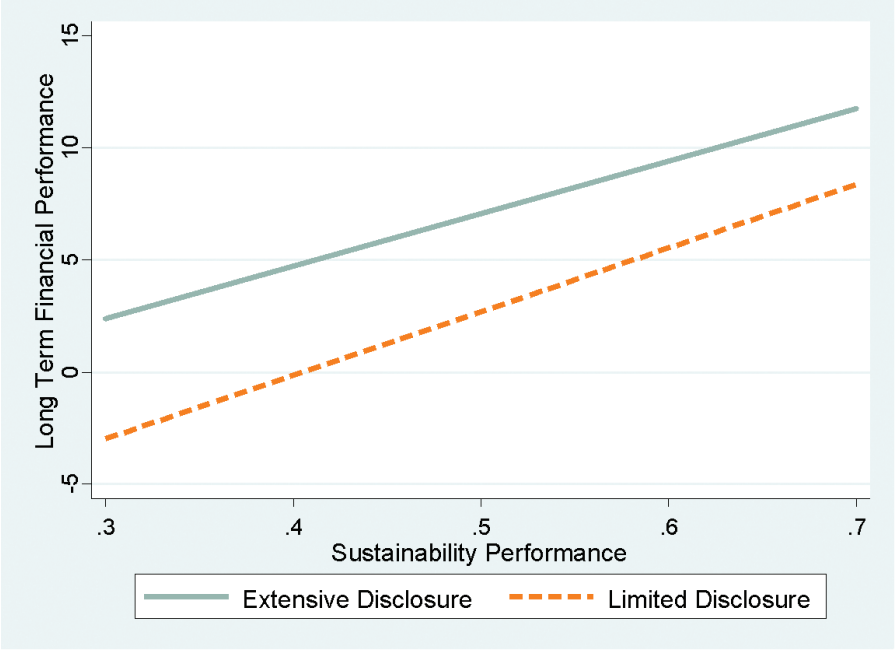

Figure 3. Predicted long-term financial performance of firms with extensive and limited sustainability disclosure

mechanism efficiency in the short and long term) and supports our results. These two models can, however, only be considered robustness tests, as they bear, as expected, the risk of bias due to multicollinearity between the sustainability performance and sustainability disclosure measures (VIF > 20). They, therefore, provide further justification for our decision to use a split sample methodology to test the revelation mechanism (models 3 to 6 of Table 3).

Third, following previous studies that used market-based measures as a proxy for a firm's financial performance instead of its return on assets (Flammer, 2013; Surroca et al., 2010; Wang, Choi, & Li, 2008), we estimated models 1–6 with Tobin's Q[10] as the dependent variable to indicate firms' financial performance. Results of those estimations (not reported here) are similar in range, sign, and significance and also validate hypotheses 1–4.

Fourth, prior literature also suggested that institutional pressures for sustainability may vary between countries (Spencer & Gomez, 2011; Van der Laan Smith, Adhikari, Tondkar, & Andrews, 2010) and that because regulatory frameworks are diverse, firms (depending on their country of incorporation) may have an incentive to invest in sustainability and its reporting (Baldini et al., 2018; Holland & Boon Foo, 2003; Surroca, Tribo, & Zahra, 2013). To test if our hypotheses are resilient to between-countries differences in norms and regulations, we run models 1–6 but, this time, identify firms with extensive or limited disclosure at the country level by splitting our initial sample at the median of firms' sustainability disclosure not only per year but also per country. In doing so, we split our sample for each year between firms with extensive disclosure compared to other firms in their own country and those with limited disclosure compared to their peers in their own country. By doing so, we considered country-specific regulations and institutional pressures while maintaining the extent of our data set. The results (not reported here) are similar in range, sign, and significance, and, therefore, hypotheses 1–4 are again validated. Although their amplitude might vary across countries, the conformity and revelation mechanisms are effective within countries that constitute our sample. To additionally check the robustness of our results against country-specific frameworks, we run models 1–6 including only firms with US- and Canada-based headquarters (996 firms in our data set), considering that these two countries have similar regulatory and institutional frameworks regarding sustainability and its disclosure. The results (not reported here) also support hypotheses 1–4, which are valid when only one institutional framework is considered.

Fifth, the same argument of heterogeneity of norms, regulations, and activists' pressures among countries could be made regarding industries. Institutional pressures for higher sustainability performance and disclosure vary among industries (Herz & Rogers, 2016; Reid & Toffel, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2017), and this could influence our results. To test if our hypotheses are resilient to between-industries differences in norms and regulations, we run models 1–6, splitting our initial samples at the median of firms' sustainability disclosure per year (as in our initial models), as well as per industry. We identified for each year firms with extensive sustainability disclosure and those with limited sustainability disclosure compared to their industry peers. The results (not reported here) are similar in range, sign, and significance and thus validate hypotheses 1–4.

Finally, although hypotheses 1–4 seem strongly and robustly validated, both by our initial model and robustness tests, it is important to note that our study considers sustainability disclosure as a whole, not differentiating disclosure of social performance, environmental performance, and effective governance (Chatterji et al., 2016; Mahadeo et al., 2011). We showed in this study that sustainability disclosure participates in a conformity mechanism that has short- and long-term effects on financial performance and in a revelation mechanism that is only effective in the short term in moderating the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance. However, one could argue that environmental, social, and governance disclosure may have diverging effects. Although such research questions may inspire future works, as a robustness check, we estimated models 1–6 considering only the environmental performance and disclosure of firms as measured by ASSET4 as our independent variables. Results of these estimations (not reported here) also support hypotheses 1–4 in the environmental component and thus provide further support for our theoretical framework.

Discussion and conclusion

This study investigates the relationships among firms' sustainability disclosure, sustainability performance, and financial performance. It specifically argues that firms, by adjusting the extent of their sustainability disclosure, trigger two mechanisms that have different effects on stakeholder support and financial performance: the conformity mechanism, within which a firm gains stakeholder support and legitimacy by showing conformity to the norms of disclosure, and the revelation mechanism, within which a firm either reassures or leaves its stakeholders in doubt about its actual sustainability performance. We theorize on the efficiency of these mechanisms and their impact on financial performance in both the short and long terms. We first show that the conformity mechanism is effective in both the short and long terms: extensive sustainability disclosure elicits stakeholder support, shows conformity to the disclosure norms, and, thereby, positively impacts financial performance both in the short and long runs. We also show that the revelation mechanism is effective only in the short term: sustainability performance impacts firms' short-term financial performance only when they opt for extensive disclosure. Therefore, higher sustainability performers have an interest in extensive disclosure, whereas weak performers are more likely to give noisy signals via their disclosure in the short run. However, in the long term, stakeholders are able to evaluate a firm's sustainability

[10] (Market capitalization + net debt)/total assets.

performance, even when the firm adopts limited disclosure. Therefore, the revelation mechanism is not effective in the long term, i.e. sustainability disclosure does not moderate the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance in the long term). Hence, even for firms with limited disclosure, sustainability performance has an effect on their long-term financial performance. In other words, firms cannot strategically use sustainability disclosure to hide low sustainability performance and leave stakeholders in doubt in the long term.

We contribute to three streams of literature. First, we contrast and reconcile two theoretical perspectives in sustainability disclosure: legitimacy theory, which underlines the existence of pressure for conformity to the norms of disclosure (Mahadeo et al., 2011; Philippe & Durand, 2011; Reid & Toffel, 2009), and signaling theory, which sees disclosure as a way for a firm to reveal or hide some underlying characteristics of interest (King et al., 2005; Mahoney et al., 2013). By showing that both mechanisms, which derived from these two theories, exist on different time horizons, we hope to advance the understanding of the relationship between sustainability disclosure and sustainability performance (Cho et al., 2015; Hummel & Schlick, 2016; Mahoney et al., 2013). Second, our findings provide useful insights into the largely unexplored relationship between sustainability disclosure and corporate financial performance (Eccles et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2017) by defining how disclosure might have direct and indirect effects that lead to financial benefits. Finally, we hope to contribute to the long-standing stream of literature on the effect of sustainability performance on financial performance (Barnett & Salomon, 2006; Busch & Friede, 2018; McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). Given that most prior works and data analyses focused on the short-term consequences of business sustainability (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2016), we hope to shed light on the long-term effects of sustainability performance and the strategic use of sustainability disclosure by firms in the relationship between sustainability performance and financial performance within the boundaries of a time frame.

Managerial implications

For managers, the choice of the extent of sustainability disclosure is not evident, as they may face obstacles as a result of the opposite effects of the conformity and revelation mechanisms. For instance, firms with poor sustainability results may benefit from extensive disclosure, showing stakeholders that they respond to their demand for transparency (conformity mechanism), but they may be punished for the poor sustainability performance they disclose (revelation mechanism). Unsustainable firms may hide their detrimental impact on society and the environment when they focus on short-term financial performance, thereby benefitting from the revelation mechanism. In the long run, however, if a firm's sustainability performance is not positive, managers cannot secure stakeholders' support and a positive financial return from their sustainability investments.

Moreover, employing sustainability disclosure to manage the public perception of a firm's sustainability performance (Deegan, 2002) is becoming increasingly difficult. Firms that are in institutional contexts in which they are more exposed to scrutiny and global norms are less capable of strategically limiting their sustainability disclosure, especially with the growing civil society activism and information access (Marquis et al., 2016). As investors increasingly incorporate sustainability disclosure in decision-making, the importance of extensive disclosure will also grow (Rodriguez et al., 2017). Hence, for managers, choosing to invest in sustainability and trying to increase the sustainability performance of their companies, as well as communicating extensively on the topic, appears to be the best choice.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unpacking Business Model Innovation Through an Attention-Based View

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Abstract

Attention is considered as a critical driver for business model (BM) innovation in established firms, where existing activities already absorb internal actors' time and effort. Although previous studies acknowledge the role of attention to detect opportunities or to generate new ideas, we still need to understand how actors deal with attentional tensions inherent in the development of a new additive BM. This article addresses this issue by adopting an attention-based view of BM innovation, that is, by examining the forms of attention involved in the process of developing a new BM. Through a longitudinal study in a small consulting company, we unfold an incremental and ongoing process of new BM development. Our findings identify three attentional stages triggered by specific mechanisms that drive BM innovation, from detecting new ideas to their implementation. The attentional perspective we use in this study revises the role of a prevailing BM in the emergence of new business logics in established firms. While previous studies consider it as an impediment for BM innovation, we reveal that actors can develop new BMs by navigating between differentiation and consistency with the prevailing BM.

Keywords: *Business model innovation; Attention-based view; Strategy; Qualitative study; Observation*

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In a fast-changing environment, business model innovation (BMI), that is, the process of organizing businesses in a new way (Casadesus-Masanell & Zhu, 2013), is considered to be a critical source of sustained value creation and sustainable performance (Mangematin, Ravarini, & Sharkey Scott, 2017). While new products or services can be copied, the ability to adopt new business logics provides a durable vector of distinction (Giesen, Berman, Bell, & Blitz, 2007). The skyrocket growth of iconic Internet firms, such as Amazon or Google, has raised significant interest for their ability to constantly develop new business models (BMs). However, public institutions and consulting companies continue to point out the organizational challenges of achieving BMI (European Commission, 2014; IBM Corporation, 2008; Lindgardt, Reeves, Stalk, & Deimler, 2009).

In response, a growing research stream examines the organizational drivers and antecedents of BMI (Aversa, Haefliger, Rossi, & Baden-Fuller, 2015; Berends, Smits, Reymen, & Podoynitsyna, 2016; Foss & Saebi, 2017). The existing studies shed light on the various contexts in which BMI occurs, not only for start-up creation (Bojovic, Genet, & Sabatier, 2018) but also for the development of new activities in established firms (Mezger, 2014). Acknowledged as particularly complex (Massa & Tucci, 2014), BMI in an established firm constitutes a recent agenda of research (Demil, Lecocq, Ricart, & Zott, 2015).

Managers of established firms conduct BMI according to various strategies (Santos, Spector, & Van Der Heyden, 2015): they replace the incumbent BM (Moingeon & Lehmann-Ortega, 2010) or develop additional activities inside (Winterhalter, Weiblen, Wecht, & Gassmann, 2017) or outside (Lehoux, Daudelin, Williams-Jones, Denis, & Longo, 2014) the company. While the scholarship acknowledges that BMI should be led by an internal dedicated team (Khanagh, Volberda, & Oshri, 2014), the process through which internal actors (also in charge of current activities) develop a new additive BM remains largely unexplored. In particular, previous studies have suggested that internal actors' ability to innovate is driven by their limited attention, which is stressed as an overlooked core driver of BMI (Dahlander & O'Mahony, 2016). On the one hand, attention allows actors to detect opportunities or to focus on new idea incubation (Li, Maggitti, Smith, Tesluk, & Katila, 2013).

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On the other hand, attention can also interfere with innovation by enclosing actors in time-and-effort-consuming activities driven by the prevailing BMs.

To determine how attention shapes BMI within incumbent firms, we draw on the attention-based view (ABV) (Ocasio, 1997). The ABV defines attention as the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational actors on a limited set of issues. The ABV relies on the idea that organizational and strategic change is driven by the allocation of actors' attention (Orvain, 2014; Shepherd, McMullen, & Ocasio, 2017). Because attention is limited (Simon, 1947), internal actors constantly make arbitrages: they address a limited number of issues by allocating different forms of attention (Ocasio, 2011), that is, by selecting issues (selective attention), by engaging managerial efforts (engaged attention), and by redistributing organizational resources (distributed attention). The ABV thus provides a useful lens to reveal innovative processes (Li et al., 2013). Accordingly, we address the following research question: *how does internal actors' attention shape the development of a new additive BM in an established firm?*

To answer this question, we conducted a longitudinal analysis of a new additive BM development by a BMI team (composed of internal actors) within a small consulting company over several years. Our findings captured an emergent and ongoing process of BMI driven by three attentional phases applied to several objects of attention. We revealed the mechanisms that trigger changes of attention forms and allow actors to select, develop, and concretize ideas that progressively feed the new BM.

This study provides several contributions. First, it extends the knowledge regarding BMI in incumbent firms (Arend, 2013; Demil et al., 2015) by spotlighting attention as a mechanism through which a new additive BM is developed while maintaining the prevailing BM (Velu & Stiles, 2013). It specifies the role of attention in the process of BMI (Foss & Saebi, 2017) by clarifying how different forms of attention lead to the incremental construction of a new BM. Second, it provides empirical insights that refine the ABV model by highlighting the triggers that allow shifts of attention over time (Ocasio, 2011).

This article is structured as follows. First, we introduce our theoretical framework, which articulates the BMI and ABV literatures. Second, we expose our methodology. Then, we describe our findings and discuss the contributions of the study.

Theoretical framework

After introducing the concept of BM and BMI, we justify the need to further explore the role of attention in the BMI process. Then, we mobilize the ABV as a conceptual lens to enhance the understanding of BMI.

Business model innovation

The growing literature on BM in the fields of strategy and entrepreneurship since the late 1990s reflects the popularity of the concept (Demil et al., 2015; Maucuer & Renaud, 2019) for both scholars and practitioners (Lecocq, Demil, & Ventura, 2010). The flourishing literature on BM provides numerous definitions that are converging toward a consensus: BM refers to the logic of the firm for value creation, delivery, and capture (Baden-Fuller & Morgan, 2010; Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Teece, 2010; Zott & Amit, 2010). Due to various ontological assumptions about BM (Massa, Tucci, & Afuah, 2017), the literature provides a rich diversity of definitions. While most of them consider BM to be a descriptive output, the recent scholarship argues that it rather represents a collective device for business exploration, which brings progressively new activities into existence (Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009). Following the recent studies (Aversa et al., 2015; Bojovic et al., 2018), we adopt a process view of BM that allows to address decisive issues such as how a new BM is developed (Baden-Fuller & Mangematin, 2015), leading to the study of BMI.

BMI refers to "the search for new logics of the firm and new ways to create and capture value for its stakeholders" (Casadesus-Masanell & Zhu, 2013, p. 464). In this view, BMI goes beyond product or service innovation and involves the reshaping of a firm's activities and operations (Bjorkdahl & Holmén, 2013). BMI is an important aspect for competition and performance (Bjorkdahl, 2009; Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010): consequently, it is considered by many practitioners and academics to be a source of competitive advantage (Chesbrough, 2010; Foss & Saebi, 2015; Zott & Amit, 2007). Thus, the academic literature invites further research to shed light on BMI drivers (Foss & Saebi, 2017) to understand how actors develop a new BM (Baden-Fuller & Mangematin, 2015; Demil & Lecocq, 2015) or identify antecedents, leading to a BM adoption (Rumble & Mangematin, 2015). Developing a new BM is known to be a challenging activity (Chesbrough, 2010), both for new ventures (Bojovic et al., 2018) and incumbent firms (Berends et al., 2016). Scholars invite for further research on the latter (Arend, 2013; Demil et al., 2015) as BMI is considered to be more difficult in established firms than for entrepreneurship projects (Mezger, 2014).

BMI in an incumbent firm encompasses either the evolution of the current BM (Demil & Lecocq, 2010) or the development of a new additive BM (Santos et al., 2015), adjacent to the core business (Schneider & Spieth, 2013). The first case is quite well understood, referring to situations of BM change (e.g. Sosna, Trevinyo-Rodriguez, & Velamuri, 2010) in which implementation could be difficult for actors (Demil & Lecocq, 2015), requiring, for instance, a progressive transition between the former and the new BM (Moingeon & Lehmann-Ortega, 2010). Otherwise, incumbent firms develop new

additive BM in various ways (Hacklin, Bjorkdahl, & Wallin, 2018), which could be distinguished in two different organizational configurations. On the one hand, some firms choose to adopt a new BM through the creation of new entities such as business units (Winterhalter et al., 2017) or spin-offs (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019), whereby actors are dedicated to run the new business. On the other hand, a new BM can be developed within the established firm (Velu & Stiles, 2013) by internal actors. Previous studies have raised questions about firms' performance when they compete with several BMs (Kim & Min, 2015) and studied how to manage a BM portfolio (Sabatier, Mangematin, & Rousselle, 2010; Snihur & Tarzijan, 2018), leading to the formulation of advices for linking or splitting different activities (Markides, 2013; Markides & Charitou, 2004). However, previous studies have provided limited explanation and conceptualization on how BMI is conducted within established firms that run an existing (core) activity (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019), except for the suggestion of a dedicated team to develop the new additive BM (Khanagh et al., 2014). In established firms, BMI teams encompass actors that are not necessarily entirely dedicated to the development of a new BMI. Consequently, established firms that innovate face tensions between new and existing business (e.g. Moingeon & Lehmann-Ortega, 2010): developing a new BM within an incumbent firm requires specific attention from internal actors, which also operates other activities. Previous studies on the search for new BMs have noted several issues that are closely linked to attention, such as internal competition for resources (Aversa, Haefliger, & Reza, 2017), ongoing paradoxical tensions between strategic temporary conflicting strategic goals (Smith, Binns, & Tushman, 2010), or cognitive dependence on the prevailing BM (Laudien & Daxböck, 2016). In established firms, actors are not necessarily completely dedicated to the search for innovation. However, identifying new signals or adopting a different perspective to elaborate new logics of value creation, delivery, and capture is costly in terms of attention. Consequently, tensions in resource allocation, in particular the available stocks of managerial efforts, may be more intense in established firms that intend to innovate their BM (Snihur & Wiklund, 2019). While those tensions may be necessary to drive the transformation of businesses and organizations (Calori, 2002), they also bring attentional challenges that must be managed to ensure BMI success (Massa & Tucci, 2014). To further explore this aspect, we investigate the attentional implications of BMI.

Attention challenges of BMI

Attention is a mechanism of allocating cognitive and organizational resources (Simon, 1947), and a critical aspect of an organization's activities and performance (Cyert & March, 1963; Hansen & Haas, 2001). While it remains overlooked in the research on BMs (Bjorkdahl & Holmén, 2013; Foss & Saebi, 2017), scholars have recently acknowledged attention as one of the most challenging aspects of BMI in incumbent firms (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019; Snihur & Wiklund, 2019). Indeed, the existing studies reveal that attention is a critical driver for the generation of new ideas (Li et al., 2013) to detect changes in the firm environment (Yadav, Prabhu, & Chandy, 2007) or to allocate persisting efforts to lead a BM innovation until its end (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019). However, attention is a scarce resource (Simon, 1947): firms have limited time and tangible resources (e.g. budgets) to address various issues. Moreover, organizational actors have limited managerial capacities and must arbitrate, consciously or not, where to distribute their efforts. Consequently, a BMI team may not simply address new ideas or relevant issues. Instead, different tensions emerge from limited attention.

A first source of tension emerges from the significant mass of information, issues, or ideas that must be addressed with limited resources (Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015). Indeed, developing a new BM relies on managers' ability to select relevant stimuli (Osiyevskyy & Dewald, 2015). Nevertheless, information overload can interfere with the notification and selection of external stimuli (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2008): the infinite scope of available information can paralyze BMI by preventing managers from distinguishing relevant signals (McMullen, Shepherd, & Patzelt, 2009). While working to maintain their prevailing activities, actors may miss opportunities (McMullen et al., 2009; Shepherd et al., 2017) or neglect new information and ideas (Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015). Furthermore, defining a new BM involves arbitration between a large flow of ideas coming from many stakeholders (Chesbrough & Schwartz, 2007) since developing innovative ideas can be time-consuming (Li et al., 2013; Vuori & Huy, 2016).

In incumbent firms, a second source of tension lies in the coexistence of the firm's existing activities and the development of new ones (Walrave, Romme, Van Oorschot, & Langerak, 2017; Yadav et al., 2007). On the one hand, some studies suggest that the prevailing BM allows synergies with the new BM (Sabatier et al., 2010). On the other hand, the literature also suggests that the prevailing BM may impede innovative initiatives (Chesbrough, 2010) by acting as a 'dominant logic', that is, cognitive schemas that influence the way managers select and interpret information (Massa et al., 2017). At an organizational level, the prevailing BM distributes firms' attention in favor of existing activities: as developing new ideas may be time- and budget-consuming, innovative BM can be conflictual with managers' day-to-day activities (Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002).

The literature thus provides significant evidence of tensions in allocating established firms' attention without explicitly addressing the role of attention in BMI. To address this gap, we turn on the ABV as a promising framework through which to gain insights into the process of BMI.

An attention-based view of BMI

The ABV is a theoretical perspective that conceptualizes how issues are selected and formulated by organizational actors and explains why and how those issues lead to concrete firm moves. It defines attention as the "noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational actors on a limited set of issues and answers" (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). While the ABV is not the only theoretical approach to attention, it constitutes a particularly interesting conceptual framework for addressing the logics of attention at work in a BMI process. The ABV results from the articulation of two other main streams (Ocasio, 1997): the cognitive approach (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006), which focuses on the interpretative mechanisms that orientate actors' attention, and the structuration approach (Cyert & March, 1963), which considers how organizational structures distribute scarce resources. Therefore, the ABV provides a particularly relevant framework through which to apprehend organizational processes (Orvain, 2014) such as BMI by helping to conceptualize the mechanisms that link a firm's strategic choices with managerial activities and interpretations (Shepherd et al., 2017). Furthermore, adopting an ABV provides two conceptual opportunities to unfold BMI.

First, the ABV offers a refined framework for understanding BMI's tensions in established firms by distinguishing several mechanisms to arbitrate between existing activities and innovation. Indeed, the ABV invites the consideration of the varieties of attention that intervene in the process of BMI by addressing three forms of attention (Ocasio, 2011; Orvain, 2014). *Selective attention* encompasses the scanning and selection of objects in the environment. Selective attention shapes innovative processes by focusing on specific details that change perceptions of the environment (Naveh & Erez, 2004) or by determining the scope of the internal and external information used to feed new ideas (Dahlander & O'Mahony, 2016). *Engaged attention* refers to the focus on deliberate managerial efforts to enhance the understanding of a specific object (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Engaged attention is critical in the development of ideas through activities such as brainstorming (Li et al., 2013). *Distributed attention* implies the allocation of organizational resources in time and space toward pre-established directions (Rerup, 2009). It determines, for instance, which activities will receive investments (Surroca, Prior, & TribóGiné, 2016). Distributed attention conditions which aspect of the new BM will receive resource commitment. Thus, the ABV provides a refined framework for understanding the BMI process as developing new ideas may imply different mechanisms of arbitrating between existing activities and innovation, underpinned by fluctuating activities (Li et al., 2013).

Second, the ABV framework provides a particularly useful lens through which to track BMI, especially in the early stages as actors may not yet specifically realize that they are undertaking BM innovation. Following ABV principles, we consider BMI to be a 'situated' process (Ocasio, 1997): attention is shaped by the contextual conditions in which the organizational actors are embedded. This consideration is important since a BMI team's time and efforts are driven by preexisting activities and structures, such as organizational goals (Greve, 2008), strategic agendas (Dutton, 1997), previous organizational choices, internal procedures and norms, or existing infrastructures (Joseph & Ocasio, 2012). Until the new BM is formalized or fully implemented, the emergence of its different components may remain quite intangible or fuzzy. Consequently, internal BMI teams may require specific organizational conditions to allow the development of new ideas (Rhee & Leonardi, 2018). Variations in attention can explain how new ideas enter BMI team's scope, particularly intense creative activities, or in changes in the way they allocate resources of the firm. To track attention, the ABV provides various tangible indicators (Gavetti & Ocasio, 2015), such as the content of communications (D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990), meetings and managerial activities dedicated to an issue (Stanko & Beckman, 2015), or budget allocation.

To conclude, an attention-based lens emphasizes two explanatory mechanisms of BMI in established firms. First, unpacking the forms of attention underpinning BMI can help in conceptualizing how a new BM emerges from activities embedded in the prevailing BM (Rhee & Leonardi, 2018). Second, considering the various obstacles within incumbent firms (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019), examining variations of attention along the process can enhance knowledge regarding the conditions to undertake BMI. Accordingly, we formulate the following research question: *how does internal actors' attention shape the development of a new additive BM in an established firm?*

Methodology

We chose to investigate the attentional mechanisms underlying BMI through an explorative study relying on a qualitative approach. This article is based on the case of new BM development undertaken by Consultor, a consulting company. We study how Consultor developed a new BM in the context of a project called the 'New Offer Project' (NOP). Our longitudinal study relies on observations over a 40-month period completed by interviews and archival data.

Research site

We relied on a single case study (Yin, 2013) because our research question addresses a complex and underexplored phenomenon that requires a rich description and an in-depth understanding of the context.

We selected the case of Consultor, which is a small French management consulting firm based in Paris. The company has several small branches in Europe and Canada. Its main activities encompass consulting services for large companies. Founded in 2010, the firm has a staff of 52 consultants and has been growing each year – achieving in 2016 a turnover of more than €6 million. In 2013, while Consultor was working exclusively for large corporations, top managers decided to develop a new consulting offer for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They named a team of consultants (NOP team) in charge of the development of the 'NOP'. The NOP includes several differences and innovations that significantly differ from Consultor's prevailing BM, such as customer segment, partners, or revenue model. Such changes include innovations in terms of services and processes, which characterize BMI (Bjorkdahl & Holmén, 2013). The NOP does not aim at replacing the prevailing BM but rather hopes to develop a new additive BM (Santos et al., 2015) at Consultor. Over months, the NOP team has worked on the new offer to develop its BM. However, it is important to underscore that NOP members do not use the concept of BM, not even the word 'business model', any definition or framework.

Following Eisenhardt and Graebner's (2007) recommendations for sampling a single case, we argue that this case is particularly relevant for three reasons. First, the case context highly conductive to BM innovation (Massa & Tucci, 2014): as the consulting industry is a mature industry, growing harsh competition pushes consulting firms to constantly innovate to maintain their competitive advantage (Avadikyan, Lhuillery, & Negassi, 2016). Second, by choosing a small organization in which top management is involved in BMI, we can observe the new BM development in a relative exhaustive way across the different levels of the firm. The company's small size and the focus on the NOP leading team – which is composed of top managers and a few consultants – offered full access to rich and relevant data for the study of attention. The internal position of one of the researchers allowed him to frequently interact with top management and to observe daily activities and decision-making.

Third, we used several sampling criteria to characterize the "revelatory potential" of the NOP team's configuration (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013, p. 15). The first criterion was the ability to reveal the attentional tensions that emerge from an internal BMI team: the NOP team was both involved in the operation of existing activities and new BM development and thus needed to differentiate between prevailing and new BM logics. The second criterion concerned the possibility of observing BMI at an early stage to better understand how new ideas emerge and are developed: we were able to follow the project from the first steps of its development. The third criterion was the multiplicity of the stakes that drove the new BM development because the NOP was not only driven by profit-seeking. Indeed, actors also considered that such consulting services could contribute to economic development by supporting small businesses.

The NOP was thus a perfect opportunity to observe how actors allocated their attention to address tensions between existing and additive BM as suggested in the literature.

Data collection

The single-case design of the study follows an ethnographic type (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). One of the authors spent 3 days per week in the field for 60 months through his internal position at Consultor. This period allowed him to participate to the NOP development as he was involved in all related activities (e.g. meetings with partners and customers, and internal workshops) and in the organization's social life (e.g. interactions with internal and external stakeholders, informal conversations, and events). Our study constituted an opportunity to observe BMI in an established firm 'as it happens' rather than through an *a posteriori* reconstitution (Demil & Lecocq, 2015). We used an insider/outsider approach (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010) to maximize the data collection provided by the insider position. This configuration enabled the study to confront the insider view with the outsider one, allowing us to obtain the right distance in the field and to increase the reliability of our findings.

The BMI was informed by both primary and secondary data. First, the first author kept a sibylline research diary (Laszczuk & Garreau, 2018) over the period of observation that allowed to take notes systematically and to share it with the second author (e.g. Bourgoin, Bencherki, & Faraj, 2019; Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018). The data collection setup allowed for assistance and participation in 98 events of NOP development over 60 months and for the recording of a substantial part of it (45 events, representing 68 h of audio recordings – see Appendix 1). Moreover, over the period, the immersed researcher shared the everyday life of the organization's members. Second, eight formal semi-structured interviews were performed and recorded (see Appendix 2). We interviewed the key actors from the NOP and Consultor top management several times at different development stages of the project. These interviews allowed us to complete our understanding of the observed events and to gather more explanations from the main actors. Furthermore, documents related to the projects (timing and e-mails) or to the company (website, articles, and corporate presentations) were collected (Figure 1).

Although the NOP was officially launched in 2013, the case analysis shows that anterior events had inspired the chief executive officer (CEO) before Consultor's creation (particularly between 2000 and 2012). Therefore, we also relied on retrospective interviews to investigate those anterior events. Table 1 summarizes the collected data.

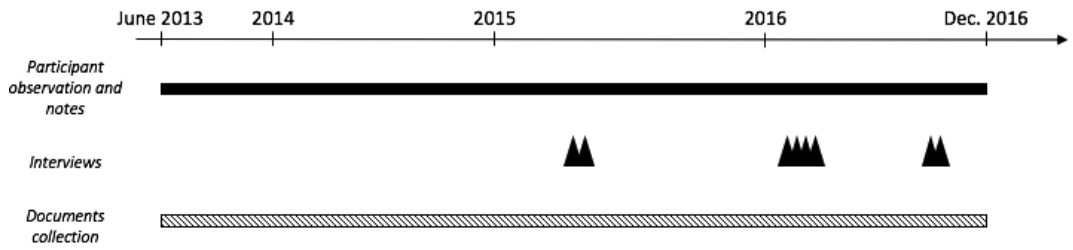

Figure 1. Data collection process

Table 1. Data collection and use in the analysis

Data sources	Type of data	Use in the analysis
Observations	Field notes from 98 events of NOP's development (approximately 420 pages): detailed records of interactions, conversations and consequences.	To identify attentional objects and to characterize the NOP team's attention (distribution of time and effort).
	Informal observation of everyday activities in the company.	To be acclimatized to the context and drive data collection on relevant events and interactions.
Meetings	Transcribed audio recordings from 47 meetings (approximately 68 h – 2,114 pages) on the new offer development.	To precisely track the NOP team's attention (words used, the interactions during meetings, and the elements that are used later in the development of the offer).
Interviews	Transcribed interviews with different stakeholders in the new offer development project (eight taped interviews, approximately 9:30 h – 574 pages).	To analyze actors' interpretations and intentions during the NOP.
	Informal interviews with Consultor's staff.	To understand the context. To grasp informal relationships between people.
Archival data	Company-related documents: web sites, corporate presentations, internal presentations (approximately 60 pages).	To consider the identity and economic context in which the new offer is developed.
	Project-related documents: minutes, correspondence with stakeholders, customers' presentations, and others (approximately 200 pages).	To trace the new offer development steps: from ideation to formalization.

NOP: New Offer Project.

Data analysis

Our analysis comprised four main steps, which consisted in moving back and forth between our empirical data and the ABV literature to reconstitute the process of BMI.

Step 1. Chronological narrative database

The first step of analysis aimed at revealing the chronology of BMI through a general narrative of the case (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). To achieve this, we constructed a narrative database (Langley, 1999; Van De Ven, 1992). We identified all incidences, that is, event meeting reports and activity reports, from 2013 to 2016, and described the nature of the activities and the topics of discussions. We defined an 'incidence' as an event delimited in time and space (Van De Ven, 1992) that occurred within the scope of NOP team's daily activities during the period. This step allowed us to reconstitute the process of BMI by ordering and characterizing events in a chronologic incidence database. At this point, no clear delimited phase emerged from this analysis. Our data suggested that the new BM emerged progressively, while the NOP team's attention navigated across several objects of attention over the period. Thus, instead of analyzing BMI as one single sequence of constructing a new BM as a whole, we apprehended the process as a series of sequences driven by specific objects of attention, as described in step 2.

Step 2. Division of the material according to seven attentional sequences

We thus divided our material according to seven distinct 'attentional sequences'. This step consisted of identifying and delimiting categories of topics that received the NOP team's attention over the period. To generate those categories, we drew upon an inductive analysis for building a data structure (Gioia et al., 2013). First, we reviewed our raw data to generate a descriptive list of topics addressed by the NOP team while developing the new offer. Second, we gathered similar

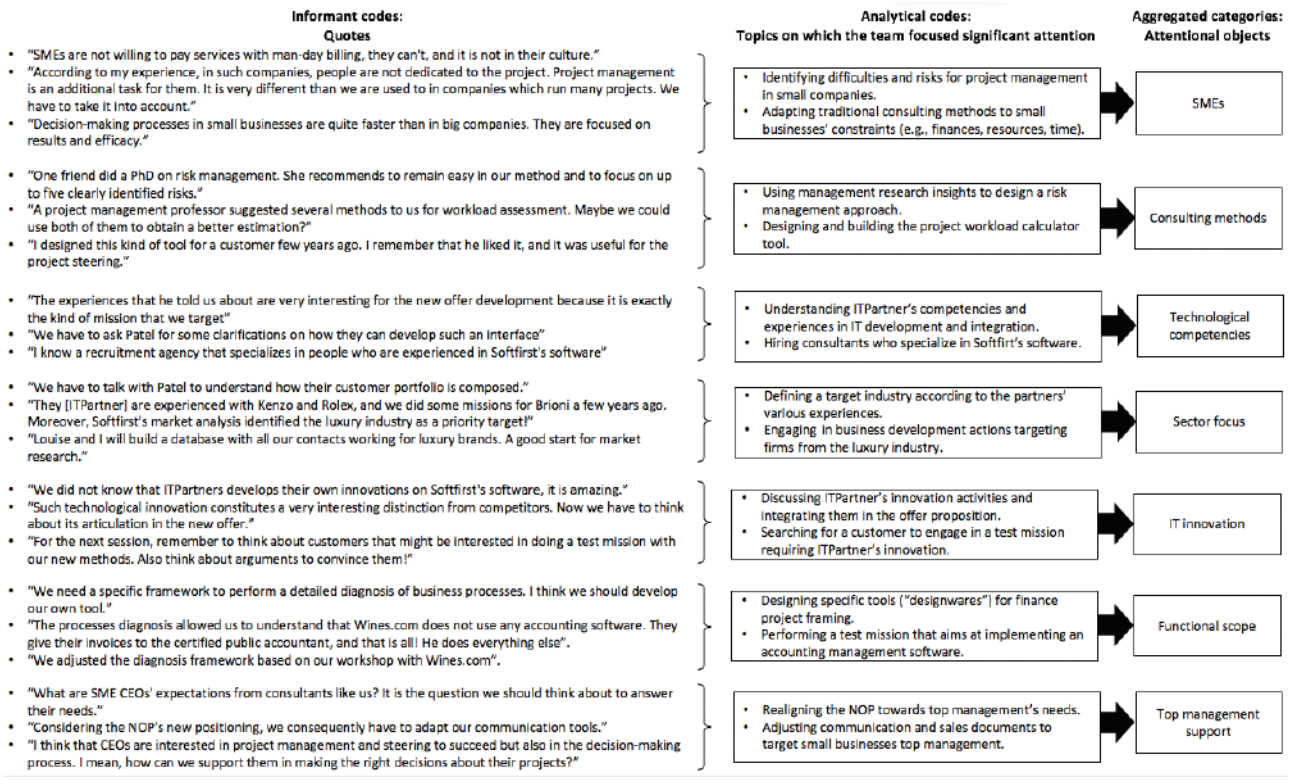

Figure 2. Data structure[a]

[a] Attentional objects are named according to actors' vocabulary in the field.

topics into analytical codes. Third, we aggregated those analytical codes into seven general categories, which reflect the general topics addressed by the NOP team. In line with the ABV, we called those aggregated categories 'attentional objects' as they reflect a coherent set of issues that entered the NOP team's repertoire and received significant attention. Figure 2 shows the data structure that allowed for the identification of the seven attentional objects.

Those seven attentional objects provided a convenient grid for categorizing our data in terms of attention allocation. We could divide our narrative database into seven coherent sequences, which gathered the database incidences addressing a consistent object of attention over time, as summarized in Table 2.

This division of our material allowed us to clearly track how the NOP team distributed their time and effort toward one delimited object, as explained in step 3.

Step 3. Thematic coding of attentional sequences

We then coded the incidences of each attentional sequence through an analytical grid, which was derived from both the ABV framework and the BM literature. Coding an incident encompassed two aspects: first, identifying the form of attention allocated to the attentional object, and, second, characterizing the construction of the new BM.

First, coding forms of attention involved characterizing how the NOP team members distributed their time and efforts toward each attentional object. We used Ocasio's (2011) typology of attention, which distinguishes three forms of attention (selective, engaged, and distributed). Based on the ABV framework, we constructed indicators that we used to code our data, as summarized in Table 3.

Second, coding the construction of the new BM consisted in identifying the evolution of the new offer that emerged from each attentional sequence. We drew on the conceptual dimensions from Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2010) Canvas, which was consistent with several of the previous academic studies on BMI processes (e.g. Berends et al., 2016; Cortimiglia, Ghezzi, & Frank, 2015). This analysis was necessary to reveal BMI as the NOP members did not explicitly mobilize the concept or the vocabulary of BMs during the BMI process.

Step 4. Identification of attentional triggers through an axial analysis of turning point incidences

Finally, as we found that the NOP team's attention varied over time, we examined the turning point incidences in our

Table 2. Attentional objects in the NOP development

#	Attentional objects	Description	Consequences on the NOP
AO1	Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)	Through their experiences, Consultor's CEO detects that small and medium enterprises (SMEs have needs for consulting services.	Due to their specific characteristics and needs, SMEs are considered to be a business opportunity for consulting services, and become the target of the NOP.
AO2	Technological competencies	Consultor's CEO meets a new IT services provider based in India that could be interesting for consulting services to SMEs.	Technological services to SMEs become a core part of the NOP. As such, technological competencies are a central topic for the NOP team.
AO3	Consulting methods	Consultor's CEO perceives that its classic consulting methods are inadequate for SMEs.	Considered to be a way to respond to SMEs' needs and constraints, the NOP team works to adapt its consulting methods. Insights from the management research allow the team to innovate as such.
AO4	Sector focus	The NOP team considers that focusing on a single sector should be relevant for the NOP positioning.	The team focuses the offer on SMEs from the luxury industry.
AO5	IT innovation	One partner presents its abilities for IT innovation, which could be interesting for consulting services to SMEs.	IT innovation becomes a core aspect of the NOP to provide to customers.
AO6	Functional scope	Focusing on a specific functional scope is actually considered to be the relevant way to introduce the NOP on the market.	The NOP team chooses to address companies' financial functions (e.g. accounting and management control).
AO7	Top management support	Through their experiences, Consultor's consultants detect that SMEs' top managers need strategic support.	The NOP team changes its view and decides to address SMEs' top management through a service dedicated to strategic support.

Table 3. Indicators of NOP team's attention

Form of attention	Definition (from Ocasio, 2011)	Indicators
Selective attention	Objects are selected and enter actors' repertoires of issues.	**A new topic appears in the NOP team's discussions:** (1) Formal meetings that mention the object (2) Informal discussions in which the object is mentioned.
Engaged attention	Actors focus on intense cognitive efforts to enhance their understanding of specific objects.	**The NOP team dedicates meetings and discussions to develop ideas on the new topic:** (1) Number of months that include at least one meeting or discussion about the object (2) Object's weight in NOP meetings' agenda.
Distributed attention	Actors allocate organizational resources in time and space toward pre-established directions.	**The NOP team reallocates existing organizational resources (e.g. activities, tools, and budget) toward their new ideas:** (1) Activities performed by the NOP team members (e.g. meeting a customer, designing a tool) (2) Organizational resources allocated to an attentional object (budget, human resources, and material resources).

NOP: New Offer Project.

database (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Explaining why the NOP team's attention varied over time was challenging as it was embedded in many organizational and external structures that shaped their everyday actions. Indeed, observations and interviews suggested that the NOP members directed their efforts depending on external constraints, interactions, firm rules, processes, or goals. We systematically compared turning points (i.e. incidences in which we observed a change of attention) (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) to highlight their similarities and differences across the seven sequences. This axial analysis allowed us to identify similar combinations of triggering mechanisms.

To conclude, our analysis led to the characterization of the process of BMI as the articulation of three dimensions: distinct attentional objects that receive successive forms of attention

triggered by specific mechanisms. To ensure the trustworthiness of our analysis, we presented the findings to the actors. They validated our interpretations and provided additional information, which we integrated into the findings.

Findings

The BMI process led to the following additive BM. The NOP aimed at proposing new consulting services to a different customer segment (SMEs), which required the company to adapt the customers' relationships and the revenue model. Moreover, the new offer intended to adapt consulting services and methods. Unlike the prevailing BM, two partners directly participated to elaborate the value proposition. Consequently, resources and activities were adjusted to enable the creation, delivery, and capture of the NOP's value. We found that the BMI process unfolded in an emergent and ongoing way, through seven attentional sequences. In each of them, the NOP team addressed a specific attentional object (i.e. a new topic that was progressively developed as new aspects of the NOP BM) by successively allocating three forms of attention (selective, engaged, and distributed).

This section is structured in two parts. First, we describe the attentional sequences by showing how each form of attention drove the development of the new additive BM. Second, we examine the attentional triggers that explain the shifts of attention.

BMI process as a series of attentional sequences

The attentional sequences encompassed three stages according to the form of attention that the NOP team allocated to the attentional object: selective, engaged, and distributed attention.

First, attentional sequences began with a stage of *selective attention* in which a new attentional object entered the scope of the NOP team's attention. The NOP team began mentioning a new topic related to a problematic aspect that they experienced in operating their current business. Those issues mainly concerned customer segments, key activities, or key resources of the NOP. However, at that stage, the NOP members formulated such aspects as fuzzy threats or opportunities that Consultor had not addressed or that were inadequately addressed by existing offers. Despite the fact that the NOP team acknowledged them as interesting facts, they identified no clear connection with their core activities. As long as they did not consider attentional objects as a relevant or top priority topic, the NOP members did not allocate any sustained effort to addressing them. Table 4 illustrates the selective attention stage in sequences AO1 and AO2.

Second, attentional sequences moved to a stage of *engaged attention* in which the NOP team allocated intense effort to the attentional object through dedicated brainstorming meetings or workshops. The NOP members intensely discussed how they could derive a new way to generate business from the issues identified in the previous stage by mobilizing existing resources and activities: they envisioned how to conduct new activities, to address a new customer segment, or use particular resources to propose new services. Consequently, attentional objects were progressively formulated in terms of new ideas to enrich the NOP value proposition. Table 5 illustrates the engaged attention stage in sequences AO1 and AO5.

Third, most attentional sequences proceeded with a stage of *distributed attention* in which the NOP team adjusted and deployed existing organizational resources in new directions to concretize their ideas. They reallocated budget and workforce to launch commercial actions or design a new billing system adapted to SMEs' financial means. For instance, the team

Table 4. Illustrations of selective attention stages[a]

Sequence	Selective attention	Illustration	Impact on the NOP BM
AO1 SMEs	Through one of his missions, Bernard discovers SMEs' specificities. He identifies that this type of structure requires consulting services.	"At LabCorp, it was very short projects that we did from the beginning to the end with the required collaboration of the internal team for operational efficiency […] So, yes these experiences inspired our idea [the new offer for SMEs] such as missions that we did for Medinnov for instance". (Bernard – interview)	SMEs constitute the *customer segment* targeted by the NOP.
AO3 Consulting methods	Based on consulting missions for SMEs, Bernard and Laura detect that traditional consulting methods are inadequate. Thus, they consider that new methods must be specifically designed to address SMEs' needs and constraints.	"It [innovative consulting methods] comes from market characteristics and constraints, I mean, we wondered how could we consult for them [small businesses]? It is with this thought that we decided to improve the new offer with innovations related to the consulting part. […] Thus, in a way, innovation came from market constraints". (Laura – interview)	New consulting methods are *key resources* for the NOP.

[a]Names and description of actors mentioned in tables and vignettes are indicated in Appendix 3.

Table 5. Illustrations of engaged attention stages

Sequence	Engaged attention	Illustration	Impact on the NOP BM
AO2 Technological competencies	Bernard and Laura dedicate discussions to explore how ITPartner's skills could enrich the NOP's value. They realize that combining IT and consulting services could be particularly relevant for SMEs.	"The main origin [of the new offer] is the meeting with a potential partner [ITPartner] with which we concurred: 'so, we make complementary stuff, with different action scopes, why don't we do something together? We should'. […] After all, considering both their competencies for offshore IT development and their ability to work efficiently for SMEs […] ITPartner constituted the ideal partner for this new offer". (Bernard – interview)	IT services are integrated to the *value proposition* of the NOP.
AO5 IT innovation	Patel [ITPartner CEO] presents his firm's activities to the NOP team. Following this presentation, the NOP team considers that ITPartner's innovation abilities could be relevant for services dedicated to SMEs.	"Today, we realized that ITPartner is not only a simple IT services firm for offshoring as we initially interpreted but a company with a real innovation strategy and ability. These latter aspects allow ITPartner to contribute to the NOP value proposition". (extract from the diary 03 November 2015)	IT innovation constitutes a part of the *value proposition* of the NOP.

Table 6. Illustration of distributed attention stages

Sequence	Distributed attention	Illustration	
AO6 Functional scope	According to the NOP new functional scope on finance functions, Bernard names a manager who he considers to be the right person to lead an experimental project. Performing this test mission, this manager operationally implements the NOP.	"Bernard asked Jean to manage the mission at Wines.com […] Considering his experience, he is the right man for the job: as a director, he is an experienced consultant and a former chartered accountant". (Extract from the diary 25 January 2016)	*Key resources* are adjusted to the new functional scope of the NOP.
AO7 Top management support	According to the new services for top management support, the NOP team defines a new billing system for missions.	"Bernard and Jean consider that man-day billing is impossible for such missions. […] A subscription system for consulting services emerged as an innovative idea to sell missions". (Extract from the diary 21 July 2016)	*Revenue streams* are modified according to new services proposed to SMEs.

designed and implemented a kit of new consulting tools and methods to promote their new offer and to engage in missions for small businesses. At this stage, attentional objects were concretized through formal resources, activities, customer relationships, channels, partnerships, or revenue streams to implement the NOP BM. Table 6 illustrates the distributed attention stage in sequences AO1 and AO6.

To summarize, our process analysis of the NOP development highlights BMI as an ongoing and emergent process, driven by several simultaneous or successive attentional sequences (AO1 to AO7). We note that those sequences were heterogeneous: some of them did not reach the distributed attention stage, or they had different temporalities. In the following section, we explain this heterogeneity by examining the conditions that allowed shifts in the NOP team's attention.

Attentional triggers for the BMI process

Shifts in the NOP team's attention occurred only when a combination of two triggering mechanisms was met. We present each of these combinations by explaining how they emerged and how they generated a specific form of attention and provide illustrative vignettes.

Selective attention was triggered by (1) an interaction between the NOP team and external or internal interlocutors in which (2) NOP members perceived a gap between their environment and their prevailing BM.

While Consultor's actors were daily confronted with a variety of information, we observed that they tended to select new attentional objects when they perceived a dissonance between their external environment and existing structures such as activities and rules deriving from the prevailing BM. Indeed, each attentional sequence began when at least one member from the NOP team noticed a discrepancy between their existing services, methods, or tools and an external stimulus.

In all sequences, this perception of dissonance came from interactions between the NOP team and internal or external interlocutors. Those interactions encompassed formal and informal meetings with customers or partners and discussions, seminars, or workshops involving other Consultor employees. For example, a customer could express a need that was uncovered by existing services, or a consultant could experience difficulties

in applying existing consulting methods. Although most of those interactions were deliberately intended by the NOP team, we note that the initial intention was rarely to deliberately search for new ideas or to innovate. Interactions triggered the selection of a new attentional object because the source of the perceived dissonance was verbalized as a new issue to address (Vignette 1).

Engaged attention was triggered by (1) a collective perception of the attentional object as a business opportunity leading to (2) a collective agreement of the possibility of addressing it.

Despite their entrance in the NOP team's scope of attention, new attentional objects did not instantaneously generate any innovative efforts. Instead, our data suggest that they could remain at a stage of 'pending problem' for a variable time (from several days to several years) by being occasionally mentioned during internal meetings. Indeed, the incubation phases systematically began from the moment the NOP team thought that they could address the new AO with their existing means (e.g. resources, tools, or skills). Once the NOP team formally acknowledged its ability to reconcile a discrepant AO with available repertoires, the intensity of attention towards the AO changed. For instance, the NOP team began to pay more intense attention to IT innovation when the team perceived a way to use IT innovation for consulting services. By perceiving the AO as an opportunity reachable through the existing BM, the NOP team became more inclined to spend significant time and effort to address it.

Those collective realignments occurred through various situations. In some sequences (e.g. AO1, AO4, AO5, and AO6), it took several meetings in which other ideas were discussed and eventually connected to the attentional object by one or several NOP team members. We note that most of those sequences implied meetings with internal members of Consultor to discuss information coming from an external interaction. Once integrated in the NOP's agenda, attentional objects received sustained cognitive efforts and time from the team (i.e. engaged attention) such as dedicated meetings, workshops, brainstorming sessions, or networking activities (Vignette 2).

Distributed attention was triggered by (1) a spontaneous managerial action followed by (2) positive external feedback. We did not find any official 'momentum' or any planned milestone in which the NOP team clearly decided to stop 'incubating' the idea and to begin implementing concrete actions. Instead, changes of attention occurred when one of the NOP team members spontaneously took the personal initiative to push for an organizational concrete 'move,' such as reallocating budget, material, or human resources to concretize the incubating idea into a new aspect of BM. We observe that these managerial initiatives occurred when the actors perceived new ideas to be consistent with the prevailing BM. In other words, they considered whether the organization and resources of the existing activities allowed for the implementation of new characteristics of NOP BM. In the sequences that did not reach the stage of distributed attention (AO4 and AO5), we noticed that no one undertook any managerial initiative. According to the NOP members' explanations, they perceived no consistency with their existing activities or received negative feedback that discouraged them from maintaining their efforts.

Thus, positive feedback was also decisive for distributed attention and the redeployment of organizational resources. Indeed, the NOP team members only launched their initiative

Vignette 1. Trigger for selective attention in sequence AO6

In October 2015, the NOP targets SMEs from the luxury industry. They have developed a nonspecialized offer with consultancy services for projects concerning all types of topics.

One day, Bernard has lunch with a former customer, Nicolas, who became top manager in an SME. During a discussion about their professional activities, Bernard talks to Nicolas about the NOP: he exposes the main purpose and the offer's configuration. Nicolas expresses his interest: according to him, SMEs need management consulting; however, he finds most of the consultancy services inadequate for this type of firm.

Nevertheless, he is reluctant to accept the nonspecialized nature of the offer. He suggests that SMEs must enhance the efficiency and speed of their projects: in this regard, a nonspecialized method may not be relevant in helping SMEs. Indeed, efficacy and velocity require methods refined through experiences on similar projects. He also argues that a nonspecialized offer may not be credible from customers' point of view. Consequently, he suggests that instead of focusing on one industry, the NOP should target a functional scope (i.e. specific thematic projects).

"So he quickly mentioned something that reminded me. He said that: "ok, you based your argumentation on projects' realization speed – I noticed your accelerating options – so in that way there is something that you should take into account: you can quickly achieve a project that you already did somewhere else" […] Thus, he said that instead of adopting an open approach on customers' needs, we should adopt a specialist position about a topic such as marketing or finance controlling […] Thus, the discussion's conclusion is that we should think and identify a functional scope as a functional specialization of the offer, on which we are able to be experts". (Bernard – meeting extract 16 October 2015)

Nicolas' feedback clashes with the way in which Bernard and the rest of the team envision the NOP. Initially, they had simply replicated an approach similar to Consultor's classic consultancy services, which did not include any functional specialization. However, after this lunch, Bernard recounts the event to the rest of the NOP team: from this moment, the idea of defining a functional scope will be a topic of discussion.

Vignette 2. Trigger for engaged attention in sequence AO6

In October 2015, after Bernard relates his lunch with Nicolas to the rest of the NOP team, the topic of functional scope arises without any enthusiasm from the members. The idea of defining a specific functional scope in their new offer changes radically from their usual approach. However, after some discussion, they begin to glimpse possibilities of choosing a functional scope for the NOP: they imagine that the functional scope could be a main function or department of the firm (such as marketing, finance, or accounting). Based on Consultor's expertise, they find that they can identify the most relevant function for the NOP scope. At some point, the NOP members perceive the functional scope focus to be an opportunity to enhance the NOP in two ways:

(1) First, to target customers more precisely ('which actors of SMEs to address?')
(2) Second, to build new consulting methods, that is, specific tools for thematic projects (e.g. accounting software implementation), which may differentiate their offer from other competitors.

"Louise: does this new specialization not reassess the new consulting methods we developed? Bernard: no, no. On the contrary, it brings precision to everything: tools, the offer preparation, projects we target in companies, people we should talk with… According to the functional scope, we will meet the right directors". (Meeting extract 16 October 2015)

Vignette 3. Trigger for distributed attention in sequence AO6

In December 2015, Bernard considers that the NOP is now mature enough to launch a test mission. To do so, he must find a customer who will agree to participate in the test. However, this task is delicate: customers are not willing to pay for being a 'guinea pig' to test new consultancy services. Requests for this test mission may annoy customers: bernard admits that he is walking on eggshells.

In addition, Consultor is sponsoring an e-commerce start-up – Wines.com. One day, during a strategic steering committee, Bernard learns that the start-up needs a new accounting system. This need constitutes a perfect opportunity for a NOP test mission: bernard submit the idea to David, Wines.com's CEO. The latter is enthusiastic and considers it to be a real opportunity for his company. As the start-up cannot afford consultancy services, the deal is set for free (without fees). Wines.com's CEO is overjoyed and plans to work with Consultor's consultants. From this moment, the NOP team begins to dedicate concrete resources and to implement the ideas that had been developed.

"Bernard explained to us that David has accepted that we will perform a NOP test mission at Wines.com. The company apparently needs new accounting software, and they do not know how to choose the tool and implement it. […] Bernard and Laura agreed to perform the mission for free only because it is for Wines.com, which is one of Consultor's partners". (Extract from the diary 30 July 2015)

when they perceived an explicit supportive signal from the environment. In some cases, this perception was an *ex-ante* intuition from actors, which was confirmed or refuted afterwards by implementing the idea. In other cases, this perception came from customers' or partners' positive feedback (Vignette 3). Our data suggest that this change of attention occurred without explicitly acknowledging an innovation in the BM. The team did not officially label those actions as the launching of a new BM. In the moment, they expressed them as a simple implementation of new ideas derived from the attentional objects. Retrospectively, however, they acknowledged that they were indeed progressively developing an additive BM.

Table 7 provides a systematic analysis of those attentional triggers for all sequences.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the whole BMI process, structured by attentional objects, stages, and triggering mechanisms.

Discussion

By examining BMI through an attentional lens, this study provides several contributions. First, we conceptualize the attentional process that drives new BM development, providing new knowledge about BMI. Second, we highlight the insights obtained with regard to the ABV. Third, we discuss the practical implications of the study. We conclude by pointing out some limits and further research directions.

Attention as a driver of BMI

While the literature acknowledges that attention is a critical aspect to uncover in the BMI research (Bjorkdahl & Holmén, 2013; Foss & Saebi, 2017; Snihur & Wiklund, 2019), few studies (except Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019) have provided empirical explanations of how it shapes new BM development. In line with recent research agendas (Bjorkdahl & Holmén, 2013; Foss & Saebi, 2017), this study aims at shedding light on the role of attention for BMI in established firms (Berends et al., 2016; Demil et al., 2015; Massa & Tucci, 2014), which face particular tensions in managing their attention (Kim, Kim, & Foss, 2016). We unfold a three-phase attentional process that, applied to various attentional objects, drives the emergence and

Table 7. Attentional triggers

Combination of triggering mechanisms leading to selective attention		
Turning point incident	Interaction with external or internal environment	Perceived gap between environment and prevailing BM
(AO1) SMEs	Bernard conducts consulting missions for SMEs.	Bernard perceives that SMEs have management consulting needs but are a customer segment that is untargeted by Consultor.
(AO2) Technological competencies	Bernard meets Patel, CEO of ITPartners.	Bernard considers that to answer SMEs' needs, consultants' intervention should increase project speed. Consultants' specific technological competency is a way to raise project velocity whereas Consultor's team is technologically not specialized.
(AO3) Consulting methods	Bernard conducts consulting missions for SMEs.	Bernard analyzes the fact that existing consulting methods are dedicated to big companies and, consequently, unsuitable for SMEs' needs and management modes.
(AO4) Sector focus	Bernard, Laura, and Patel discuss the NOP's target with Softfirst's managers.	Although the NOP targets SMEs from all industries, Softfirst encourages Bernard, Laura, and Patel to focus on a particular sector.
(AO5) IT innovation	Bernard, Louise, and Jacques have a business lunch with Patel.	Patel's presentation of ITPartner's technological innovations affects the NOP team's perception: ITPartner is not a simple technological subcontractor for offshoring.
(AO6) Functional scope	Bernard meets Nicolas to discuss the NOP.	For project efficiency and speed, Nicolas advises focusing the NOP on a functional scope (i.e. projects' thematic specialty). This feedback contradicts the NOP team, which believes that the NOP must be nonspecialized.
(AO7) Top Management Support	The NOP team organizes a workshop for NOP development with other Consultor's consultants.	Other consultants advise that the NOP should not address managers with regard to their project implementation but rather target top management for the management of the firm's project portfolio.
Combination of triggering mechanisms leading to engaged attention		
Turning point incident	Collective perception of the object as a business opportunity	Collective perception of the possibility to address the object
(AO1) SMEs	Considering the large number of SMEs, Bernard and Laura consider that this customer segment could become a growth driver for Consultor's consulting activities.	Bernard and Laura's discussions lead them to plan to build a dedicated offer for this type of company.
(AO2) Technological competencies	Bernard and Laura consider technological competency to be a good way to enrich the NOP value.	Bernard and Laura think that Consultor can acquire technological competency collaborating with ITPartner.
(AO3) Consulting methods	Bernard considers adapting consulting methods to SMEs to be an opportunity to differentiate Consultor from its competitors.	The NOP team believes that they can build innovative consulting methods based on their experiences and using management research insights.
(AO4) Sector focus	Consultor's top management perceives the sector focus to be a good way to differentiate the NOP on the consulting market.	Bernard, Laura, and Patel plan to identify the NOP focus sector considering Consultor's and ITPartner's experiences and networks.
(AO5) IT innovation	The NOP team is impressed by ITPartner's innovations: it could reinforce the NOP's value proposition for customers.	Partnership with ITPartner allows their IT innovations to be included in the NOP's value proposition.
(AO6) Functional scope	The NOP team perceives the functional scope focus to be a way to increase NOP precision in two ways: first, for targeting customers (the part of the firm to address); second, for consulting methods building.	The NOP team wants to choose the NOP functional scope according to the main Consultor's expertise.
(AO7) Top Management Support	Bernard and Laura think that targeting SMEs' top management is a good way to be close to the customers' needs.	The NOP team considers Consultor's experienced resources (such as directors and senior managers) to have legitimacy and credibility to address top managers.

(Continued)

Table 7 (Continued). Attentional triggers

Combination of triggering mechanisms leading to distributed attention		
Turning point incident	Spontaneous managerial action	Positive external feedback
(AO1) SMEs	Bernard and Laura decide to build a dedicated offer to address SMEs as a new target for consulting activities.	Bernard and Laura explain their idea of the SMEs' dedicated offer. A partnership between Consultor and ITPartner is settled.
(AO2) Technological competencies	Identifying complementarity between expertise, Bernard and Laura propose to ITPartner a partnership with the NOP.	Patel accepts the partnership. Consultor's consultants and ITPartner's engineers discuss their complementarity in an operational way (i.e. how they can work together).
(AO3) Consulting methods	Identifying reusable knowledge from former missions, Bernard hopes that the NOP team could begin to concretely build new consulting tools adapted to SMEs.	The first tools are presented to a potential customer, which has an enthusiastic reaction.
(AO6) Functional scope	Bernard wants the NOP team to perform a test mission: he proposes a free mission to Wines.com (an SME) that is a Consultor partner.	The Wines.com's CEO accepts the proposition of Consultor to perform a test mission for his company.
(AO7) Top Management Support	Bernard asks to the NOP team to work on the NOP's commercial and marketing tactics using knowledge from previous missions linked to strategic support (e.g. missions for project portfolio management).	The NOP is presented to a potential customer with the aim of having Consultor perform a mission for him.

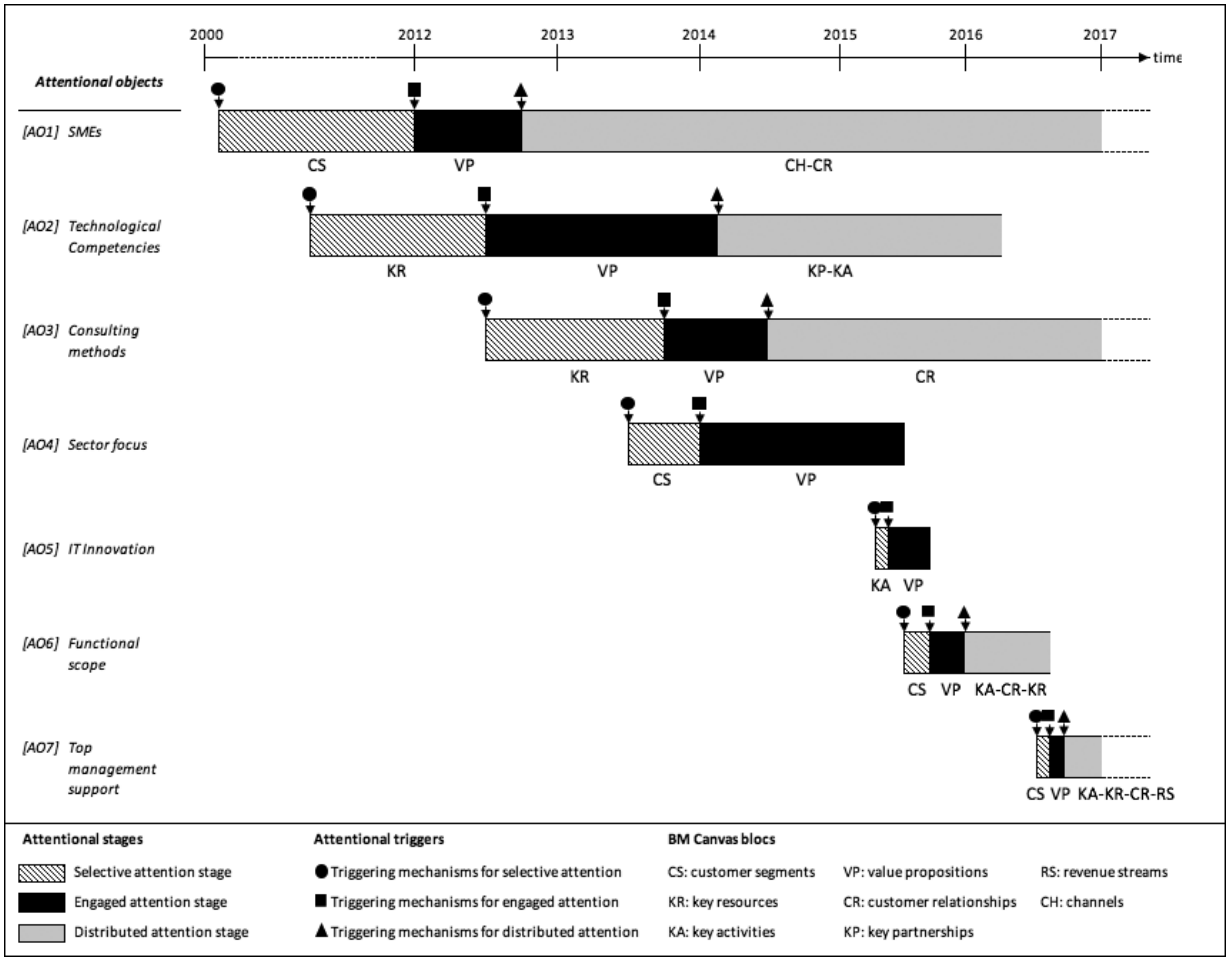

Figure 3. BMI as a succession of attentional sequences

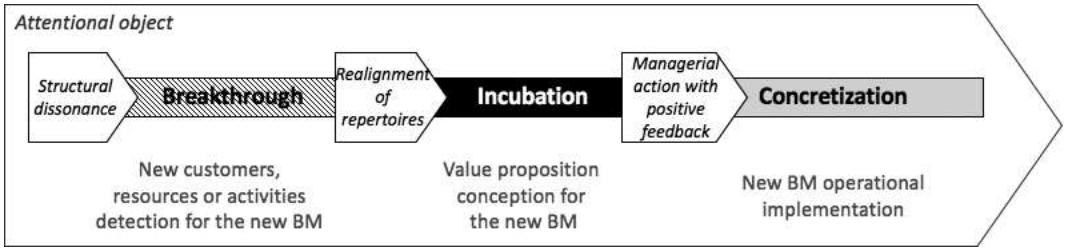

Figure 4. The attentional process driving BMI

development of a new BM over time. Triggered by specific mechanisms, shifts of attentional forms allow actors to select, develop, and concretize ideas for new BM development (see Figure 4).

First, we highlight a 'breakthrough phase' in which actors turn their attention towards addressing new customer segments, the use of new resources or activities to conduct in the new BM. Actors' social interactions create a perceived gap between the prevailing BM and their environment and constitute a 'structural dissonance', triggering selective attention that fosters the selection of a new object into the actors' scope. The new ideas derived from this attentional object constitute starting points for new BM development.

Then, our study reveals an 'incubation phase' in which actors conceive the new BM's value proposition. The perception of a reachable business opportunity operates as a 'realignment of repertoires', triggering engaged attention for actors' new idea exploration. During incubation, actors pay particular attention to the implications of such value proposition, that is, to the required adjustments of other BM aspects to implement such new ideas. This step is critical for the additive BM development because the actors envision the new value proposition's feasibility regarding their existing means (e.g. resources, experiences, skills, or networks).

Finally, we unfold a 'concretization phase' in which the actors operationally adjust and implement the additive BM according to the new value proposition. Adjustments emanate from a 'spontaneous managerial action with a positive feedback' from external stakeholders (e.g. customers or partners). Our findings indicate that managerial actions are conditioned to managers' perceptions of consistency between the additive and the prevailing BM. This latter, as a dominant logic (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Massa et al., 2017), defines existing organizations, activities, and resources that actors use to implement the new additive BM.

Unpacking the attentional mechanisms of new additive BM development in an established firm provides two main contributions. First, it enhances the knowledge of BMI by revealing the ongoing and emergent nature of the process. Second, it invites the BMI literature to reconsider the critical role of the prevailing BM.

BMI as an ongoing and emergent process

While previous literature has considered new BM development to be a deliberate managerial willingness to innovate (Martins, Rindova, & Greenbaum, 2015; Snihur & Wiklund, 2019), our study reveals that it relies on both deliberate and emergent processes, similar to other organizational processes, such as strategy construction (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). We depict BMI in established firms as an ongoing process that involves different forms of attention (selective, engaged, and distributed), allowing new objects to progressively 'feed' the innovation process. Our findings indicate that BMI calls for a combination of actors' behaviors using both external and internal insights rather than relying only on exogenous knowledge (Snihur & Wiklund, 2019). Once new ideas emerge from actors' interactions with the external environment, their implementation requires deliberate allocation of internal time and effort. Furthermore, by revealing attentional triggers, we contribute to the recent call to specify what initiates an attention shift in BMI (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019). Our study provides evidence that BMI is not only a matter of actors' efforts or willingness to innovate. Instead, BMI attentional shifts require specific combinations of triggers: those triggers imply external interactions or stimuli and spontaneous managerial moves that are emergent rather than deliberately planned actions.

From differing to consistency: Actors' use of the prevailing BM

The attentional lens adopted in this study provides insights into the critical role of the prevailing BM, which challenges existing theoretical discussions on BMI in established firms. While previous studies considered the prevailing BM as a 'dominant logic' that can impede actors to see their business in a new way, we observe that it is a crucial element for the development of the new additive BM. Indeed, our findings show that the prevailing BM constitutes a frame of reference that drives actors' attention during the BMI process, through which they become aware of the discrepancies between their external environment and their internal activities. The prevailing BM is also used

as a frame of reference to solve the tensions that emerge from the development of a new additive BM while continuing existing activities (Velu & Stiles, 2013).

First, in breakthrough stages, actors tend to differ from the prevailing BM by selecting dissonant objects. These findings highlight how BMI occurs despite the existence of a dominant logic inherent in an established firm (Chesbrough, 2010; Massa et al., 2017; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). More precisely, Chesbrough and Rosenbloom (2002) argued that the prevailing BM drives decision processes since decision-makers tend to filter information that exclusively fits with this dominant logic. In contrast, our study showed that actors can select dissonances between the prevailing BM and their external environment, driven by their natural tendency to search for consistency in their actions (Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1957). Moreover, those results are consistent with Saebi, Lien and Foss's (2017) study, which shows that firms are more prone to BMI when they face threats instead of opportunities: when actors perceive the weaknesses of their existing structures, they spend time and effort designing creative solutions and thus develop new BM (Massa & Tucci, 2014; Schneckenberg, Velamuri, Comberg, & Spieth, 2017). Conversely, in the incubation phase, actors design new additive BM value propositions seeking consistency with the prevailing BM. Through such consistency, actors ensure that they can (prevailing BM defines the firm's means) and know how (prevailing BM constitutes a dominant logic) to concretize new ideas. A lack of perceived synergies with the prevailing BM explains why some attentional objects are dropped before their concretization. Finally, in the concretization phase, actors use the prevailing BM (e.g. the firm's resources, activities, or skills) to operationally implement the new BM. While the literature acknowledges external (with the environment) and internal (between components) consistency of BM (Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Morris, Schindehutte, & Allen, 2005), our study reveals that inter-BM consistency is required for a new additive BM development in established firms. These observations extend Berends et al.'s (2016) conclusions about synergies between the prevailing and new BM by specifying how the prevailing BM is directly or indirectly used to construct the new one. Overall, our study highlights how the 'path dependency' effect arising from the prevailing BM (Bohnsack, Pinkse, & Kolk, 2014; Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002; Demil & Lecocq, 2010) determines managerial thinking and influences the development of a new BM. Consequently, BMI is not necessarily a way to avoid established firms' inertia and does not guarantee strategic renewal (Snihur & Wiklund, 2019).

Contributions to the ABV

By mobilizing the ABV as a conceptual lens for BMI, this study also provides insights that refine the ABV in two ways (Ocasio, 2011; Ocasio, Laamanen, & Vaara, 2018).

First, our study highlights the role of distributed attention (Ocasio, 2011; Orvain, 2014) through which the reallocation of organizational resources supports the translation of an idea into concrete actions. While previous studies addressing attentional processes of innovation mainly focused on selective and engaged attention (Kim et al., 2016; Li et al., 2013), only a few studies analyzed the role of distributed attention (see Vuori & Huy, 2016). In line with studies demonstrating that resource allocation strategies affect innovation performance (Klingebiel & Rammer, 2014), we suggest that distributed attention is critical for innovation processes, explaining how new ideas are operationally concretized. In particular, our study shows that when actors are unable to switch to distributed attention, the attentional object falls into an 'attentional trap': paradoxically, an attentional object can be 'dropped' despite the amount of attention it receives. Those results challenge the established idea that attention mechanically leads to organizational moves (Shepherd et al., 2017). Instead, since organizations must constantly manage a stock of attentional objects, they might be tempted to be opportunist: they may prioritize those that require less effort to be translated into action and to set apart highly demanding objects. Those considerations invite further research on the role of distributed attention in innovation processes.

Second, we contribute to the recent refinements of the ABV model by throwing light on the attentional triggers that allow variations of attention. Previous studies have provided an understanding of the characteristics of those forms of attention (Dane, 2013; Rerup, 2009) and shown that processes of strategic and organizational change rely on a succession of attention forms (Shepherd et al., 2017). Nonetheless, these insights raise questions about the conditions that allow switching from one form of attention to another (Orvain, 2014). Our study reveals specific triggers for BMI, which can be explained by the particularities of the organizational context. Indeed, the existence of an internal team dedicated to BMI can be compared to a situation of 'corporate entrepreneurship' (Sharma & Chrisman, 1999) where corporate entrepreneurship teams compete with existing business activities for corporate attention (Burgelman & Valikangas, 2005; Sakhdari, 2016). We highlight the conditions through which those entrepreneurial efforts, in our case by the BMI team, led to changes at the corporate level by entering the concretization phase. The triggers identified in this study (structural dissonance, realignment of repertoires and managerial action with positive feedback) account for aspects of 'attentional structures' and 'communicative channels' in the ABV model.

Practical implications

By studying BMI at Consultor, we shed light on how a consulting firm can develop a new functioning logic to run its business, overstepping novelty related to product or process

innovation (Avadikyan et al., 2016). In that way, our study provides several implications for practice. First, we observe that BMI in established firms, in terms of strategy, develops in both deliberate and emergent ways (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Thus, in their daily activities, managers should be aware of topics and cues from the environment that do not fit with their existing way of thinking and running the business. In other words, dissonances with the prevailing BM could be considered to be opportunities for BMI. Moreover, the prevailing BM, instead of impeding new BM development, could constitute a type of reference that actors can use to detect elements from the environment that do not fit with the existing structures, that is, for exploring opportunities and overstepping their path dependencies and cognitive myopia (Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002).

Second, our study suggests that to avoid 'attentional trap', that is, getting stuck at the incubation stage, firms should focus on creating triggering mechanisms rather than allocating endless amounts of time and effort. For example, firms can insist on creating organizational rituals of 'go/nogo' decisions to launch a new idea, forcing interactions with external stakeholders at early stages to obtain feedback or defining incentives for managers who proactively champion new ideas. Moreover, contrary to the previous studies that focus on top managers' role (Frankenberger & Sauer, 2019; Govindarajan & Trimble, 2011), we stress that including various stakeholders is crucial for new BM development, such as internal actors (e.g. managers or employees) or customers and partners, to gather feedback.

Limitations and research avenues

We investigated BMI through a single case study: our model of the attentional process driving BMI needs further validation. More specifically, the allocation of attention may vary among firms with different characteristics and settings. In particular, we studied a consulting firm – operating in a mature sector – with a flexible structure, greater potential for generating new ideas, and immaterial resources. For instance, the NOP team could develop and drop many ideas without relying on any major investment (e.g. major purchases, and R&D investments). Therefore, the innovation dynamic may vary over industries where reconfiguring BM implies important financial investments. Moreover, the financial health of the company may also influence the willingness to innovate and take business risks (Bromiley, 1991; Makri, Lane, & Gomez-Mejia, 2006). Firm size may also be relevant. For instance, researchers may observe different BMI dynamics in a large company, where many levels separate operational activities from strategic decision-making and where units are more clearly separated. In particular, in large firms, top management may not be systematically part of the internal teams in charge of BMI, which could encompass actors such as middle managers. In this case, the BMI process may involve activities of 'championing' ideas (Burgelman, 1983), or 'issue-selling' (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), to convince top management to change their strategic orientations. This would imply taking not only a time but also a space focus of BMI to track how ideas circulate within the firm until their concretization.

Moreover, our study was mainly delimited by the activities and discussions that occurred within the firm. Although we provide a rich understanding of what happened inside the NOP team, we presume that other attentional mechanisms may happen outside this scope: CEOs' and managers' cognitive repertoires are also influenced by many other aspects of their professional and personal life, such as their personal network or their previous experiences (Dane, 2013). Other analytical methods such as cognitive maps (Calori, Johnson, & Sarnin, 1994) can complete our understanding of the attentional mechanisms that underlie BMI.

In addition, the fact that actors in the field did not mobilize the BM concept raises the question of whether the use of a BM framework (such as Osterwalder and Pigneur's Canvas) would have affected BMI. Other studies show that material and formal aspects are critical for new BM development (Demil & Lecocq, 2015), and more broadly for strategic innovation (Fréchet & Goy, 2017).

Consequently, our findings suggest several directions for future investigations. For instance, further studies should explore the competitive relations among attentional objects that feed BMI. Attentional objects may benefit from synergies or can interfere with one another since an organization cannot attend to all of them equally. Considering BMI to be a competitive arena of attentional objects may open a fertile ground to address the cognitive aspects of this process in more detail. In the same manner, studying how attention is allocated among various BMs in a same firm may explain how firms develop and manage a portfolio of BMs (Aversa et al., 2017; Sabatier et al., 2010). The ABV thus provides a promising conceptual framework to address the complexity of managing multiple BMs (Snihur & Tarzijan, 2018). Exploring the temporal dimension is another way to develop our attentional process of BMI. Indeed, while some attentional objects were rapidly developed, others observed slower attentional phases. For instance, future studies could investigate the role of attentional factors in accelerating or slowing BMI, such as objects' saliency (Bundy, Shropshire, & Buchholtz, 2013). Finally, our study focused on an incremental process of BMI. Studies could also investigate radical BMI such as firms' reactions to a disruption in their environment. In this case, the challenge may not only rely on the allocation of organizational attention but also on the way in which the actors reconstruct a shared understanding of their environment and their BM. A theoretical lens such as sensemaking (Weick, 1995) could therefore be complementary to the ABV.

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Appendix 1. Data inventory I – recorded events

#	Date	Event type	Attendees	Length in minutes
1	20 February 2014	Internal meeting	3	28
2	08 April 2014	Internal meeting	3	87
3	25 April 2014	Internal meeting	3	81
4	16 May 2014	Internal meeting	3	83
5	29 June 2014	Internal meeting	3	279
6	10 October 2014	Internal meeting	3	179
7	06 November 2014	Internal meeting	3	60
8	06 January 2015	Discussion about the NOP	2	115
9	26 January 2015	Internal meeting	3	201
10	06 February 2015	Phone conversation	3	16
11	24 February 2015	Internal meeting	3	221
12	04 March 2015	Workshop	2	86
13	11 March 2015	Business lunch	4	96
14	12 March 2015	Workshop	2	93
15	18 March 2015	Discussion about the NOP	3	24
16	25 March 2015	Workshop	2	63
17	03 April 2015	Internal meeting	3	59
18	14 April 2015	Conference	30	110
19	12 June 2015	Discussion about the NOP	2	85
20	16 June 2015	Workshop	2	73
21	19 June 2015	Internal meeting	3	53
22	17 July 2015	Workshop	2	115
23	22 July 2015	Workshop	3	51
24	07 October 2015	Internal meeting	3	163
25	16 October 2015	Internal meeting	5	122
26	30 October 2015	Workshop	4	76
27	13 November 2015	Business lunch	2	22
28	19 November 2015	Workshop	4	51
29	27 November 2015	Workshop	2	52
30	08 December 2015	Business lunch	5	55
31	25 January 2016	Meeting	5	63
32	11 February 2016	Meeting	5	122
33	29 February 2016	Workshop	3	122
34	07 March 2016	Workshop	3	118
35	18 April 2016	Phone conversation	2	53
36	02 May 2016	Internal meeting	4	103
37	30 May 2016	Internal meeting	18	110
38	21July 2016	Internal meeting	5	230
39	08 September 2016	Workshop	4	72
40	26 September 2016	Workshop	3	61
41	28 September 2016	Phone conversation	3	3
42	18 October 2016	Internal meeting	5	66
43	07 November 2016	Internal meeting	5	45
44	18 November 2016	Discussion about the NOP	2	35
45	09 December 2016	Internal meeting	52	70

Appendix 2. Data inventory II – interviews

#	Date	Function	Length in minutes
1	7 July 2015	Partner 1	72
2	22 July 2015	Partner 2	57
3	7 February 2016	Senior manager consultant	94
4	24 February 2016	Partner 1	63
5	14 March 2016	Partner 2	103
6	17 March 2016	Consultant	78
7	26 October 2016	Partner 1	55
8	17 November 2016	Partner 2	51

Appendix 3. Actors involved in the NOP

Name	Position
Bernard	Consultor's CEO
Laura	Consultor's director
Patel	ITPartner's CEO
Louise	A Consultor's consultant
Jacques	A Consultor's consultant
Nicolas	A Consultor's customer

CEO, chief executive officer; NOP, New Offer Project.

M@n@gement

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

How Communicative Performances Can Constitute an Organization's Self

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Abstract

The creation of an organization's self is the attribution of a collective will and agency to a group of individuals, thereby constituting them into an organization able to interact with its peers. As such, the organization's self represents a central issue for collective action, as studied through the prism of the 'communicative constitution of organizing' (CCO). Performances, as communicative and spectacular events during which a collectivity presents its self and displays a given message, represent a little-studied opportunity to understand the constitution of the organization's self, and to explore the links between the organization's self and the selves of its members. The empirical part of this study analyses the French feminist activist group, La Barbe, which uses innovative performances to denounce the absence of women at the top of organizations. The article's contribution is twofold: first, the analysis presents how visual and symbolic performances can help to constitute an organization's self, notably through what performances produce for the organization: visibility, coordination and mobilization. Second, it shows the impact of performances on those who execute them, which retroactively has important organizational effects by ensuring their engagement in the organization.

Keywords: *Communicative performances; Organization's self; Communicative constitution of organizing; Activist groups; Qualitative case-study*

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How can a group of individuals speak as one and present itself as a unified collective? This question goes back to the very nature and function of organizations, as it questions why individuals need organizations, how they form them, and what they 'gain' when the organization comes into existence. Reducing the group to its members negates the existence and effectiveness of the organization, and considering that the organization exists in and of itself reifies and ignores the agency of its members. Moreover, both of these approaches undermine the role played by nonhumans in structuring the organization. The growing theoretical stream of 'communicative constitution of organizing' (CCO) scholarship (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) tackles this question by considering how, under certain conditions, individuals are able to constitute themselves as a collective 'we', and thus perform an organization's self: the organization being an entity with personality and agency.

Performances, as scripted public events, focus on the spectacular transmission of a given message to external audiences using mainly discourses, material symbols and bodies. They remain an understudied phenomenon in organizational studies. Yet, they represent key opportunities for groups to express a claim, make a collective statement, or engage in a political process and, in doing so, to present themselves as a collective actor and perform an organization's self. Studying performances provides an opportunity to understand how a collective constitutes itself into an organization. Performances as such can be considered as objects not only for communication studies but also for organizational studies. In addition, those who execute performances bring into play their bodies, their demeanors, and their speech. To describe a spokesperson as being the 'face' of an organization is a telling metaphor: the body and the expression of an individual take on a new dimension when they represent a collective and speak on its behalf. This proximity lends to the question of the personal involvement of the organization's members in constituting the organization's self and the effects it has on them, in particular, the way in which performances inspire motivation and engagement in its members. This leads to two interlocking research questions. First, how can performances constitute the organization's self

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and be considered as organizing events in addition to being communicative events? Second, how are the members' selves impacted in the constitution of the organization's self and how do they contribute to this process?

This article's empirical part is based on a 12-month qualitative case study of the feminist activist organization La Barbe, which denounces the absence of women in power positions. It acts through spectacular and innovative performances, thus communicating not only to external audiences (e.g. journalists, the targeted organization, and public opinion) but also to its members, be it in terms of recruiting them, coordinating them toward action, or retaining them.

Performances thus represent both a communicative and an organizing phenomenon: they constitute the organization's self through three effects: visibility (the organization is made visible to external parties), coordination (activists are pushed into action), and mobilization (activists are recruited and remain engaged over long term). The last aspect is particularly important: what motivates activists in the long run is that performances transform them and help them with feminist issues that matter to them (in particular, with relation to politics and power). By constituting the organization's self through performances, the activists' own selves also undergo change, which motivates them to engage further in the group. I suggest naming this retroactive and reciprocal dynamic the 'organizing self', which takes into consideration how emotions and an individual's inner life can contribute to CCO processes. Since performances are communicative events, they have an important organizing potential: they not only constitute the organization's self *vis-à-vis* external parties, as well as for the individuals who make up the organization, but can also be an important motivating factor. Finally, they link the individual's self and the organization's self in a reciprocal and self-sustaining relationship.

In organizational studies, many studies challenge the reification of organizations, considered as stable objects. Instead, they suggest that organizations should be viewed as dynamic processes (Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Cooren, 1997), hence the use of the term 'organizing' rather than 'organization' (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014). Further research has insisted on the instability (Kozica, Gebhardt, Müller-Seitz, & Kaiser, 2014; McCarthy, 2005) and fluidity of organizations (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), and on the fact that organizations can exist without actorhood (Grothe-Hammer, 2018). On the contrary, the empirical fieldwork presented here highlights how a (social movement) organization can achieve some degree of stability and permanence over time, especially due to performances.

In a broader perspective, this article contributes to the search for a better understanding of alternative organizations (Barlatier, Chauvet, & Morales, 2017; Dorion, 2017; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014) in order to enrich the field of management by looking at understudied or unusual kinds of organizations (Germain & Josserand, 2013).

Theoretical framework

The constitution of the organization's self

In the mid-1990s, scholars began to reconsider the roles and functions of communication (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). Setting aside the view of communication as simply the bearer of a message between an emitter and a receiver, they explored the way in which communication contributes to the organizing processes of collective action (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011): communication does more than simply express reality; it creates it (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). This stream of research refuses to make a strict distinction between organization and communication (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014), which should be seen as two sides of the same coin, each constituting the other in a retroactive and interdependent relationship. Although CCO started in the field of communication theory, it has gradually integrated organizational studies and is now found in both fields.

An important theoretical contribution of CCO is to explain how a group of actors transforms into an organization. In this perspective, a key attribute of organizations is that an organization is able to lay claim to personality, agency, and action, that is, to constitute the organization's 'self' (Taylor, 2011). The organization's self is essential in the communicative constitution of an organization as it assembles a group of individuals into a single entity that is able to interact with others and present itself as an actor at a broader social level. CCO thus links the individual actors with the broader level of the organization. This article explores the ontological nature of the organization's self and its constitution and seeks to understand the position of individuals within this process.

One starting point for CCO is to consider in what way individuals – when they speak for the organization – are the actors (in the sense of the concrete person) of the actant (in the sense of the abstract person created by the speech act), which is the organization. It thus draws on the legacy of Austin and Searle to analyze the organization as the result of performative speech acts (Taylor & Cooren, 1997). The first condition for a successful performative speech act is to have a *competent* actor, meaning that someone is able to convince others that he/she effectively represents the organization when he/she speaks. The second condition is that individuals need to be truly *legitimate* 'agents' of the 'principal', which is the organization. They have to faithfully represent the intentions of the group that makes up the organization. Only under these two circumstances can an organization's self be successfully

constituted – 'successfully' in the sense of being recognized by others (actors or actants) as what they claim to be. This emphasizes the fact that the individual and the organizational levels become imbricated through the performative speech act, which questions the distinction between these levels: "it seems obvious to us that the frontier between interpersonal and organizational communication is not cut-and-dried, but a matter of degree, and is determined as much by epistemological as by ontological considerations (it is not, in other words, independent of the point of view of the person who observes and reports on the exchange)" (Taylor & Cooren, 1997, pp. 432–433). In addition, it is not only thoughts but also feelings that are expressed in speech acts; the performative constitution of the organization's self thus goes beyond language and affects individuals at a deeper level.

The metaphor of ventriloquism develops this perspective (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Bencherki, 2010; Cooren & Sandler, 2014) and describes the interlocked relationship between the actor and the actant. The spokesperson acts as the ventriloquist, making the organization speak as if it were his/her dummy. At the same time, however, the organization also controls the spokesperson (through a specific set of implicit and explicit rules that determine the conditions under which he/she can speak on behalf of the organization, what subjects he/she can address, how he/she is legitimized by the rest of the organization, etc.). Thus, in this relationship, both the organization and its spokesperson can be the dummy or the ventriloquist. There is a constant and indistinguishable oscillation back and forth between those two postures. The organization's self is created by its spokesperson who incarnates it, but the organization also controls the expression of the spokesperson.

Nonhumans also play a role in linking the individuals and the organization. The organization's self is constituted by being attributed actions (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011). Nonhumans are attributed personality, intentionality, and actions by humans (e.g. my calendar 'reminds me' of today's schedule); as nonhumans, organizations are constituted through this process of attribution which gives them a 'self'. By extension, humans can also be attributed actions by nonhumans (such as when a chief executive officer [CEO] is attributed the actions of his/her company). Reciprocally, actions can also be appropriated: by projecting oneself into a nonhuman, an individual appropriates its actions; an organization can also appropriate the actions of its members. Appropriation and attribution blur the line between humans and nonhumans and, by extension, between an organization and its members through a phenomenon called "hybridicity", in which it is never clear exactly where the action originates. In other words, the action always oscillates between humans and nonhumans, thus creating the organization's self much in the same way as ventriloquism. This perspective escapes the dichotomy of essentialism (the organization exists in and of itself) and reductionism (the organization only exists through its members), and instead emphasizes the reciprocal exchanges that form both the organization's self and the selves of the organization's members.

However, the position and behaviors of individuals within the organization inevitably involve power relationships and struggles, to the point that individuals may endanger the organization's self. For example, by letting anyone contribute to its databases, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia jeopardizes the stability and homogeneity of its self (Kozica et al., 2014). Dissenting voices can tell stories that contradict the dominant narratives that constitute Wikipedia (e.g. the idea that anyone can contribute equally is contested by reports of moderators' abuses). Dissenting voices are silenced or placated through different mechanisms aimed at imposing the dominant identity of Wikipedia: normative shifts in the meanings of words, the use of the utopia of 'freedom' as a discursive tool to hide Wikipedia's limitations, and the legitimization of the dominant party's technical powers over other members (e.g. the possibility of banning the Internet Protocol [IP] address of dissenting voices). The organization's self is enforced through normative or even authoritative means in order to ensure the control of the organization's self. Yet, debates can also serve to reinforce the organization's self. The hacktivist group Anonymous refuses to reveal its members' identities and anyone can claim to belong to this organization. This endangers the organization's self when problematic individuals act in its name. As a result, other members are forced to reveal the problematic individuals' identities and debate on whether a given action and a given individual are acceptable to the organization (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). This, in fact, strengthens the organization's self as it drives a reflection on which individuals can rightfully act in the organization's name, particularly when the actors are anonymous.

Finally, while previous studies have explored the relationship between an organization and its members, it is also important to understand the communicative relations between organizations. A parallel can be drawn between the construction of an individual's self and an organization's self (Taylor, 2011): they both build their selves through connections, transactions, and interactions with others. They should be seen as a result of these connections rather than a cause: they cannot exist without the validation of others and without their inclusion in a network of other actors. This ontological stance explains the importance of communicating with other organizations or actors in the constitution of the organization's self, as it is through communication, in any form, that organizations validate each other and bring each other into existence. This also highlights the interdependence between actors during transactions: each 'creates' the other by engaging in a communicative process and validating the other's existence.

CCO has built an ontology that challenges preconceptions about organizations. Notably, it disseminates the organization's

self across several sites: it is not 'situated' in a specific person, object, or place, but exists through their interactions. More specifically, the organization and its members are embedded in several reciprocal and interdependent communicative relationships, sometimes with the mediation of nonhumans or discourses: ventriloquism, attribution, appropriation, power struggles, and interactions with other peers. While many studies have shown the impact that individuals may have on the organization's self, they also imply that these processes affect the individuals themselves – a perspective that could be further explored and developed.

Performances in the constitution of the organization

Performances deserve greater attention in organizational studies, and CCO helps understand how they contribute to the organizing process. This section therefore aims to show what performances are and how they can be understood through the CCO lenses.

What is the common denominator between the general assembly of a company, a press conference given by an non-governmental organization (NGO), a trade union demonstration against a political decision, and an action by ActUp denouncing the homophobic public health regulations? Through each of these performances, an organization expresses a message and – in doing so – presents itself and acts as an autonomous agent. As an event, performances provide organizations with the opportunity to exhibit themselves. As a concept, performances deserve the attention of scholars working in the field of organizational studies.

The concept of organizational performance was developed in the 1970s by Charles Tilly (Tilly, 2008; Tilly & Wood, 2009), who studied social movements in Europe from a historical point of view. The concept refers to the public expression of claims from a group (usually demonstrators) to another external party (a public institution, a firm, a cultural or religious organization, etc.), the movement itself being composed of smaller actions and interactions. Tilly started with a nation-level analysis, but continuators have used the concept of 'tactical repertoire' to explore the organizational level (Fillieule, 2010; McCammon, 2003; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, & Andersen, 2009; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004; Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008). Viewed from this perspective, performances share several characteristics.

First, contrary to traditional explanations of social movements as deeply irrational events (Le Bon, 1895), Tilly insists on the idea that individuals who engage in performances know what they are doing and develop a conscious strategy to achieve their goals, particularly by adapting a given performance to specific circumstances. Second, performances are routinized: actors know them and put them on regularly. They evolve slowly building on small sporadic improvisations within a given script of events. Innovative performances are more difficult to create as they require more effort and their meaning is not always clear. The concept of performance is drawn from the metaphor of a theatrical troupe that knows and repeats a limited repertoire of plays, and rarely innovates. To express its claims, an activist group may use a set of performances that is constrained by the group's culture and its members' past experiences.

Empirically, Tilly describes street demonstrations, chanting, and picketing. Many works have explored and analyzed other types of performances. More specifically, they have shown how performances can be prepared and elaborated to create a strong symbol representing a cause (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004).

In addition to these characteristics of performances, the current of organizational esthetics (Reinhold, 2017) stresses the importance of visuals, objects, and bodies in performances. Reinhold's research into the conception, enactment, and effects of artistic performances in an investment banking firm shows how artists challenge demeanors and behaviors through performance. Their aim is to raise an awareness of the constraints that companies put on bodies, in an attempt to emancipate them, or at least to deepen the participants' consciousness of their own bodies in a strict working environment. In this sense, performances aim to produce a certain message through collective action. Moreover, the esthetic dimension of performances suggests that attention needs to be paid to their use of semantic artifacts. These include (1) the discourses that the organization's members deliver in its name during the performance; (2) the occupation of a given space which is divided into different areas that interact with each other (e.g. the hierarchical relationship between the podium and the audience); (3) the different expected roles of those participating in the performance (not only the organization's members); (4) the behaviors and demeanors of these roles; and (5) the symbols and images used by the participants to express their identity (e.g. ties and suits for male managers). Performances aim at creating an impression on the audience and other stakeholders through a message that is not only textual but also visual, spatial, and, to some extent, ritual (since many of the performances are routinized). However, Reinhold (2017, p. 85) carefully points out that, "[c]ritical artists should not be mistaken for activists but their practice of art, here dance, aims at producing social change, here more sincere embodied relations" (thus focusing more on an inner change), which (while still explicit) may be difficult to pin down than the political claims of an activist group, for instance.

These approaches to performances can be synthesized into a definition. Performances are *scripted public events focused on the spectacular transmission of a given message to external audiences, using notably discourses, material symbols, and bodies.*

While this definition focuses more on the communicative dimension of performance, performances also have organizing

properties. By executing a performance, a group of individuals expresses a common claim, which enables it to surpass the individual level and transform itself into another object – an organization able to interact with its peers. Thus, a central characteristic of performances is to represent an organization to an external audience through the production of images and discourses. Performances cannot be reduced to the innocuous symbolization of an organization: they constitute the organization's self, meaning that they attribute personality, agency, and characteristics to the organization and enable its members to speak in its name. As one of the CCO organizing processes (speech acts, attribution to nonhumans, ventriloquism, etc.), performances should be considered as communicative events that connect the organization to its members and thus build the organization's self.

Research questions

How can the constitution of the organization's self through performances be explained and integrated into CCO perspectives? Performances are central events in the constitution of the organization's self. They are an occasion for the organization to present itself and establish its existence in the eyes of others. Yet, this is a difficult and fragile process, and not all performances successfully constitute an organization's self, that is, not all of them manage to create the image of an enduring, legitimate, and stable organization. For instance, a major concern for the constitution of the organization's self is the issue of the legitimacy of the spokesperson, who has to be recognized both by the external actors and the organization's members as a valid representative of the organization (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Sandler, 2014; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Kozica et al., 2014). The interactions with other organizations and actors (Taylor, 2011), notably journalists (Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2010, 2012; Stohl & Stohl, 2011), should also be taken into account: how a performance can acknowledge and be acknowledged by them, thus engaging in a circle of reciprocal transactions. Finally, a performance calls on the intervention of various humans (including their bodies and demeanors) and nonhumans (discourses, visuals, symbols, and slogans). The performance needs to be able to attribute the actions of these humans and nonhumans to the organization in order to constitute the organization's self (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011).

These issues can be summarized in a first research question: *how can performances successfully constitute the organization's self and be considered as organizing events in addition to being communicative events?*

If an organization and individuals are so interlinked through the constitution of the organization's self, it is likely that individuals are involved not only through their conversations, speeches, and actions, but also at a deeper level through their affects and inner life, as noted in the literature review. This lends to the question of the interactions between the organization and individuals through the medium of performances and of the individuals' emotional involvement in the performances. The possibility for a performance to become an organizing event might also therefore depend on the performers' emotional and personal involvement. In fact, CCO scholarship has sometimes adopted a broad-based analysis that tends to overlook the fact that individuals' inner life may be influenced by and help to constitute the organization. Exploring the role played by this inner life could give CCO greater insight into the role of individuals in the constitution of the organization's self and into the deep relations between the organization and its members.

This leads to a second research question, interlinked with the first: *how are the members' selves impacted by the constitution of the organization's self and how do they contribute to this process?*

Empirical work: The feminist activist group La Barbe

Presentation of the group

Founded in 2008, La Barbe is a French feminist activist group that denounces the absence of women in positions of power. The group includes about 30 active members and some hundred more loosely connected members, all female, with a relatively uniform age distribution of between 25 and 65 years. On average, they have a high educational level (master's degree or higher). Many of them are journalists, teachers, consultants, or work in associations fighting AIDS epidemics (the founding members originated in these associations), some are photographers or visual artists, while the youngest members are still students. Their occupations give them relatively flexible schedules, which is necessary to be able to take part in performances held during the day on short notice (most of them are prepared a week in advance). A significant number of La Barbe's members are openly lesbian (some are bisexual and/or transgender) and active in movements defending homosexuals' rights, consonant with research that highlights the importance of lesbians in radical feminism (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). The vast majority of La Barbe's members are white.

The name of the group refers to the fake beards (*barbe* in French) worn by the activists, and also plays on words since '*la barbe* !' is an outdated French expression used to express strong irritation.

The group is only lightly structured and has almost no financial or material resources beyond the accessories used during the performances. It has no legal personality: the association 'Les Ami-e-s de La Barbe' provides legal support enabling insurance coverage and the use of a room every other week at a local cultural center. All of its members are volunteers,

whatever their responsibilities or degree of involvement. The main tools comprise La Barbe's website,[1] its e-mail address, an internal mailing list for decision-making, and a mailing list to contact journalists. Furthermore, the group has few rules (either explicit or implicit), almost no hierarchy, no specific procedures for sharing out work or cooperation, no bureaucracy, etc. Yet, La Barbe has existed for more than 10 years without interruption, although with various levels of activity.

Most of the group's members have prior experience in activism and are engaged feminists. La Barbe was founded in reaction to the many sexist comments leveled against Ségolène Royal during the 2007 presidential campaign (Royal being the foremost left-wing candidate opposing Nicolas Sarkozy, the leading right-wing male candidate). Shocked by this sexist climate against a woman seeking a position of power, La Barbe's founding members wanted to act. It seemed to them that the sexism issue weighed in more strongly than the usual left-right opposition, even among Ségolène Royal's natural political allies:

> I was under the impression that sexism in French society had reached a worrying level. I was also concerned that many of my friends who were supposedly left-leaning really hesitated to vote for Bayrou [the centrist male candidate] or even not to vote at all. And my analysis was that they could not imagine voting for a woman. If it had been a man with the same program, they would not have hesitated. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

La Barbe is particularly relevant when it comes to exploring performances, as the group does not rely on traditional performances such as demonstrations, picketing, etc. Instead, its founding members have created a set of performances specifically for their cause, drawing inspiration from other activist groups and feminist theoretical references (mainly Butler, 1990; Delphy, 1979). This characteristic reveals how activists gradually learn and appropriate their performance, while also being drawn to the group by the innovative image it creates (Hildwein, 2017).

La Barbe's most important performance involves ironically congratulating an organization for its ability to keep women out of power positions. The activists of La Barbe 'congratulate' an organization by disrupting a public meeting (conference, general assembly, and round table). They position themselves on the podium facing the audience and adopt a 'dignified demeanor', remaining still and silent (as shown in the photos on pp. 7–8, Figures 1 to 3). They all wear prop beards. Some of them hold placards similar to silent film cartons, bearing words of encouragement such as 'Bravo', 'Marvellous', 'How daring!', or 'Thanks!'. Occasionally, they also carry a banner with the words 'La Barbe'. One or two activists remain in the audience to take photos or shoot video footage (a role that I often played since, being a man, I could not take part directly in the performance). An activist reads aloud a text – prepared before the performance and afterward distributed to the audience – in which the activists ironically congratulate the organization for its ability to keep women in subordinate positions, with typical formulas such as 'You make the patriarchy proud'. The activists then shake hands with men in senior positions and leave the meeting. This script is often adapted depending on the identity of the targeted organization (e.g. a discourse targeting a political organization and referring to its ideological inspirations), on the statistics supporting La Barbe's claims (e.g. the number of women in top positions in the organization), and on the size and layout of the venue where the event occurs. The script is also adapted at the last minute depending on whether La Barbe is accepted, silenced, or violently rejected (e.g. the discourse may be skipped in order to focus on producing the impactful image of still and silent women facing the audience).

To give some historical context, feminist movements have always worked in detail on the use of symbols in their performances (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, 1995; Whittier, 1995), which makes feminism a fruitful social movement for studying the impact of a tactical repertoire. This dates back to the first-wave feminist movements. For instance, in the 1930s, French suffragette leaders Jane Valbot and Louise Weiss organized spectacular performances in which they chained themselves to the gates of the Senate (one of the two French parliamentary chambers), or handed the senators 'forget-me-not' flowers and socks embroidered with the inscription 'Even if you give us the right to vote, your socks will be mended'[2] (Molinier-Boyd, 1995). More generally, feminist social movement organizations have an enduring self-reflective tradition of looking for alternative forms of self-organizing (Dorion, 2017) and rethinking issues such as hierarchy or task division to challenge power relations. This has led to innovative forms of organizations (Ashcraft, 2001) and great vigilance regarding the eventuality of a 'structureless' organization that could hide concrete power relations (Freeman, 1972).

One of the major inspirations[3] for La Barbe's performances is the activist group Lesbian Avengers, which defines itself as 'a direct action group using grassroots activism to fight for lesbian survival and visibility'.[4] The group was created in 1992 in New York City by experienced activists. It promotes change through activism and encourages women's empowerment through the transmission of skills and a 'do-it-yourself' policy; every lesbian should be able to create a 'chapter' in her city to demonstrate and express anger against

[1] http://labarbelabarbe.org/.

[2] Original French: '*Même si vous nous donnez le droit de vote, vos chaussettes seront raccommodées*' (author's translation).

[3] To avoid any misinterpretation, the only sources of inspiration mentioned in this article are those that La Barbe activists explicitly mentioned as such.

[4] http://www.lesbianavengers.com/handbooks/Lesbian_Avenger_handbook3.shtml

Figure 1. An activist reads the tract from the podium while others face the audience, wearing prop beards and holding cartons (26 September 2011)

Figure 2. Activists facing the audience, while the tract is read off-camera (30 November 2011)

Figure 3. A general view of the performance (25 January 2012)

homophobic behaviors and decisions. Lesbian Avengers also encourages innovative and spectacular performances:

> Avoid old, stale tactics at all costs. Chanting, picketing and the like alone no longer make an impression; standing passively and listening to speakers are boring and disempowering. Look for daring, new participatory tactics depending on the nature of your action.[5]

The most spectacular and well-known performance of their repertoire is to line up and eat fire as a symbol of protest in reaction to the homophobic arson of lesbians' houses.

> When lesbians saw their houses get burnt, which happened many times, [the Lesbian Avengers] went to where it happened and gave each other burning torches, they ate fire, they lined up, they have a speech about the fact that they will take the fire someone tried to use against them to build their own strength, their own might, and so they put petroleum in their mouths and they hand it to the next person, who hands it to the next, and finally, they brandish their burning torch and they shout their motto, which is 'This fire will not consume us, we will take it and make it our own'. They reverse the stigma onto the homophobes. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

Although La Barbe draws inspiration from several other activist groups, Lesbian Avengers is the group that most closely interlinks communication and organizing. As for the visual impact of performances, Lesbian Avengers is focused on direct action and activism as the prime means of changing a state of mind and the overall situation. It favors spectacular and innovative performances that create an esthetic shock in order to reach their goals in the shortest time and with minimum effort. In addition, Lesbian Avengers focuses on reversing the stigma and shaming their adversaries, which is an approach borrowed by La Barbe.

The innovative dimension of La Barbe's performances is reinforced by the legacy of Act Up, to which several founding members belonged. An example of Act Up's innovation is the 'die-in', in which activists gather at a given place (public health institutions or the Catholic Church are the usual targets), fall down on the ground, and remain immobile until the police pick them up. In this operation, the activists' bodies symbolize the victims of the AIDS epidemic and shame the target (Broqua & Fillieule, 2009; Patouillard, 1998). La Barbe also draws on a similar use of bodies and the search for visually impactful events.

A third inspiring activist group deserves mention with respect to the role of humor: billionaires for Bush. This American activist group was created in 1999 in order to denounce the importance of corporations and money in US government and politics. To this end, activists disguised themselves as privileged rich people and demonstrated to ironically 'congratulate' the Bush administration for its support to war, its fight against healthcare, etc. What struck the founding

[5] Ibid.

members of La Barbe is that Billionaires for Bush created an ambiguous moment of uncertainty, where it is difficult to ascertain whether or not irony is being used. The activists revealed their adversaries' influence not through words, but rather by creating a moment where reality became blurred. At that moment, the audience had to acknowledge something that was obvious, but which then also appeared as deeply unfair:

> And so they played their role so well that there is an instant of utter confusion when you tell yourself, 'bastards!', there is an instant when you don't know whether it's real or not, you're in a position where you ask yourself whether they are taking the piss, or is it really them, is it second-degree, what's happening? So it creates this questioning and I admired that because I found that they were invincible even from Bush's friends, who could only see themselves in this portrait. And this is what really inspired the second-degree, the irony of La Barbe. [Manon – 26 September 2011]

Billionaires for Bush influenced La Barbe by bringing the answer to the problem of showing up men and their responsibility. The use of irony means that the opposition between activists and their adversaries can be temporarily obscured, just long enough to reveal the image of the adversaries themselves and challenge the audience's own contradictions: supporting equality while passively accepting male-only podiums of men in power positions. The irony used by La Barbe (particularly in the text read aloud by the lead activist) plays an important symbolic role. From the outset, 'irony' is a concept used by activists to describe how they try to destabilize the targeted organization by congratulating it.

La Barbe gave some 120 performances between February 2008 and July 2012 (from its first performance up to the end of the fieldwork, at which point I stopped counting). Today, the group is still active (although with less intensity), more than 10 years after its creation.

Methodological approach

This article is based on a qualitative case study conducted over 1 year (July 2011–July 2012). It draws on ethnographic methodology (Beaud & Weber, 2010) as applied to organizational studies (Cunliffe, 2010; Watson, 2011; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009), communication studies (Tracy & Geist-Martin, 2014), feminist analysis (Naples, 2003) and social movements research (Snow & Trom, 2002). It follows on from the 'ethnographic turn' of organizational studies over the last two decades (Rouleau, de Rond, & Musca, 2014). With respect to debates on CCO methodologies (Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014), this methodology captures the way in which individuals make sense of their interactions with each other within an organization and how they explain their engagement in the organization. In addition, it allows the researcher to become immersed in the organization and observe it from the inside. This method thus connects sense-making and internal organizing processes, making it a relevant approach to study CCO phenomena.

Concretely, the empirical work consisted of interviews, observations of the activist group, its performances and internal meetings, and substantial data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with activists (17 interviews), with journalists who wrote about the group (5 interviews), and with human resources managers of organizations targeted by La Barbe (11 interviews). All interviews were recorded and transcribed; on average, the interviews lasted for 59 min: the shortest one lasted for 31 min and the longest one lasted for 2 h and 10 min. Interviews with activists followed two main directions: first, the question of how they make sense of the performances and what kind of message they intend to send; and, second, how they joined La Barbe in order to retrace their activist and feminist careers. The interviews with journalists covered how articles are chosen by the editorial board and how performances of La Barbe are represented (connotations, focus on a particular aspect, length of the article, etc.). This approach allowed the interview to capture why activist events are selected (among other possible news) and how they are treated by media. The interviews with managers were more difficult to handle as I chose to avoid confronting them directly with La Barbe's performance, as this tack could have been perceived as an aggression. Instead, they were first asked to describe their position and their work, and the interview gradually shifted toward the issue of external activist influence on management practices. In accordance with ethnographic methodologies (Beaud & Weber, 2010), the interviewees were never interrupted and were encouraged to follow their line of thought even when it went off topic, to allow them to cover blind spots omitted by the questionnaire.

While the interviews with journalists provided a lot of information on their interactions with La Barbe activists and on how they view them, the interviews with managers were not as productive as expected. Even managers sympathetic to the group and its cause could not pinpoint any consequences for their organization and saw the performance as a nonevent. The most notable reaction was that of a female Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Diversity director in a large banking organization, who expressed how she had felt legitimized and had appreciated the performance. However, even she had to admit that it had had no managerial or organizational consequences. These negative results led me to abandon interviews with managers and refocus on the interactions between journalists and activists. The journalists who had covered La Barbe and were willing to answer my questions were nonetheless quite difficult to reach.

The anonymity of the respondents (and, in the case of journalists and managers, of their respective organizations) was

guaranteed by changing their names and any items that could make them recognizable. The records and the raw transcripts were kept confidential, and only selected excerpts are shown and used for academic articles. Two rationales justified this anonymity and confidentiality: first, for deontological reasons, particularly to protect activists, and, second, to gain the respondents' trust and encourage them to speak their mind.

When observing performances as both communicative and organizing processes, I was attentive to several levels within the same event: first, the organization of the performance itself, that is, how activists discuss and decide where and how to act. Second, I described the material, discursive and visual elements of the performance (although they tended to remain the same across the performances): how activists behave, what objects they use, what they say, and what symbols they convey. Third, I noted how the audiences reacted to the performances in order to capture some of the 'atmosphere' of each event. By audiences, I mean not only the audience at the event but also other individuals present: men targeted by the performance, security guards, journalists, people from other activist groups, etc. Their reactions would vary greatly, ranging from cheering and laughter to silence (due to misunderstanding, humility, or disdain), and even booing, harsh insults, and physical contact. Fourth, the interviews with the activists helped me to understand what message they intended to convey through the performances. Interviews were also used to make sense of observations and avoid misconstruing the activists' behaviors during and after performances. Fifth, the interviews with journalists and the coding of their articles allowed me to capture how the message was received and interpreted by them. In addition, I also took note on how I initially would interpret the performances when I first saw them, before my first interviews with activists.

While the activists were always quite friendly to me, I (as a heterosexual man) was soon seen as an outsider. La Barbe never defined itself as a women-only group (some men would also sometimes attend meetings), but its performances could only work if performed by women since men wearing fake beards would not have the same symbolic power. Even when welcomed, the presence of men in some feminist spaces tends to reproduce patterns of dominance and inhibit the speech of group members and hamper their emancipation. Moreover, one of La Barbe's objectives is to be autonomous from men in organizing the group (or any activity). My position as an outsider should be nuanced. I had many characteristics in common with the activists in that most of them were white and enjoyed a high level of education. My access to the field, however, was not without immediate consequence: i was asked not to participate in the online spaces that the activists used for discussions and decision-making and, although I was able to attend internal meetings, I was asked not to record them.

To counterbalance my outsider position and the questions it might have raised, I remained as silent and as withdrawn as possible, intervening only when forced to and expressing my mind as little as possible. Given that the differences separating me from the activists could not be ignored, it was important to assume them and limit their effects as far as possible. Acting as the photographer during the performances was a precious vantage point as it not only involved me in organizing the performance but also benefited La Barbe, while keeping my intervention to a minimum. To further this trust-building and understand the activists' world views, I immersed myself in their theoretical inspirations, whether material feminism (Delphy, 1979), queer feminism (Butler, 1990, 1993), or other references they might mention (Haraway, 1988). This immersion aimed to capture the precise meanings that activists gave to their performances and to identify any misinterpretations on my part. A great deal of introspective work was also needed to understand how my gender identity as a man may have affected my analysis (Hildwein, 2019), and I reflected on my position as a male academic and on how an individual's standpoint affects the way in which knowledge is produced (Espìgnola, 2012).

A large amount of additional data was also collected in order to complete the field work. The entire data collection comprised (1) 17 interviews with activists, plus interviews with 5 journalists who had written about La Barbe, and 11 managers impacted by La Barbe's performances (as mentioned earlier); (2) notes from field observations of 18 performances (and two performances that were atypical for La Barbe) and 25 internal meetings between July 2011 and July 2012; (3) a total of 2,325 photos, mainly from performances; (4) a total of 226 press articles about La Barbe, published between 28 February 2008 and 19 November 2013 (during the research period), found on the databases Factiva and LexisNexis; (5) 93 press releases by La Barbe; and (6) a total of 138 leaflets on La Barbe's performances.

Press releases and leaflets were used to capture the group's discourse. These highlighted the importance of statistics (related to each targeted organization), metaphors, and irony in La Barbe's argumentation. This written discourse is an integral part of their performance as it reinforces the imagery, expands on the humor by ridiculing the target, and gives statistical evidence to support the activists' claims. Press articles provided insights into how La Barbe's performances are represented by journalists: the length of articles, the connotations used to refer to La Barbe (vocabulary, turn of phrase, and appraisals), and the errors and inaccuracies made by the author of the article.

The coding was adapted to each type of data collected (e.g. interviews with activists, interviews with journalists, interviews with managers, press releases, leaflets, and press articles). For instance, interviews with activists (which are central in this

article) were coded using NVivo to identify the prominent sense units. The initial coding was inductive and aimed at encompassing all the nuances of the text, which revealed issues that had not initially been identified mainly regarding the personal transformations that activists undergo when they join La Barbe and execute its performances. The first sense units were gradually grouped into larger categories in order to reveal the main themes and subjects broached by the activists. Four main categories emerged: 'Meaning given to performances', 'Relationship to the media', 'Mobilization factors', and 'Internal mechanisms of the group',[6] which were helpful in understanding and analyzing the viewpoints and experience of the group's activists. Working on these categories, I identified different organizing roles in the performances: 'Relationship to the media' provided elements regarding their visual impact; 'mobilization factors' showed how La Barbe's members are recruited and retained due to the performances; 'internal mechanisms of the group' helped me understand how performances spur activists to action and enable them to avoid dissension; and 'meaning given to performances' provided the activist and feminist references serving as the basis of the performances. A further analysis of the category 'mobilization factors' showed how deeply activists were affected by the performances and their participation in La Barbe, which justified the exploration of the ways in which the performances had a personal impact on the activists.

Finally, the results were presented to members of the group and their reflections and criticisms were taken into account.

Results: The organizing properties of performances in an activist group

This section examines how performances constitute the self of a feminist activist group through three effects: The visibility of the group, the coordination of the performances, and its members' mobilization. The analysis follows an inward movement, starting with the effects of performances on external parties (visibility), then the effects on the relationship among the activists (coordination), and finally the effects on activists themselves (mobilization) and the ensuing reciprocal relationship between the organization's self and the members' selves.

Visibility through innovative performances

Creating a visual shock has been one of La Barbe's objectives right from the beginning. Its founding members see spectacular performances as a means of action, to express indignation, highlight a status quo, show why it is unjust, and mock those who benefit from it or try to legitimize it.

> I wanted a subversive visual system that would speak for itself, that by itself would show everything, I wanted people to see how serious this is, to see how men are holding the strings and to see it immediately… To deconstruct and make these roles look ridiculous. I wanted to do all of these, I was looking for this inversion mechanism, I knew that we would have to look for places of power, to show the absence of women and men's supremacy and I wanted people to see very quickly, in a single glimpse, what a scandal it is [Manon, a founding member; 26 September 2011].

From the outset, the core activity of La Barbe has been a subversive and symbolic communication process. It is 'symbolic' in the sense that it attempts to have a sudden effect on the audience, without necessarily calling on rationality or discursive processes, by pointing out in a few simple images the omnipresence of (white) men in power positions. Humor (in particular irony and ridicule), surprise, and an ensemble of corny symbols are the key tools of this symbolic shock (for a more extensive interpretation of La Barbe's performance, see Hildwein, 2016). La Barbe's self is constituted initially through the esthetic denunciation of the absence of women in places of power.

These performances are effective on at least two audiences: Potential future activists (as discussed in the 'Mobilization of activists' section) and journalists.

The visual shock created by performances attracts journalists' attention to La Barbe and thus constitutes the group in the media arena. An experienced journalist who wrote an article about La Barbe explains why he was interested in the activist group:

> I like the happening, I was seduced by their courage during the performance, by the mode of action, the happening, I found their choices to be interesting, as well as their claims. [Alberto – 28 April 2015]

What first draws the journalists' attention is the activists' direct involvement in the performance (their courage) and the use of the performances themselves, that is, the visual impact of the performances. Irony is often mentioned as a key element in the visual and symbolic shock produced by La Barbe. As a result, the performances afford the group media coverage and visibility, enabling it to reach a wider audience.

In contrast, journalists often commented in the interviews that not all social movement organizations catch their attention. They view many performances as too dull and uninteresting and simply dismiss them without further consideration. Demonstrations in particular are seen as an overused performance, a 'cliché' almost of social movements especially when they focus on a pure show of strength (the number of participants) and fail to explore other symbols (colors, visuals, slogans, etc.). The innovative characteristics of La Barbe's performances distinguish it from other social movements and strengthen its presence in the media.

[6] In French: *Sens donné aux performances, Rapport au média, Facteurs de mobilisation et Fonctionnement interne du groupe*.

Journalists are also drawn to La Barbe because its innovative performances meet the need for unexpected images and ideas that rouse their readers' interest. This is not only a challenge for newspapers and TV channels in general, but also for each journalist individually with respect to his or her daily work on the editorial board. Ultimately, their ability to find impactful images has strong repercussions on their career and professional advancement.

> Concretely, I have a subject, we have meetings, and each of us suggests subjects, or subjects are imposed on us. 'Here, there is this news about this…' After that, there is a discussion, people have ideas, the management has ideas, but you have your specialization and you want to follow your own mind. We negotiate, we discuss how long each paper should be, and we discuss again and again with the editor-in-chief to determine if articles are well-rounded. [Alberto – 28 April 2015]

This plays a key role in the relationships with their superiors and colleagues, depending on their experience and their power within the editorial board.

> We have to juggle with balances of power, which means, my boss comes to me in the morning to prepare the meetings: 'Can you do the paper on Mr. So-and-so', 'No, I have my own thing' 'Please, come on', and here you have the balance of power between a new person who has to work on that kind of thing and a guy like me that has been there for 4/5 years and who can say no to his boss, even if it means shouting, 'I don't care, they can hire someone else, otherwise quality papers are never done'. [Malik – 24 April 2015]

For journalists, an innovative performance represents a weapon in their fight for a certain degree of independence, that is, being able to decide what subject they want to write and resist hierarchical pressures. As such, innovative performances are integrated into the dynamics of editorial boards, which explains their success: It is not only a matter of visual shock, which simply makes an activist group visible, it also strengthens the position of the journalists who write about La Barbe. In this context, La Barbe's performances are effective because they create surprise and facilitate the journalists' work.

From an organizing point of view, performances are not only successful in communicating a message (and making it into the newspapers) but also constitute the organization's self through the interactions with other actors or organizations (Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). The performances of La Barbe not only characterize their targets and voice their claims, but also speak about La Barbe and bring it into existence as an autonomous organization and a legitimate actor in the media, acknowledged by other actors (in this case, journalists). Activists can say 'we' and speak as a group, including when speaking to each other ('we [La Barbe] should react to this event'). In a similar way, journalists can say 'it,' referring to La Barbe. Performances constitute La Barbe as an organization by creating its 'self' from a communicative point of view.

The fact that some performances are able to attract the attention of journalists and others are not indicates that the creation of an organization's self also depends on the conditions in which the message is formulated: It has to be validated (and repeated, commented, interpreted, etc.) by other actors who judge its pertinence in a certain cultural context. In an environment where media attention is difficult to attract amid the vast amounts of information continuously produced, innovative and spectacular performances represent a pivotal tool (compared to others) to create an organization's self, as they directly target the need to be culturally relevant through the intensive use of visual and symbolic means.

Coordination through action

While the first impact of spectacular performances is visual and directed toward external parties, performances also help constitute the activist group by facilitating the coordination of its members. Being relatively simple, performances are a call to action in themselves and thus encourage collaboration.

A focus on action

A firm principle of La Barbe is to focus on action as opposed to debates or theoretical discussions. Its founders see theoretical discussions and ideological debates as a real danger for feminist organizations, as some issues (notably pornography, prostitution, and the Muslim headscarf) tend to deeply divide feminists to the point of preventing their collective action. This belief stems from their past experiences in other feminist organizations that encountered problems or even dissolved due to ideological divergences (for a complete analysis of La Barbe's criticisms of French feminism, see Hildwein, 2016: pp. 120–126). As one of the founding members said:

> It's the *kiss of death*.[7] The more we discuss ideology, the less efficient we are. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

According to the members, ideological debates create schisms among activist groups, hinder collective action, and ultimately prevent them from taking any meaningful action. As such, debates constitute internal factors of instability, forces that tend to destroy organizing processes.

Lesbian Avengers provides the model for a different kind of performance in which performances are the essence of a group, and discussions are avoided as much as possible since they tend to divide the group and hinder its action.

[7] In English in the original text.

> And so we imitated Lesbian Avengers regarding this, we decided not to have discussions, except for debating dinners where we have debates on specific subjects, we would choose beforehand and have a special meeting to debate them. But the rest of the time we wanted to avoid vexing questions and to really concentrate on action, so this was really the starting idea, it would be direct action. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

La Barbe's activists agreed that, should any member wish to debate ideological issues, she can organize a 'punk dinner'[8] at home (outside La Barbe), to which she can invite whoever she pleases to discuss a specific (usually touchy) topic. However, it is also understood among the members that this must not impede further performances or become one of La Barbe's main activities.

Performances are a way of gathering activists around a common purpose and acting concretely. Discussions focus on the modalities of a performance rather than on its justification or its form. This way of functioning is possible because La Barbe's performances are not contested by the activists (in fact, performances have undergone little change over the group's 10 years of activity, with only minimal incremental innovations such as shaking the hands of men on the podium). The absence of contestation is, first of all, due to La Barbe's mode of recruitment (see pp. 14–15): the performances are the main reason why women join the group, so those who are skeptical will not take part.

Second, the performances focus on a simple message (the denunciation of the absence of women in power positions) which raises few to no objections. Moreover, the performances are relatively easy to set up (involving few props and activists), which makes coordination all the more easier. Furthermore, by focusing on a single symbolic visual shock, performances do not dwell on complex explanations of the subject addressed and never propose solutions. Activists refuse to give any advice (which could lead to heated debates) or to position themselves as specialists on the subject. Requests for solutions (expressed, for instance, by the targeted organizations) are forwarded to external experts identified by the activists. This position is reinforced by another explicit rule of La Barbe that prohibits joining any other cause or allying with any other organization, including other feminist organizations. The group is focused on one cause and one cause only. This has the same rationale as above: avoiding unnecessary conflict. La Barbe takes part in external public demonstrations only on rare occasions.

Third, the preparation of performances allows for discussions and negotiations before and after the performance. Before the performance, the activists identify a target organization, gather information about it (the gendered distribution of power positions, for instance) and about the event (how to enter, how to escape, how to access the podium, how dangerous security is, etc.), and prepare a tract. The text of the tract is discussed among the activists and offers a time during which they can align their frameworks and thus channel any dissension into a structured debate.[9] After the performance, activists gather again in a bar, discuss the relevance and effectiveness of the performance, and exchange their impressions on the shared experience. The discussions and negotiations involve three different levels of the performance: (1) how the performance can concretely take place in the room, how activists will move, place themselves, etc.; (2) what the performance means for this specific organization (as the absence of women in power positions has different reasons and consequences for a company, a religious organization, or an NGO, for example, how virulent do they want to be, are the activists shaming the organization for the first time or not, etc.); and (3) what this means in a broader political and social context (e.g. relative to upcoming elections, in the wake of a social debate regarding feminist issues, etc.).

The reason that the performances manage to avoid dissension and spur action is that discussions do not (or very rarely) concern the performance itself (i.e. its symbols, its discourse or its visual shock), but rather its application and its meaning in a given situation. The activists thus start their discussion with a common denominator: the performance itself as a call to action. The discussions do not ask whether the performance should happen or not, but rather how it should be executed. This means that discussions and debates are already part of the general action, which cements the group from the outset and springs from two factors. First, the performances have a strong enough meaning to obviate their renegotiation at each occurrence and make them easily adapted to different conditions. Second, there are organizational spaces and times in which these debates and discussions can take place: Performances play an organizing role also because they exist within a broader network of communicative/organizing processes that support them. This process ensures the group's stability over the long term by allowing a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability, while at the same time reinforcing performances as the group's central and legitimate mode of action.

The hidden hierarchy in the performances

La Barbe was founded with the ideal of a non-hierarchical organization in mind – a long-standing ideal in feminist organizations but one that has also been greatly contested (Freeman, 1972). Inspired by Lesbian Avengers, La Barbe's performances further this ambition. Because of their relative simplicity, coordination and hierarchy are kept to a minimum. For other types of

[8] '*Dîner punk*' in French.

[9] As mentioned in the methodological section, I was unable to directly observe these online spaces; these conclusions are drawn from interviews with activists willing to discuss their internal debates.

performance, La Barbe would require a much more substantial organizational structure, especially for coordinating activists and integrating newcomers (see the next section). Like Lesbian Avengers, La Barbe – which started up in Paris – encourages the creation of other similar organizations nationwide (Toulouse, Lille, Bordeaux, etc.) and helps them to act autonomously without external intervention. This ideal is also reflected in how responsibilities are shared out among La Barbe's members. The activists in charge are changed regularly, for example, the role of coordinator should not be held longer than 6 months. Also, the responsibilities within La Barbe are separate from the responsibilities of its supporting association, 'Les Ami-e-s de La Barbe'. For instance, being the treasurer or president of this association confers no particular right in the main group.

However, whether or not this ideal is achieved is debatable. Activists often mention the aura and charisma of some founding members as being a limit to this ideal. Another issue is the time that each activist spends on the Internet: those who are able to devote a large part of their day to internal decisions tend to have a much greater influence than other members who are no less legitimate.

Another limit to this ideal arises directly from the organizing role of performances. As shown in the previous section, performances spur the members to action and, as such, are part of the organizing process. However, this comes at a certain cost. We could consider that performances have a certain *intentionality* (Cooren & Taylor, 1997) that originates from those who created them: the founders' theoretical frameworks (including feminist ones) are reflected in the performances. For instance, the queer feminist positioning (in the sense of Butler, 1990, 1993) emerges in the use of fake beards and the 'gender confusion' that La Barbe aims to create. These ideas are translated into symbols that incorporate the discourses and demeanors of the performances and make them invisible. By agreeing to participate in performances, newcomers also adopt such ideas. Not all recruits are aware of these theoretical references and have little occasion to debate them. As a result, the performances are also organizing processes as they (implicitly) align the frameworks of the performers and represent a form of hierarchy wherein the founders are a step above the newcomers, even when the former have left the group. Performances encompass a hidden hierarchy and contribute to the stability of the group, although through debatable processes.

The 'coordination' aspect of performances contributes indirectly to the constitution of La Barbe's self. It does not perform the self, nor can it be considered as a communicative process. It nonetheless creates favorable conditions for expressing this self and executing the performances. In particular, it facilitates relations among the activists by helping them to manage any political or feminist positions they may hold that could otherwise divide them. The above described characteristics of performances thus shape communicative processes (internal debates) in a way that will not prevent the other organizing processes (visibility, mobilization). Moreover, by avoiding divisive debates, the 'coordination' aspect of performances helps activists establish their ties with La Barbe and appropriate its message to the point of identifying with La Barbe's self. Finally, performances also contribute to the group's coordination because they have reified certain theoretical frameworks that direct the group toward action.

Mobilization of activists

Performances constitute the group by encouraging the mobilization of activists and help recruit, integrate, and retain them in the group over the long run.

Recruitment and early participation

Most future activists are attracted to La Barbe after watching a performance or seeing images of a performance.

> It's also online, on YouTube. Our movies became a sort of ad for La Barbe, many many women come saying, 'I came to La Barbe after watching the movies'. It has become a recruiting tool, even if it wasn't the initial idea, the idea was to expose some issue. [Henriett – 27 September 2011]

At the outset, the recruiting process relied on classical means, such as individual networks, but later evolved to attract activists outside of the initial group of founders.

> Now girls who join the group do it more because they've seen us on TV or because they went on the website or because they read an article, rather than out of cooptation or personal acquaintance. Nowadays, they join us because they heard about the group, because of our communication rather than being girlfriends. This changed a lot. During the first year, we recruited through personal networks, and it changed as soon as we had articles in the media, on the Internet, etc. [Aline and Coraline – 21 September 2011]

The visual novelty and humorous aspects of the performances (particularly the irony) retain activists in La Barbe, as they enable them to express their concerns cordially.

> During the performance, you have a small rush of adrenalin before stepping onto the podium, every time. This performance is an extremely polite way to say 'fuck off, we disagree'. This polite aspect fits me well, it's in my nature, my education, it's quasi British humor, dry humor, no exploit, no anger… And I like that it doesn't weaken the power of the discourse. [Marie-Cécile – 5 January 2012]

More specifically, performances serve as a recruitment tool because they constitute a communicative process. They are not only directed at audiences such as public opinion, the targeted organization and journalists, but also at potential future members of La Barbe who may be feminists and/or activists in

search of a new engagement. While personal networks can reach only a limited number of potential members, performances open up the group to new candidates and provide a broader palette for recruitment. This also contributes to the group's longer-term stability and ensures a source of replacements for the founding members.

This recruiting process is not limited to a newcomer's entry into the group. In a second stage, she also participates in her first performance, which not only represents a real hurdle (fear of not fitting in, of not being able to enact the performance properly, and of the audience's hostility and possible violence from the security service) but also a rite of passage. One of La Barbe's principles is that the status of a newcomer should not diminish her legitimacy or her ability to ask questions, take part in decision-making, and represent the organization externally, particularly when answering journalists.

> Even if you've been at La Barbe for two hours, you still have the right to express yourself and to reply in an interview. Of course, two hours is a bit of an exaggeration, but there's really this idea that we don't want to confiscate knowledge, we share, we're a collectivity and this is the idea of empowerment,[10] it's 'go on, you'll learn on the job' [Amélia – 20 March 2013]

This principle arises from the founding members' negative experiences in other feminist groups, where they felt that they needed to earn their 'feminist diploma' (in their own words) to have the right to speak or participate in the group. More generally, this principle aims at developing the autonomy of activists by pushing them to act ('The one who says it, does it!'[11] is a catchphrase at La Barbe) and to learn by doing. This is especially relevant in a feminist environment in which the independence of women is an important issue.

The performances embody this principle. Being easy to learn is here of prime importance, as a more complex performance with greater exposure could discourage newcomers and make them leave the group even before taking part in a performance.

> When I came to La Barbe, I was shy, and it took me some time. I first observed, tried to understand how I could fit in and look at it. And then, there was an action like the one I saw on Facebook, 'let's meet at that place', it was at the Maison de la Radio, it was in December 2010 and I went there and it was quite friendly, they immediately tried to integrate newcomers, I felt at ease… I took part in meetings, in public events, but my first action was still 6 or 7 months after that, and since then I've been at La Barbe. [Amélia – 20 March 2013]

Apart from the activist who reads the text aloud and the activists who take photos, no distinction is made between activists on the performance set. Each is invited to participate in the performance. What matters is that performances should be a shared activity that is relatively simple and brings the group together without suggesting or imposing hierarchical positions within the group.

On several occasions, during internal meetings, some activists discussed the question of integration, summarized as follows: 'At which point do I start to say "we" instead of "I"'. Performances help construct a sense of community by creating an organization's self that is relatively easy to identify with: you participate in La Barbe's performances, so you *are* La Barbe. Any activist can easily appropriate La Barbe's self and belong to its community. Furthermore, any activist can act and speak on La Barbe's behalf. The organization's self is reinforced by a strong ventriloquism: Any woman can speak for La Barbe and promote its message; any activist can easily attribute her actions to La Barbe.

What matters in recruitment is that performances are a striking communicative process. What matters in the integration of activists is that performances are a shared activity that is easy to fit into and appropriate. As the performances are easy and accessible, they can be readily reproduced and disseminated, both in concrete terms (anyone can join) and from a personal point of view (everyone feels that they can act legitimately). They constitute the group in the long term by encouraging identification with La Barbe's self through appropriation ('I am La Barbe', 'we are La Barbe') and attribution ('I can act on La Barbe's behalf').

Retention over the long term

Performances play a longer-term role as they provide the activists with an opportunity to develop skills that correspond to their militant concerns: Developing a feminist perspective on events, practicing a new relation to space and their bodies, rejecting their primary feminine socialization, and learning to defy authority (for a discussion on how those skills are acquired, see Hildwein, 2017). This apprenticeship is reinforced by the acquisition of feminist theoretical frameworks during personal discussions, internal debates, readings, and punk dinners. The activists describe the changes they have experienced through their continuing participation in La Barbe in terms of self-actualization.

> La Barbe brought me tons of things. It's linked to my self-improvement, in terms of self-confidence, it's about being conscious of the roles I am assigned to. Before that, I had known subconsciously, since I was a child, I knew something was off, but here, clearly I can put my finger on it, even if I still don't feel free. [Amelia – 20 March 2013]

Performances first impact self-confidence as they force the activists to make a leap of faith and face their fear of social exposure.

10. In English in the original text.
11. '*C'est celle qui dit qui fait*!' in French (author's translation).

> When we go on stage, I have to force myself a bit, and I am really thankful to La Barbe for that because it forced me to be more outgoing and my heart was beating furiously and now I don't doubt the legitimacy of our actions any more. [Louise – 25 January 2012]

La Barbe's performances not only denounce the illegitimacy of a certain type of masculinity but also build up the activists' sense of legitimacy. Given the rationale driving the performances, this legitimacy more specifically involves the relationship with power and politics and pushes the activists to develop self-confidence with respect to these subjects.

> Being an activist opened up the field of politics for me as something where I could intervene. Whereas before, as a girl, I didn't even dare to think, I didn't even consider having a political opinion, I let people choose for me, I was listening, I chose among the set of ideas that people chose, but I didn't dare to take a position. And at one point, I told myself, being feminist is political. [Anne-Louise – 2 February 2012]

Participating in La Barbe's performances is also an eye-opener, raising the awareness of power relations and the gendered representations of power and politics.

> Being at La Barbe means educating yourself about performances and changing your glasses. It's really like changing how you look at things. I'm in the bus, I'm in a meeting, I'm at a family dinner, what's happening, how many men, how many women, who speaks, who occupies the room, who takes the decisions, something I'd never been aware of, I thought we were equal. You become more attentive to what happens in reality, rather than what you believe. You realize that all aspects of public life are dominated by men. It's exactly that feeling: as if you changed your glasses. [Aline and Coraline – 21 September 2011]

On a secondary note, the irony employed in the performances has an important role as it both creates an enjoyable experience and reinforces the activists' control over their messaging and the course of the performance.

> Wearing this fake beard helps, the irony helps to keep smiling, in the warmth of congratulation… when people boo us, we have to greet them warmly, saying: 'Bravo, you are right, we are with you! etc.' Something that helped too was to realize that we are legitimate, we are at home, we are here to support them, we love them and we're here to tell them how much we adore them. [Louise – 25 January 2012]

Irony also protects the activists against aggressive reactions from the target and the audience. Making the target look ridiculous is not only a symbolic act but also helps the activists assume a strong position and manage their stress. Pretending to feel at ease, to be enjoying the situation, to be among friends and peers, and to be serene are all devices to appear calm and in control, and thereby gain legitimacy and fight against any hostility in the room.

Performances retain the activists over the long term not only because they produce a strong and attractive visual message, but also because they contribute to the activists' self-actualization and personal development. To achieve this, they link three different elements together: a cause, the individuals interested in it, and the involvement of bodies and demeanors connecting both of the former. Regarding the cause (i.e. combatting the gendered representations of power), other performances might well not have the same impact on activists. La Barbe's performances are consistent with what they say and how they involve individuals. The constitution of the organization's self also derives from the shared concerns of the activists, who find similar solutions for these concerns by executing the performances together. This reinforces the links between them and creates conviviality. Regarding the implication of their bodies, performances are also *experiences* that push the activists to transgress by stepping into a space that is reserved for men in power positions, challenge their authority, and face the aggressive and sometimes violent reactions. Through performances, the activists can experience themselves as independent political subjects and powerful individuals able to question authority and to think, choose, and act on their own accord.

This has profound consequences for the activists as performances enable them to appropriate La Barbe's message and embody it in the deepest possible sense. By bringing their bodies into play in the performances, this transformation includes how they see the world, their relation to public spaces and to each other. La Barbe's self is appropriated by the activists and reaches their inner selves. In a sense, the revelation produced by performances also applies to the activists themselves: they are their own target. Adopting a broad understanding of what we mean by 'communication', performances can also be seen as communicative processes directed at those who execute them. This very concrete and immediate medium (putting one's body at the center of the performance) shows the activists that they can open up new existential possibilities for themselves. In this sense, the organization's self goes beyond a discursive element directed toward external parties ('we' as an organization differentiated from other organizations or audiences). It is also constituted by the relations between the members and their shared experiences ('we' as an organization, beyond the collection of individuals), and even their emotions and deep thoughts, reaching into an individual's innermost being. In other words, La Barbe is not simply the message it emits. It is also a community of activists and the political and feminist development process that binds them together.

Contributions and conclusion

This section develops the two contributions of this article. First, it shows that performances can be considered as an

organizing process, and thus reinforces them as a concept worthy of further inquiry in the field of organizational studies. Second, it makes a theoretical contribution to CCO scholarship by proposing the concept of 'organizing self'. It concludes with additional considerations derived from these empirics.

Performances as an organizing process

How are La Barbe's performances able to successfully constitute the group and what do they produce that constitutes the organization's self?

Performances contribute to the constitution of the activist group firstly as a *symbolic visual shock*. They heighten the group's visibility as their strong symbolic innovations attract journalists' attention (particularly due to their use of irony) and because their novelty gives journalists more power when negotiating their independence with their colleagues. Expressing a simple message quickly, they also help to coordinate the group and avert the need to discuss the performance in itself at each occurrence. However, the situated meaning and concrete unfolding of the performances still need to be negotiated, both when preparing the performance and afterward during debriefings. Performances contribute to a group's mobilization by visually representing the group to potential future activists and thus ensuring new recruits for the group.

Secondly, performances contribute to the constitution of the activist group as a *call to action* that unites activists around a relatively simple and clear-cut task, which avoids ideological debates within the group that could create dissension and hinder its activity. This function is supported by the existence of spaces and events where activists can choose to debate ('punk dinners') and by rules forbidding the group's association with contentious issues or other activist organizations. As the performances are built on specific theoretical assumptions, they also align the activists' activity towards specific goals and means of action. As shared activities, performances enable newcomers to quickly integrate the group and easily participate in its core activities. This aspect is all the more effective as, in line with the group's rules, new activists enjoy the same legitimacy to act or speak for the group as any other member and are invited to take action and develop their autonomy. Performances also create social bonds between activists and thus reinforce the mobilization of the group.

Thirdly, performances represent *personal experiences* that enable activists to develop feminist skills and experience themselves as political subjects able to question authority and assert themselves. This is possible because the performances involve the activists' bodies and demeanors and push them to act, connecting them directly with a cause that interests them. Moreover, irony contributes to the feeling of being in control during the performance and thus reinforces these aspects. When they participate in La Barbe and appropriate its cause and its message, the activists become transformed. This ensures their engagement and long-term mobilization. While the aspect of performances as a personal experience is narrower than the first two dimensions mentioned above, it also has deeper and long-lasting effects.

At each level, the specific characteristics of the performances (visual innovation, direct and simple involvement of activists, direct link between the symbols and the cause) heighten their effectiveness: A more common type of performance (such as a demonstration) would not produce the same effect. Table 1 summarizes the effects of the performances on the organization.

Visibility refers to the existence of the group in the media arena: it is the organization's self in its usual communicative sense, performed by the spokesperson and the performances with regard to other audiences and other actors in the field. In particular, by repeatedly commenting on the group in their articles, journalists validate the group's existence and help establish it as a legitimate actor in this field. It is a communicative act: Activists and journalists refer to La Barbe as if it were an existing individual with an independent will (much like any other organization or institution), thus materializing the group's existence.

Coordination does not directly produce the organization's self but creates favorable conditions for its constitution by

Table 1. The effects of performances at the intersection of their three dimensions and the constitution of the organization

Performances as…	Constitution of the organization through…		
	Visibility	Coordination	Mobilization
…a symbolic visual shock	Attracting journalists' attention Irony	Simplicity: No need for reinvention or ongoing innovation	Recruiting potential activists
…a call to action		Avoid dissension through a shared activity Reified theoretical frameworks	Integration of newcomers Relations between activists
…a personal experience			Acquiring feminist skills Irony Involving the activists' selves

Through visibility, coordination, and mobilization, performances create an organization's self and the condition of its permanence.

giving activists reasons to act together and avoid internal divisions. It facilitates the repetition of performances over time and thus of the constitution of the organization's self. This reinforces the idea that communicative processes are necessary to the constitution of an organization but not sufficient, and that broader elements should be considered (Bisel, 2010).

Mobilization is the existence of the group from both a relational viewpoint (as shared experiences, relations, and affects that bind the activists together) and an internal viewpoint (as a transformative experience that leads to the acquisition and development of feminist skills). Performances convey a message not only to external audiences, but also to the activists themselves. This message suggests that activists should consider themselves as political subjects, demand power positions for themselves, and challenge gender roles, particularly in situations where authority is at stake. Performances are organizing in the sense that they enable activists to appropriate (in the sense of Bencherki & Cooren, 2011) this message and the organization's cause, and thus become part of the organization. The activists appropriate the group's message and cause and integrate these into their own selves. In turn, they attribute their thoughts, affects, and actions to the group as they execute the performances, as they speak to journalists on its behalf, and as they debate the goals of performances and means of action.

To summarize, performances constitute the organization by creating its self. Visibility creates the organization's self by constituting it as an actor *vis-à-vis* external parties (notably through media communication). Mobilization creates the organization's self by having the organization's members appropriate its message and its cause, thus 'becoming' the organization. Coordination does not directly create the organization's self, but it does create favorable conditions for this self by ensuring that the activists act together smoothly.

An additional consequence for La Barbe is that its performances enhance the group's long-term stability despite its relative lack of resources (financial and material) and absence of formalization (bureaucracy, hierarchy, etc.). From an organizational point of view, La Barbe is centered on its performances, which represent its organizing backbone, supported by a limited range of other elements. These notably include the group's explicit rules (any activist can speak for the group, the rotation of responsibilities, the refusal of ideological debates within the group, the reluctance to pose as experts, the call to autonomy, and do-it-yourself) and discussion spaces (internal meetings, the [de]briefings before and after performances, and the internal mailing list). Under specific conditions, performances can even replace traditional organizing functions (coordination, task division, external communication, recruitment, integration, retention, etc.). While La Barbe cannot be reduced to its performances, it certainly represents an original kind of organization, created and sustained mainly by a central event that permeates the whole group (including its members' inner lives and emotions) and ensures its coherence.

This research contributes to organizational studies by exploring not only the communicative dimensions but also the organizing properties of performances. It furthers and expands recent developments in organizational performances (Reinhold, 2017).

Expanding the organization's self: The organizing self

The involvement of the activists' selves described in the *Mobilization* category deserves further attention. Performances require courage, conviction, and personal involvement to be successful. Their organizing role arises from the (positive) changes that they trigger in activists and which push them to engage and remain in the organization. This process should be emphasized as being essential to the constitution of the organization's self and the organization in general. To mark its importance, I propose naming it the 'organizing self', in reference to the alternating process of appropriation/attribution between the organization's self and its members' selves: the agency and personality of the organization is appropriated by its members, who reciprocally attribute their actions, and personalities (their thoughts, affects, and beliefs) to the organization's self.

The adjective 'organizing' refers first of all to the dynamic and processual nature of the CCO, which is an important notion in the CCO research stream (Putnam et al., 2009; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014) inspired by the work of Giddens (1984). Second, it highlights the importance of the individuals within an organization, which stresses the fact that the members' selves contribute to the constitution of the organization.

The organizing self is also a reciprocal *communicative* process in which the organization's message and cause circulate between the organization's self and the members' selves through the oscillation between attribution and appropriation. Performances reinforce this communicative dimension of the organizing self as they embody a twofold message: one for external audiences that is constitutive of the organization's self and one for the organization's members which influences their own selves.

The organizing self should be distinguished from the organization's self as the organizing self is a process linking the organization and its members, including their inner life, while the organization's self is a personality attributed to the organization through several communicative processes, including the organizing self. The organization's self is the result of the organizing self, as it is the members' emotions and beliefs that are attributed to the organization and thus constitute its self.

The organizing self is all the stronger when it contributes to the self-actualization of the individuals it affects, for instance, by helping them acquire valuable skills. In the case of a feminist activist group, the organizing self is essential as it enhances their political and militant personal development and corresponds to their concerns regarding sexism and patriarchy. When the organizing self accomplishes this dynamic, it contributes to the individuals' sense of belonging to the group and ensures their engagement over the long term given that they have strong personal incentives to participate in the organization. From an organizational point of view, this explains the activists' engagement and the group's long-term stability.

The notion of an organizing self builds on and expands the metaphor of ventriloquism (Cooren, 2012, 2014; Cooren & Bencherki, 2010; Cooren & Sandler, 2014) in the constitution of the organization's self. The members of an organization are not only speaking on its behalf but are also constrained by the organization in a constant oscillation, alternately playing the role of ventriloquist and dummy (Cooren & Bencherki, 2010). An organization and its members are also closely interwoven given that the organization's self and the members' selves influence each other reciprocally. The hybridicity between an organization and its members (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011) extends into their respective selves – even the members' inner selves are influenced by the organization and participate in its constitution. The members of an organization can become the organization as they constitute it in the same way that an actor can become his/her character by engaging his/her personality and affects. Taking the role of the organizing self into consideration adds a layer of analysis to the CCO approaches, since it takes the members' selves into account – their personalities, their emotions, their frameworks, their beliefs, etc. This close link between the organization's self and its members' selves suggests that the former is not limited to its actions and discourses. It can also have emotions in the same way that actions and discourses are attributed to organizations, as the CCO literature has repeatedly pointed it out from its beginnings (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Putnam et al., 2009; Taylor & Cooren, 1997). An organization can, for instance, 'be angry' in the same way that it can 'declare' or 'decide'. More generally, this is coherent with the CCO ontology in which the boundaries between organizations, humans, and nonhumans are permeable.

Concluding remarks

A minor and secondary contribution of this article is to add to the idea that communication can be *disorganizing*, as other works have suggested (Bisel, 2010) or demonstrated (Vàsquez, Schoeneborn, & Sergi, 2015). This contrasts with CCO's core assumption that communication constitutes organizations. Internal debates should be able to provide a common interpretation of a situation that aligns the frames of analysis of the organization's members and justifies their collective action toward a goal. When they fail to do so (particularly when tackling a fiercely debated issue), they may hinder the organization and even endanger its existence. Thus, certain communicative messages can destroy rather than constitute the organization by creating debates that shift efforts and energy away from more important tasks and undermine coordination by introducing distrust and animosity. It is not that communication is absent or fails *per se*. Quite the contrary. The members of the organization communicate well enough to understand their opposing views and interpretations, which in turn prevents them from working together. In this case, communication destroys the organization and, in particular, destroys the organizing self as an inner process (see above). The CCO is only possible with certain types of communication, particularly when it comes to discussing the organization's basic assumptions and worldviews. A diversity of individuals may make it difficult to align worldviews and, in La Barbe's case, it seems simpler to focus on action and let each member find fitting justifications for their participation in the performances – in a way, silence can also represent an organizing principle when it means avoiding destructive communication.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the emancipatory potential of the organizing self, in the sense that individuals (through their engagement in an organization) can experiment with new existential possibilities for themselves and act outside of the predetermined roles assigned to them. In the case of La Barbe, this is made possible by a specific type of performance. Their performances are singular in that they bear a message for the activists themselves – one which corresponds to their own questions relating to feminism and gender roles. The performances also give rise to personal experiences that involve the bodies of the performers; the use of their bodies and demeanors is another means of communicating with the activists themselves. The organizing self can contribute to individuals' emancipation to the point where it becomes the most important production and reason for the existence of the organization in question. The importance of the body in performances brings to mind Butler's performativity in the sense that the way bodies act impacts the interiority of individuals (Cabantous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016; Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). Further research could thus examine through a Butlerian lens how the organizing self can become a subversive organizational process.

Finally, performances rarely occupy as central a position as they do in activist groups, which lends to the question: can the organizing self be an emancipatory process in other kinds of structures, and, if so, under what conditions? Further research could investigate other kinds of emancipatory organizations and consider what importance the organizing self has in these in order to identify their specific characteristics from both

an organizing and a communicative point of view. This would also lead to a broader reflection regarding the possibilities of emancipation in an organizational setting, including an exploration of the different meanings of what is meant by emancipation.

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

From the Leader's Values to Organizational Values: Toward a Dynamic and Experimental View on Value Work in SMEs

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Abstract

In this article, we contribute to empirically account for Selznick's argument about the moral competence of organizations by showing the ways an organization collectively thinks, acts, feels and expresses needs (Callon, 2006) related to its desirable ends. These are related to the socio-technical arrangements processing the values work. Made up of devices, actors, and social groups, the socio-technical arrangements are brought into existence by means of material embodiments of values in artifacts. Considering the case of a leader who has founded a firm in the social and solidarity sector in order to implement his personal values, we contribute to better understanding value-based leadership. We trace how this leader's values are progressively and collectively materialized into artifacts that create new relationships in which the organization's desirable ends are to be met. Adopting a relational and processual view on values work, we trace the evolution of this socio-technical arrangement to maintain or restore the implementation of organizational values in an evolving context, contributing to a dynamic view on organizational values.

Keywords: *Value-based organizations; Value-based leadership; Organizational value; SME*

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Corporations have long been recognized as social entities developing shared and normative understandings of the world that can be later exported to society at large (Dobbin, 2009). Mizruchi (2013) argues that, since the 1980s, the prevalence of the shareholder theory has led business leaders (this term also refers to female leaders and entrepreneurs) to consider that firms should maximize social welfare by maximizing total firm value in the economy. Many contributions to the institutionalist theory (e.g. Selznick, 1994) or value-based leadership (VBL) (e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) show that values contribute to guiding social behaviors toward virtuous ends and that organizations think about and account for their corporate social responsibility (e.g. Branco & Rodrigues, 2007). Other contributions point to the fact that organizations might simply not want to engage in values practices and enunciate organizational values in an attempt to greenwash or fairwash their activities (e.g. Laufer, 2003) to meet stakeholders' expectations (e.g. Freeman & Philips, 2002; Jensen, 2002).

Yet, accounting empirically for organizations as moral agents is no easy task, as shown in the recent literature, because organizational values remain strange entities. On the one hand, value statements, codes of conduct, and corporate social responsibility accounts have become familiar features in the economic world. On the other hand, numerous scandals still break out about unethical practices against employees or in the marketplace, fuelling skepticism about the effectiveness or truthfulness of organizational values stated by firms, even by those having explicit codes of conduct or CSR policies (e.g. Kolk & van Tulder, 2002). Even in the social and solidarity sector, society expresses suspicion for firms making profits while meeting a social need: see, for example the controversy about the Grameen Bank (Karim, 2008). In short, are organizational values trustworthy? Or on the contrary, are they only rhetorical and manipulative? Can they be effective in guiding individuals' conducts inside and outside the firm? These and similar questions have been raised in the literature in recent decades. For instance, Anteby (2013) argues that business morals remain largely elusive in corporations in order to maintain pluralism or relativism in moral affairs. Organizational values remain essentially instrumental in fostering employees' identification with the organization (Besharov, 2014) or customers' loyalty (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003).

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Whilst cogent analysis from organization science tends to focus on the instrumental power of organizational values, we propose to depart from the debates about the truthfulness or usefulness of organizational values so as to focus on the practical ways an organization implements values, meaning how it collectively thinks, acts, feels, and expresses needs related to its desirable ends (Callon, 2006). The organization is defined as a collective comprising actors endowed with the capacity to think, act, and feel, and also comprising artifacts and devices that organize relationships between those actors and provide them with specific capacities and incentives to think, act and feel. In this respect, the agency is distributed in the organization among actors, endowed with their own ethical agency and values, and devices that are not only passive instruments in their hands but orient individuals' behaviors toward the achievement of the desirable outcomes enunciated by the leader. Based on the work of Selznick (1994, p. 240), we consider that organizations can be considered as moral agents since "they are in principle capable, through organizational measures, of recognizing moral issues, exercising self-restraint and improving moral competence". In the literature, this theoretical argument is not empirically put to the test. In this article, we aim to fill this gap by understanding the role of the progressive materialization and implementation of organizational values. In the context of the creation and development of a small or medium enterprise (SME), we start by identifying the entrepreneur's values as the antecedents of organizational values. Drawing upon the actor-network theory, we observe how they are progressively incorporated into material objects, social entities, and managerial devices (e.g. written documents, discourses, committees, or groups of practices and explicit social policies) in the organization and gradually constitute a sociotechnical arrangement to meet desirable ends. The fluid and constructed-in-the-relationships nature of the distributed moral agency also implies its dynamic character, as new actors, material artifacts, and social groups form new relationships. While we do not observe the way moral judgments are practically made at the individual level in everyday practices, we analyze the progressive construction and evolution of the sociotechnical arrangement in a turbulent context. We also observe the positive and negative emotions felt by actors as symptoms of the effectiveness of the sociotechnical arrangement in solving moral issues that arise, and as an impetus to alter it in order to restore the meeting of desirable ends.

We depart from a perspective that would leave the moral content of values outside the scope of inquiry to focus only on their instrumental power. We also avoid taking a stance that would consider values as abstract desirable ends relevant only in individuals' minds, outside of practices. We thus complement VBL mechanisms identified in the literature and consider that the leader's role is also to deploy and sustain a sociotechnical arrangement to help in achieving the organization's desirable ends. To that end, we complement Selznick's theoretical argument with the analysis of organizational devices creating a new arrangement to meet the desirable ends.

From the leader's personal values toward organizational values as devices

Regarding the truthfulness or usefulness of values

The vast majority of contributions on values in the sociological and managerial literature converge on the nature of values (Kraatz & Flores, 2015). First, these are ideals and views of what is desirable (Kluckhohn, 1951). They point to what is 'worth being, doing and having' (Selznick, 1994) and to an end-state that is better than the other ones, from the point of view of the individual holding this value (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Rokeach, 1973). Second, values are abstract "durable, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entities" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21). In a business context, a value is "something that, in the given organization, is taken as an end in itself" (Selznick, 1968, p. 57). Third, values embody a moral imperative (Tsirogianni & Gaskell, 2011) and are experienced by individuals as obligations and specifications of what ought or ought not to be (Heclo, 2008; Joas, 2000). Fourth, values endure over time. Though not fixed, individuals' values are relatively persistent through times and contexts (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994; Williams, 1979). Fifth, values are felt by people who can experience positive or negative emotions when they reach or fall short of their ideals (Barth, 1993; Tsirogianni & Gaskell, 2011).

Extensively researched at the individual level, values also operate on the group and organizational planes (Capelli & Sherer, 1991; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Their nature is different from that of personal values since they are not seated in individuals' minds. The institutionalist perspective recognizes that organizations have values of their own (Clark, 1956; Selznick, 1949, 1968; Zald & Denton, 1963). Through processes of value infusion, a shared moral order can emerge in an organization (Selznick, 1994) since values are inter-subjective and potentially socially integrative (Patterson, 2014; Selznick, 1968; Smith, 2003; Vaisey, 2014). Indeed, in the literature, the antecedents of organizational values largely emanate from the entrepreneur's or management team's personal values, which, through a top-down process, percolate to the rest of the organization (Schein, 1985). This is particularly relevant in SMEs that tend to favor informal management and communication as well as coordination through mutual adjustment (Torres & Julien, 2005). These authors also note they benefit from a centralized power and strong proximity, allowing the entrepreneur to establish strong relations with his/her collaborators. The centralization of the entrepreneur's power and even the personalization of management

are based on direct supervision. These specificities show that values can ultimately be imposed by the entrepreneur. Yet, due to heterogeneous interests or values at the individual level, this diffusion process might result in a fragmented organizational culture (Martin, 2005). The VBL-related literature has particularly focused on describing behaviors that are rooted in the leader's moral and ethical foundations (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978) are those who appeal to and influence followers' values and inspire them to transform their organizations. In this stream of literature, the leader relies on motivational and empowering mechanisms to influence followers' values (Burns, 1978). When perceived as moral, authentic, and ethical (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), the leader's values improve the effectiveness of leadership, in the sense of their capacity to influence followers' behaviors (e.g. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa 2005). In these contributions, organizational values are instrumental in conveying the leader's personal values to the rest of the organization. In fact, when leaders infuse the organizations with their values, they become institutionalized (Selznick, 1968) as shared value systems that can prove useful in managing and coordinating complex organizations (Barnard, 1938).

Indeed, in the institutions and in the VBL literatures, organizational values are cognitive or cultural instruments aimed at infusing the leader's personal values into the organization. Debates revolve around the usefulness or truthfulness of organizational values. The cognitive perspective provides many accounts of values typologies that contribute to grasping the heterogeneous set of value arrangements among individuals (Schwartz, 1992). However, that definition of values – either individual or collective – as abstract notions makes it difficult to theorize how they connect with one another and how they are implemented in organizations (Gehman, Trevino, & Garud, 2013). The cultural perspective focuses on how values are embodied in discourses or symbols (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004) and exert an instrumental power they can motivate and guide personal behaviors (Hitlin, 2008; Joas, 2000). They can also shape evaluations about actions, actors, or objects (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995). Finally, values can also be used to explain and justify behaviors and decisions (Gecas, 2000; Mills, 1940). Many scholars associated with this strand of research consider that the emergence, stability, and dissemination of values are institution-dependent. Values and the institutional mechanisms sustaining and diffusing them are considered effective when they provide the organization with a robust frame for social behavior that favors high resilience (Scott, 2014).

Finally, critical studies take an opposite approach toward the instrumental power of value. They question the truthfulness of values embodied in cultural artifacts. Far from being transparent representations of the organization's moral order, the normative power of values can be used to serve unethical ends. For example, in the literature on VBL, Burns (1978) suggests that VBL depends upon the moral content of the values conveyed. Those leaders "should encourage followers to embrace moral values such as justice or equality" (Burns, 1978, p. 155) but, in a business context, some academics have argued that VBL can have a narcissistic, self-aggrandizing 'dark side' (Bass, 1985; Howell & Avolio, 1992). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) show that authentic transformational leadership actually rests upon the moral content of the values conveyed, while pseudo-transformational leaders tend to promote competitiveness at the expense of collaboration and manipulate, rather than empower, their followers. Such contributions give rise to a debate about leaders' sincerity and the truthfulness of the moral content of the stated organizational values.

In these streams of literature, organizational values are instruments which, by means of cognitive or cultural mechanisms, infuse the leader's personal values into the organization in order to influence individuals' values and behaviors. They are evaluated either against their usefulness in providing a robust frame for social behaviors in organizations or their truthfulness as regards their manipulative power toward stakeholders. We argue that organizational values are not mere instruments. They are devices creating new relationships between actors equipped with artifacts. We propose to study how organizational values help materialize the leader's values and contribute to our understanding of the empirical ways an organization collectively thinks, acts, feels, and expresses needs (Callon, 2006) about desirable ends or norms to be enacted in mundane business activities.

Values as devices distributing the values work

In literature, scholars have considered how organizational values as artifacts intervene in practice. Some have studied the discursive embodiment of values in organizations. Values are not only disseminated along a top-down process but their meaning is negotiated among actors across the organization (Ford, Ford, & D'amelio, 2008) and beyond organizational boundaries with various stakeholders (Kraatz, Ventresca, & Deng, 2010; Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010). This discursive approach helps better understand how values manifest at different places in an organization and how actors make sense of values, according to the specific context they evolve in, and can in consequence make practical moral judgments on the appropriate behavior. But in these contributions, organizational values are considered in isolation even though, under normal circumstances, they are created and used collectively, forming mutual, interrelated systems that also include various humans or constituted social groups (Ueno, Sawyer, & Moro, 2017). Applying this view to a value-based leader, organizational values are the result of the progressive

materialization of the leader's personal values into artifacts that create a network of relationships that enact the values work, as defined by Gehman et al. (2013), as the practices through which actors translate values into practices and then enact them. In fact, many contributions in the new economic sociology show that moral categories are formed during the exchange relationships in the market. For example, Zelizer's sociology is "concerned with how people, working through institutions (and sometimes against them), and using symbolic-material distinctions that signal moral commitments and assignments of worth, draw boundaries and connections between themselves and others, us and them" (Fourcade, 2012, p. 1060). She particularly explores areas of observable tensions between commercial and moral motives. In accordance with Callon (1998) and MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu (2007), she argues that "markets are intensely moralised and moralising". Applied to an organizational setting, this approach would consider that organizational values are devices bringing new relationships into existence in which moral imperatives are created or enacted collectively. This relational perspective considers that ethical agency is not reserved for individuals. It departs from the ontological view of organizations as deprived of agency, as supported by the vast majority of contributions. According to them, "that it would be unwise and improper to vest organizations with rights beyond those of their members so it is not possible to expect them to fulfill responsibilities beyond those owed by their members" (Scott, 2002, p. 36). As Selznick (1994), we acknowledge that organizations are not endowed with rights but that this argument is not sufficient to consider that they do not exert moral competence. In this respect, organizational values are different from individual ones but "organizations can and do take account of multiple values; accept limits on the ends they may pursue and the means they may use, devise procedures for controlling conduct in the light of moral concerns. They are in principle capable, through organizational measures, of recognizing moral issues, exercising self-restraint and improving moral competence. They can in short, be responsible participants in the moral order" (Selznick, 1994, p. 240).

By considering that moral competence is in fact distributed along a socio-technical arrangement created by the organizational values embodied in speeches and artifacts, this relational perspective also departs from other contributions that account for firms as moral agents. In these contributions, scholars theorize the institutional mechanisms that perform and maintain shared value systems in organizations (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985; Besharov, 2014; Selznick, 1968) or they value rational authority as a promoter of higher virtues in organizations (Rothschild & Whitt, 1989; Satow, 1975). But these contributions consider values only as cultural or political instruments whose moral content is to be found outside of practice, relationships, and predating their embodiment and enactment. Apprehending the set of artifacts and actors is then necessary to account for 'the procedural and constantly negotiated quality of moral agency and moral decision-making (something especially important in the context of an organizational environment)' as well as "the emotive, embodied and indeterminate nature of ethical existence as a lived social relationship within (as well as without) organizations" (Hancock 2008, p. 1359). To empirically investigate Selznick's argument in firms, few recent studies have adopted this relational perspective on values. They focus on value practices as contributing to the emergence of values and their implementation. Gehman et al. (2013) adopt this epistemology to study how values are implemented in practice by focusing on values works. Daskalaki, Fotaki and Sotiropoulou (2018) adopt a similar approach to study value practices in a crisis. They extend the performative understanding of values as situated in networks of practices, by considering the intersections between the material and the discursive, as well as the emotional and relational dynamics involved in the co-production of values in corporate spaces, both in buildings and at an urban scale. We agree with them and consider that values are specific devices that distribute the values work across social and material elements (Latour, 2005). Initial entanglements become networked to allow for actors' adherence to value practices, and finally the implementation of these. Based on the work of Gehman et al. (2013) and Daskalaki et al. (2018), we perceive human needs and cognitive ability as the intent of artifacts design but they also emerge from the arrangement of humans and various other artifacts. We aim at complementing these accounts on value practices by focusing on the larger system of artifacts and actors in an organizational setting. More precisely, we want to account for the materialization of the leader's personal values into a socio-technical arrangement and more particularly for the organizational choices made as to the design of this system and its evolution through time. Doing so, we intend to provide an original empirical account on Selznick's argument about the improvement of an organization's moral competence (1992). Gehman et al. (2013) studied the emergence of a code of honor in a university, which can hardly qualify as a typical for-profit context. They also focus on the single artifact that is studied and its production provokes encounters between actors who work together to implement value practices. More precisely, they focus on a specific category of organizational practices they dub 'value practices', which they define as "normatively right or wrong, good or bad, and therefore pursued (or not) as ends in themselves" (Gehman et al., 2013, p. 87). Nevertheless, they do not contribute to our understanding of values as devices in mundane commercial activities. They also do not grasp the values work in the university on the whole but rather trace how the honor code contributes to value practices outside its initial scope. In our study, we aim at extending this approach to study values as devices to also

encompass managerial practices in an SME. Indeed, organizational values guide behaviors in mundane tasks also. Moreover, they do not account for the dynamic evolution of the socio-technical arrangement created by the material embodiments of organizational values. In a changing context, uncertainties about desirable behavior might arise and raise moral issues to be solved in order to restore the implementation of organizational values. When failing to do so, the organization might question not only the values stated or the institutionalism mechanisms infusing them, but also the design of the arrangement itself. Since the antecedents of organizational values lie in the leader's individual values, which are relatively persistent through times and contexts (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994; Williams, 1979), they will likely show similar characteristics. Then, to improve the implementation of these desirable ends in practice, the organization would likely alter the socio-technical arrangement designed to meet the organization's desirable ends by altering the artifacts themselves and by transforming the network of relationships between artifacts and actors.

In the context of the creation and development of an SME, we start by identifying the entrepreneur's values as the antecedents of organizational values. Drawing upon the actor-network theory, we observe how they are progressively incorporated into material objects, social entities, and managerial devices (e.g. written documents, discourses, committees or groups of practices, and explicit social policies) in the organization and gradually constitute a sociotechnical arrangement to meet desirable ends. The fluid and constructed-in-the-relationships nature of the distributed moral agency also implies its dynamic character, as new actors, material artifacts, and social groups form new relationships. While we do not observe the way moral judgments are practically made at the individual level in everyday practices, we analyze the progressive construction and evolution of the sociotechnical arrangement in a turbulent context. We also observe the positive and negative emotions felt by actors as symptoms of the effectiveness of the sociotechnical arrangement in solving the moral issues that arise and as an impetus to alter it in order to restore the implementation of desirable ends.

Research method

Research context

In this article, we choose to focus our results on the SME that was studied longitudinally from 2014 to 2017 (Iacobucci & Rosa, 2010). Though a single case study has an idiosyncratic character (Gehman et al., 2018), it can explain complex dynamics or processes. We observe the materialization of organizational values in artifacts and in organized groups (commission, their operating rules, their composition) and identify the relationships built between actors and artifacts. In interviews, we capture the negative or positive emotions of actors, which are the symptoms of the implementation.

After a trip to Canada in the late 1990s, Claude, a public policy consultant, returned to France steeped in the culture of that country centered on the individual. As a specialist in matters centering around the evolution of public policies as well as social and health systems, he decided to duplicate this model in France. In a context of hospital reforms, Claude initially proposed to the state his system of support for vulnerable people, in order to make it a public service. Faced with numerous regulatory and administrative obstacles, he finally preferred creating a company: this is how Persontop was born in 2000. It intended to help people who have lost their bearings and do not know who to turn to when confronted with personal difficulties. Specializing in the field of social intermediation, the SME offers advice and support services on behalf of organizations, mainly in the social protection sector, thus enabling them to address their beneficiaries' concerns. A total of 10 million beneficiaries currently have access to these services. The counselors, working on the different telephone platforms, therefore deal with varied issues that are not always easily dealt with such as supporting a loved one at the end of his/her life. The company has around 20 customers and provides more than 50 tailor-made offerings to make sure its relationship with them is personalized. Its core business was initially focused on supporting the elderly through close collaboration with retirement funds. However, since 2010, it has also been offering its services to large companies and therefore provides follow-up for the benefit of active people. A total of 5 million employees are currently benefiting from it. As an illustration, programs that ensure a balance between private and professional lives have been developed in view of current societal issues. In 2013, the SME chose to break into new markets and invest in health and well-being. This company generated a €12-million turnover and grew to 95 employees, operating from three sites in 2016.

Claude was keen on taking his employees into consideration, and decided to co-construct the social pact with all his SME's internal stakeholders. The pact was in the form of a 12-page document providing information on the rules established in terms of employment, remuneration, social relations, and management. More precisely, it defines the rules to be followed in these areas, which are meant to promote benevolence, social cohesion, and 'living well together'. In this sense, the social pact strives at imparting meaning. It also grants a predominant place to middle management members, by specifying the role they must play in terms of support and work organization.

This SME is part of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) sector. The SSE sector comprises a group of companies whose

internal operations and activities are based on the principle of solidarity and social utility. In addition, in line with a logic of social utility, the SSE provides an answer to many societal issues.

Data sources

We have diversified our collection methods: life stories, semi-directive interviews, participant observations, and documents. A total of 22 interviews are analyzed in this article (Table 1): 18 interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2016, including two retrospective ones in 2017 (Calabretta, Gemser, & Wijnberg, 2017). Other interviews were conducted with external actors. Since we chose a level of intra-organizational analysis, we chose not to integrate them. The objective was to verify some information and determine whether the perceptions of the manager and the human resource management (HRM) had changed.

Data analysis

We have conducted a re-used of qualitative data (Germain & Chabaud, 2006). It "consists of re-examining one or more sets of qualitative data, with a view to examining research questions that are different from those contained in the original study" (Thorne, 2004, p. 1006).

Our data were derived from an early study on the link between HRM and innovation in SMEs. The interviews conducted by one of the authors of this article highlighted the manager's predominant role in the evolution of the organization toward an alternative form that clearly differs from the other two SMEs studied. Indeed, values seemed decisive for managers, guiding them in their choices and in the construction of their organization. The leader wants to operationalize them and put in place tools that are consistent with them.

So we decided to conduct a supra-analysis that "transcends the focus of the primary study from which the data was derived, examining new empirical, theoretical or methodological questions" (Heaton, 2004, p. 34).

In the context of the supra-analysis, we identified the potential of the data that emerged from an empirical problem and have actually turned out as a gap in the literature. The new analysis is in keeping with the dynamics of the initial research project, following what Heaton (2004) recommends and was conducted by the researcher who carried out the initial research, which facilitates data reprocessing.

To re-use qualitative data, two themes in the initial interview guides are analyzed for each population: organization, values, and environment; human resources management. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews lasted between 40 min and 2 h 30 min. We also conducted new analyses of the documents to identify how they create new relationships in the company (a network of relationships) and develop the values. We focused on the explicit mention of the values as well as the

Table 1. Summary of documents and interviews

	Interviewee		Date	Total interview time	Pages
Executive management	Founder	1	02.04.2015	1 h 18	28
		2	05.20.2016	1 h 05	24
		3	06.07.2017	2 h 03	40
	Executive director	4	05.20.2016	1 h 02	22
	Director of customer relations	5	05.20.2016	1 h 33	27
	Director of social marketing	6	05.20.2016	1 h 29	30
	Director of innovation	7	06.10.2016	1 h 27	28
Collaborators	Team leader 1	8	02.03.2015	0 h 52	19
	Business engineering manager	9	05.26.2016	1 h 06	23
	Quality manager	10	06.10.2016	2 h 30	48
	Information engineering manager	11	06.17.2016	1 h 24	28
	HR manager	12	06.17.2016	1 h 22	27
		13	06.07.2017	1 h 16	25
	Team leader 2	14	06.17.2016	0 h 53	19
	Counselor	15	06.23.2016	1 h 05	24
	IT manager	16	06.23.2016	0 h 50	17
	Education manager	17	06.23.2016	0 h 50	16
	Engineering manager	18	06.23.2016	0 h 56	20
Documents	Social pact				12
	Company presentation				9

formulations of obligations and rights (which refers to a moral imperative).

As part of a process-oriented research, we used a temporal bracketing strategy (Langley, 1999). We are interested here in the evolution dynamics of the socio-technical arrangement designed to include these values. Thus, we have identified sequences within the organization's trajectory. They have been identified using key dates and breakthrough events, which emerged thanks to the analysis of interviews with the manager, employees, and key partners of the SME, and also through documents attesting to the organization's evolution, such as the social pact.

As Langley (1999) points out, these sequences should not be equated with successive phases of a process. They only serve to structure the description of facts. We thus trace the construction of the sociotechnical arrangement materializing and enacting the leader's values.

Therefore, our analysis process was the subject of coding and double coding work, carried out by two of the three co-authors. First, we proceeded with a simple coding, in which the co-author who had conducted the interviews, together with the third co-author, analyzed each interview individually and developed an early coding, based on the different back-and-forth movements between the study of the literature and transcriptions. Then we embarked on double coding: we compared our first individual analyses in order to together establish which categories to retain. This enabled us to elaborate a fine structure of the information contained in the interviews. Finally, the second co-author played the devil's advocate.

First, in an inductive way, we highlight three dimensions corresponding to the construction phases of the socio-technical arrangement at stake: materializing and translating the leader's personal values in a social pact (2010–2011), toward an experimental attitude on organizational values (2011–2013) and reconfiguring the sociotechnical arrangement to address organizational change (2013–2016).

In a second step, we took up our several verbatim again, in order to bring out the themes. These themes correspond to our results. Finally, we grouped these themes into each of the corresponding phases (Table 2).

Table 2. Data structure

Dimensions	Themes	Quotes
PERIOD 1. Materializing and translating the leader's values into a social pact (2010–2011)	The antecedents of organizational values: the founder's personal values and background	"At 30 years old, at Orange, a doormat had been placed in front of my door and I enjoyed the use of a company car with a driver, so it scared me a lot! And my profile, finally as an entrepreneur or, in any case, the desire to develop and innovate has taken over rather as the boss of an SME! I had something like a revelation: I understood there are important things to advocate for the good of all". (Founder, Interview 2)
	The social pact: a collective translation of the leader's values into corporate roles and HRM practices	"The goal was to support everyone in the big transformations we were going to have! I wanted to protect them on the human and social level in some way". (Founder, Interview 1)
PERIOD 2. Toward an experimental moral agency (2011–2013)	The limits of the social pact in implementing organizational values	"There were many of us participating in its construction. From the beginning, management wanted all levels to be represented and above all that everyone should adhere to policies". (HR Manager, Interview 12)
	Drawing upon the evaluations at individual level – The lack of deliberative spaces to translate the pact into practices and make valuations	"The terms used are sometimes very complicated; you get the feeling advisors don't understand the direction we are taking, where you want to embark them... Then they started dragging their feet... We have failed to give them the all the keys they needed". (Education manager, Interview 17)
	Toward an experimental arrangement to implement values work	"This body meets once every other month and is made up with all types of professions at hierarchical level, etc". (HR manager, Interview 12)
PERIOD 3 Reconfiguring the moral agency to address organizational change (2013–2016)	Underperforming organizational values in a context of organizational growth	"At the beginning, it was perfectly clear: commitment, solidarity and respect were all the rage; today we are more into profitability, tools and rigidity; we feel at a loss, somewhat.I no longer believe in all this. The manager is moving the SME forward, but what about our initial values? Lost, gone... It's nonsense!" (Counselor, Interview 15)
	Frustration and negative emotions due to unanswered moral issues	"They are first in line, we feel that some are tired. This can be translated into absenteeism on the platform". (Team leader 2, Interview 14)
	Reconfiguring the moral agency to address change	"It's true the pact has had for some time, with all these changes, some trouble being implemented.... Some zap it completely... It's still supposed to be the common thread of good living together!" (Team leader 1, Interview 8)
	The limits of the distribution of the values work at Persontop	"We realize that, sometimes, some employees confuse the company's business purpose with their own persons, we must remain very alert about it!" (HR manager, Interview 12)

Results

Period 1. Materializing and translating the leader's values into a social pact (2010–2011)

The antecedents of organizational values: The founder's personal values and background

Claude was strongly inspired by his mother's values.

> Claude's mother practiced in psychiatry for a long time and ended her career as a general practitioner. So this is it: taking care of the person, the social dimension, actually comes from the country doctor. It no doubt runs in the family, but as an individual he holds deep convictions. (Executive Director, Interview 4)

The family environment he was immersed in led him to focus on interpersonal relationships and specialize in occupational psychology and ergonomics. After obtaining his master's degree, Claude joined the Orange group where he held a position as HR Director for 7 years. Orange is a French telecommunications company. Following privatization in 2004, this company has developed a culture of profitability. Its staff has been downsized and new management methods have been deployed, leading to a deterioration of working conditions. However, Claude did not feel he had much in common with the values conveyed by the company because it did not pay enough attention to the human dimension.

> At 30 years old, at Orange, a doormat had been placed in front of my door and I enjoyed the use of a company car with a driver, so it scared me a lot! And my profile, finally as an entrepreneur or, in any case, the desire to develop and innovate has taken over rather as the boss of an SME! I had something like a revelation: I understood there are important things to advocate for the good of all. (Founder, Interview 2)

In 1998, his first initiative was to propose to the State a new support system for vulnerable groups based on the Canadian model.

> It was in this context I fell in love, not with a Quebec woman, but with a specific approach. I propose to delve deeper into these issues by focusing on providing a service, on the matter of taking the person into account, by tackling the issue through demand and not supply. I discovered this new world and I was in for a great shock! (Founder, Interview 1)

He was turned down because of the still too precursory nature of the suggested model. A resilient man – and determined to participate in the improvement of social and health systems by proposing concrete solutions for individuals facing personal difficulties – he developed the Persontop project. In order to overcome institutional and regulatory obstacles, he opted for starting a private company, while maintaining the business's social and societal purpose. The manager first approached pension funds and mutual health-insurance companies to develop his project and offer services that meet the needs of the elderly in particular.

Claude was marked by a bad managerial experience at Orange, therefore considering that values can be implemented in service supply only if the organization itself is geared around his personal values. Until 2010, it was essentially in an informal manner and through Claude's leadership that the organization's values were implemented. Claude anticipated business growth and major organizational changes that could undermine organizational values. He therefore decided to formalize Persontop's values and embarked on values work. Drawing upon his experience as HR director, he chose to focus on managerial practices and HRM policies and their materialization into a social pact as the best way to implement his personal values in Persontop. In fact, from the very beginning, he aimed at transforming social intermediation in France to implement the Canadian approach. In this respect, he wanted to get an ecosystem involved and infuse his personal values outside Persontop.

> At a turning point in its evolution, when any company questions the nature of its growth, its markets, the extent of its development and to calmly answer its strong questions, Persontop has chosen to implement a social pact. (social pact, p.1)

The social pact: A collective translation of the leader's values into corporate roles and HRM practices

In 2010, the founder initiated the draft of a social pact as a device to clarify and communicate the organization's values. The social pact is a 12-page document enunciating the organizational values and translating them into human relations policies.

> How to live well together? The aim of the social pact is to provide a collective answer to this question while taking into account the economic and social realities of the company and its environment. (social pact: p. 1)

The document starts with the definition of three values:

(1) Solidarity: expressed through getting everyone to feel they belong to the company and have its future at heart. It's the result of a permanent exchange and a much sought-after transparency regarding objectives and the major events that make up and drive life in a community. It's the strength of the company facing the outside world;
(2) Commitment: this expresses employees' willingness to act as an engaged stakeholder, thereby getting involved in the work community. It's a source of solidarity and trust in the company's future and therefore in the employees' fate.

(3) Respect: this is a multifaceted value. It means respect for others, their work, their difficulties, their own values and ethics. It's the very foundation of social cohesion (…). It is also the respect of the customer through his own behaviour and through the signature of Persontop 'priority to the person'. It is finally the respect of oneself, the supreme level of this value. (social pact: 3–4)

These values are not expressed as virtues by themselves. They express the roles and behaviors employees should engage in if they are to keep on 'living well together' under economic pressures. In fact, the social pact was initiated shortly after the 2008 economic crisis. The entrepreneur feared these economic conditions might harm employees and deteriorate social cohesion. In 2015, the entrepreneur, together with the executive director, argued that these values are first and foremost protective of employees:

> The goal was to support everyone in the big transformations we were going to have! I wanted to protect them on the human and social level in some way. (Founder, Interview 1)

> We have 3 values in the social pact that I relate a lot to: solidarity, commitment and respect. I think we are pretty much on these 3 values that correspond to what I think personally. (Executive Director, Interview 4)

In the following eight pages, the social pact translates the three values into rules and policies about employment and remuneration, and management and social relations that endow individuals with rights and obligations regarding the embodiment of these values (Table 3).

Other than the three values stated at the beginning of the pact, other values are embodied in rules such as equity in remuneration and absence of violence by means of justified and explained managerial decisions. We also observe that, at rules level, while individuals (employees, as well as managers or directors) are endowed with many protective rights, managers are ascribed to play a key role in implementing organizational values and are thus endowed with specific obligations. To respect individuals' ethical agency, values are translated in terms of an individual's desirable behaviors only in their respective organizational roles, that is, value-based organizational selves.

Table 3. Summary of the rights and obligations formalized in the social pact (extracted from the document)

		Rules and policies enunciated in the pact *(selection of the rules embodying values)*	Values
Employees	Rights	"Each employee will be systematically accompanied in his search for optimizing his career within or outside the company"	Respect Solidarity
		"In Persontop, the development of the career path is carried out left through the acquisition of experiences as training or acts of improvement. In collaboration with the employee concerned, Persontop assumes the responsibility of this development"	Respect Solidarity
		"When this path knows the natural limits of a non-extensible perimeter, Persontop makes every effort to support its external professional development when the employee expresses he wishes to do so"	Respect Solidarity
	Obligations	"The company and the employee are co-responsible (for the development of the career path)"	Commitment
		"The manager, however, is not alone engaged by the obligations of the social pact. The employee has his share, illustrated by the quality of the work provided"	Commitment
Management	Rights	"To meet their multiple obligations, managers will need to assess themselves and measure progress to meet the obligations contained in the social pact. Persontop therefore put in place a system that gives the manager a vision of how it is perceived and the identification of areas for improvement"	Solidarity Respect
	Obligations	"The manager gives meaning to the job" "The manager transmits his experience, enriches his employees' work. This regulates tensions".	Solidarity Respect
		"The value of the remuneration policy is measured by its degree of fairness, selectivity and consistency with the business as well as the company's business model"	Fairness
		"He teaches, trains, explains, demonstrates and convinces. The unexplained, unjustified act of authority leads to failure, it is the primary form of violence"	Absence of Violence Solidarity
		"The manager accompanies:-trust is the foundation of management-a priori trust induces acceptance of error-it is up to the manager to turn error into an educational act -through this approach, it will highlight each of its collaborators' potentials"	Trust Respect
		"He is the guarantor of equity". "To live together, rules are needed, the manager ensures their equitable application for all" "He will be the guarantor that all will respect the company's values' 'To do this it will have to be credible, and even exemplary"	Equity
Direction	Obligations	"Persontop is committed to helping managers evaluate their managerial behaviour"	Solidarity
		"Persontop is committed to training its managers and future managers in the techniques of organization and supervision to make them as operational as possible and meet the needs of teams"	Solidarity

Furthermore, the pact translates organizational values into rules and policies but does not embody them in practices. It specifies the moral principles to be followed, and it anticipates the need to implement tools for controlling their enactment without clearly formalizing the means to implement them.

This pact as a device creates new relationships between managers, employees, and direction: it translates values into roles and modes of relationships between employees; between employees and their managers; and between the direction and managers, which should be endorsed in specific contexts such as managerial authority, employees' control, evaluation, or evolution. The social pact does not precisely describe how these values are to be implemented but rather provides individuals with a way of framing what is worthwhile, in order to guide their conduct in this social context.

> We have a social pact. It's really a key tool here! It deals with HRM policies, etc. But the document begins with company's values being quite clearly spelled out. These are things we must keep in mind on a daily basis before taking action, we must comply with them. (Director of Innovation, Interview 7)

So far, the design of this artifact copes with the dominant views of organizational values found in the literature. First, the antecedents of the stated organizational values are to be found in the founder's personal values. Second, in order to foster shared meanings, organizational values are clearly defined and written in a document which collates values and enables them to be enacted by actors. Third, the pact is meant to guide behaviors drawing upon individuals' ethical agency in terms of the desirable ways to enact their respective organizational roles. This translation is however specific because it defines value-based organizational selves who are not identified in the previous literature on organizational values.

Period 2. Toward an experimental moral agency (2011–2013)

The limits of the social pact in implementing organizational values

The social pact aims at organizing the moral agency in Persontop. But the process adopted to reach its final writing has deep impacts on its implementation. At first, Claude wanted to collaboratively build it in order to foster adhesion and improve the latter's performance of practices. He intended to involve all employees in the reflection on, and implementation of, tools that reflect the organization's values. In doing so, Claude tried to show them that they each had a role to play, at their own level, in the development of the company and in maintaining the 'living well together' concept. In other words, he wanted to make them feel responsible and rest assured he was committed to taking their personal interests to heart. Finally, this approach should enable him to apply the values he defends once again. In fact, the employees' representatives as well as the managers directly involved in the discussions expressed strong adhesion to it:

> We were, as it were, in a form of democracy. We tried to include everyone in the creation of a pact that took everyone into account. We've done pretty well actually, if you ask me. (Director of Social Marketing, Interview 6)

> Many of us participated in its construction. From the beginning, management wanted all levels to be represented and above all that everyone should adhere to policies. (HR Manager, Interview 12)

> We do things as we go along, by means of discussions. We are given the floor and we can act thanks to the social pact, it is a good thing for us!. (Counselor, Interview 15)

According to the founder himself, active contribution to the social pact is a condition of its implementation, as explained in the artifact itself:

> The result of a common reflection between all actors (employees, staff representatives, management and direction), a testimony of a desire for social cohesion sought by all, this pact is the work and property of all those who participated in its elaboration. As such, each will have a share of responsibility in its evolution, its adaptation to circumstances, the environment and the daily life of the company. (social pact, p.1)

But actually, the writing process mainly involved Persontop's founder, top managers, and external partners. First, the organizational values in the pact are the founder's personal values. Indeed, the three values were chosen and defined by the entrepreneur himself. Retrospectively, the founder and the HR manager recognized that the collaboration focused on the translation of these values into rules and policies. In order to speed up this values work, the founder decided to speed up the writing process of the pact, creating tensions among collaborators:

> I have created a working-group representing the company's population to participate in the reflection. I didn't want anyone to feel aggrieved. Many meetings were held to see how we could infuse these values into our tools and create something coherent! We saw what we could bring them and what they were willing to give back in return, I mean, this is not Pollyanna's world! I must admit we didn't always understand each other; it took time to move forward... Is that what led me to twist their arms a little? (Founder, Interview 3)

> After a few months, we had to speed things up. We had to test these values to see whether they fitted in with our tools, and do better if necessary! On the whole, I think everyone acknowledged these values, but tensions had more to do with the way all this was set up…. (HR Manager, Interview 13)

In actual terms, the words used are those of the entrepreneur's and directors'. In this respect, the process of writing the social pact mainly engaged the entrepreneur, the directors, and the external partners. It enunciates the organizational values and translates them into rules and policies that set up moral modes of relationships between actors in quite a loose way, since it does not plan the means actors should draw on to enact those values. As a consequence, its implementation in practice can only be evaluated with regards to its capacity to help individuals implement their value-based organizational selves as defined in the pact.

Drawing upon the evaluations at individual level – The lack of deliberative spaces to translate the pact into practices and make valuations

The social pact states values and rules meant to guide individuals' conduct but not to formalize the managerial means to enact these values, roles, and policies. As a consequence, the pact only provides a role framework to managers and employees in order to guide conduct and implement organizational values.

At the top-management level, the social pact is well-understood and enacted. For example, the HR manager who was strongly involved in the translation of organizational values into policies and rules implemented several tools and practices to help managers cope with their obligations. In addition, the managers guide their annual evaluations of employees according to a grid measuring productive performance but also respect for the three values. Such a tool not only provides role framing but also a valuation frame to account for the actual implementation of organizational values at the individual level. This frame is partly made up of numbers and objective goals achievements when dealing with economic performance. As for the implementation of values, the frame provided to the manager remains unclear. Even though some objective facts are written down in the evaluation – such as the employee's participation in the values work (in committees), or his/her engagement in already identified value practices such as mentoring between employees – the manager's appraisal of the employee's enactment of organizational values in mundane business tasks is not explicitly mentioned in the guide nor supported with analytical grids. However, this translation of values and policies into practices is not complete. Indeed, many role frameworks are not translated into valuation ones, since it would require a difficult and costly formalization effort.

> When I think about what we could put in place to go further… I always wonder whether it is possible in relation to the values we advocate; whether it was all going in the right direction! We feel they stand at the core of everything, so formalizing everything is no piece of cake! (HR Manager, Interview 13)

The HR manager acknowledged left the need for more formalized artifacts fostering the implementation of organizational values as well as how costly and difficult it is.

Furthermore, as seen earlier, the social pact was mainly written in the entrepreneur's and some directors' words. At Persontop, we observed that the material embodiment of the organizational values into words that are not always clearly understood by employees actually deters its implementation in everyday work.

> The terms used are sometimes very complicated; you get the feeling advisors don't understand the direction we are taking, nor where you want to embark them... Then they started dragging their feet... We have failed to give them all the keys they needed. (Education Manager, Interview 17)

Failure to translate it into practices and tools to provide employees with actionable valuation frameworks seems to deter the Implementation seems to be a of organizational values in mundane business activity.

In this respect, the social pact does not perform well because it does not enable all employees to enact the value-based organizational selves. In fact, the founder relies on another means to implement the social pact in practice. From the founder's point of view, the social pact is a contract between management and staff. This is reflected in working hours flexibility and the development of tele-working.

> What was set up not so long ago is the possibility of working remotely! We want to try to have a little more flexibility from time to time at that level. (Team Leader 2, Interview 14)

In return for giving employees working hours flexibility as well as empowerment, the entrepreneur expects them to reciprocate by actively participating in values practices such as mentoring or coaching. The founder endows individuals with a moral obligation to reciprocate. The implementation of the organizational values relies not only on the social pact as a moral device but also on individuals' evaluations of fair reciprocity as to gifts made by the firm. In so far as this moral obligation is considered as normatively right and as the means to guarantee the implementation of the organizational values provided in the pact, we can define the 'individual obligation to reciprocate' as a new organizational value, complementing the social pact. Once again, while some employees enact the obligation to reciprocate, many others do not behave in the expected way either.

> Some of them confuse self-interest and the collective interest! We have made commitments with this pact and so has the company.

> It is meaningful to me: for example, I give, therefore I receive! Others have not got it, they don't see the way it works, unfortunately. (Director of Innovation, Interview 7)

These divergences among employees also deterred the implementation of organizational values, since they compare their reciprocity with others'. Feelings of injustice and frustration arise and erode their own enactment of the values of commitment and solidarity.

> I find some don't play ball... When you commit whole-heartedly and see the way it's turned out, at some point, you don't feel like keeping up the good work, you know what I mean. (Information Engineering Manager, Interview 11)

As shown in the literature, these negative emotions can be considered as symptoms of the non- implementation of organizational values and thus of inaccuracies in the sociotechnical arrangement preventing them from enacting the value-based organizational selves. In this respect, we can consider that the leaders' values, even if they are embodied in the pact, are not fully implemented at the organizational level. In this case, this is mainly due to difficulty individuals face when conducting assessments about the fairness of the expected reciprocity or when translating the values and policies in the pact into understandable terms upon which employees could act. These findings show that the social pact sets up an initial sociotechnical arrangement whose limits call for the creation of deliberative spaces to dissipate ambiguities. Indeed as a written document, the social pact proves robust since it formalizes values into HRM rules and policies but owing to its very robustness, it also proves to be rigid. Once written, it circulates in a fixed version and does not address unexpected underperformance cases of organizational values. These uncertainties, arising from mundane tasks, need to be answered by employees as well as managers to restore the implementation of organizational values.

Toward an experimental arrangement to implement values work

The entrepreneur and the directors anticipated these potential limits of the social pact in implementing organizational values. They are well aware that this material artifact will not by itself operate the moral agency in Persontop and they therefore acknowledge the need for experimenting value devices and practices and making them evolve over time.

> Persontop's staff, representatives, management team or direction, the co-authors of this social pact, did not aim at describing the ideal society. They are aware of the natural difficulty of ensuring the 'living well together' (…). They hope that translating it into words and objectives to be achieved, even if they are not all achievable, at least not totally, will enable them to build together a common pride. To meet this ambition, the pact will have to be kept alive. It is a reflection of company life, it will have to be adapted to the latter's changing realities. (social pact, p.13)

In 2011, the founder created the social pact commission to ensure the pact would gradually evolve and be reinforced. By organizing deliberation in Persontop, the founder expects employees to engage in a sharing dynamic, aiming to build value practices, since he himself goes along with it and strives for it together with employees. This commission aims at evaluating and controlling the implementation of the pact and thus respect for the values provided in the document.

The committee offers a window designed to discuss the application of the pact and to air issues or diverging interests, in order to make progress in implementing organizational values in everyday practices. In the social pact commission, new rules can be set collectively in order to implement organizational values. For example, committee members agreed that the entrepreneur's remuneration is not to be higher than six times the lowest salary in the company. They also designed the mentoring and coaching practices between experienced and new employees to implement the value of solidarity stated in the pact. Many actors take part in these decisions: employee representative bodies, collaborators, as well as the most concerned actor, the founder. This body aims at keeping the social pact alive, subject to proposals and perpetual questioning. Issues or discomfort in implementing the value-based selves are to be addressed in this instance and new means are designed to promote new organizational values such as maintaining remuneration fairness and sustainability between employees and management. These deliberations are an ongoing process maintaining continuity while questioning moral issues and pursuing the values work.

> This body meets once every other month and is made up of all types of professions at hierarchical level, etc. (HR Manager, Interview 12)

We observed that the social pact commission transforms Persontop's socio-technical arrangement from a normative one, drawing upon the social pact and individuals' evaluation, into an experimental one sustained by the social pact commission.

These results show that the initial socio-technical arrangement is designed around an artifact, namely the social pact; and a deliberative space, the social pact commission, so as to maintain the actors' engagement but also control for and improve the implementation of organizational values. In this respect, the leader sees values work as an ongoing, fluid, and constructed-in-the-relationships process. His aim was to design a socio-technical arrangement to sustain experiments on how to improve value practices. The social pact commission was aimed at constantly renewing the distribution of

moral agency in Persontop, since new actors, material artifacts, and social groups are being formed, thus in turn creating new relationships. But the purpose of the commission was to deepen the materialization and formalization of values into new versions of the social pact, supporting the leader's belief in a single artifact that would ensure the implementation of organizational values. This result converges partly with the institutionalist literature: in it, the embodiment of values and the institutional mechanisms sustaining and diffusing them are considered effective when they provide the organization with a robust framing for social behavior that favors high resilience (Scott, 2014). The leader builds a socio-technical arrangement that fosters continuous framing instead of promoting plastic artifacts and deliberative spaces to answer the permanent overflowing inherent in organizational life in a changing environment.

Period 3. Reconfiguring the moral agency to address organizational change (2013–2016)

Underperforming organizational values in a context of organizational growth

To address the growth of the activity, Persontop's management decided to formalize tasks and adopt tools in order to maintain high productivity.

> We are at a turning point with the growth of the company, we cannot do things as we used to ... We need suitable tools to be effective! (Founder, Interview 2)

This growth also decreased the proximity that used to endure between managers and employees. Under these new circumstances, we observed that employees felt it more difficult to act upon organizational values. The intensification of work and the increasing distance between employees and management discourage sharing the pact and dedicating enough time to evaluate whether it is respected in everyday work operations. The organization's discourse stresses the values of respect, solidarity, and commitment as being officially on the agenda. However, in actual fact, the arrangement, centred on the social pact, evolves slowly, while the organization promotes structuring and formalizing its activities with the adoption of management tools.

As a matter of fact, if the entrepreneur's values circulate among employees by means of discourses and the social pact, the tools that provide employees with actionable valuation frames mainly embody the economic performance objective.

> At the beginning, it was perfectly clear: commitment, solidarity and respect were all the rage; today we are more into profitability, tools and rigidity; we feel at a loss, somewhat.
>
> I no longer believe in all this. The manager is moving the SME forward, but what about our initial values? Lost, gone... It's nonsense! (Counselor, Interview 15)

Only a small number of employees actually engage themselves in values works in the social pact commission. As a result, many employees feel the initial values have been lost, or have even gone for good. However, for many of them, the salary was not the main reason they got themselves hired in this SME; rather it was the values supported by the manager, as they brought about the creation of a value-based organization.

> The social aspects have finally given way to economic issues, performance profitability... We can no longer relate to this new organization, it is no longer the one that made us feel like getting up in the morning... Today we work in a kind of big, soulless company! (Information Engineering Manager, Interview 11)

The social pact as a written document reveals deterred performance when proximity between employees and management decreases. Designed to be circulated among employees, it does not translate into actionable terms the organizational values and calls for managers to help employees make sense of it. More and more actors in Persontop do not draw upon the artifact nor are they engaged in the values work in the social pact commission. In this respect, the means chosen to materialize organizational values and to maintain their implementation in mundane business activity do not seem accurate anymore.

Frustration and negative emotions due to unanswered moral issues

During an observation day, we had an exchange with some telephone counselors who expressed negative emotions about their work and resented the introduction of new management tools.

> It was different, before... We used to chat with our managers every morning! Today, we do not have the time... Now we have more formal meetings, scheduled every quarter, we also have to go online to get information.

By showing us how to use the software, several of them did not fail to emphasize their deep attachment to their profession while stating it was changing dramatically:

> I love this job, I feel really useful! But, it is frustrating too: we have very quantitative objectives now and call durations are not to be exceeded...We used to have more time to accompany our beneficiaries.

In this sense, other managerial and professional tools promote a 'quantophrenia' that hinders employees from implementing

services that put 'people first'. In our retrospective interview with the HR manager, loss of meaning was underlined:

> Here is one point all managers agree on: there is especially a significance problem in the communication chain... Since we do not understand what is expected of us, we can hardly get involved, later… (HR Manager, Interview 13)

As a result, the introduction of these management tools generates weariness, resulting mainly in absenteeism:

> They are first in line; we feel that some are tired... This can be translated into absenteeism on the platform. (Team Leader 2, Interview 14)

Managers who acknowledged the negative emotions aired by employees committed themselves to submitting a new moral issue to the founder. Since they enjoyed greater proximity with the top management, they were able to communicate the decreasing implementation of organizational values.

> All these external transformations put pressure on us, which is reflected on our teams while we try to pay attention to that ... It should not interfere against the common commitments we've made together. (Director of Social Marketing, Interview 6)

There is a real awareness of the degradation, which leads to reconfiguring the moral agency.

Reconfiguring the moral agency to address change

With hindsight, the leader reconsidered challenging the organization's morality that led to its reconfiguration.

> Back to square one! We had to rebuild everything step by step! It was rather chaotic... I had a hard time coming to terms with it, but we had to start from scratch. (Founder, Interview 3)

> We had to accept to start all over again, to think about a new way of doing things without denying the past! (Quality Manager, Interview 10)

This founder's attitude reflects his experimental attitude toward values work at Persontop. In 2014, Persontop's founder decided to create a new entity to address the issue of employees' well-being. The health and well-being committee is distinct from the social pact commission. It relies on volunteers and comprises management members, the HR department, and company staff. At first, it promoted actions to restore employees' health.

> Actually, the goal is to launch health and well-being dynamics regarding food as well as relaxation, the fight against sedentary lifestyle, this kind of things. I was not here yet, but a questionnaire was sent to employees to find out what they needed. (HR Manager, Interview 12)

But soon, it took over practices that were previously undertaken within the social pact commission, such as those aimed at working on problems encountered by employees in their private lives and that impact their work. We observe here that a new social group is being formed in order to address a specific category of value practices, namely those aiming at sustaining employees' well-being at work.

New issues are regularly raised and worked on in the Health and Well-Being committee. Since 2015, Persontop's founder has included external partners when implementing value practices as such.

> This year, we will work on slightly different topics with the health committee; we will deal more about how we can support employees who are family caregivers, whose spouses, parents, children have serious personal difficulties and try to find what can be put in place to support these employees. (HR Manager, Interview 12)

These observations contribute to a dynamic view of an organization's values work. While trying to implement organizational values in mundane business activity, tensions arise between the implementation of the values stated in the pact and the productivity objective. Employees feel negative emotions as they face these ambiguities and fail to solve these moral issues. They trigger a reconfiguration of the sociotechnical arrangement so as to restore the implementation of organizational values. On one hand, the material embodiments of values and the institutional mechanisms pertaining to a performative framing sustain the organization's value system and on the other hand, the identification and resolution of ambiguities or negative emotions are the drivers of change in the distribution of the moral agency in the organization. In Persontop, even if framing activities are costly, as mentioned by the top management, the socio-technical arrangement is dedicated to it. Fewer resources are allocated to deliberations on how to solve issues, some of them being recurrent and calling for a reconfiguration of the sociotechnical arrangement, while others are to be solved only occasionally.

The limits of the distribution of the values work at Persontop

Since the social pact is a written device that is circulated in the company and is adopted outside the organization, it shows greater rigidity. The social pact provides moral behavioral norms by defining value-based organizational selves and could provide stability to the value system if communicated and understood by all employees. In fact, we observe that, internally, fewer employees consider the social pact is the cornerstone of Persontop's culture.

> It's true the pact has, with all these changes, had for some time some trouble to be implemented... Some zap it completely... It's still

> supposed to be the common thread of living well together! (Team Leader 1, Interview 8)

The growing lack of knowledge about the Pact has deep impacts on the implementation of organizational values inside Persontop. In particular, many individuals who ignored the social pact failed once again to meet their moral obligation to reciprocate. They consider work flexibility and other human resources policies as rights, but do not have much of a clue about their counterparts in terms of participating in other value practices, such as mentoring, mutual help, or participating in committees.

> We realize that, sometimes, some employees confuse the company's business purpose with their own persons, we must remain very alert about it! (HR Manager, Interview 12)

Some employees, who are aware of the social pact thanks to their seniority in Persontop, felt frustrated by other employees' lack of commitment and solidarity, while they were still committing to the values work, creating tensions in teams and with middle managers.

> When we announced the creation of this committee, we created a 10-member working group, representative of the company's population; they really played the game and volunteered to try and perform concrete actions! (Founder, Interview 2)

Employees evinced difficulties assessing the fair counterparts they should give back and started to compare their commitments with those of other employees. These tensions are stressful for managers. As a matter of fact, the social pact gives a key role to managers in controlling and enabling the enactment of organizational values in employees' practices. They are endowed with many obligations, while being put under pressure to monitor the employees' productivity. They are the locus of trade-offs between economic performance and moral behaviors, without guidance or support in making them. The social pact states the need to accompany managers in the enactment of the values:

> To meet their multiple obligations, managers will need to assess themselves and measure progress to meet the obligations contained in the social pact. Persontop, therefore, put in place a system that gives the manager a vision of how it is perceived and helps him identify areas for improvement. (social pact: 9)

> Persontop is committed to helping managers evaluate their managerial behaviour. (social pact: 9)

However, in practice, the accompaniment is not provided. By 2015, the middle management, caught up in these tensions without effective solutions to solve them, felt exhausted, and a majority of them were considering leaving the firm in the near future.

The social pact as a moral device enunciating stable values is complemented by the social pact commission. It allows for an experimental attitude toward performing means. But the social pact commission also partially failed in its experimental mission. As a matter of fact, the experimental approach implies designing and experimenting value practices and also evaluating the outcomes in order to revise or adjust the value practices and promote moral progress. Few efforts are dedicated to the evaluation and revision of value practices in Persontop. We observe that values work focuses on certain topics such as how to implement solidarity between employees or respect from the organization toward its employees by considering personal issues or their well-being, while other topics remain unexplored. On this point, we can consider the experimental arrangement allows for progressively implementing organizational values but only if actionable tools embodying valuation frames are provided or if ambiguities can be treated in deliberative spaces. Indeed, in order to meet them and maintain the implementation of organizational values, the social pact commission should also tackle moral issues arising from practices. If we observe that the commission succeeds in designing and implementing new value practices, the disappointing outcomes in terms of value implementation might lie in failure to properly reframe the moral issues at stake. In fact, economic pressures embodied in productivity tools generate negative emotions among employees. But instead of tackling the issue of trade-offs between economic performance and 'living well together', the social pact commission framed the moral issue in terms of restoring employees' well-being. It corrects the symptoms without resolving the moral issue itself. The experimental arrangement promotes an accumulative process through which rather abstract values are translated into practices and actionable tools. But the failure of some experiments should provide information on which practices are actually being implemented, but also question the firm's moral competence in terms of framing moral issues and organizing the values work.

Finally, on one hand, the material embodiments of values and the institutional mechanisms pertaining to a performative framing sustain the organization's value system and on the other hand, the identification of unexpected moral issues is the driver of change in the distribution of the moral agency in the organization. At Persontop, even though framing activities are costly (as mentioned by top management), the socio-technical arrangement is dedicated to it. Fewer resources are allocated to deliberations on difficulties in implementing value-based organizational selves. Besides, at the end of our data-collection period, the socio-technical arrangement was also getting more complex with new instances and initiatives. This complexity seems to make it more difficult at Persontop for employees to grasp the values work and get involved in it. This calls for some rationalization in order to maintain the actors' commitment to values work.

Discussion

On the instrumental power of organizational values

In order to apprehend organizational values, we show that values are indeed desirable ends but also devices or means deployed in the organization so as to guide conduct. While we agree with Rokeach (1973), Schwartz (1994), and Williams (1979) on the relatively stable nature of desirable ends (solidarity, commitment and respect), their instrumental power starts with their embodiment in a material artifact, the social pact. It becomes available as a semiotic resource for prescribing what is 'worth being and doing' (Gehman et al., 2013). Now, contrary to contributions arguing for a clear and shared understanding of the content of values as the condition for their usefulness (Dobbin, 2009), the performativeness of the social pact does not lie only in an explicit definition of the content of organizational values. It is appraised in the observable enactment or value-based organizational selves. We contribute to complementing the account by Gehman et al. (2013) on the semiotic role of such an artifact, by showing that organizational embodiments of the leader's values distribute a socio-technical arrangement creating new relationships, which in turn help implement the values work. Take for example the mentoring practice: the social pact enunciates the value of solidarity; it is then translated by the social pact commission into a practice where new modes of relationships between employees are devised and communicated throughout the organization; then the founder draws upon the moral obligation to reciprocate at an individual level, so as to control for its implementation in practice. Then, the performativeness of the semiotic resource does not depend only on the discursive content of the value of solidarity but on the performativeness of all the means enacted to implement the stated organizational value, including the moral obligation to reciprocate, which is not written in the pact but embodied in the leader's discourses. Complementing Gehman et al. (2013), we show that values work interacts with mundane business practices and in particular that value devices might compete with productivity tools and lead to breakdowns in the practice of organizational values (e.g. McLean & Elkind, 2003).

We also contribute to the semiotic definition provided by Gehman et al. (2013), by showing that, in order to be implementable, organizational values should provide actors with actionable frames and more particularly enable valuations. We observed that individuals' divergent assessments about fair reciprocity deterred the implementation of the solidarity value. Without a proper frame, which could be enacted by managers, employees feel negative emotions that counter-perform other organizational values, such as commitment. In this respect, values as devices not only sustain compliance-driven or aspiration-oriented ethics programs (Weaver, Trevino, & Cochran, 1999) but also equip actors with valuation frames.

Finally, we also depart from this definition of values as a stable and shared semiotic resource (Gehman et al., 2013), by showing that the content of organizational values is actually made of the experiences lived by individuals while enacting them. We do not account for these practices in our data, but we observe the negative emotions expressed by employees and managers in interviews as a symptom of the underperformance of organizational values in enacting organizational selves in mundane business activity. In fact, for employees, the content of the value of solidarity does not by itself explain the constitution of their organizational selves. At the individual level, solidarity equals all the dispositions (which include talents, abilities, and moral sensibilities) accumulated by individuals throughout the enactment of this value, which will in turn determine how they are likely to behave in future value practices. When employees feel frustrated because they deem their commitment or solidarity is not valued by management to the extent they value it, disengagement and mistrust ensue, and thus probably erode their willingness to enact it in the future. This result complements cultural accounts on organizational values, where their implementation draws upon institutional mechanisms sustaining their understanding and infusion in the organization. For example, it provides an alternative explanation for the fragmented culture observed in some organizations by Martin (2005). It is not only due to heterogeneous interests or values at the individual level but can originate from the heterogeneous valuations made by individuals. The organization might equip individuals with valuation frames in order to avoid a deterioration of the implementation of organizational values. Finally, values are instrumental in organizations, but as also suggested by the existing literature, their instrumental power is not restricted only to other organizational outcomes (such as the identification of employees). It is first instrumental in the dynamic constitution of actors' organizational selves, apprehended in their roles (employees, managers, directors…). On this point, an early evaluation of the implementation of organizational values would bear upon the appraisal of these value-based organizational selves as performed by individuals in their respective organizational roles, along with what is considered as 'worth being and doing' by the organization.

On the distributed and dynamic nature of values work

Organizational selves are constituted throughout actors' enactments of organizational values in exercising their roles and tasks. Yet, as defined in the literature review, the firm's empirical ways of thinking and acting about desirable ends is not only explained by the instrumental power of organizational values on individuals' moral agency. It is distributed in a network of relationships between actors, material artifacts, and social groups to implement value practices.

In this article, we account for organizational values as devices distributing the values work via socio-technical arrangement. We depart from the dominant ontological view of values as abstract desirable ends outside of practices and manageable only by human ethical agency. We also differ from a definition of the firm's moral agency in terms of categorical values such as justice (Scott, 2002). We argue with Gehman et al. (2013) for a processual account of value-based organizing, including desirable ends as embodied in artifacts that are in turn enacted in values work and value practices. Nevertheless, we also contribute to considering that organizations have a moral competence that can be improved through time. We provide an original empirical account on Selznick's argument about the moral competence of the organization. In order to do so, we complement Selznick's theoretical argument to characterize a firms' values work as distributed in an arrangement made of artifacts and actors which enables the organization to collectively think, act, feel, and express needs about its desirable ends (Callon, 2006). Gehman et al. (2013, p. 103) show the dynamic nature of values work, during which 'disparate groups can be connected, but can also be disconnected. The social and material elements binding values practices can unravel and come unknotted'. But they do not account for progress in the moral competence of the university they study throughout consecutive values work and practices. Leaving aside a few contributions on value practices, moral progress is concerned with the usefulness of values in building shared understandings of the world either through corporate culture (e.g. Schein, 1985) or by acting through cognitive mechanisms to allow for more ethical conduct (e.g. Schwartz, 1992). In other words, organizations' moral progress is assessed according to the efficiency of value content along with its diffusion mechanisms in fostering virtuous behaviors. We show that values embodiments not only exert an instrumental power, but also create relationships between actors and thus contribute to distributing in specific ways the collective process underlying values work. This view on the material embodiment of organizational values as contributing to a specific distribution of the collective values work complements the cultural perspective. Indeed, it is not only speeches or artifacts that – by means of institutional mechanisms – are purposive of stabilizing value systems in organizations. The institutionalist and cultural perspectives on organizational values focus on the normative power of values since they provide the organization with a robust framing for social behavior that favors high resilience (Scott, 2014); but our account on the distribution of the values work in Persontop shows for its part that the plasticity of devices might also be necessary to solve unexpected or unanticipated moral issues faced by individuals in mundane business activity. While robustness is useful to guide behaviors, deliberative spaces where unanswered moral issues are discussed might be useful in restoring organizational values' implementation in a turbulent environment. They are also necessary when organizational change is important as experienced in the third period observed in Persontop. It illustrates the fact that the framing provided by a socio-technical arrangement might prove irrelevant in a different context such as organizational growth, in our case. While the stated values remain stable, the way they are embodied in artifacts, the relationships created by these artifacts, and the resulting sociotechnical arrangement might need to be reconfigured in order to remain performative in the renewed context.

In our article, we show that the leader supports an experimental attitude toward values work and that the distribution of the arrangement made of robust devices and deliberative spaces such as the commissions are meant to allow for continuous improvement in implementation of organizational values. On this point, we show that heterarchical governance (Stark, 2009), characterized by relations of interdependence wherein authority is distributed, has been adopted to allow for an experimental attitude toward organizational values, since stakeholder engagement is fluid, concerns are emergent, and values practices are performed over time.

In the case of the social pact, the founder anticipated economic pressures that could cause trouble for employees. Drawing upon his personal values and their informal enactment between 2000 and 2011, he chose the embodiment of his values into a social pact to maintain 'living well together' under economic pressures. He was aware it will not solve moral issues encountered by managers and employees in everyday work: so, he decided to create the social pact commission to conduct values work triggered by these moral issues. In the article, we show that moral competence is being exercised at every step of the moral deliberation. Firms' commercial nature raises specific moral issues on how to make trade-offs between commercial performance and moral performance. The first step of the moral deliberation process consists in framing the issue. We observe that, in our case, these issues are ill-defined and focus on how to correct the symptoms of this tension rather than actually resolve the tension. Through the second step of the process, in the case of trade-offs between commercial and moral performances, we observed that, above correcting measures, some artifacts are built up to help actors make arbitrages. The social pact provides behavioral norms and is translated into employee-evaluation tools that are aimed at helping employees and managers mitigate their practices. However, we observed that productivity tools endow actors with frames having a strong normative power, thus making their commercial outcomes accountable, while tools designed to measure the implement of organizational values fail to do so. If several frames are simultaneously used in practices with diverging ends, the most performative ones (those that best allow for valuing) will probably exert the strongest normative power and orient behaviors toward the most accountable end, in this case the commercial outcomes.

We observe that evaluation of the values work was planned by the social plan but, in fact, new resources are dedicated to it, therefore deterring the improvement of the firm's moral competence. This view on values work draws upon a pragmatist epistemology of moral deliberations[1], as experienced by individuals and within relationships, as is consistent with processual-oriented analysis of values practices (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

Finally, considered as a whole, the firm's values work draws upon a network of actors, groups, devices, which cumulate through time. This results in a complex network that creates uncertainty about its outcomes and its ability to meet the desirable ends. In the case of Persontop, the increasing complexity of this arrangement over time resulted in confusion and lack of transparency. Employees felt that it was increasingly difficult to understand each committee's roles and the ways they could commit to enacting organizational values. This echoes the contribution on engagement by Gehman et al. (2013). Indeed, to become networked, actors must be enrolled in the values work. Complexity hinders involvement, since actors cannot understand clearly how they could participate in value practices. The explicit content of values provided by the pact is not performative at Persontop, because of the lack of clarity about the distribution of moral agency. This observation calls for two alternative answers. In the literature, some argue for a routinization of value practices or the removal of ideology undertaken by management (Besharov, 2014). Another means would be to create entanglements where actors could share moral issues but also best value practices, and communicate on the social groups and material artifacts in order to raise everyone's awareness about the values work and the specific organizational framework setting them up, and thus promote engagement. Furthermore, by making everyone knowledgeable about what 'ought to' or 'should' take place in the firm, actors can become responsible for implementing particular actions, whereas some time ago they would not have been held responsible for implementing one particular action versus another (MacIntyre, 1957).

Value-based leadership versus moral entrepreneurship

The figure of the leader is predominant in the literature on organizational values, because his values are the antecedents of organizational values (e.g. Schein, 1985). Many contributions pay attention to value-based leaders (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1992) who 'encourage followers to embrace moral values such as justice or equality' (Burns, 1978, p. 155). They either focus on understanding individuals' core values and expressing them consistently, or prescribing certain values as being necessary for effective VBL. Through sense-making mechanisms, meanings emerge and foster understanding and respect, and can ultimately help the group work together to make wiser, more ethical decisions. This provides a context for value-based leaders to apply their personal core values in a respectful and equitable way. Another stream of literature in sociology takes an opposite stance about moral entrepreneurs as key actors in movements oriented toward norms and values (Smelser, 1972). The moral entrepreneur is an individual, group, or formal organization that takes on the responsibility of persuading society to develop or enforce rules that are consistent with its own ardently held moral beliefs. Becker (1963), who coined the expression, explains that moral entrepreneurs may act as rule-makers, by crusading for passing rules, laws, and policies against behaviors they find abhorrent; or as rule enforcers, by administering and implementing them. This moral entrepreneur disregards the means implemented to establish his/her moral beliefs and turns them into rules.

In our contribution, we depart from a cognitive perspective supported by VBL as well as from a normative perspective where the moral entrepreneur imposes his personal values on others. In line with the existing literature, we observe that the leader contributes to the content of organizational values but fosters collaboration in the translation of the latter, to delineate value-based organizational selves – that is, moral selves (Hitlin, 2008) – in terms of organizational roles. Now, unlike moral entrepreneurs, he respects individuals' own values (as written in the social pact). However, his personal values are not devoid of normative content. The normative imperative embodied in organizational values does not apply to individuals in their entirety but is limited to their role as organization members: employee, manager, or director. Furthermore, the value-based leader as a pragmatist figure is responsible for organizing the values work to promote the progress of the organization's moral competence. Indeed, institutionalists tend to focus on how institutional values provide robust frames to maintain the organization's identity and stability in turbulent environments (Selznick, 1968). On the contrary, the pragmatist epistemology of organizational values pays attention to how actors deal with the tensions arising when reality overflows the frame. In this respect, the moral entrepreneur or the value-based leader is responsible for allocating resources to framing moral issues, to the values work, and to evaluating outcomes. Rather than exerting normative control or fostering sense-making to reach shared understandings, he provides calculative frames to make value practices accountable, thus enabling trade-offs between economic and moral outcomes in practice.

Practical implications and limitations

Values are an important driver of performance in organizations. They matter to employees, shareholders, partners, and

[1] We draw upon Dewey's Later Works to get a broader picture of his writings. Later Works, 1925–1953, 17 volumes, Boydston Jo Ann (Ed.), Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–1990.

society as a whole. Managers gain new insights when considering that organizational values are not fixed and proposing to assess value-based organizations in terms of their ability to experiment on values and to organize the ongoing values work. The framework of our study shows that framing organizational values is not one-off strategic work that would provide stability and durable social integration, but should be organized as an ongoing process to solve the moral issues frequently arising in a turbulent context. Our results provide empirical evidence for the need to organize entities, dedicate resources, share information about moral issues, and evaluate the implementation of organizational values in order to improve the organization's moral competence. In this process, managers play a central role in conveying weak signals about moral conflicts or in deterring implementation of organizational values in everyday practices. They should also make sense of the ongoing values work, for employees to make sure that values are translated into practices.

The empirical setting, the exploratory method of this study, and re-using qualitative data raise some questions about the generalizability of our three-step framework, while at the same time offering opportunities for further research. A single-case research design offers the opportunity of an in-depth analysis but a multiple-case design would improve our understanding of the different possible interactions between multi-level values and their consequences in the implementation of organizational values. It could also enable the identifying of other forms of organizing the values work by complementing the deliberative and experimental process observed at Persontop.

As for data collection, we took several precautions to ward off biased and/or inaccurate answers regarding the values work processes by combining retrospective interviews with other research methods (e.g. ethnographic observations). Yet, replicating the study with another sample or in a different context and with other primary data would provide another direction for further research. For instance, applying the framework to ongoing values works could enable a better understanding of why some events trigger new values works while others are overlooked. Indeed, in our work, we did not observe how actors enact values in everyday practices, so that we do not grasp the implementation of organizational values in situated moral deliberations. However, we observed positive or negative emotions as a symptom of a successful or failed implementation of organizational values in solving a moral issue. A complementary ethnographical analysis on how actors enact organizational values in situated moral deliberations would be necessary to give a comprehensive account of the dynamic nature of a firm's moral agency. Furthermore, in Persontop's case, the values work process is presented as linear and sequential. Studying ongoing values work without retrospective interviews could also contribute to grasp the iterative nature of the processes at work. Finally, we observed values work within actors inside the firm. By doing so, we account for the distribution of the moral agency inside the organization. In our case, the leader chose to focus the values work on HRM policies and managerial practices but in other organizations, this work would most likely include external actors such as customers or suppliers and thus entails an extension of our analysis to all the stakeholders of the organization concerned. Studying values works including external stakeholders might contribute to better understanding how organizations act as moral agents on markets and might contribute to the moral order in society at large.

Conclusion

In this article, we contribute to providing an empirical account of Selznick's argument in favor of a specific collective moral competence exerted by organization. We complement his theoretical argument and study how an organization progressively enacts a sociotechnical arrangement made of material embodiments that translate the leader's personal values into organizational ones, also made of deliberative spaces, aimed at deploying a dynamic and experimental attitude toward values work. Even if values are clearly enunciated and translated into policies and organizational roles, the choices made upon the artifacts and the relationships they entail as well as the social groups constituted can alter the result of the values work and produce a less effective value system in guiding conduct in a more satisfying way.

We also characterize the moral competence of firms as distributed in a network of actors, social groups, and artifacts to depart from the debate between the usefulness or truthfulness of organizational values. In order to foster moral progress, the organization supports a moral deliberation process following an experimental pattern. This experimental attitude toward values is more effective, since a robust framing and the supportive institutional mechanisms identified in the literature might prove ineffective in a turbulent environment. The value-based organization (and first and foremost its leader) is therefore the one testing iteratively the effectiveness of values in producing desirable behaviors and reassessing them under changing conditions.

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UNPLUGGED

Anti-editorial – Living the PhD Journey… The Life of Pi

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As the director of a doctoral programme in business administration, I sometimes wonder if I do anything but reproduce or even accelerate the shitshow. The PhD is a liminal space where learning prepares a student's transition to an academic role. However, we have collectively naturalised a set of institutional pressures, as if the typical experiences an academic will go through during his or her career were to be considered normal. We kindly and elegantly say that there are 'codes' or 'tricks of the trade' or 'routines' to be learnt – rites of passage. Academic language, when used to collectively narrate ourselves, is coupled with muted violence. Thus, it seems to be desirable to internalise certain socially accepted practices to avoid a shock upon entering academic life, between natural selection and an evolutionary approach. As Pi related his adventures, we theorise the doctoral journey to make it bearable by reinterpreting its trials, cultivating a 'sufferer' vision of the thesis.

The thesis beyond the academic test, as a moment of life, provides anaesthesia for the pain to come. Heroism has the advantage of confining the thesis to an extraordinary space, and by placing it out of ordinary life, we accept practices that elsewhere would be considered questionable. These practices escape common decency and create situations of unacceptable mental suffering. This confinement outside ordinary life also allows the continuous play on the tension or lack of boundaries between personal and professional life. Being pregnant, taking holidays, being a doctoral student after having had a professional career, settling one's migratory situation, eating … All these situations, with their various associated challenges, take an uncontrollable dimension because we have collectively put in place institutional arrangements that allow all (and any) overflows, that our discourse maintains in order to make life acceptable. It follows that what we call identity work today is simply overwork and weariness, putting students at risk: just read the numerous documented studies on student suffering … even if that – of course – only concerns *other* universities.

Giving back its true extraordinary meaning to the doctoral journey means putting exploration back at the heart of the project. For that, we must allow everyone to cultivate their ordinary life. Such naivety, some will say. This is nothing new to the realm of academic capitalism. It is nevertheless interesting that we ask organisations to pay more attention to our research and that we repeat questionable evidence-based management mantras, while our daily practices, at the heart of institutions' transformation, are the opposite of what we preach from the comfort of our observer's role. Giving voice to the doctoral students who live this life on a daily basis, letting them out of this *bourgeoisly* inflicted silence, would be a very modest first step. We do not have to tell ourselves stories like "The Life of Pi".

I sincerely thank the authors and authoresses of this special Unplugged who accepted to share their experiences, analyses, emotions and joys with us.

Thanks to Nancy Aumais

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Managing a PhD: An ethnographic Journey

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Officially, my PhD story began 4 days before Christmas in 2012 when I received a letter confirming that my proposal on municipal waste management had been accepted in the Swinburne University Postgraduate Research Award programme. But perhaps my journey had already started when Dr Teresa Savage, who taught me Japanese grammar and history when I was an undergraduate, kindly invited me to write an honours thesis about how Japan and Australia could work together to aid developing countries. I had no idea that writing and researching could be my 'thing'. But maybe I am wrong again. Maybe I was destined to be a thinker long before that. Thanks to a dead-end retail job (I was selling watches at a high-end boutique for several years), it gave me plenty of time to ponder life. Whatever the starting point was, it eventually led me to pursue a PhD – a journey full of surprises.

At my very first supervisory meeting, my principal supervisor, Dr Rowan Bedggood (whom I met during my honours year), asked what I was curious about. She wanted to make sure that I didn't just 'land on' a topic that made sense at the time. If I must be honest, waste management sounded significant in a research proposal, and I was desperate to get my foot in the door. But if I was given a second chance to pick, I would probably choose something very different. And I told her exactly that. For instance, a presentation given by Dr Grant Walton about how corruption was perceived in Papua New Guinea (PNG) struck me profoundly. I had found it the most fascinating topic at the International Development Conference in New Zealand, which I had attended in the previous year. Wouldn't it be exciting to research something like that? It was almost like investigative journalism. Perhaps I could investigate human trafficking, or doctors receiving 'red pockets' in China before performing surgeries, or even ghost-writers being recruited to do student assignments.[1] So, by the end of that conversation, my thesis topic had changed from 'Waste Management, Corporate Social Responsibility and Obsolescence through Public-Private Partnerships' to 'I don't exactly know what I want to research, but I am curious about corruption'.

Then, I met up with my supervisors almost weekly to discuss my research project. I also kept myself busy by attending induction sessions, seminars and workshops. While I enjoyed my new freedom and identity, I soon realised that finding a social phenomenon interesting and having to write a 100,000 word thesis on it were two very different things. I was still unclear about what my research project was. Though, for the purpose of brainstorming, I noted down everything about corruption I could think of. I tried to recall stories from friends and families and browsed through media resources. I downloaded hundreds of academic journal articles in the hope that I would find the overlooked niche that would miraculously transform my life as an aspiring scholar.

At this point, I also thought it would be a great idea to informally document my PhD journey in the form of a journal. In the first entry, dated 23 April 2013, I wrote:

> …I was in a workshop last week and learned about the importance of warming up when writing. So, I have decided I should do this. This morning I've started [writing] before 8am. I've decided to drive in so that I can leave a little later in the evening (otherwise it would get really late to catch the train home) … By the way, no one will be reading these entries apart from me. This will serve a good way to keep track of what I have been up to and a record of my (rather slow) progress.

I had heard many stories about how pursuing a PhD can be a lonely endeavour; therefore, right from the beginning, I knew that I had to do something different. I approached a couple of fellow newbies and suggested that we should form a mini study group. The idea was that if we met up regularly, we could push each other to write, critique each other's work and be productive together. They were keen to partake. We soon recruited two more colleagues, and that was the birth of my support group. I am forever grateful for their collegiality. The five of us (Dr Vassilissa Carangio, Dr Alison Herron, Ferial Farook and Noor Mohamad) later presented our initiative at the biannual Living Research Conference at Swinburne University to encourage other PhD students to

[1] 'Red pocket' is a traditional Chinese way of money-gifting where the money is placed inside a pocket-size red envelope.

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follow suit. The excerpt below is taken from our presentation abstract:

> …[W]e also became sounding boards and audiences for practising presentations, and shared the joys of milestones reached and attempted to collectively solve obstacles along the way. To celebrate this special collegiality and developing friendship, we named our little community 'SWINspire', which encapsulates the group's evolved physical and symbolic essences to Support, Write and Inspire.

Indeed, SWINspire helped me enormously on both a personal and professional level throughout my PhD life. For example, when I participated in the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) competition, I had to present my research topic to a large group of people. I had done public speaking before, but 3MT was on a completely different level, and I felt extremely vulnerable. How could I convince others of the significance of my research when I barely knew what I was doing? After all, I was only a few months into my candidature. But my principal supervisor and fellow SWINspire members devoted their precious time for me to practise and fine-tune my narrative. In the end, I came in second at the university final and won $1,000 in prize money. It was a glorious moment in my PhD life.

You see, while the first year of my candidature was dominated by uncertainty, I was enthusiastic about my PhD in general. I became even more passionate about my research project after attending a writing retreat in Queenscliff facilitated by Prof. Ron Adams in late 2013. At this retreat, I met other PhD candidates from various universities and disciplines across Australia. I also learned about the 'performance' of writing. For one of the exercises at the retreat, we had to describe our PhD journey using a metaphor. This is what I wrote:

> The course of my PhD is like the weather pattern in Melbourne: every day has four seasons. Always unpredictable – one minute sunny, the next minute gloomy. It never rains when I have my umbrella, yet it pisses down when I go on a picnic. But I have learned to grab the chance when I can, have a beer when it's clear, and have a hot chocolate when it hails. If I get caught in the rain, I dance and enjoy the moment.

After the writing retreat ended, I got involved in another writing group with colleagues at the Faculty of Business and Law. We would take turns to book empty classrooms to write. I took this self-imposed commitment very seriously, and I even promised the Facebook world that I would not shy away from this hell of a marathon:

> Words are not dead; they continue to live through interpretations of the readers. They bring out emotions, provoke feelings, paint imaginations, and leave footprints, lingering in your heart. I have learned so much about what a writer can achieve. At the very least, I should try my best to engage the audience. To do so, I will need to let go; and let my words dance. Come, dance with me!

Dancing or not, I was certain of one thing – I wanted to see the end of my PhD. By then, the context of my thesis also became clearer. I essentially wanted to explore how social media could be used to mobilise bystanders to help victims of corruption. My thesis would focus on three case studies – the first case was about a young man who died mysteriously at an underground subway in China, and his mother tried to seek justice from the state-owned subway company; the second case was also in China, about how an activist got targeted after raising awareness about an incident where several primary school children were molested; and the last case was about a victim who continued to suffer at the hands of a powerful tycoon with Yakuza connections in Japan. My research project mainly dealt with qualitative social media data, but I was unsure how the cases could be presented in my thesis:

> The more I look into the data, the more I want to present these stories in a compelling way. Although none of these incidents were new and previously unreported, I feel like I am in a unique position as a researcher and thus have an obligation to tell the world what really happened to these brave people who stood up against corruption. I thought about using narratives to write these chapters, so I began developing dialogues in my head, standing in their shoes, trying to imagine that I am them. And this is what I think got to me eventually. Switching between individuals who lost hope, I know I cannot save them, but should I just accept that it is the case? I cannot bring back someone's dead son, I cannot protect a family facing eviction, and I cannot change the judge's decision to dismiss a case against a powerful stalker. What happens to these people are not up to me, but what happened to them can perhaps be portrayed by me. Can I write about their stories in a powerful way? If 'writing is becoming' (Noy, 2003), then I hope to become a stronger person through my writing.

Despite my strong will to tell the world about these cases, writing slowly became labour. Concurrently, I taught several undergraduate business subjects, so I had legitimate reasons to avoid my thesis. But even when I was not working, I found it hard to concentrate. Sometimes I would stare at my computer screen for ages and not produce any writing:

> At the moment I'm stuck… I have some ideas about what to write, but then when I need to write things down, I become mute…
>
> …I started to look at power from a different angle. I have gone through consumer power and found the different streams of power literature. Then I came across the Foucault wall – this was the first low point I've experience during my PhD journey so far; it was also the first time that a dead person drove me crazy. I have attempted to read a few of his papers about power and its association with knowledge which is what I found applicable in the case of my research. But I quickly gave up because it was like he wrote in another language. So I've decided to read about a paper which Foucault himself wrote in order to explain his own work as a reflection before I go on further, hoping to be enlightened with

> his help. I was even more confused [than before]. My world was turned up-side-down, I started to question everything. According to Foucault, we need to understand the opposite before we can understand the immediate. Say, in order to understand sanity, we first need to understand insanity, and to understand power, we need to understand resistance to power. Similarly, to understand knowledge, which is something we know, we will first need to define what we don't know. But how do we know what we don't know when we don't know?

Then life got in the way and my PhD was abruptly pushed aside. The year 2015 was a year of disruption for me in many ways. Some major life events during this time include ending a long-term relationship, selling a property, moving back to my parents' home and having a car accident. I found it increasingly difficult to look at my thesis. Procrastination was my only agenda. I started blogging and wrote about random things. For example, I did a piece on the social construction of the 'friend-zone' and developed a five-level conceptual model for this peculiar phenomenon. I fantasised about ditching my PhD, going to Japan to have a solo wedding, becoming a gravia model and living happily ever after on sushi and ramen in a match-box apartment somewhere in Shibuya. I really wish I had the courage to walk away from it all. What happened instead was relatively tame: I enrolled myself in a local drama class (only to realise that I can't act), got several tattoos (including one when I was drunk) and shaved my head (people in the PhD office thought I was terminally ill).

By the end of 2016, my newly grown hair experienced shades of blonde, pink, green, blue, silver, purple and eventually back to black. I started wearing prescription glasses. I converted to minimalism. I sold and donated most of my belongings. Emotionally, I became more stable. I also started a new relationship. I tried to reconnect with my thesis, but it was still out of whack. And if I was not writing, I would be thinking about the fact that I was not writing. My plans to submit my thesis evaporated; I desperately needed a new hobby to distract myself from being overwhelmed by frustration and shame. So, I bought a ukulele. I didn't think learning a new musical instrument at 33 was possible. But even my songs could not escape the phantom claws of my PhD. The very first song I wrote is called *I have a THESIS to write*, which pretty much summed up my life back then. It went like this:

> Today is a Monday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Tuesday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Wednesday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Thursday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Friday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Saturday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Sunday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Tomorrow is a Monday, and I still have a thesis to write.

I created a YouTube channel using the same name as my blog – 'Barbie and Trolls' – and I uploaded my song.[2] A friend complained that it was a bit 'repetitive' – but that was exactly my point. Every day, I wished I was doing something different, something new, something easier. Then one day, it suddenly clicked, and I did exactly what I wished for. The epiphany was that my creative outbursts should no longer be ignored. Instead of beating myself up for not progressing with my thesis, I started to embrace creating *other* things. I allowed myself to draw again. This was something I had stopped doing since I was 17. I experimented with different media including *sumi* (Japanese ink), watercolour and pencil. I even held an art exhibition at a local commercial gallery, showcasing 14 pieces of my *sumi* work.[3] To my surprise, my creative pursuits did not derail me further from completing my thesis. On the contrary, they helped me regain focus and self-confidence. In the end, I even decided to include some of my artwork in my thesis at the beginning of the chapters for all three case studies.

But just as I thought my PhD was getting back on track, the drama of my life escalated. My father went missing for 9 months. During this time, my younger sister was also diagnosed with a rare small-nerve disease that had resemblances to Guillain–Barré syndrome (GBS). For the first time in my candidature, my thesis was not the hardest thing I had to deal with. In fact, I would much rather be dealing with my thesis than anything else at that point. Since writing was the *only* thing I could do, I kept going. I developed a routine. I partnered up with several study-buddies. I gave myself deadlines. I pushed on until my goals and milestones were met.

Finally, I submitted my thesis in November 2017. But even that was not the end of it. Waiting for my examiners' feedback was just as tough, and my brain started to eat itself:

> Day 82 after submitting my thesis.
> No news yet.
> Feeling pretty empty.
> I have no purpose.
> I don't know what I'm doing with my life.
> I started to have doubts.
> Doubting myself, my ability, my relationships, my life.
> What am I doing?
> How did I get here?
> Where should I go from now?
> I need to have a new project and a new identity.
> But I can't seem to move forward.
> I'm paralysed while drowning in my own fear.

Luckily, the examiners' reports arrived before I had another meltdown. All I needed to do were minor revisions (to my

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtsZ-fgzhK8.

[3] http://www.tacitart.com.au/Tacit%20Archives/Archive201017/TCA%20Exhibitions%202017/entangled.html.

supervisor's satisfaction) and then I would be able to put 'Dr' next to my name. But for some reason, I could not bring myself to do those final corrections. For almost 5 years, I constantly imagined what my life would be like after I had submitted my thesis. But when I finally had the chance to put it behind me, I was suddenly terrified to let it go. I felt very conflicted and the idea of 'finishing my thesis' pained me so much. After another 3 agonising months, I managed to address all the points raised by the examiners (the actual work only took about a week) and resubmitted.

I graduated in 2018. My dad eventually reunited with my family and he was able to attend my graduation ceremony. My sister, however, is still yet to recover from her illness. At the time of drafting this article, I just landed a full-time role as a research analyst for a not-for-profit organisation. On the creative side, I still sing silly songs with my ukulele, but I rarely share with the world through my YouTube channel. I am learning to draw digitally in my spare time, and I have plans to set up an Etsy store selling cat stickers (some of my digital artwork can be found on Instagram.[4] Sometimes when I look back, the PhD feels like a dream. So, is it possible to manage a PhD? The short answer is yes – you just need to keep going.

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[4] @peibydesign.

On the PhD Journey: Its Past and Future

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Vulnerability is part of the human experience, as uncomfortable as it can be. Why am I making myself vulnerable in this essay? My desire is for other PhD students to know that what they go through is normal (or at least felt by others), and for future students to enter this journey being more aware of its struggles.

Along my PhD journey, I heard a few professors say how their PhD time had been like living a dream life, and how they were somewhat missing this 'liberty'. But a dream life it is not, for many of us, most of the time.

Undertaking a PhD has been the best decision I've taken in my life, although it has not been an easy road. Here is a part of my story.

This text is an attempt to reflect on the past and future of the intense journey that is called the PhD. It is a kind of sense-making exercise: retrospectively reflecting on it and seeking order and meaning.

My thesis is about time and temporality, which are, in my opinion, amongst the most essential topics underlying most of human experience. Time and temporality have not only been the focus of my research, but they played an important role in how I experienced the PhD journey. Accordingly, I will present this essay by introducing the stages of the PhD: before, during and what is to come.

Before the PhD

Earlier in life, most of my decisions were based on opportunities which were within reach, avoiding competition.

When choosing the field for my undergraduate studies, I was tempted to study journalism, but it was difficult to get into, and even more difficult to secure a job afterwards. The profession was starting to experience difficulties, and I was afraid of the outcome; therefore, I went into communications studies (a bachelor's degree with specialisation in media and culture industries) – a field I was nonetheless passionate about and that seemed more promising career-wise.

And then I realised, as well, that there was a lot of competition to get the jobs in this trendy field. "You'll have to start as an assistant for a few years and then climb the ladder", many teachers told us. Well, I did not decide to go to university only to find a position that I was not truly interested in afterwards. And the idea of endless unpaid internships and fighting for a job did not enchant me.

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So I did a master's degree in project management, since I had realised through the years that more important than the content of the project itself was the project as a mode of organising, and that the people with whom I worked were really important to me.

I finished my master's degree and worked in the project management field, holding different positions in diverse industries. I was learning a lot, and it was nice, but this was not it.

You know what I mean? 'It', as in something that wakes you up with excitement in the morning, making you eager to work on what thrills you; something you love, and in which you excel.

I took time to reflect on my life. What do I really like, and what am I good at?

I already knew I would want to do a PhD one day, if only as a personal challenge. I'm the first in my family to even go to university. I was raised by a single mother in a more than modest context and did not know then that, statistically, where I came from did not destine me to a bright future. I realised, only while doing my master's degree, how privileged most people pursuing higher education really were. I told myself, 'One day I'll prove the statistics wrong and do a PhD, just to show that nobody is "destined to get the short end of the stick"'.

I was expecting to work for a while and to do my PhD later on, to pursue academia as a second career. And then I ran into one of my master's professors at a professional event. We were chatting about our field, and she looked at me and told me, "Julie, you must really do your PhD".

Serendipity. The idea grew in my head, and I realised that this was it: I was made to be a professor. Now. Not after 20 years in a career not made for me. I was passionate about pedagogy. I had the perfect balance of analytical skills and practical grounds. I needed autonomy, diversity and intellectual challenges. I was made for that career, and that career was made for me.

I didn't even do a master's thesis, since my master's degree was not research oriented. I enrolled in a methodology class and prepared for the test required for admission into the PhD programme, while still working full time. I was on a crazy schedule, rising before dawn to study for my class before going to work. Despite these crazy hours, I was feeling more energised than ever, excited about the future. I got accepted to the PhD programme and left my job. It was the beginning of a 5-year (or so) adventure.

For the first time in my life, I decided to do something despite the competition. I knew most people did not finish their PhD, and that amongst the ones who finished, most did not get an academic position. But I felt at peace anyway, at least at first. (I do admit to have been overwhelmed with anxiety by the end of my PhD – I will elaborate more on that soon.) I knew I was doing the right thing, despite not being especially confident in myself in general. I had the strong belief that no matter how few people succeeded in getting an academic position, I would be part of them.

The PhD roller coaster

During the PhD, I felt I was on the right path. I liked every dimension that a professor must pursue: teaching, research and services to the community. I had the opportunity to teach my first classes then, and I enjoyed it as much as I expected. I was passionate about my researches, which provided me with a strong purpose. I was implicated in many initiatives and enjoyed contributing to my community. Really, it was (still is) the dream job for me.

I did promise you to 'elaborate' on the darkest time in my PhD. Well, I realised that anxiety and depression being very high amongst PhD students was definitively not a myth. I experienced an intense amount of anxiety through this PhD. It was enough to make me read the whole *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) (whose ontology is far from mine) used by psychologists to diagnose mental health issues. I felt I had so many of those issues. (Actually not, but I recognised myself in many symptoms of many issues, which is apparently a normal thing when you read it, unless you're a psychopath.)

The PhD experience has been a roller coaster, bringing me excitement and fulfilment, but also despair. I often had the thought that, had I known, I would never have done it. And all this while having the two most wonderful supervisors – inspiring, generous and supportive, and having secured financial support through grants. I cannot even imagine the nightmare other less fortunate ones are going through.

The end of the PhD was especially excruciating, since I had then a full-time job and was also teaching, while still finishing my PhD in the early mornings and weekends. Five years is a long time, and I was dying to put an end to that adventure. I had had enough. I don't even know how I made it through to the end. The day before I submitted my thesis, I broke down in tears on the sidewalk while talking on the phone with one of my (still very supportive) supervisors. I'm not even sure I could have gone one more day without completely breaking down (I was definitely not far).

I was not as relieved as I had hoped after my submission. After all, I still had a full-time job, classes to teach, a bunch of marking to do and other deadlines I had pushed forward – still too much for one person. My weekends were far from free, and I had to catch up on sleep and rest (which my schedule would not allow, before what seemed like a long time). I felt kind of empty inside, and still stressed out. The treadmill was still too fast, and nothing could make it stop. (But don't worry… this essay has a happy ending.)

I know that it can be hard to bounce back when you make it to the bottom. Although I have been spared so far, my readings on well-being and burnout are making me cautious and concerned. I think I've been very close to that bottom. I could see it, but I stopped just before crashing. I promise myself to take better care in the future. It will be a challenge, since academia is so demanding and reinforces that you can always do more. The funny thing is that my research interests include work intensification, overwork and work–life tensions and paradoxes. It's no wonder why.

An especially interesting issue for academics is the autonomy paradox: the more autonomy you have, the more hours you work, ending up controlled anyway (Putnam, Myers, & Gaillard, 2014). Academia is so prone to that paradox!

Overwork is all around in academia. And it all starts at the PhD, a particularly precarious situation – so little openings, so many brilliant candidates… you can always do more, it's never enough.

"Don't fall into the comparison game", one of my supervisors wisely told me. I had to repeat this to myself so many times. I often felt that everyone around me had more publications (which was not hard to beat, since I had none until recently). But my journey has been distinct and interesting for its own reasons, I guess: I started a business, did a lot of academic and practitioners' conferences, taught a few different classes, did my PhD within a reasonable timeframe, etc. Others, having many publications but maybe fewer outside activities, have probably fallen into comparison games with me. How many times did I have conversations like:

- Another PhD candidate: How can you do everything you're doing?! How productive you are!
- Me: Well, I have no publications so far, and you've got [x]! Isn't that most important if we want to land an academic position? Stop comparing! (And neither should I)

You always emphasise what you didn't achieve, instead of what you did. After submitting my thesis while working full time and teaching, I had two other papers to submit for special issues. My proposals had been accepted, so I could not consider missing these opportunities, even if I had no more time and energy at that point. However, instead of celebrating what I had achieved so far (which was considerable), I was upset with myself at the idea of not being able to get everything done.

This is something I want to change from now on: acknowledging what I achieve, and not only where I fall short, or what the end results will be. There is so much invisible work in that career, so much effort behind a single published paper. We need to be proud of ourselves all along the way for doing difficult and meaningful work.

The dark side of academia (overwork, guilt and anxiety) may ruin the bright side of a career (purpose, accomplishment and excitement), which can be so fulfilling if you don't end up completely burnt out.

So the real relief actually came after the defence, when it was clear and official that I had made it through. Because I was unsure until I got the official news, meaning was dependent on the outcome. I felt, as with tests: How did it go? "Well, I'll tell you how it went when I see my mark".

The PhD is over now. I feel like the luckiest person on earth, since I already had a position as a professor even before my defence. I was right to do it. I made it. I landed the most fulfilling job in the world. I will get to work with brilliant people, do research that will help organisations and people, and teach the next generation of leaders. Call me naive, if you like, but I think it is one of the most fundamental roles you can have if you want to change the world.

The PhD experience has taught me many things – as much about how to be a researcher as about more personal matters. It is quite a challenge. It puts you in situations where you really have to work on yourself and show resilience.

Sometimes you have to be strategic and follow opportunities, but sometimes, despite challenges, you have to follow your dreams. I did the former all my life, and finally the latter when I decided to do my PhD. Knowing the end result, of course, I have no regrets. I now look forward to and feel excited for the future. Really meaningful journeys are difficult, but worth it all.

How time affected my experience

Weick (1995) mentions that delays bring negative emotions. We are told that a PhD should take 4 years[5] (which very few students doing qualitative research accomplish). But that creates an expectation and a goal. My interest regarding time is not innocent. I have always noticed the impact of deadlines, timeframes and delays on people, but, most of all on me. The timescale of the PhD often stretches. You can't rely on a linear and predictable paradigm. Things unfold in their own way. Reflection requires time.

But I was secretly (or not) hoping to reach that 4-year target, which I was even hoping would be the very maximum, since doctoral scholarships are allocated for 3 years. What comes after is a struggle between other paid commitments and finding time for research (you now know how this struggle felt for me). I was even pushing for more: I would turn 30 years old 4 years after having started the PhD. How awesome it would be to finish before! – a totally arbitrary goal.

[5] Four years is the expected duration of the PhD in administration in Canada. It includes more than 1 year of coursework, a synthesis exam, a thesis proposal and the research work.

How time is related to meaning and how meaning is built around time!

Every delay along the way (administrative or otherwise) has been lived as a true challenge. I could see how all these micro delays were putting this overall goal at risk. At some point it became clear that I would not be done in 4 years. I was comforting myself by saying it was ok, since I took an 8-month break (to focus on growing the business I co-founded a few years before – another thrilling but nerve-wracking story adding to the PhD journey). I thought: If I make it in 4 years and 8 months, it will kind of be the same as 4 years (I will be in my thirties though, but well, who cares after all?).

But then that 'new goal' also slipped away. Like a mirage, an oasis in the desert, I felt the end was always moving away. I panicked a bit before my 5-year milestone, but it seemed so close now! Closer than ever! I stayed hopeful and continued my walk in the desert towards the mirage.

And this was it. 64 months in, I submitted my thesis.

Most of the people around me (outside of academia) had been constantly asking me if I'd be done soon, even from the very beginning. (I guess the word that we should never ask a PhD student if he/she will be done soon has still not spread enough. I hope you are taking note.) I think that by the end, my irritation was obvious when I tried to explain to them that a PhD is not a 6-month endeavour. I almost threw myself into the arms of the few persons I met afterwards who told me "Wow, this was fast" when I mentioned getting it done in 5 years, or so. Yes, it was (relatively) fast (for social science and qualitative studies), thank you, finally! How weird it was to find that it was 'fast', though it felt so slow.

I guess that those delays are harder for time-urgent individuals, having a preoccupation with the passage of time, deadlines, and the rate that tasks must be performed (Mohammed & Harrison, 2013). Time-urgent individuals are "chronically hurried, trying to fulfill all of their ambitions and commitments under deadlines situations that they have often created" (Waller, Conte, Gibson, & Carpenter, 2001, p. 589). Well, this is me (and I am not so alone in academia, am I?): committing to so much, and struggling to get everything done on time.

Time urgency is regarded as a stable individual difference, but I'm working on myself to be more flexible with time. Because academia is filled with expanding delays and long timeframes, I need (and am getting) to be more comfortable with all this.

After the PhD (future perfect thinking)

Seeking order, clarity and rationality is an important goal of sense-making (Weick, 1995). These three have been lacking so much throughout my PhD. This essay gives an overview of what the sense-making process has been for me. But given that sense-making is a process, it is continuous and never stops.

According to Weick (1995), we make sense of the future by thinking retrospectively about it, which corresponds to future perfect thinking. Even when thinking about the future, we imagine it as being in the past.

My PhD has set me on what will be a long and fulfilling academic career. I will work on fascinating topics, contribute to build knowledge around organisations, teach students with a never-fading passion, collaborate with brilliant colleagues and contribute to academic life in many ways. I can see it as if it were already past. I know struggles will be real, as well, but at least the PhD experience gives us part of the means to continue on this journey.

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Of Implosions and Blossoming: A Doctoral Journey

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A colleague once confided in us that the doctoral journey was like a painful birth for her. I must admit that this image, cloaked in suffering, haunted me. As it turned out, this colleague predicted the character of my own doctoral experience, an experience that was half discovery and half existential questioning. Germain and Taskin (2017) suggest that the doctoral journey is a confrontation. In my view, it is the confrontation with oneself, as well as a dialogue between oneself and the world. The human spirit is the seat of all uncertainty; the individual internalises the tensions of the world, believing these tensions to be their own, and subsequently seeks to escape them without even questioning the reason for the presence of these tensions in their thoughts. Confronted by their own choices and trapped by the productions of a vulnerable intellect, exposed to the regard of others in the most intimate yet public ways, the researcher may succumb to doubt and inhibition, and – ensnared in the ordeal that perplexed even Sartre – silently begin to consider the possibility that 'Hell is the Other Me'.

At the origin …

At the origin of the researcher's universe, a momentary implosion occurs. The challenge faced by the doctoral student is to be able to discover their own developmental trajectory by asking this question: Is the doctoral journey primarily the discovery of self?

During doctoral research and the ocean of questions that this experience raises, serendipitous opportunities await for the researcher to meet this Other self, the one who doesn't ask to be revealed.

The doctoral student's choice of thesis subject is never simply the result of happy chance. Conversely, determining one's research objective is not a directed effort as much as an occasionally hesitant outline of potential ways to subjectively express one's intimate thoughts.

Indeed, it is in questioning one's subject and in abandoning any attempt of a better reconstruction that one manages to embrace its potential to be *behind what* can be discovered and grasped by the researcher.

To write: To reveal the traits of oneself

Writing is the activity at the heart of that into which the subjectivity of the researcher is invited. Writing qualifies the researcher (Germain & Taskin, 2017), but it is also indicative of an omnipresent subjectivity that tends to be experienced in multiple forms. Our own awareness, in fact, leads us to analyse in one mode rather than another, to prefer some ways of reading over others, or simply to question one aspect of a hugely polymorphous reality – this subjectivity, in turn, is interpreted as the manoeuvrability of the doctoral student.

Sometimes lost in this world of perception, the researcher will, nevertheless, be confident to state that traits of their subjectivity may be recognised and admitted by the scientific community. However, they will not be less constrained to justify their analytical choices, one by one, in the section reserved to exposing the *limits* of their contribution, alternately invoking Chronos and Argos.

But subjectivity betrays oneself, or is rather translated in formulae enshrouded by self and crystallised in writing. This translation is often associated with a writer's individual style, but it harbours more than what others tend to grasp or even wish to allow. It betrays, in fact, the ways of thinking that are at the origin of what I like to call the *traits of self*. Often, the reason and form of bursts of expressive passion are reduced to the sum of intellectual efforts and mere hints of individuality. Yet, these traits of the researcher will have been preceded by a moment of blossoming which reveals 'that' which precedes it.

In fact, prior to becoming a researcher, the doctoral student will have experienced a doctoral journey. Implicit in this experience, one can believe in a training of another type, a type that

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designs perspectives as fundamental *to* and *for* the research of *self*.

During this intellectual voyage, which is already intense and fed by the need to acquire multiplicity of knowledge (Raymond, 2018), the researcher is connected and is immersed in a deep, subliminal exploration, which readies their heart for this moment of blossoming, co-constructed by the perspectives and presence of Others, each one reading the researcher's drafts. Among them, we will find the thesis director.

To be judged: The perspective of others as a part of me

A condition really exists in this journey through the wrongly called 'well-known' land of self: that condition of openness to be shaped within the research process. The words of Germain and Taskin (2017) have seduced me in this regard. I wish, from the perspective of the researcher, to reflect on these words. To be formed *within* the research is to rethink the nature of the doctoral journey and to extend its borders. In other words, it is to give in to humility and, thus, avoid the pretence that one can enter into the borders of the self from a single perspective. There is an implicit promise in this process: firstly, for the thesis director, that of transcending the role of evaluator; then, for the researcher, making the doctoral journey a life path during the course of which they learn to be challenged and not simply be 'supervised'. This passage is not systematic. It is based on the researcher's own will to recognise that their thesis director is not just an assessor-evaluator, a role to which they are often limited because of hierarchical positions in some of our institutions.

In fact, among roles occupied simultaneously by the thesis director, a distant guide hides behind the figure of 'verifier', 'corrector', 'reader' and 'adviser' to which the researcher sometimes reduces the director. Does this seem paradoxical? The fervent researcher will denounce the utilitarian roles that characterise society's approved management techniques, without perhaps glimpsing that behind these figures someone else is hidden who reads our work and challenges us in each of our drafts.

To be challenged: this is also a question. The guide questions the researcher's choices and leaves no place for unanswered questions. Although the latter's human spirit has already allowed them to find a myriad of confrontations and contradictions within, the researcher will be born, most of the time, from what others reveal in them.

In other words, the researcher who chooses to recognise an invitation to an *inner* journey will seek a plural where only a singular was glimpsed before.

Make no mistake about it: sometimes the process may be violent. In fact, some of these multiple paths create fear because they involve a reassessment – or perhaps simply because each path is one step closer to the light of what we conceal within us, hidden behind the moments of doubt. Perhaps the expression frightens as does its experience, but the scientific research allows the structuring of this journey of the self by re-inviting relevance to the choices that one makes as a researcher. I experienced this invitation, and I chose to see invitations in every single question. This choice is not innate; it is more so the result of the attention given to it, nonetheless equally inspired by the Other's view, that makes this experience a *lived* journey more than just *thought*. The doctoral journey can, in fact, be limited by frustration, as the journey might not make sense until the end. Each intermediate step is a production endured by means of a symbolic suffering.

The intimacy of reflection

To be a doctoral student is to listen to this world that is in us and that whispers a story to us. One must be ready to navigate this return towards the self by humbly accepting to be *shown* as much as *seen* clearly from the perspective of others – to discover in the thesis director someone who can help the researcher to read within while being without. This also requires an intimate revelation of the researcher's thoughts when sharing an idea or a perspective. In my view, this feature of the process is left unsaid in today's doctoral experience. As long as the doctoral pathway remains defined as the voyage of the *aspiring* researcher, the process will only trace a semblance of the individual's experience, too narrow to take account of tensions and intra-personal conflicts that the researcher must learn to transcend. In order to properly acknowledge the recurring features of this complex path, I believe it is necessary to reveal the implicit expectation that feeds the researcher: that of being questioned in their drafts, within a pathway, but by an Other who detaches them from what Tisseron (2011) would call *'rear' logic*, according to which the Other is present only to evaluate the researcher's value. The researcher instead seeks to meet a supervisor-guide who will question the student towards the possible, that which will allow the researcher's inner life to resonate within their broader reality that is much wider than just the world of research.

During my doctoral pathway, I have encountered mentors, and from experience I know that I would not have been able to write my thesis with one of them. Certainly, the *guide* inspires as much as a mentor, but the latter also fascinates people. The mentor is the eternal inaccessible lodged in the light of the unreachable. Between the researcher and the mentor, a barrier exists. There are echelons to climb and a hoped-for, fantasised future that one can, at most, glide over. The mentor will never plunge into the depths of the researcher's inner reflections. Therefore, from this somewhat monodirectional relationship frustration can sometimes enter the research formed

around this mentor, who aspires that people become what they will never be.

But what then about the guide-supervisor? To be supported consists not merely of a gift from the Other: such a perspective could place the doctoral student in a state of perpetual expectation and great vulnerability. No, to be supported involves, primarily, a choice on the researcher's part: to dare to be detached from one viewpoint in order to blossom in the world that surrounds us, to dare to be open to the plural, a place not often reached because of the pervasiveness of the singular. It is, in this way, a joining in a rhythmic relationship by consideration of what this Other supports us in.

To explore and the singular becoming plural

The *in research* that Germain and Taskin (2017) translate grammatically by an encompassing *by* is, undoubtedly, the deepest form of immersion that a researcher can know. It is the space at the heart of which the researcher accepts abandonment for another start. It is, in fact, from the *in* that the possibility of little *by*'s is born. The *in* is the space of departure from which thoughts, as well as their expression, blossom. But the *by* itself changes through time and through discussions with others.

The *by* cannot be the through. It is, in fact, only *'one'* of the several forms of *through*. These *by*'s are different ways of thinking, *visible* because they are palpable to the mind and *actualised* through a form that is made aware and that will have sprouted in the *within*. In other words, the multiplicity of intense experiences is expressed in writing.

On account of trying to name everything with *by*, we wish to identify a form among others that makes sense of our personal experience: distance.

The history of humanity has taught us that temptation is born from the forbidden, and that from a temptation never fed arises frustration.

In contrast, I believe that maintaining this desire to be distant from the object of research is to better love this same object. In the typology offered by Germain and Taskin (2017), the figure of the 'explorer' supervisor is certainly open to this form of experimentation, but the exploration is reserved, nevertheless, to only being a *floating* exploration in comparison to the attempts at detachment initiated by the researcher. In other words, the researcher lends no credibility to detachment if it harbours the potential for evasive reflection that will lead, ultimately, to a dream world from which the researcher's thoughts will perhaps never return. The supporter-guide, on their part, can offer a pathway of return to the subject of research that the guide knows the doctoral student chose at the origin because it made sense to them.

This need for detachment is not, in fact, a 'moment of confusion'; as long as the detachment is supported, it will be experienced as an escape from the game of social and academic production expected of the researcher. If the thought that one renders to doctoral research is constructed and is structured with the passing days, the passion, on the other hand, is not to be controlled: it is to be harnessed and changed, to be sure, but to welcome it is to allow it the time to nurture us and thus lead us to embrace new forms of individuality. And so, to conduct research differently from what was anticipated and bring into it multidisciplinary approaches will make this voyage of writing a non-linear experience. By diving into philosophy and sociology, I have, for my part, expressed what I call *the intellectual polyamorous experience* I have gone through. Transparency in the expression of this experience has allowed me to reiterate to everyone that passion and desire in research are precious gifts that one has the right to enjoy. Distancing myself from what I had initially designed as the *conventional contours* of a specific thesis subject offered me the opportunity to make my work an interdisciplinary dialogue. This choice allowed me to acknowledge the vividness of non-time when the researcher finds much more than they ever lost.

To rediscover possible time…

My doctoral research started with a promise: to be listened to. It evolved in subsequent years to another promise: to learn to listen to myself. To understand this truth, it is necessary to delve into a rediscovery of time.

Thoughts are shared and paced by speech. But speech without exchange is only monologue suffocated by the absence of the Other. The doctoral students, too, need their words to find the space in which to be liberated, listened to and questioned through conversation. The 'Other' is in some ways the guardian of these beginnings, allowing researchers to escape the world of the neoliberal university – in which a process of injunction to production is sometimes imposed – in order to find the core of what makes sense to them and to renew with reason their desire to be researchers. In the self, the identity of 'researcher' is not fixed but draws from each form of authentic socialisation, far removed from duties and obligations.

A typology reread from the perspective of time

It is crucial to pay attention to time as it is allocated to conversations between the researcher and the supervisor. Indeed, when evoked as a grid for reading, time allows for diving into the core of the classifications of the roles of thesis directors and their position as researcher companion. Time mobilised here is the duality outlined by Bergson (Worms, 1997). We use it to reveal, from the perspective of the thesis director, *objective time* described as a universal reference. This allows us to infer

Table 1. Supervisors and their corresponding researchers: A new typology of relations through the perspective of time. Inspired from Germain and Taskin 2017, page 14, themselves inspired from Wright, Murray et Geale, 2007

Role as defined by Germain & Taskin, 2017	Function of objective time	Description of subjective time	Corresponding researcher
The quality controller	Time is constrained	Time has a limiting scope in the exploration of the fields of possibilities of intimacy of thought offered to researcher.	The official
The thesis director	Time is structuring	Time reminds of the finality of the nature of the commitment in the supervised doctoral journey.	The qualified
The trainer	Time is a cause	Time is the operating agent for future choices.	The competitor
The mentor	Time is material	Time is outliner of the object of research and appears in a defined space which takes shape in a temperate, transient time.	The copy
The explorer	Time is abstraction	Time is absent; thought creations take place in a symbolic dimension detached from the laws of physics.	The detached thinker
The guide (the supporter)	Time is revealing	Time has given in; it is detached, shared; it is changing, sometimes captured, sometimes embraced.	The passionate researcher

the subjective time subsequently internalised by the researcher. We return to the work of Germain and Taskin (2017), who propose a typology of the roles of thesis directors (Table 1 first column) – to which we have (1) added a new role (the guide), to offer our interpretation from the perspective of (2) time (providing our three new right-and corresponding columns).

To be liberated…from self

If a doctorate is the affair of only one subject of research, *the doctoral voyage* remains, for its part, the story of the blossoming of an identity of the assumed researcher. However, can a unique experience teach us everything? I do not believe so. If experience is a space, my personal conviction is that it is quite vast, allowing the inclusion of diverse passions, varied and sometimes opposing, that lead the researcher to find them. Linked intellectually to a research theme, the doctoral student can still unreservedly dive into a deep reflective questioning. Will the researcher have to, on behalf of the *solemn vow* of exclusivity made to a doctoral project, renounce the very passions that still stimulate this project?

My doctoral pathway has provided me with suggestive evidence. Another quest lies on the borders of research, embedded in the framework of a thesis: that of the sense of self. Behind the thirst for understanding the truth that one associates with a phenomenon, a pathway is outlined that affirms what the researcher is for the scientific community but that also includes what the researcher is ready to become. However, between *being* and *becoming*, the courage to dare to be the one that I want to be is hidden, and the *me* is inhabited by my intimate will.

How does the researcher escape the inherent questioning of their condition? The doctoral student cannot. However, the student has the power to discover in themselves a researcher formed by the research … by self. The supported doctoral student is not a protected one; they are not mollycoddled. The doctoral student is simply not alone when returning more deeply into themselves. The perspective of the Other and the multiple questionings that the Other awakens in us will sometimes make the difference.

If the doctoral student chooses to recognise an invitation to explore the edges of their research, this student will have learnt to read the world and the myriad of phenomena contained in a full and authentic view.

Isn't this, after all, the story of the researcher's subjectivity? Interlaced by humility, the present and the subjectivity that sometimes resonate together as a single fragile inner truth in the mind of a researcher are not orphaned. This truth is its own – its singularity, one of the parts of its individuality – the moment that the research is supported as a harmonious story of possible achievements. Doubt is no longer suffering but creation, which may have an implicit promise as a starting point. The Other will challenge perhaps each of our thoughts, but, ultimately, they will have listened with attention and consideration to each response given.

Certainly, the intellectual passion can be a fire that is extinguished in the silence of the smouldering. It can, however, also be the kindling that precedes the flame…

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Research Acceleration and Empirical Alienation: The Complicated Relationship between PhD Students and Their Field Studies

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Imagine finding yourself in an aseptic meeting room, facing the person you are interviewing for your PhD field research. It was a hard work getting this interview: you had to mobilise your network and identify contact persons, send emails and convince a manager to accept the idea of a researcher coming in and asking questions on company time. Once that groundwork was done, you had to send emails once again in order to schedule the interviews. And now you're finally here and the voice recorder is running. However, following the first 10 or 15 min of chitchat and icebreakers, the person in front of you – a she, let's say – isn't really engaging with your questions. Words still come out of her mouth, but they seem to originate from an annual report or a public relations website rather than a human brain. It isn't those words you are searching for. You're here to find out more about any contradictions and paradoxes inside this company. You start wondering. Should you ask more difficult questions? Should you probe more deeply and try to tease more information out of her and see what happens? What if she gets upset? After all, she was already nice enough to take some time out of her demanding job to help you do yours. What if, after this interview, the other employees won't talk to you anymore? What if you lose access to this company? Would you have the time and energy to find another company and still finish your PhD on time? Maybe you should just keep nodding along to the disembodied voice that comes out of this person's mouth. If you can't tease out any truly valuable information from this interview, you'll at least have an additional 60 min to add to your data set and flaunt in some abstract.

This train of thought has probably popped up at some point in the head of every PhD student in the field of management who is conducting qualitative research on primary data and who does not have a particular relationship with the organisation that he or she is studying, i.e. he or she is not a paid employee in a company or a volunteer in a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) etc.). These are difficult questions to field, as field research is of the utmost importance to the success of a PhD student. It is commonly accepted that empirical data are crucial components of a doctoral thesis, without which nothing is possible. One can always get by with a mediocre literature review or a dubious theoretical contribution; however, without solid empirical data, PhD students are bound to failure.

However, the time dedicated to PhD research is getting shorter. My university, for example, showed a 60% decline in students registering for their fifth or later year between 2012 and 2017; and as of 2019, it is quite out of the question to enrol for a sixth year. PhD students are also asked to take increasingly more responsibility upon themselves, to become managers of their own 'capital', such as their networking capabilities, workload capacity and, indeed, access to the field. This means that they, despite still being students, are progressively losing their right to make mistakes, as they have less and less time to correct them. In that context, they are increasingly made to feel responsible for these mistakes.

When individuals are asked to become more entrepreneurial in some aspect of their life – in other words, to be more competitive, motivated, autonomous and efficient, or, in short, more responsible – they will, in all likelihood, develop psychological dysfunctions (Ehrenberg, 1995). The mental health of PhD students is indeed starting to receive some attention in academia. The journal *Nature* dedicated not one but two editorials to the topic (*Nature*, 2019a, 2019b). The first international conference on the mental health and well-being of postgraduate researchers took place in Brighton, United Kingdom, in May 2019. It was a sold-out event. According to some Australian (Barry, Woods, Warnecke, Stirling, & Martin, 2018) and French studies (Haag et al., 2018), PhD students have higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than the general population. Another study conducted in Flanders has shown that PhD students have a one-in-two chance of developing a mental health problem and a one-in-three chance of developing a psychiatric illness, such as depression. These odds are worse than those found to apply for the rest of the highly educated population and worse than those for professionals working in the defence sector or emergency services (Levecque, Anseel, Beuckelaer (de), van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017). This is possibly to be expected since, from the very beginning of the PhD journey, we are inveigled to see our colleagues as competitors rather than as friends and to remember that we will be vying for the same positions in the not-so-distant future. In this way, we become suspicious instead of showing solidarity towards one another, which is

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unfortunate because it deprives us of a support structure within our own community.

In this article, I will argue that the acceleration and entrepreneurialisation of academia, in general, and PhD students, in particular, are detrimental not only to our well-being but also to the quality of our field research and the ways in which we approach and consider the field. This has consequences for positivist and critical scholars alike, although the latter may find themselves under even more pressure (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). The thoughts I share herein come mainly from my personal experiences during 3 years of PhD studies, complemented by a quick dive into the literature. I focus mainly on life as a PhD student under the French system, a system considered to be (for the time being) less unforgiving and uncompromising than the British, North American and German systems. Thus, what I have to say could probably resonate even more with the experiences of students from these other systems.

I will begin with a few thoughts on the rise of the PhD student as an entrepreneur of the self (Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2004), the acceleration of research and the alienation of researchers (Rosa, 2010). I will then comment on the consequences of these changes on fieldwork and on the quality of PhD research. I will conclude by providing a few pointers for the way forward.

The PhD student as an entrepreneur

Academics work under immense pressure to perform and are continuously subjected to the judgements of others (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017; Knights & Clarke, 2014). This is even more true for PhD students: we find ourselves at a defining moment of our career in which we have no right to fail, very often with no back-up plan. As one director of a French business school describes in a blog piece entitled 'Please don't tell my parents I'm a PhD student in management; they think I'm looking for work',[6] we work under precarious conditions for at least 3 years, with little to no time off, even for our family. We are often left alone with our anxieties, and we aim for jobs which, in France at least, do not enjoy any particular prestige. The whole PhD experience tends to become one of scrambling to get one's articles published, even though journal articles are only one among many ways to communicate about research, and one that seriously constrains the production of new knowledge (Germain & Taskin, 2017). According to Brown (2015, p. 181):

> The saturation of higher education by market rationality has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, [which] aims at making young scholars not into teachers and thinkers, but into human capitals who learn to attract investors by networking long before they 'go on the market', who 'workshop' their papers, 'shop' their book manuscripts, game their Google scholar counts and 'impact factors', and above all, follow the money and the rankings. Brown (2015 p. 181, 195)

As a senior professor said during a roundtable at the PhD workshop of the 2018 Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting conference – a conference that touts itself as fostering alternative points of view – "I would not recruit someone without a three-star paper".

Thus, publishing is clearly one of the main priorities. However, in France at least, PhD students receive no training in the publication process, with neither supervisors nor universities considering that to be part of their job. As a result, we are left to our own devices in 'figuring it out'. That struggle is defined by two main challenges. Firstly, publishing takes time, and it is almost impossible to get published before finishing your thesis. Secondly, insofar as publishing is another source of anxiety, it reinforces our psychological insecurity because we know from the beginning we won't be able to meet the expectations of the academic community.

As we become entrepreneurs, we act not so much as people seeking to engage meaningfully with their world as managers who are driven to get ahead by exploiting ever more forms of capital, and to doing so by outcompeting other people. This is particularly true for field access and fieldwork, which could be considered the prime capital of PhD students in management. It has been noted for some time now that PhD students are expected to possess a number of skills (networking, knowing how a sector works) before even starting their PhD, rather than being given the time to acquire these skills (Park, 2005). It comes to no surprise, then, that the average age of students upon completion of the PhD is 34.5 years in France (FNEGE, 2018).

Acceleration and alienation

Modern life is in a state of constant acceleration. Speed as a societal norm is naturalised in modern society. The fastest triumphs while the slowest stays behind and loses. Moreover, as temporal structures are taken as a given rather than a social construct, the losers have nobody to blame but themselves (Rosa, 2010). Respect from peers is earned through competition. Speed is essential to competition and is thus essential to respect and recognition. PhD students have to be fast and flexible to gain and maintain recognition, a struggle that simultaneously forces them to accelerate on a continual basis Rosa (2010, pp. 59–60).

Academic life is no exception to acceleration. The temporality problem was mentioned as follows in a call for papers for workshops on business schools and critical management

[6] My translation; http://blog.educpros.fr/isabelle-barth/2013/06/10/ne-dites-pas-a-mes-parents-que-je-suis-doctorant-en-management-ils-croient-que-je-cherche-un-emploi/.

studies that took place at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) in November of 2019: "[*t*]he only temporality is one of constant evaluation, measurement, pace, urgency, etc. The injunction for a single temporality leads to a colonization of the future by forbidding the variety of subjectivities".[7] This is especially true for us PhD students who have a set deadline by which to conduct our field research and accomplish our work. Thus, we become alienated from our work and ourselves, for example, when staying up to work until midnight with nobody but ourselves having asked that of us. Yet if the modern PhD student is an accelerated capitalistic entrepreneur, what does that tell us about our relationship with field research?

Fieldwork access as prime capital

As I have already observed, it has become increasingly more expected of students to begin the PhD process with their own set of skills, which includes fieldwork access. A senior editor at an FT-ranked journal recently mentioned to me during a workshop that it was becoming usual for students to start their fieldwork before the official beginning of their PhD in order to 'save time'. This behaviour has negative consequences for other students, as it gives the community the illusion that students can actually gather quality data and finish their PhD in 3 years. Yet, why would supervisors pause and reconsider such expectations if some students are capable of being so 'high-performing'? Another senior professor remarked that it is even becoming increasingly difficult to gain field access for senior scholars. What then of junior scholars who have no expertise to offer and a much narrower network to rely on?

Fieldwork during the PhD process is often of utmost importance for one's future career as a scholar, since it is with the PhD data that one's big early-career article is going to be written. However, nothing much is said in handbooks or in the literature about how to gain field access (Bruni, 2006). There is a constant fear of losing access, especially as it is not something that you negotiate once and are then done with (Bruni, 2006; Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016; Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017). We all know at least one story about a student who lost access to empirical data and had to either finish with a worthless thesis or abandon the PhD altogether. Some testimonies heard during the 2018 Critical Management Studies (CMS) doctoral workshop held at the Grenoble École de Management are quite telling: "I was terribly embarrassed […] all I had in mind was that I had just intruded on a family that I didn't know anything about. […] The feeling of being an intruder was particularly strong as it was a small and close-knit group[8]" (Jaumier et al., 2019, p. 1568). Some students find ways to make themselves useful and feel less as intruders: "[t]he activists needed somebody to take pictures during a performance […] which gave me a role inside the group"[9] (Jaumier et al., 2019, p. 1573). Closer to home, I met a young scholar who taught continuing education seminars – normally a well-paid job – free of charge in order to gain contacts and field access. The following year, when I replaced her as the teacher, the seminar's organiser did not understand why I, having no particular interest in access to this field, wanted to get paid.

Gaining and maintaining access is thus very stressful to us. However, as research output accelerates and the time allocated to the PhD process shrinks, access to fieldwork becomes the only way to differentiate students for qualitative research in social sciences. Yet even putting time-consuming fieldwork aside, who seriously believes that anyone can become proficient in an entire body of literature or even just one theory in only 3 years? Indeed, the PhD experience is not about making a relevant theoretical or methodological contribution. Much as the 'elevator pitch' of an entrepreneur, the PhD process is about who can tell the most compelling story, which can be judged quickly and efficiently by looking at the originality and quantity of the data amassed by a student. Otherwise, why would so many of us feel the need to fill our space-constrained journal abstracts with mentions of the number of interviews we conducted or the number of months spent working on an ethnography?

Let's face it: while a few PhD students are truly brilliant (and a few truly clueless), the vast majority of us are just normal people with strong analytical skills and the willingness to work on weekends. The only time-efficient way to differentiate PhD students in the span of 3 years is to look at the data that we gather. It is generally accepted that the more difficult the access, the more interesting the data (MacLean, Anteby, Hudson, & Rudolph, 2006). Therefore, 'What's your empirical data?' has become the PhD student's equivalent of 'What do you do?' as the first question to be asked when we meet a new person. The quality of research is not judged by the power of its arguments but by its ability to rapidly gain recognition. According to Rosa (2010, p. 55):

> In the Social Sciences and the Humanities, there is, at present, hardly a common deliberation about the convincing force of better arguments, but rather a non-controllable, mad run and rush for more publications, conferences and research-projects the success of which is based on network-structures rather than argumentational force.

Fearing, hating and distancing oneself from fieldwork

The above-mentioned state of affairs influences how we might experience fieldwork. We cannot wait to be done with it. We trade tales of successful scholars who have not returned to the

[7] My translation; the title of the call for papers was "Appel à contributions pour la journée scientifique sur les écoles de gestion : objets de la critique mais aussi acteurs de la résistance et de la (leur) transformation ?"

[8] My translation

[9] My translation

field since their thesis defence. More problematically, we try not to ask difficult questions during interviews so as not to waste the interviewees' precious time and ensure we get invited again. As students, we have no expertise and nothing to bring to the table when we negotiate for access, even if professors and handbooks tell us to propose providing feedback to the company during our negotiations (who has ever done that?). Sometimes, we even try to hide our student status (again, as advised by supervisors) because we feel that managers are more likely to accept an interview with a 'real' scholar. I personally felt like a beggar more than once when emailing or talking to a so-called company 'gatekeeper'. Indeed, as the famous writer George Orwell, speaking from first-hand experience, said: "[*a*] man receiving charity practically always hates his benefactor – it is a fixed characteristic of human nature" (Orwell, 1933/2013, p. 186).

Fearing, hating or wanting to get away from fieldwork as quickly as possible encourages many PhD students to adopt a detached attitude, which leads to what Bourdieu and Wacquant called the "intellectualistic bias, which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). By refraining from asking difficult questions, by selecting a field that is easier to access rather than a field in which research would be relevant, we unwillingly develop "unthought categories of thoughts" (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 10).

All this takes place at the most important time in our lives as scholars, insofar as it is during the PhD process that we acquire our identity and reflexivity as researchers (Germain & Taskin, 2017). However, instead of cultivating a healthy habit of doubt, acceleration makes PhD students internalise and objectivate a narrow vision of research by focusing on the traditional and accepted ways to gather data and conduct interviews or ethnographies. Theodor Adorno (1998) called this 'the reification of consciousness' and argued that "the deployment of its ingrained conceptual apparatuses often pre-empts its objects and obstructs culture, which would be one with the resistance to reification. The network in which organized human science has enmeshed its objects tends to become a fetish" (Adorno, 1998, pp. 38–39). Thus, overcome with anxiety, fear or hatred of field research, precisely at a time in our career when we should be pushing new ideas forward, we forget that there are other ways to conduct research: "[y]ounger faculty, raised on neoliberal careerism, are generally unaware that there could be alternative academic purposes and practices to those organized by a neoliberal table of values" (Brown, 2015, p. 198). Again, similar to entrepreneurs, we are encouraged to disrupt business models and simultaneously build a business that will scale upward, and to aim for the type of success that is valued by the business world we are supposedly disrupting.[10]

[10] I would like to thank Helen Taylor for this observation

Unthought categories of thought and the reification of consciousness lead us to internalise a very narrow definition of how science is made and validated. Legitimation in universities occurs only through one's peers, be it during a thesis defence or through publication. Outside sources of legitimation, such as the communication of results to publics other than scholars or concrete, positive impacts in organisations, are not available to PhD students. As social sciences are made more 'professional' through the importation of methods and practices from the hard sciences (Lagasnerie (de), 2011), legitimation becomes an exercise in scientification. Thus, we find ourselves in an inescapable situation. Ironically, the mechanisms that transform us into entrepreneurs and put us under pressure to conform to a narrow definition of research are also those that isolate us further from the world outside academia and cut off our access to other forms of capital and recognition that could make us less dependent. "These forms of academic capital appreciation degrade, rather than augment the value of public research universities in the eyes of the public and the legislators who hold the purse strings" (Brown, 2015, p. 195–196). This outcome might be even more prominent in the French context, where management tends to be marginalised as a social science and has to fight for a place of recognition (e.g. management is merged with economics at the CNRS, the French government research agency, and does not appear separately in most official statistics). The temptation of scientification thus grows insofar as management scholars aspire to be seen as 'real' scientists and are under more pressure to use data collection processes and research designs that mimic those used in the hard sciences.

Critiques of the PhD process under a regime of acceleration

Hartmut Rosa (2010) formulates two critiques of acceleration. Firstly, the functionalist critique, which states that a society that is constantly accelerating will eventually collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, as increasingly more "desynchronizations" (Rosa, 2010, p. 69) occur between social worlds and between the social and extra-social world. For example, the practice of democracy is a time-consuming process and requires increasingly more time as the world accelerates; sooner or later, we will reach a breaking point. Secondly, Rosa makes a normative critique by stating that acceleration is neither moral nor ethical. Temporal norms are not neutral, and they alienate individuals who put themselves under ever more pressure to complete to-do lists that grow ever longer.

From a functionalist point of view, acceleration means that the work of scholars will be less relevant and of a lesser quality. As field access progressively becomes a form of capital, scholars and PhD students will increasingly shy away from collaborating with others. For example, we fear that our data will be stolen

by senior scholars, themselves under pressure to publish more and thus seek more forms of precious data. In fact, one of my colleagues refused a visiting opportunity at a university abroad for fear that her PhD data would be extorted from her. This stands in stark opposition to the scientific ideal. Furthermore, under acceleration, we will continue focusing more on fields that are easy to access and that yield data that can be accepted by our peers according to strict scientific standards and less on interesting fields that are often difficult to study. In marketing, for example, nudge theory[11] is gaining traction both in academic and professional circles. However, it is also a problematic practice that considers consumers to be irrational individuals incapable of learning and changing (Bergeron, Castel, & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018). Studying this phenomenon would require either lying to interviewees, covert observation or relying exclusively on secondary data. Would such a research design be accepted by our peers? Finally, harder access to data leads to an increasing number of students working directly from inside organisations and on their payrolls (a system called a CIFRE, a research convention with businesses, "Convention industrielle de formation par la recherche", in France). How can we preserve independence and freedom of thought in such cases?

The normative critique goes further and is particularly relevant for CMS scholars. A recent article in *The Guardian* proposed to 'bulldoze the business schools' as they have lost all social relevance (Parker, 2018). According to the article, CMS researchers working from inside these schools, in particular, have lost touch with the schools' missions and mandates; their critique is internalised through the systems of publications and rankings. CMS arguments made from inside the business school tend to lose clout and become a 'systemic critique' (Lagasnerie (de), 2017), in other words, one that is neutralised by the very system it is supposed to fight. As we have seen, the mounting pressure put on the shoulders of PhD students will only compound this effect. Scholars will increasingly distance themselves not only from the field but also from society. How many PhD students working on accounting for CO_2 emissions have I seen taking an airplane to present their findings at a conference, alongside three other scholars who likewise travelled by plane to get there? If critical scholars want to remain relevant, they have to put themselves back at the core of society, not remove themselves from it (Lagasnerie (de), 2011). In addition, beyond CMS, business schools themselves would do well to become more critical if they want to be relevant to society (Woot (de) & Kleymann, 2011).

Conclusion

The more society accelerates, the more time we need to understand, criticise and comment on what is happening. The objects of our studies are a part of society and are no exception to this need. Organisations are evolving faster than ever before, and new modes of organising are emerging all the time. The boundaries between private and professional lives have disappeared. There is no limit to the quantity of electronic data that we exchange every second. And we have less and less time in which to complete our PhDs. In addition to the mounting temporal pressure, we focus more on data and fieldwork that are easily transformed into a capital and focus less on theory, which takes more time and does not translate into anything that is easily and quickly communicable. In that context, how are we as PhD students supposed to produce relevant research? Acceleration is a vicious circle: with less time to complete our PhDs, we focus on less relevant field research, whereby we will progressively lose our usefulness to society, in turn exacerbating the pressure for future PhD students.

In light of the fact we may not be able to 'change the world' and find solutions to the problem of acceleration as a whole, we are left with two alternatives. In the first alternative, PhD students will continue to focus on easier fieldwork and well-known research designs, at the risk of becoming alienated from society and losing relevance to anything that is not a peer-reviewed journal. The second alternative is to accept the difficult conditions we find ourselves under and take steps to mitigate them. We as PhD students are not in a position to say 'no' to our university or to our supervisors; yet at the same time, we cannot afford to say 'no' to ourselves, which is what defines alienation. Thus, we need to protect ourselves. This is not about creating a 'safe space' in which to shelter students from the harshness of academic life that we will inevitably have to face someday. It is about differentiating between what constitutes a good and necessary challenge to the student and what brings about alienation. Being rejected by a journal, failing to secure access to a field and being strongly criticised by peers during a conference are all healthy challenges that will make us good researchers, provided that we have enough time to get back up and try again. A student who has not once seriously considered quitting still probably has something to learn (Germain & Taskin, 2017). It is when we never have enough time that we see every other scholar only as a competitor and every challenge as a life-threatening danger, that we become alienated from ourselves, and that we and our research suffer from this alienation. The pace of the PhD process should not be driven by and determined by publications and instead should allow for exploration (Pezet, 2019).

The PhD experience is crucial to the development of oneself as a researcher, as it is not so much about being trained for research than about being trained by research; this means that space needs to be made for doubt and failures (Germain & Taskin, 2017). Acceleration means that the gap between generations grows wider (Rosa, 2010), which is also true for the gap between students and supervisors. I am only 10 years younger than my supervisors and some of their colleagues; however, it

[11] Influencing consumer behaviour to achieve 'desirable' outcomes.

would have been unthinkable for most of them to publish in a peer-reviewed journal before their thesis defence. Senior researchers should be more attuned to the acceleration of academic life, do more to understand what their students are going through, and give them time and space to fall down and get back up. It should be easier for students to have someone senior to talk to who is not their supervisor. Collaborations between students, both for papers and for other kinds of research, should be encouraged. Students should be better trained for the publication process, which should be talked about not only in an instrumental way but also with a more critical mindset. More credibility should be given to modes of inquiry that do not comply with the standards of ethnography or semi-structured interviews; for example, secondary data should be less frowned upon. Whatever happens and whatever we might think about it, society and academia will continue to accelerate. Thus, it is up to both junior and senior scholars to find new ways to create relevant research.

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Networking Fatigue, Self-Care and JOMO* in International Research Exchange

*the *joy of missing out*

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In this article, I explore and discuss my experience of academic international mobility. Firstly, my aim is, through theory, to add to our understanding of why being on academic exchange can be very exhausting – even when scholars, as I did, have institutional and social support at home as well as abroad and sufficient financial resources. Secondly, based on my own story of overcoming fatigue while on exchange, I offer a few lessons learnt which may hopefully benefit early-career researchers going abroad in the future.

As a PhD candidate at the Business and Social Science Faculty at Aarhus University, I am required to undertake an institutional research exchange[12] preferably with a university outside of Denmark. The chance to work and live abroad for some months was part of the appeal for me to pursue a PhD position. During my undergraduate degree, I went to Spain for a semester through the European Erasmus Programme[13] and on an internship in Germany for a semester through the student organisation AIESEC.[14] Practically since my enrolment as a PhD student in early 2017, I knew that the destination of my exchange would be the Sociology Department of Northeastern University in Boston, USA. Therefore, I applied for and was awarded a 5-month Fulbright scholarship, which gave me the opportunity to benefit from the support and opportunities that travelling through an organisation offers.

One presumed benefit of the research exchange is that it enables PhD candidates to develop international networks that may lead to academic collaborations and, ideally, jobs in the future. I think of this as the 'networking imperative'. That is why, already before arriving in Boston, I had (1) set up meetings via email with prominent scholars from my field located in the Boston area, (2) arranged a short guest lectureship in Seattle and (3) registered for multiple conferences. While of course very excited, the thought of all these networking activities also almost made me dizzy. Furthermore, when students and early-career researchers go on international exchanges, we are encouraged always to say 'yes' to opportunities that arise. I have experienced this in the context of Erasmus, AIESEC as well as Fulbright. 'You never know what might happen or who you might meet', they all say. In this way, the culture of exchange seems to be characterised by a constant state of *fear of missing out* (FOMO).

I will be the first person to testify how planned as well as random networking encounters may result in exciting opportunities and experiences. Nevertheless, here, I will play the devil's advocate. In this piece, I explore my experience of overcoming what I call 'networking fatigue' and practices of self-care while on exchange. Using the autoethnography of my research exchange in Boston (which is still ongoing in this moment of writing) as a method of inquiry, I advocate for saying 'no' (just occasionally) and champion the notion of *joy of missing out* (JOMO) (see, e.g., Brinkmann, 2019). I further argue that balancing the creation of superficial, instrumental network connections with building deeper, more meaningful relationships is vital to well-being when living abroad.

Theoretical backdrop

This piece takes the form of an autoethnography. Following Haynes (2011, p. 134), I understand autoethnography to encapsulate "a personal, intuitive knowledge, deriving from a knowing subject situated in a specific social context". Writing autoethnographically enables me to engage with personal experiences, emotions and identity, as affected by social and cultural structures (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) in a "search for intelligibility and understanding" (Holland, 2007, p. 198). While autoethnography does not claim generalisability, I believe that stories of individuals' life experiences may in different ways benefit or enrich other people. In order to achieve this, autoethnography must stress a reflexive, dialogical engagement with the self in relation to theory (Haynes, 2011). I unfold the theoretical backdrop of this autoethnography below.

International mobility increasingly makes or breaks the careers of academics. The need to be internationally mobile

12. http://bss.au.dk/en/research/phd/rules-and-regulations/
13. https://www.esn.org/erasmus
14. https://aiesec.org/

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when pursuing a research career is widely believed to limit women disproportionately, especially women in heterosexual family structures (Ackers, 2004). Research has found that single women without children are more likely to engage in international exchanges and collaborations (Uhly, Visser, & Zippel, 2017). That is me. Free of any constraints in terms of a romantic partner or children at home (but with invaluable support from my parents, sister and close friends), I decided to prolong my exchange to 5 months. However, while travelling alone makes the logistics significantly easier, there are many challenges to handle before, during and after the exchange. When travelling alone, you have to deal with those on your own, which makes taking care of yourself perhaps even more pressing.

I would like to stress that I am in no way claiming that readers should feel sorry for me. I do not take for granted that I get to travel as a PhD student, live abroad, and meet and work with amazing scholars. I love my job (yes, in Denmark, a PhD is a paid job, and I get to take my salary with me on my exchange). However, I believe that it is possible – and warranted – to scrutinise those structures of the academic system (such as international mobility requirements or the networking imperative) that in different ways may lead to researcher stress, fatigue and burnout without renouncing all responsibility for neither symptoms nor solution. And as you will see below, I did react. I chose to withdraw.

Audre Lorde (1988) famously stated 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare'. Following its feminist origin, self-care is about survival. Oppressive systems, such as the hyper-competitive, neoliberal and academic labour market, do not want us to survive. Academia is an elimination process. Only very few make it all the way. Thus, stepping out of that system to recuperate in order to persevere becomes a radical defiance (see also Mountz et al., 2015). However, as the borders between work and leisure time are increasingly blurred, stepping out of work becomes increasingly difficult. Guy Standing's (2014) writings help us to understand why that is.

Standing (2014) makes the distinction between *labour* and *work* – *labour* being the remunerated activities associated with an employment. *Work*, on the other hand, refers to all work that is not *labour*, such as 'work-for-labour', which are the activities individuals need to do in order to ensure *labour*. Traditionally, *labour* activities are expected to occur in industrial time, that is, on the clock and usually for a certain number of hours per day or week. *Work* activities, on the other hand, occur in tertiary time – a time in which *work* and *labour* are jumbled in a 24/7 environment (Standing, 2013). Under this light, networking is also *work* because networks are widely considered important to succeed in academic careers (e.g. Smith-Doerr, 2004; van den Brink & Benschop, 2013), and it may be crucial to ensure collaborations, information about funding or job opportunities (e.g. Benschop, 2009; Whittington, 2018). However, when networking occurs, for example, at the bar at night after a conference, or when 'coffee meetings' take time away from writing papers, networking becomes a work-for-labour in a tertiary time. Such work-for-labour activities are often added on top of regular labour hours on the clock and may, therefore, add stress and strain for some. Furthermore, networking is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). You cannot network without putting yourself on the line and showing empathy and interest in other people. Moreover, while networking may be fun and rewarding, in my experience, even for an extrovert, too much of it can be draining.

My story

People have often told me that I am 'good at networking', and I guess it is true; I have never been shy when it comes to reaching out to people I found interesting or who I would like to know for one reason or another. I have always been a very social and outgoing person, and, as I hinted at in the Introduction, I love to travel. Therefore, I was really excited to indulge in the opportunities awaiting in Boston.

It is important to note that my research exchange is taking place now, in the final year of my PhD. Under the Danish system, I have 3 years to write my dissertation, which should consist of at least three published or publishable papers. My amazing host supervisor, Prof. Kathrin Zippel, was forwarding information about the most important events and conferences taking place during my stay in the United States already before my arrival. I stressed that I needed her to help me prioritise my time because I should focus primarily on my writing (and here I am now, writing something not remotely related to my research topic). While I am relatively well on my way with my dissertation (knock on wood!), in order to finish on time, I have to follow a quite tight schedule during the remaining 8–9 months. As such, I needed to find an appropriate balance between work (*labour*) and pleasure (*work*) while in Boston. Given the following, it may not seem that I succeeded.

When I first arrived, I took full advantage of the opportunities for socialising that Fulbright offered. Already in my first weekend here, I went to the monthly pub night as well as a concert and dinner event. Fulbright hosts these great events to help travelling students and scholars thrive. They are occasions to make friends, to have cultural experiences and to ensure that scholars are not isolated and only work while abroad. It is important to note that attending these events is not mandatory. Nevertheless, I experienced a strong tacit expectation in the Fulbright community that we should participate in their events because why would we want to *miss out* on them?

Also, in Boston, not only are there about a million colleges and universities, but many of these also have gender studies programmes and departments offering fascinating open lectures, workshops and much more. It may come as a surprise to some, but in Denmark gender studies is not very well institutionalised. For instance, the only gender research talks I hear at home are usually the ones I co-organise myself.[15] Therefore, I welcomed the opportunity to engage in these dialogues here in Boston, and while the events I have attended were all in different ways very interesting, I eventually hit a wall. That wall was 'networking fatigue', which showed itself in noticeable changes in my behaviour. Below, I give two examples hereof.

Example 1

I had submitted to present a paper at a 3-day conference in Boston in March. At this point, I had already been to a conference in Denver, Colorado, and had just come back from a busy week as a guest lecturer in Seattle. To be honest, I did not feel much like going, but I felt that I should. Academically, I was not sure how much I would gain from the particular panel on which I was going to present. The other speakers' topics were quite far from my own, and even if I did get useful feedback, my paper was already submitted to a journal and was already out of my hands. I participated in the first session of the first day at the conference, but I was mentally absent. I chose to go to that session because the convenor was a renowned scholar, who I wanted to meet. The same day, my university hosted an exciting feminist symposium that I could not miss. So, I hurried from the conference and managed to make it to the last session of the symposium. I started getting a headache, which I rarely have. That same evening, a friend from another university was celebrating his birthday at a bar, and I went there straight after the symposium. At the birthday celebration, the other guests, who were all international scholars, were very nice and talkative. However, the only conversation I could manage at that point was with one of the scholars' sweet 3-year-old son. Besides that, I did not engage much in their conversations. All I could think was 'When would it be okay for me to sneak out?' My headache got worse. That was when I decided that I was not going to the conference any more that weekend. I went home, and I sent out emails to the other speakers on my panel, informing them that I would not be able to come (none of them replied), and I mentioned to one Northeastern colleague that I would stay home. I am sure my absence was absolutely insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, I have always been a dutiful person, and bailing like this is not in my character – that is, it felt like bailing to me. But it was the right decision in that moment, and I took that weekend for some much needed downtime in my flat, alone, to recharge my energy.

Example 2

During the first initial months of my stay in the United States, I participated in various Fulbright get-togethers, both social and more formal events. There are many 'Fulbrighters' in Boston, and it was never the same people who showed up. While people are always nice, repeating the same routine 'get to know each other' questions and answers time after time became tedious. Often, the conversations would fall back to cultural differences – 'Oh your country is like that? Well my country is like this'. I recall going once to the monthly Fulbright pub night but not staying very long. Normally, having a beer at the pub with friends is my preferred way of going out as it is very laid-back, and I can relax. But when it comes to a 'networking' event with 25+ participants, who do not know each other, I felt like I was performing a very reductive version of myself through the repetition of the same short scripts over and over again. Nevertheless, every time I went to a Fulbright gathering, I would meet at least one person with whom I had good chemistry. I would ask them, either in the meeting or in a message afterwards, if they would like to hang out. For a Dane, with our somewhat guarded cultural traits, this is very forward behaviour and made me feel uncomfortable. However, I had nothing to lose, and it proved worth the vulnerability because it enabled me to initiate friendships that we could build on. It was such relief to go to a museum, take a stroll, have a coffee or a lunch with these new friends, and I am convinced they felt the same. One of them said to me the first time we hung out: "[s]orry, I'm just telling you all of this… but maybe that's okay, I guess we're friends now", giving the impression that she had also longed for someone to confide in.

In addition, I was making friends outside of the context of Fulbright. The other PhD scholars of my Northeastern department immediately included me in their social activities, and seeing each other most days at the office also allowed me to get to know most of them beyond the small-talk level. In short, I found that once I had established those friendships in which I could have meaningful conversations with people I myself had chosen to be with, I no longer felt the urgency to be part of the networking game.

Networking fatigue and self-care

Being on exchange means being in a constant state of work-for-labour in a tertiary time because the exchange is compulsory in the Danish PhD system. Undoubtedly, it is *fantastic* to be abroad. But I am not at 'home' (in terms of culture, language, accommodation, etc.), and that makes it harder to be off work

[15] https://projects.au.dk/genderinginresearch/

when I am not working. In my experience, the networking imperative is one reason for that, but in two different ways.

Firstly, as a PhD candidate, you are already never really off work. Academics work many hours, during weekends, and most of us probably think about our research constantly. I am always longing to know more, so usually, I desperately want to go to academic events and meet other scholars from my field. However, I have found that to depend very much on context. That is, under normal circumstances, at home, I have my familiar routines, my flat, my work, my friends. On this backdrop, travelling to a conference to network with interesting new people is a refreshing change that gives me energy, and I enjoy it. But while on exchange, when the default mode for every situation is unfamiliarity, and I constantly have to adapt to new places, new people, new customs, networking eventually becomes tiring. Secondly, while 'the networking imperative' mostly concerns professional-academic networking, during my exchange, social networking has also been imperative to me personally. That is, even making friends became part of the additional emotional work I needed to do to thrive. I unfold this a bit more below.

In summary, networking is not only encouraged on exchange; it is unavoidable, making superficial professional and social relationships the norm. Therefore, unless we find a counter-balance to that, of deeper, meaningful relationships, internationally mobile scholars may reach their limit and experience networking fatigue.

As described in my stories above, I experienced networking fatigue mentally and physically, which made it easier to respond to my need to unwind. I know me, and I realised that I had stretched myself with all the networking activities I had planned. Nevertheless, FOMO was lurking, and I wanted to make the absolute most of my time in the United States. My response to networking fatigue was quite simple. I withdrew and decompressed. What permitted me to do that was the fact that I had made particular choices, which enabled me to live roughly in the same manner as I am used to at home.

For example, since moving out from my childhood home many years ago, I have always lived in small flats alone, except for my exchanges in Spain and Germany. As I get older, I become ever more adamant about my privacy. Therefore, I went for the more expensive accommodation alternative (and I was privileged that I had the finances to do that), that is, to live in a small place by myself. I guess that if you are used to living with other people, living alone while abroad can feel lonely. But for me, because I am used to living on my own, it would have been much more difficult to relax when I really needed to if I could not be myself in the place where I live.

Another example is my choice to prioritise building deeper relationships over networking. I realised that I longed for meaningful conversations when I caught myself spilling my guts about a personal issue to someone whom I felt just marginally more familiar with than my average acquaintance in the United States. I would like to stress that while networking with prominent scholars often had a deliberate instrumental aim, when it comes to making friends, it was never a conscious calculus as in 'I need to make friends with this person, otherwise I will be unhappy'. Once I had created a few deeper relationships, it happened organically that I simply did not seek out the social networking contexts any longer.

While I was of course never forced in any way to go to all those conferences or social networking events, the culture of exchange and my internalised FOMO led me to do more than what was good for me. That is why I champion JOMO on exchange (at least occasionally) because in order to survive – let alone thrive – in a foreign country, I need my strength. Preserving and prioritising self-care also enable me to be more present and give more when I decide to engage in networking, which benefits the connections I establish.

Concluding remarks

While Fulbright offers some cultural preparation, not all travelling scholars are as equipped as Fulbrighters. But even then, you can never be 100% prepared. As mentioned previously, I am an extrovert, and I love to travel. Going on exchange for me is a labour of love. I love to do it, but it *is* labour. With three living abroad experiences, by now, I have gained a pretty good sense of how I can best take care of myself in foreign environments. However, other early-career researchers may not have this knowledge. For example, my home university requires PhD students to go abroad, says that it is good for us, and then it is up to us to either swim or sink when we go.

It may seem counterintuitive that I am advocating for living abroad in a manner that is similar to what we do at home because then why go abroad at all? However, maintaining some degree of familiarity – whatever that might entail for the individual person – might be key to ensuring the energy needed for constant networking. In other words, what will allow a particular person to practise self-care on exchange is of course an individual matter, but they may want to consider what that is before going.

Autoethnography is tricky. Sharing my story with readers makes me vulnerable. I was even advised not to publish this piece because it might negatively affect potential future employers' assessment of my personality and 'resilience'. In addition, putting the stories into words makes them seem very banal, as if I felt guilty about 'bunking off' a conference, and now I am trying to justify it as something more than that. Critical voices may say that it is blowing a little bit of exhaustion out of proportion to write a piece like this one about it. My objective was never to wallow in self-pity because I do not feel sorry for

myself at all. Rather, I hope to provide early-career researchers going on exchange with useful insights based on my experience. Ideally, such insights may spur reflections in advance about what constitutes an appropriate balance between networking and JOMO for readers going on exchange in the future, instead of in hindsight as in my case.

On a final note, I am wondering whether the stress and strain associated with research exchanges is simply one way in which we experience that academia is a greedy institution (Hey, 2004; Hunter & Leahy, 2010) that only keeps on taking. Maybe reaching the edge of what we can endure is part of the purpose of exchange. There is no doubt that we learn more about ourselves under pressure than when we are comfortable. These are certainly important lessons if we want to pursue an academic career because the demands of academia will only increase over time. Therefore, the main lesson that I take with me from this experience is that I have to learn to distinguish between actual requirements, expectations (institutional, social as well as my own), and recognise my boundaries, so that I can sustain myself while navigating through all of that. The bottom line is, I would say, we *have to* say 'no' – and we might as well enjoy it when we do.

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M@n@gement

The Fact of the Belly: A Collective Biography of Becoming Pregnant as a PhD Student in Academia

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The personal is professional

> Those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be here. Think of this: how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us. Think of the kinds of experience you have when you are not expected to be here. These experiences are a resource to generate knowledge. (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 9–10)

In this article, we explore how pregnancy is experienced in an everyday academic setting, and how being pregnant affects the PhD journey. Pregnancy may, at first, be assumed 'private' or 'personal' and, therefore, not relevant in a 'professional' academic context. Yet, it is not unusual that PhD candidates in Denmark (including at our own institution: CBS) decide to have children while enrolled in PhD. One reason may be that a PhD position in Denmark comes with a full salary, pension and benefits, such as 1 year of paid parental leave. In this article, we embark on 'personally relevant research' (Greenberg, Clair, & Lagde, 2018) and think of the private, personal and the professional as *entangled* (Barad, 2007, 2014). They are always-already affecting one another so that it becomes difficult or at least futile to distinguish between them. Becoming pregnant while employed affects not only your private life but also your professional life. And it – as we will show – renders the personal professional. Becoming pregnant while on a professional (PhD) journey will affect that journey. The pregnant body is signified by *the fact of the belly*,[16] it comes to mean something. The pregnant belly cannot *not* signify.

The Danish parental leave system fosters gender inequality, with mothers overwhelmingly taking the responsibility of childcare during parental leave and fathers committing to 10% on average.[17] The imbalance is not necessarily problematic in itself. However, we may problematise the imbalance with reference to studies showing that taking up parental leave diminishes possibilities of career advancement, access to leadership positions as well as future earnings (Gupta, Smith, & Verne, 2008). The so-called 'child penalty' creates an approximate 20% gender pay gap in earnings in the long run (NBER, 2018). A 2018 report from Boston Consulting Group confirms that the largest leak in the talent pipeline happens from age 30 to 40 (BCG, 2018). This is identified as the period during which career progression and family expansion usually take place, with the latter impacting the former adversely. At CBS, the career path begins to split after PhD level: the graph showing women's and men's representation in academic positions starts opening up like a pair of scissors, with the widest gap at the professor level. Four out of five professors are men (The Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). This picture has not changed over the past 20 years. It is our assertion, however, that the implications of having children do not begin with parental leave but when the belly starts to grow, show and imply meaning.

We are interested in understanding the wider implications of pregnancy and in investigating what we will term the *micro-implication of becoming pregnant* as part of the PhD journey. With the microimplications of becoming pregnant we refer to *the meaning of pregnancy ascribed to a pregnant body by someone, as implied by the character of that someone's social interaction with that pregnant body*. We created the concept of microimplication by repurposing Grice's (1975, p. 24) pragmatic concept of 'implicature'. An implicature is something that is not explicitly expressed by a speaker, but implied or suggested. Grice (1975) makes a distinction between 'particular', 'conventional' and 'general' conversational implicatures. Here, we borrow largely from the notion of particular, context- and situation-specific conversational implicatures. We will elaborate on this throughout the article. To this end, we present two memory stories, each a product of a collective biography workshop where all three authors worked together to collectively understand the two memory events. The body of text that makes up the two memory stories should be understood as a form of writing where the basis of knowledge is the embodied experiences of power (Ahmed, 2017).

The article has four parts. (1) We explain collective biography. (2) We present the two memory stories. (3) We spell out the

[16] The concept 'the fact of the belly' is inspired by Frantz Fanon's concept 'the fact of blackness' (Fanon, 1952).

[17] Parents can take 52 weeks of leave in total, of which 32 weeks can be shared between them as the parents see fit (18 weeks are reserved for the parent giving birth, 2 weeks for the other parent). See, for example, '13th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2017' (2017) and 'Køn: Status 2019' (2019).

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microimplications of the fact of the belly. (4) We speculate in and discuss what it means to be pregnant in academic settings and what happens to nonconforming bodies in an androcentric academic department, with an overwhelming overrepresentation of men,– especially in senior faculty and management positions.

Collective biography

> In collective biography a group of researchers work together on a particular topic, drawing on their own memories relevant to that topic, and through the shared work of telling, listening and writing, they move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories come as close as they can make them to 'an embodied sense of what happened'. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3)

The collective biography workshop was inspired by the methodic practices laid out by Davies and Gannon (2012; see also Davies et al., 2013; Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Sommerville, 2005; De Schauwer, Van De Putte, & Davies, 2018). In writing a collective biography we are concerned with the more-than-representational in the sense that the memory stories are not presumed to represent the memory events as they 'really' happened. Rather, we are interested in *re*-presenting the memory stories in a manner that allows us to explore their affectivity by bringing forth the embodied sensations of the memory events. It is the way in which – through "collaborative attention to detail" (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 360) – the memory stories come to resonate with all of us and become intensely felt that makes them real.

For practical reasons and akin to the adaptation in the work of Basner, Christensen, French, and Schreven (2018), we focused our collective attention on Sara's memories, rather than having all three memory-workers bring their own memories. Sara is the only one of the authors with lived experience of embodying pregnancy. Sharing her experiences of being pregnant during her PhD enabled us all to dive deeper into the microimplications of the fact of the belly. By exploring this topic, it was soon made clear to us all that the decision to have children – to become a parent – affects the journey. Parenthood affects women and men differently. Our sensation was that this differentiating factor of PhD life had its inception during pregnancy. Thomas, one of the male authors, has also experienced becoming a parent in an academic setting. His experience is one of almost becoming invisible, where pregnancy and parenthood are absent in professional life. We may say that to Thomas's body the pregnancy was a non-fact. In stark contrast to this stands the experience of Sara whose pregnancy – as the memory stories will tell – is difficult to hide. She, her body, is highly visible, physically, as her belly sticks out and takes more space than usual. This very fact of the belly translates into a different lived PhD experience, one that is undeniably embodied, giving birth to different affective states.

Our main concern is to examine the embodied sensations and affective states of the memory stories. The purpose is to draw out their affective and material details through descriptions that move and resonate with us as memory-workers. The choice of collective biography begs the question of what the collective mood brings that the autobiographical method (e.g. Daskalaki, Butler, & Petrovic, 2016) lacks? Sara could easily have explored her personal encounters by herself through autoethnographic accounts (e.g. Awasthy, 2015; Hearn, 2003; O'Shea, 2018). The motivation for using collective biography is that we, as a collective of authors, want to dive into and explore the affective implications of the fact of the belly. As the memory events we base this piece on are situated in everyday, informal interactions with colleagues, there are no formal 'field notes' of the exchanges. Moreover, an ambition for the workshop was to move beyond mere reflection, as in mirroring or representing the memory events as something of the past. Working collectively on the memory stories enabled us to bring out, enrich and more vividly describe those affective dimensions, which are easily taken for granted by the memory-holder. While Thomas and Jannick cannot put themselves in the place of Sara, or any other pregnant body for that matter, they wanted to understand the implications of becoming a pregnant body in the context of an academic institution. Sara, on the other hand, wanted not to be alone or isolated with her experience. In our first discussion of this article, she initially relativised her experiences, doubting whether she was 'right' to feel out-of-place. After all, she has a privileged position in the Danish system, benefiting from relatively generous family policies. We wanted to explore and understand the pregnant experience on its own terms *as a collective* without judging it, juxtaposing it with or relativising it to any other PhD experiences.

The collective biography workshop, effectively, is a methodology for affective research. And as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) suggest:

> The development of methodologies for affect research should be regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what 'the empirical' produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material and perhaps to collect material that has previously been perceived as banal or unsophisticated.

Knudsen and Stage (2015) specifically mention accounts of researchers' bodily states as an example of inventive ways for generating empirical material. In the remainder of this section, we present a walkthrough of how we went about conducting our collective biography workshop.

Ahead of the memory workshop, Sara wrote a first iteration of her memory stories for Thomas and Jannick to read in preparation for the workshop. They, in turn, added initial questions to the text. At this stage, questions were mainly points of

clarification about passages in the text where the words and formulations seemed distant to Thomas and Jannick where the sentences were complete, yet with the sensory descriptions lacking in detail in order to touch the affective dimension. A telling example of this is from Memory Story 1, in which Sara describes that she is pregnant and that she can no longer hide this fact of the belly. But as neither Thomas nor Jannick has any bodily recollection of what that entails, both curiously asked for a more detailed account of what the pregnant body in the memory event feels like, what it looks like, and what emotional labour goes into trying to hide this growing fact of the belly. Asking questions with a "strong situational specificity" is, as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) also argue, a necessary step for grounding, empirically, the analysis of affective processes. The explication of gender in both memory stories is another and equally telling example: initially, none of the memory events provided any explicit mentioning of gender; the terms 'they' and 'their' were used as gender-neutral pronouns to refer to Sara's colleagues. As Thomas and Jannick began probing, gender came forth as entangled, affectively, with the bodily reactions and changes. The men in both memory stories (i.e. Sara's male colleagues), in short, distance themselves when confronted with the fact of the belly – by means of irony and ridicule. The woman addresses the fact of the belly directly, trying to connect with it through own embodied experience. We are, of course, not suggesting any generalisation based on this reading; we merely point to how the entanglement of certain things begin to 'glow' (MacLure, 2013a, 2013b) and show greater significance for our thought and writing as the memory workshop progressed.

We collectively decided to begin the workshop with Sara reading her memory stories aloud. Listening to Sara's voice and watching her as she re-lived the events when sharing them prompted Thomas and Jannick to probe the text before them not in chronological order but in accordance with the different affective intensities it created in the room. We recorded the entire session (3 h) for us to listen through and use as a companion when re-writing the memory stories. The final iterations of the memory stories – as included in this article – are thus the product of several re-workings and re-shapings of the body given to the text. The said re-workings are a collective endeavour: Having elaborated on the initial version of the memory stories based on the collective attention to details at the workshop, we continued to circulate the text among us until none of us felt we had any more to say. At this critical stage the body given to the text is saturated with the affect that resonates with all memory-workers and not just the original memory-holder.

The situation of a woman sharing a story with two men (who do not share any experiences with microimplications of pregnancy) could easily become a classic setup, where a woman's bodily and emotional experiences are explained by men. There are two things to say to this: (1) this is a collective project concerned with collectively understanding a single person's lived experience; insofar as the work of analysis and conceptualisation is concerned, there is no opposition between the members of the collective. Thus, we humbly suggest that in coming together to work collaboratively we turned the moment of the collective biography workshop into movement towards translating lived experience (de Beauvoir, 1953) into shared experience. Lived experience, given that it is about a particular and hence subjective experience, is not necessarily shareable. Yet, Davies et al. (2013, p. 684, italics in original) point to how collective biography work is where the memories become and "*are* the subject", not "*of* the subject". This brings us to the second point: (2) the men are not explaining the woman what her experience means; the men involved are not able to have an experience of the fact of the pregnant belly, but they are willing to appreciate its affects and understand its ramifications. It is an occasion for empathetically learning about an experience they are unable to have and to develop a sensitivity to this particular situation and to similar situations.

Memory story 1

My old department has recently merged with another department, and I have got a new office and new colleagues. I am a PhD student halfway through my studies. And I am also pregnant.

Simultaneously with getting the new office and new colleagues, it started to become impossible for me to hide my growing belly.

Having experienced pregnancy before, the changing of my body was not new to me. I was not reacting to the change with amazement, curiously inspecting the belly in the mirror when changing clothes as I did the first time. The bump was just there. And it was growing. It was an expected fact. A tangible, physical fact.

Starting as a feeling of bloatedness, it began manifesting itself as a more solid extension of my body, going from a rounding of the belly to an actual bump, bulging out over the lining of my pants.

The bump hindered me from wearing my normal trousers and it made the clothes I could wear fit differently. I became aware how different material of the clothes could disguise or reveal the bump. The urge to hide my pregnancy was strong. I did not want the focus to go from me as a person to my pregnant body, with all the conversations, tips, sharing of experiences and pieces of advice that come with it.

The winter season gave me all kinds of excuses to wear big sweaters, and I became a master of layering clothes – all as a means of disguising the growing belly.

I became painfully aware of how I was sitting, standing and walking. How I was carrying my body. Counterposing. Arching and rounding the back, to let the belly sink in and not pop out.

Always sitting straight, never leaning back. It exposes the front, and the belly.

Crossing my arms in front of me. But not too much. It is a commonly known telling sign that pregnant women touch their bellies. So never, *never* touch my belly, hold my belly or in any way draw attention to that part of the body.

Always keeping in mind how to carry my body in a way that could hide the belly occupied my mind space, and sometimes it made me lose focus of what was said in meetings or conversations. It is like when you are thinking about the fact that you are lying, and then trying to hold a steady gaze, looking the other person in the eyes. Because you know that straying eyes are a sign of lying. But being too conscious and overdoing the steady look will also expose you as a liar.

I was focused to find the right balance between acting relaxed and natural in my bodily actions without being obviously hiding something. The winter season was not just an excuse to wear oversized clothes, it also meant Christmas parties and get-togethers, all including alcohol. Being a married woman in my early 30s saying 'no' to alcohol, in private or professional settings, is guaranteed to get pregnancy rumours started.

I shamelessly exaggerated my son's bad sleeping habits, to give me an excuse to not drink alcohol and leave early, alternatively not to attend alcohol-related Christmas activities at all.

I specifically remember how unfairly treated I felt when I had to present excuses and explanations to saying 'no' to beers at the Christmas party, while my female colleague with an Arabic name was left without questions. I could not lean up against my colleagues' assumptions of religious reasons; in their eyes, the only reason why I was not drinking could obviously be that I was pregnant. But there was also something else.

I have always been uncomfortable with comments to my body in professional settings as they limit my space of action.

I have been sexualised and made aware of my body at every workplace I have had since I was 14, ranging from well-intended compliments to straight out sexual harassments.

It feels like I cannot escape being my body, that what I say and do cannot stand alone but always are accompanied by my body. Hiding my pregnancy was a way to postpone or avoid this feeling.

It was the beginning of March, the belly had grown to a point where no back arching, arm crossing or big sweaters could hide the obvious fact that I was pregnant, and this was stressing me out.

The stressy feeling, enforced by being in a new professional environment, gave me a vague tension or ache in my stomach, always expecting a confrontation or uncomfortable conversation.

Many times, I tried to avoid presumed questions or comments by proactively taking control over conversations, asking the other a lot of questions or talking without space for interruptions.

Though sometimes I gave in to the feeling and kept to myself, I could not be bothered to play the game…

It is close to lunch time. I can hear the early lunchers rummaging around in the kitchen, but I cannot see who it is from my office. My stomach rumbles and makes loud noises.

I looked at the clock. Maybe I could just go to the kitchen, get my lunch box and eat it at the office, but that would be weird, I should socialise with my new colleagues. That is what professional, well-mannered people do. They socialise and build networks, creating future opportunities.

I waited a bit longer. Maybe more people will come, and there will be someone I know.

The noise from the voices in the kitchen was increasing as the informally agreed lunch time approached.

I was too hungry to get any work done; I could not deny my body food any longer. I took a deep breath, braced myself and closed the office door walking out to the kitchen. There were new faces sitting at the lunch table, and I could not see anyone familiar. I smiled and said a general 'Bon appetit' to the table. I walked to the fridge and grabbed my lunch box. Voices were muttering and chattering at the lunch table. While putting my food on a plate to heat it in the microwave oven, a new colleague, a woman in her 40s, approached me:

'Oh that food looks great'.

'Yeah, I generally prefer to bring my own food, the canteen gets less exciting after a couple of years at CBS', I answer. The new colleague smiled. I relaxed. This is a nice conversation.

'You are one of the new ones, no? Where are you from?' she asked me. Good. This is not as bad as I expected it to be. I decided to take the opportunity to present myself.

'I am from the Department of Business and Politics, my PhD is funded by the AlterEcos Project, do you know it? We look into alternative forms for organizing within the financial sector'.

'Ah DBP. Nice. And I can see that you are expecting. Congratulations! How far are you? Isn't it the best experience ever to be pregnant?'

I freeze mentally and the surprise makes me hesitant. How do I answer? I really do not want to talk about my pregnancy with someone I do not know. I do not think that being pregnant is the most amazing thing, but I know by experience that saying such thing will cause strange looks and an even longer conversation about being pregnant and motherhood.

I smile stiffly. How can I get the conversation back to professional stuff? And what do I answer? I'm stressing out, I must say something now or it becomes socially awkward.

'Yes. I'm having a baby in July'. Not really knowing where to look. Hoping for the microwave oven to be signalling that the food is ready. Fuck. I should have asked her something. Stupid. I had the chance to take control over the conversation. I missed it. I feel stressed and disappointed with myself, for not taking control over the situation I was dreading…

'Oh that is just great. Summer babies are just the easiest. You do not need that much clothes, and you will just have vacation all summer. My two kids are from May and June. It was such a great experience. But I guess you should be careful; the heat last summer was crazy. Might not be a dream scenario, neither being pregnant or having a small baby. Fingers crossed it was just a one-time thing, right?'

I am torn between the feeling of just taking my food and leave and being polite and acknowledge what my stranger colleague said, maybe ask some questions about her children. Why is it so hard to say stop that I am not comfortable in this situation? I'm smiling politely, take my food and say:

'That sounds nice. Hope you will have a productive afternoon' and go the few meters to the lunch table. It is nearly full, but there is a spot between two senior staff, both men and both, unfamiliar to me. I aim for that spot.

'Is this seat free?', I said as I got closer to the table. They both nodded and smiled but continued their ongoing conversation.

Sitting down, I felt awkward and misplaced. Invited to the table but not included in the conversation, which would be common courtesy at a lunch table in the workplace.

Eating my food silently, I tried to follow the conversation to get a chance to contribute, or at least make myself visible.

There is no break in the conversational flow, like the conversation between old friends. One starts filling in before the first one has finished. Internal references mixed with half-finished sentences and laughter.

I gave myself some slack and gave up the attempt of being part of this conversation. I finished my food. Feeling disappointed, but also angry for the impoliteness and exclusion. I thought of the expression 'It takes two to tango'. It is not just my responsibility. I stood up intending to leave the table. One of the men turned and said directed at me:

'Can you pass with that big belly of yours?'

Looking smilingly at the colleague at the other side of me, I freezed again. Stopping for an instant, the motion of pushing the chair back under the table.

Surprised.

Did he really just say that? I felt perplexed. There is more than plenty of space around the table to pass my colleague, so this must be a joke and not a considerate remark. The colleagues laughed in unison. Continuing their conversation. I left with the feeling of never wanting to have lunch at that table and with those men again. The lunchroom has become a minefield, where I never know when something will blow up in my face.

Memory story 2

I have agreed to eat early lunch with a colleague from my former department, as I have a meeting at 12:30.

As we were eating, more and more colleagues were gathering around the lunch table. My colleague and I talked about his teaching and plans for the coming weekend. As I had finished my food, I prepared for leaving the table.

'Oh well, I think it is time for me to get going so I get to that meeting in time', I said, collecting my stuff. My old colleague looked at me, smiling, and asking:

'Wasn't your meeting at 12:30? Where was it? It is just 12:10 now'.

'Yes, at *Kilen*', I answered, getting up and starting to put my dirty dishes into the dishwasher. A new colleague looked at my old colleague laughingly and said:

'You know, pregnant women are very slow. It is best to give them their time'.

I felt angry. My heart started beating, and I felt the blood flow to my neck and face. Reddening, getting warm cheeks. They knew nothing about what I had to do before the meeting and how much time it takes. I also have my bike, so my pregnancy does not impair my ability of transporting myself around campus. I know saying all that will just incite comments on how I do not understand jokes or that I am being sensitive and emotional as a pregnant woman. It makes me frustrated. There is no good way of answering. My old colleague picks up on the joke.

'Yes. With all that extra weight. It is good you are taking your time. We do not want you to be late'.

Common laughter. Other colleagues around the table started laughing as well. I felt super uncomfortable. It embarrassed me, this unwanted attention from the lunch table. I was also disappointed with my colleague that I knew from my former department, to participate and contribute to the joke. I became the laughingstock of the lunch table. Like a stab in the stomach, I felt an urge to defend myself. But I did not know how.

'Maybe I should call you a taxi? I can arrange with the Head of Department to put aside some funds for preggers taxis. What time do you want me to order the taxi?'

Even more laughter. My thoughts were running wild. How could I get out of this situation without being even more made fun of even more?

'Well, I do need to finish some stuff at the office before I leave for the meeting'. Polite again. Explaining. Trying to render approval or acceptance for my actions. Not showing the disappointment, anger or discomfort. Not having the strategies for how I can put my foot down in a constructive way. Leaving the situation in status quo. Not making them aware of the impact of their sayings and doings. Not standing up for myself. Angry and disappointed.

'Have a nice weekend', I said, leaving the lunch table.

The microimplications of co-workers

As already mentioned in the Introduction, microimplication grasps the meaning ascribed to something (Sara's pregnant belly) by someone (Sara's colleagues) as expressed by that someone's interaction with that something. A microimplication

is when actual action betrays the implied meaning. The notion of microimplications was developed in the course of our workshop. While familiar with the concept of microaggressions (see, e.g., DeSouza, Wesselmann, & Ispas, 2017; Sue et al., 2007), we needed a different term in order to conceive what we could sense happening in the memory stories. The sense of unease is grounded in those small details, those tiny acts that are not aggressive but affective. We acknowledge that some of the interactions from the memory stories can be interpreted as microaggressions. What we suggest is that even if we interpret them as such there is more to these microaggressions than merely aggression, and we want to challenge this feeling of the offensive that comes with naming something as an aggression.

Let us examine the situations in the memory stories: what other strategies could the woman at the microwave have chosen given the implication that she knows that the other part (Sara) is pregnant? She could have ignored it; she could have asked open questions (rather than normative, closed ones that imply a correct answer) if she was adamant to make pregnancy the topic; she could have waited for an invitation to converse about the pregnancy. How could the male senior staff have acted on the implication? They could have ignored the pregnancy; they could have struck up conversation with the new colleague (Sara); they could have abstained from making jokes as well as from participating in laughing; one could have asked the other to stop laughing. How could the colleague that Sara know from her former department have acted on the implication of the pregnant body relative to the time of the meeting? He could have been quiet; he could have checked his assumptions; he could have abstained from participating in building a joke; he could have checked his moral compass; he could have checked whether Sara validated the joke by laughing with them; or he could have countered the first statement made about the speed of pregnant women. In all three instances there were other viable options available; therefore, the particular courses of action are in no way necessary ones. They are actions made legitimate by the implied meaning of the fact of the belly.

A microimplication is an implied meaning made explicit via the act it legitimises and motivates. The implied meaning is not articulated; it is not tested for verity or falsity, but acted upon. So, we have to ask *what microimplications can be read from the particular acts?* They all share the implied meaning that addressing the pregnant body is both a socially and intersubjectively acceptable thing to do – and also in ways that would not seem legitimate, were the female body not pregnant. They differ in the rest: the first act suggests that it is implied that pregnancy is a good thing. The second act implies that it is okay to make a comment on how the pregnant body moves in a room and to joke about the assumed (in)abilities of the pregnant body, but also that to make that comment is appropriate to begin with in light of the prior non-communication between the parties. The laughter implies that it is a fun situation and unless it is read as an act of belittling cruelty, that it is an innocent joke. The third act implies that the speakers know what it means to be pregnant, that they know its capacities and inabilities sufficiently to be able to construct a joke *in situ*.

The microimplications that are linked to the fact of the pregnant belly point to a fundamental problem of self-determination. By being made to mean pregnant in a certain sense by the microimplications of co-workers, Sara is effectively not able to *not* signify pregnancy. She does not determine the meaning of her pregnancy; it has become a social signification. The fact that the meaning ascribed to her as a PhD student is intersubjective is not the issue. The issue is how the implied meaning is acted upon and the short- and long-term effects these carry. Will she, for example, be left out of the Outlook calendar invitation to the next project meeting? During the workshop Sara spontaneously shared a third memory story about one such instance of 'benevolent discrimination' (e.g., Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2018), where presumptions about the fact of the pregnant belly resulted in her being excluded from a meeting – as if she were already on parental leave. Will she be treated as more of a body to take care of than as a skilled mind to interact with? In other words, will she be sidelined, not out of her own actions, decisions and wishes, but by the actions of others based on what they think she means, needs and wants as a pregnant woman?

Strategic dichotomies

There are several semiotic dichotomies emerging from the memory stories: personal/professional, private/professional, body/brain, old/new, familiarity/strangeness, senior/junior, inclusion/exclusion and recognising/ignoring. The point to using the concept of microimplication is to draw attention to how these dichotomies come to be actualised when they inform people's concrete actions. They are not just analytical distinctions (which they certainly also are); they are practical distinctions effectively made by the members of the situation. The sign that organises these various practical distinctions is the visibly pregnant body, the fact of the belly. Sara is effectively interacted with as a junior, as a personal and private person; she is ignored as a professional mind but recognised as a physical body. The opening paragraphs in Memory story 1 spell out the emotional labour (see, e.g., Ashfort & Kreiner, 2002; Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008; Hochschild, 1983) that goes into hiding the fact of the belly in order for Sara's body not to come to the fore at the expense of her brain. And, similarly, her strategy of asking questions to avoid inquiries about her body. Sara's pregnant body is taken as an open invitation for commenting on her body in ways that otherwise seem inappropriate to most people, especially in a work context. Perhaps it, for that reason, is no coincidence that both memory stories are situated in an informal lunch setting.

This text builds on an individual experience, expanded into a collective biography where the affective dimensions of

microimplications are in focus. Our intention is not to generalise this experience as a universal conclusion or explanation of the experience of being pregnant as a PhD student in academia. Nor do we regard this as a stand-alone experience locally produced in the specific academic setting. In this final part, we bring back attention to what happens to bodies entering into an academia not shaped by nor for them. Bodies and subjectivity are traditionally seen as problematic in an academia where logic and objectivity are incontestably held in highest regard as good research practice, shaping the academic culture. Although more and more embodied alternatives are emerging in academia (our piece of writing is just one example of many – see, e.g., Gilmore, Harding, Helin, and Pullen [2019] special issue of *Management Learning* on writing differently), the embodied accounts are just drops in a sea of conventional research norms, cherishing objectivity, distanced/neutral positioning and logic detached from emotion.

The mainstream research norm is objective and disembodied, but the actual university, we contest, is very much embodied. In the concrete setting of the two memory stories, academic embodiment is male (and heteronormative), the type of body suitable for academic work. The standardisation and homogeneity of this particular embodiment universalise the male body, rendering it invisible in an academic context. A body that temporarily (such as a pregnant belly) or constantly does not conform to the embodiment that is academia becomes a visibly present body because it differs from the academic embodiment. It pokes and challenges the traditional academic culture simply by being. In Ahmed's (2012) words, we may say that Sara's pregnant, non-conforming body inhabits an institutional space that does not give her residence. This involuntary being-out-of-place or not-at-home animates resistance to the pregnant body in the androcentric academic department. People act and react to the very present body – the fact of the belly, leaving little or no room for that body to define and act on its own behalf, a process we have described by using the concept of microimplications. From the memory stories we know that people use different strategies to handle a very present body, like the pregnant belly. Individuals with embodied experiences of pregnancy might see it as an opportunity to exchange experiences or a point of connection. Others, with no physical experience of being pregnant, might use jokes and witty comments to cope with the fact of the belly. Although the strategies are different, they have at least one thing in common: the fact of the belly merges the private sphere with the professional, and by that forecloses opportunities for the pregnant PhD student to act as an academic subject that can engage in and hence live the PhD journey.

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Entangled in Scholarly Institutionalising – The Travails of the 'Mature Age' PhD Student

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> Today's society is no longer Foucault's disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer 'obedience-subjects' but 'achievement-subjects'. They are entrepreneurs of themselves. (Han, 2015, p. 8)

When I was asked to contribute a piece to the Unplugged section of *M@n@gement*, I did not think that I would write about what follows. But as I wait the approval of an extension to my PhD, I am contending with what it means to be a 'mature age' student entangled in the institutional affordances and constraints of the situation I find myself in.

Last week, I was chatting with 'Krista', a peer PhD student, while waiting for my youngest daughter to turn up for lunch. We are both in Politics and International Relations, and she, like me, is a 'mature age' student, coming to the end of her time as a doctoral student. We randomly grab moments in corridors, kitchens and outside buildings to chat and compare our experiences and frustrations with what feels like an infantilising of our position as doctoral students, women who have substantive and extensive professional experience outside academia (in the institutions of the public sector). As we stood outside the library, my daughter turned up at the point we were moaning about the impact of doing a PhD on our sense of embodied selves – the institutionalising practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) that we feel have deconstructed who we are and that are affecting our bodies in the form of loss of confidence, anxiety and even joint pain. My daughter quipped about how relieved she was to not have to go a class or write assessments, having just come out of 19 years of educational institutionalisation – she graduated last week with an honours degree in Biochemistry from another university. In response, we described what happens when you hand in the printed copy of your thesis in our esteemed seat of learning – you literally get a lollipop – admittedly quite a large piece of candy with the university logo impressed in it and you get to pick from two flavours. We suggested that after all the intellectual, physical and emotional labour accompanying the production of a thesis, a lollipop for women of our age was

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an insufficient symbolic recognition of our efforts. We appreciate the apprentice-like aspects of undertaking a PhD (Raineri, 2013), but handing out lollipops seems at odds with transitioning from being an apprentice to a journeywoman scholar. So what have I learnt about the institutional activities associated with performing 'doctorateness' before finishing? What is the elusive mix of qualities required of me in the course of acquiring doctorateness, things like, 'intellectual quality and confidence, independence of thinking, enthusiasm and commitment, ability to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities' (Denicolo & Park, 2013, p. 193).

Elements of the work entailed in the doing of a PhD embody a range of institutionalising doings (Yazdani & Shokooh, 2018). In the course of becoming enrolled in scholarly-ness, I have felt at times that these activities echo the performance management practices I had been immersed in as a public servant and what I observed in my ethnographic fieldwork with local government and National Health Service (NHS) managers in Scotland. My university's 'quirky' celebratory reward from the administrative processes associated with the submission of a PhD, materialised in childlike condensed carbohydrate on a stick, seems like an appropriate point of departure to reflect on features of institutionalising I have encountered, been enveloped in and begun to embody. I want to sketch, how, as part of the doctoral process; threads and fleeting connections of practices with isomorphic tendencies have repeated through life, in my professional experiences and my conversations with managers in my doctoral fieldwork. I also reveal as I have passed the 50 age mark, how these reproductions are generating a weariness and a newly felt cynicism, that at this time has generated unease about where these feelings will take me as I creep closer to the finishing line.

However, before I go any further, I need to be explicit that I do not want to convey that these reactions are a totalising, or reduction, of my doctoral journey. I have wanted to do a PhD since my, now a scientist, daughter was a baby, and so I have loved having the time and space to satiate my inquisitive disposition, to read profusely, deliberate on my professional life worlds and discover the joys of ethnographic writing – the personal delights of what seems like spatiotemporal excess in a time that appears unable to afford this – so let me provide some context.

When embarking on this PhD undertaking, my initial application was informed, in part, by a desire to make sense of my own experiences of, and curiosities about, collaborative working as a public sector manager. My biography has been shaped by environmental science studies, activism and formative participation in feminist collective organisations – anti-institutional configurations – where debates about power dynamics were everyday work, as part of wider movements engaged in challenging traditional hierarchies to advocate for shared power structures. The immersion in my late adolescence into collectivity has had a lasting legacy in the normative values I enacted. However, given subsequent employment experiences, I could also be seen to be marked by the discursive manoeuvrings of new public management and new public governance (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006) and managerial preoccupations with performance management, in my journey through the third sector, adult education, local government, state government and the NHS in Scotland and Australia. Additionally, as a 'non-professional' public servant in professional public sector contexts, I have observed and experienced the consequences of not belonging to a profession, as well as the dynamics between professions (e.g. social workers and clinical psychologists in disability services, youth workers and teachers in educational settings), and wondered about the effects of, what I thought were, institutionalising, professional 'blinkers' in how people worked together. I have also been an actor in collaborative efforts to tackle intractable issues, or working in 'the swamp', as Schall (1995) describes it, and the inertia (Huxham, 2005) that seemed to frequently emerge. On arriving in Scotland in 2008 from Australia, I was immediately struck by what I described as the dense partnership landscape in the public sector and attendant performance management frameworks (Ferry & Scarparo, 2015) – an institutionalising of inter-organisational relations. This moment, in reaction to my experiences to that date, was the trigger for an idea for a PhD. Nonetheless, what might seem self-contradictory, given my interest in matters of collaborative performance, which informed my research questions, I relished the opportunity to escape the performance trap (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018) and have the time to explore matters in detail.

Accordingly, when it came to my doctoral research I was one and the same time an 'outsider' and an 'insider', having had professional and managerial experiences in the particular domains of the public sector I was studying, doing ethnography in the public sector. Sayer (1992) argues that it is not possible for the researcher to stand outside the research and indeed, whilst I did not have any direct work history with the actors involved in the research, I brought my background, values and interpretations to the work of ethnographic research, the experience of an ex-public servant (turned novice ethnographer), who felt her way through inter-organisational ethnography, with a group of managers implementing a mandated collaboration.

So I want to draw out here three threads which I think have travelled through my doctoral experiences that seem to me to tie with and tie me to the doings of a PhD in a Russell Group University in the United Kingdom – institutionalising patterns that have both surprised and disappointed me. These threads are awkward, untidy and unfinished as I am still immersed in both sense-making about and concluding the processes of the PhD and what is playing out in my body at present.

Thread 1 – the consequences of my performance/performative management enactments as a public servant.

Thread 2 – the performance/performative management work of the managers I shadowed in my ethnography.

Thread 3 – the performance/performative management practices that have become entangled in the doings of a doctorate prior to completion.

Thread 1

At the risk of embarrassing myself publically, I want to share what could be regarded as a 'cringe-worthy' extract from my pre-PhD curriculum vitae, the bit called 'personal profile' that I first developed and then adapted from 2008 to 2013 – a representation of my performance-based identity perhaps.

> An energetic, motivated and highly dynamic Manager with strong strategic and communication skills and extensive hands-on experience initiating and building strong partnerships with success in developing and delivering key social, health and care services within a range of settings and with diverse groups.
>
> More than 20 years' of experience in planning, delivery, management and evaluation of national, state and local programmes (including aged and disability care, suicide prevention, domestic violence, mental health, public health, housing, homelessness and youth services) in the public, private and non-government sectors in Australia, United Kingdom and internationally. Wide-ranging experience in operating in environments of complexity and uncertainty and in the context of collaboration.
>
> Expert in outcomes (results) planning and evaluation, change management, service development, policy analysis & training. Specialist in planning, implementing and evaluating evidence-informed interventions, programmes and policies and advice for organisations working in a results-based management environment. Significant experience in the design and facilitation of brain-friendly learning in planning and evaluation approaches, including contribution analysis/outcomes, planning/results-based management in the context of complexity, partnership working and tackling 'wicked issues'. Substantive practice experience in working with diverse groups across urban and rural contexts, including, older people and people with disabilities, survivors of family violence, people with substance abuse and/or mental health issues and vulnerable adults. Chairperson of the Board of Edinburgh Women's Aid, with long-standing involvement in the goveranance of charities.
>
> Ability to adapt quickly and efficiently to working environment. Exceptional interpersonal skills and capacity to learn new skills quickly and apply them successfully. An innovative, loyal, and results-orientated professional, with strong facilitation, community development and interpersonal skills, and proven ability to surpass goals.

Over this period, I had four jobs, and performance management dimensions were routinised features in them all. I was involved in reporting on performance, evaluating performance, training on performance and authoring resources for performance for intra- and inter-organisational purposes. Whilst I have always thought of myself as having a critical stance, a commitment to the qualitative and the narrative, when I look back, I shudder. It reads as a performance, a theatrical act for seeking a part in an organisation – a partial, performative representation. What the extract also does not show is that this text was co-created in conjunction with a UK recruitment advisor, whose 'expertise' I sought to translate my professional experience when I moved from Australia. It also unsurprisingly does not reveal the accumulated, embodied consequences over the course of my career roles, where I sought increasingly senior positions enmeshed in institutionalised performance management – asthma, arrhythmia and anxiety.

Thread 2

As I got to know the managers I was shadowing in the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent that the two longest serving managers in the team had had some problems with their health and that the situation they found themselves in was fraught. The pressures and consequences of NHS performance management in the UK have been well documented (Dickinson, 2014), and having worked in the NHS, I was familiar with the performance management frameworks in use in Scotland. Nevertheless, seeing at close quarters what these actors were undergoing not only reminded me of my own experiences, but revealed the personal impacts of being responsible for the performance of various services in a context of accelerated action.

> … [W]hat's interesting is the NHS has moved quite significantly into measuring things in real time and they're evaluating in real-time, adjusting and making changes accordingly and having to account, at the most, you know, with a time-lag of weeks or months, for some activities and this basically against very clear performance standards and targets within the HEAT framework for Scotland Performs, that we have to report on. … to be honest I'm running out of steam, it's just getting really, really, more and more difficult, instead of easier. You would think that with more experience, you'd be more sanguine about it. … But I believe in the concept of what we're trying to do, I just have 'mebbe' a little bit of cynicism about the way they're going to do and whether some of the kinda protectionism, game playing, hopefully only slows it up, but doesn't prevent it. But I could see someone like [the chief officer] being pissed off and going why would I keep going, seriously, so I'm trying not to be cynical about it and in the future might hold a change of personnel because that's what happens. ('Stuart', 6 June 2016)
>
> [T]he last five years, really I think the kinda pace of everything in the NHS has just dramatically changed, you know, to the point where we're needing to justify things with a level of data which is, in the moment, you know, it's not about sort of doing a bit of a retrospective, how have things been over the last 12 months and reporting it. We're talking about, you know, reporting things within the month, or within the week or within the day, it's the performance targets … which needs to be fed up nationally, so in times of dips in performance, like we've had a really, shoddy couple

> of weeks from our emergency access standard performance, to the point where, we've not quite got the kind of, Scottish Government coming in with their task team to sort the problem out, but we are having to report them on a 30-minute basis … it's not just managing those expectations internally, because you've got to manage our teams and kind of try and not completely protect them from that, but you have to work with different people differently, don't you and when you've got a team of people, who you want to be productive and well and enjoy their work and all those sort of things, and you've got us at this level, with, soaking up some of the pressure from the executive team, managing the expectations and challenges that the staff have on the ground and trying to handle all of that, in very different ways, …. I think that's, that is a massive problem for us I would say. We are working in the moment, we are reacting to the day's operational crisis and not giving ourselves enough time to think about what we need to do to fix that, to stop that stuff. … If I had a clone I would ask them to deal with all of the reactive, in-the-day stuff and allow me to get some time to try get up stream a bit, so we could fix it. … the motivation or the imperative to get something done, is driven by something probably more reputational, than necessarily outcome focused. And so depending upon the authenticity and how genuine your senior leaders are, how much they really care about making a difference, to their local population or whether they're actually they're just doing a job, because it's well paid and they like the buzz of it, depending on that, the completion of documentation and the 'being seen to be being collaborative' to satisfy an internal audit report, is probably more of a motivator, for some, than for others, so, and people will be very good at just kind of … and no disrespect to chief execs, cos I know they've got massive amounts work on their plate and they're spinning so many different things, it must be a horrible place to be at times and so much of it probably is, kind of, presentational and can't possibly be genuine or authentic for some people, but I'm pretty sure that reputationally, that is probably a big issue for our local systems, we will want to be doing something that presentationally, looks like, it's the right thing to do. I'm a real cynic it's terrible. I know that, absolutely, in fact, if the kids weren't probably as young as they were, I'd probably, be actively, looking to go somewhere else [laughs] … you know it really is difficult. ('Samuel', 6 June 2016)

The temporal rhythms of the performance management that Stuart and Samuel talked about, I felt, were, in part, attempts to know more and more, at increasing frequency, in minutiae and producing heightened responses on the part of managers (Ylijoki, 2016). This effort had become a taken-for-granted feature of demanding daily work, a ceaselessness of having to get more and more done, a centripetal acceleration that shapes organising. This modus operandi from acute health settings penetrated activities beyond the hospital, even when the manager occupied a non-acute role. Similarly, the language used in the hospital for daily work expressed hurriedness, a squeeze on time, with words like, 'huddle', 'safety brief', 'surge capacity' and 'discharge flow', part of everyday vernacular. Despite the distance, the geographical separation from government, the extractive forces of performance appeared to pull effort towards the centre, as managers and many others danced to the demands of an acute systems orientation that felt as though it was reaching a breaking point. Resources were being stretched, but managers worked to ensure that appearances were maintained, the semblance of control and the authoritativeness of interventions pervaded everyday workings. However, as one of the strategic planners expressed to me:

> I think there's a real risk in 'Kintra', because it's very busy, and the numbers of people are small that either, one, something gets missed, or people just get totally burned out, because they're trying to … well they have to be really busy because they're busy doing all the stuff they need to do … ('Sharon', 21 June 2016)

These managers had paid a price in the relentlessness of the work of the NHS, a marriage broke down, both of them, in the previous 12 months, had taken lengthy sick leave to recover from work-related stress, and less than a year from my exit from the field, they had left the organisation and the area. After spending time with these managers, despite my long-standing involvement and ongoing interests in the fields of care work and public management, I thought I could never do these kinds of jobs again. I am not prepared anymore to pay the performative toll.

Thread 3

Just over 2 years ago, about 6 months after I finished fieldwork, immersed in transcribing and analysing my data, I was told that my father's health was in a parlous state. I returned to Australia to get a rapid lesson in the state of aged care in rural, regional Queensland and to say goodbye to my Dad before he passed away. On this rushed, emotion-filled visit, I also spent time with my mother in the capital city of Queensland, and given my previous work roles, I quickly realised something was wrong with her, something I now know is vascular dementia. These life events that I frankly was not prepared for (even with my background) immersed as they were in matters of care for older people, are not far from the topic of my thesis. What has felt like a strange, serendipitous, personal and academic collision in the midst of an ethnography of care organising has not been lost on me. However, whilst these events were significant, I did not feel I could take time out of the PhD, I needed to press on regardless. In hindsight this was not the wisest decision, but in the meantime what has become clear is that another life event is taking place in my own body – menopause – another matter I gave little thought to until its unfolding symptoms have begun to drain me as I try to crawl to the end of the thesis.

Over time, performative logics have encroached and nested themselves in my work, and whilst I thought I might escape them by trying a career shift into academia, it appears that now even doctorateness has incorporated the institutionalising mimicry of the discourses in new public management, or what some refer to as the 'neo-liberal' university (Kelly, 2016). I first

became aware of this, when attending conferences and doctoral workshops where I learnt about the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) and having to consider how to make our work REF-able (McCulloch, 2017). Having previously worked as an evaluator, I was shocked to see the lack of evaluative sophistication and criticality in how this UK higher education governance process was being discussed. There have been lengthy debates in the worlds of evaluation (often outside of academia) going back over 10 years about performance management, the value of evaluation and the methodological challenges associated with measuring impact (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008).

Adding to this is my awareness that before I even hand in the thesis, I am expected to be working towards publishing journal papers, possibly book chapters, as well as capture any activity that might be useful to enhance my CV. All this effort for the ambitious target to become a '4 × 4', a term I first heard at a management conference 3 years ago, which I initially thought was a reference to a large vehicle, or a block of wood. This goal of publishing four papers in four star journals was revelatory, given that I did not understand the significance of the star ratings of journals. At the same conference, another academic showed me their ready reckoner of journals that laid out all the star ratings from 4 to 1. I was told I needed to familiarise myself with these journals, with the aim of getting published in the 4-star ones. As a political science student who interlopes in academic management and organisational studies events I was shocked, how was I supposed to do that? But now I see this individualised effort coupled with the wider research performance efforts of the university in the REF, and how the impact of individual academic's work is being conceptualised and appropriated for evidencing institutional research quality. Needless to say I have not yet even written any journal articles.

Twisted threads

As I edit the final chapters of my thesis, my body is not cooperating, asthma has gripped me now for over 6 months, and menopause is revealing the ageing of my body in ways I do not want to acknowledge. So is it menopause that is actually making this whole PhD endeavour complicated, or have institutionalising practices enrolled me into particular ways of performing doctorateness that are just exhausting? At this stage, I think it is an entangling of a menopausal body with these practices that is engendering dissonance and feelings of doubt and weariness. Why should I bother? I had not appreciated the precariousness and the performative work in higher education, and now I am not sure what to do next. But then again, the outcome is unknown and so is the embodied price to pay, but as of today, as a menopausal body, I feel too tired to contemplate a life as a middle-aged 'early-career' scholar. BUT, I am not yet prepared to give up, I am keeping hold of why I wanted to do a PhD and that this is a decade-long personal aspiration no matter what comes after. And so, in my own small way and despite the travails, I am endeavouring to enact resistance through the troubling of the writing conventions of the thesis itself, an 'against the grain', personal attempt to embody a different way of doing ethnographic writing as doctorateness (Weatherall, 2018). Whether it matters is the fact that remains to be seen.

> There are always interstitial, residual, marginal, irrelevant, recalcitrant and plain contradictory elements that escape any attempt to identify, govern, and stabilize a given … arrangement. (Jessop, 2004, p. 163)

> These documents can delude. But more than this they constitute part of a "turn-of-the-century international language of good governance" (Strathern, 2006, p. 195), the style of which, the ubiquitous bullet point for example, is non-transformative. These documents are not open to intellectual operations. "They allow no growth. They create no knowledge" (Strathern, 2006: 196; Hunter, 2008, p. 510)

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Queering the PhD Journey: An Autoethnographical Discussion of 'Fit'

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Fit

> 'Have you always been a sort of … square peg in a round hole?' I'm asked earnestly by a fellow PhD candidate in the Management Discipline one morning. I'm waiting to step into a supervisor meeting, engaging in a little social chitchat with other students working in our open-plan space. I've been sharing my mid-year plan to travel home to the country town where I have family, friends, dogs. The mental struggle to place me in a rural environment must be equal to the labour of forcing a square peg into just such a round hole. I take my square-peg status into my meeting, sharing it laughingly with my supervisors as we settle in to discuss the latest draft of my literature review. I've taken no offense – perhaps I'm even sparkling a little bit with pride in my perceived difference – maybe square is a complimentary shape of peg to be.

In the pursuit of new knowledge, I as a PhD candidate seek to contribute unique work to the Critical Entrepreneurship Studies field, to establish myself in academia as a researcher, as an expert. It is a privilege to be here, which is not to say I did not work hard for this opportunity. The PhD journey is built upon a many-layered history that gives us a place to stand and begin from, over and over, in footsteps of many, many others.

This journey is shaped by a clearly stated required outcome. Regular hurdles, boxes to tick. It is around this structure that we as students congregate – a common ground and a shared focus. Our roughest edges are worked off with coursework designed to bring us up to speed with approaches to critical reading and writing, to flex a stronger grasp on our methodological approach – to develop an ability to explain ontology, epistemology. We learn ways to fit, to be fit for purpose. Some things are backwards; we know what we're meant to know, the level we'll be working to in 3 years, but we have to learn by doing. We're aiming for an end point, and we expect to arrive somewhere if we've done it right, but we're drawing our own maps.

I am a square peg in a round hole. I watch others in the Management Discipline thrive on moments of fit; lightbulb moments explained in language that is newly learnt, shiny, fresh out of the box. These are colleagues, and I am pleased to witness the satisfaction and confidence at their fingertips. They slip into this language, it shapes them. They flex outwards and then settle into knowing.

I speak with a friend over lunch on Sydney's hottest day so far – it is 36°C and still only spring. The warmth sets the tempo of our conversation. We reflect, return and revisit pieces of past conversations, think aloud, double back to correct and revise ourselves. I take comfort in her companionship; my thoughts are often half-formed, unfinished, uncertain – the space left around these doesn't prohibit connection or understanding.

She asks me what I learned, undertaking my coursework – the semester has almost finished. I take my time before explaining that I understand now that there are places I do not have to belong and will not fit. My own strength comes in the other times, when my classmates are reduced to something

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like panic as they grapple with theory and language. They visit the sense of not fitting, while I live there. I breathe it in as reassurance, a familiar friend.

In my first year, I regularly come unstuck in coursework classes discussing theoretical approaches that have 'the nod' from our discipline – the more I learn about other ways of thinking, the less accessible certainty becomes.

The PhD journey

This 'unsticking' often feels like it is meant to be a cause of panic. It seems a failure of sorts, to be adrift in such significant concepts, theories and approaches. I read clearly on the faces of other members of the class the unease caused by confusion with new ideas. My classmates mutter shared gripes with each other, fuelled by this panic, a façade of ontological stability shaken in the face of such a challenge (Rumens, 2018).

I know so little. I know less than I did when we started here. I don't know enough to do this. I know nothing.

By the end of a day of theory, my brain is packed full of the flecks and fragments that sparked recognition, interest, a new idea. I understand that this is exactly what this class is for, and as I travel by train from university to home, I work through that same confusion expressed by classmates. I don't know anything; nothing I think or have thought is going to work for a legitimate project. Everyone else knows more, has more planned, has grounded themselves in reality in a way that our supervisors and assessors will recognise immediately as the Real Deal, whereas I am bringing some half-formed, barely flexed concept from a feminist inkling into a legitimate Management Discipline space.

Who am I, exactly, to be taking up this space?

We work up to a presentation of our research project, around the 1 year mark. I double down on what I don't know, and zoom in on it, writing and rewriting and re-rewriting a set of research questions that I am not going to understand the value of until after I have finished the project. I breathe into this not knowing the same way you are meant to take a deep breath as a physiotherapist adjusts muscles and bones – my body is being reshaped by the sort of desk job that makes me wear my stress in my shoulders. As I am writing this, I consciously correct my posture.

Another responsibility – to take care of an unruly body. I commit to 3 years of wrangling a mess of just such unruly thoughts and suspicions into smoothed and rounded sentences, arguments, chapters. My body takes on a cartoon-like quality, with a head large and busy with thoughts; my hands nimble for quick typing, scrolling, scribbling. I wonder where my body fits into a doctoral thesis, a research process entirely concerned with order and outcomes. I am determined to bring my whole self to my fieldwork, to consider my physicality as a researcher, to know how it feels to sit by participants building a social enterprise, to consider where and how I fit as an outsider inside (Weatherall, 2019). I will unavoidably bring this self to my writing, too. We learn the skills calling for us to tidy our researcher lives – to write away the bumpy, rough corners and counterpoints to the theories and practices that will make us right, robust and real. To write ourselves to fit. If I am thinking differently, how might I write differently?

Looking beyond the academy

I am learning to be an activist. I want things to be different. I want liberation for all, from violence of all kinds. Dismantling systemic oppression looks like many things to me – it's the sort of responsibility I want, need and choose to belong to. I want to be radical in the way that means returning to roots (Liu, 2018). I protest, march, argue and make a public point of saying what I believe. I am unlearning the need for things to fit together tidily, in my life, firstly, then in my ways of seeing and knowing – lastly, I work to unlearn it in my writing. But knowing how to be radical in the academy is an exercise in interdisciplinarity – in seeking critical voices from an unruly cacophony of spaces, I look to Black feminist voices, queer voices and disabled activist voices. I commit to a critical practice of intersectionality, a practice of the sort that calls for a centring of marginalised stories (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981, 1984). I look to others who know the systems of oppression I am fighting more intimately than me; how else can we know the reach of such systems without hearing from those who have faced them, eye to eye?

My practice of intersectionality owes everything to the activists I hear from every day. I learn newly critical ways of seeing systemic oppression from the articulate, passionate, and sometimes furious sometimes funny folks I keep in my orbit due to social media. Critical reactions to events in the social and political realms happen on my timeline in real time; I learn to see and uncover those systems that were previously shielded by my own privilege. A regular day in the news cycle becomes a testament to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Hooks, 1981). Critiques of heteronormativity identify shades of violence from the assumption of norms, to limitation of rights, to denial of humanity and to loss of life.

I learn by watching others perform activism, advocacy and solidarity. The more I witness, the more I learn, and the braver I get. These are the artists, the writers, those working in the non-profit sector. My project is unavoidably shaped by them, and yet there is no place in my carefully curated list of references for me to truly credit their impact for the ways it is felt. We can look to others to inform our way of taking apart the world. Maybe a poem can do it, maybe a song can do it, maybe a Twitter exchange can do it. Lorde calls us to poetry as a site of activism, a tangible way of connecting emotion to action.

"For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence" (Lorde, 2007, p. 37). I observe such poetic defiance in the form of gorgeous dancing queer Black activists on Instagram – truth to power spoken from Aboriginal playwrights and championed by gay Chinese-Australian writers. I fill my ears with queer podcasters critiquing exclusion of trans People of Colour from conversation, and hear the sort of savage, witty takedowns that have me double over with laughter and a thrill of joy and danger, to hear such words spoken aloud. I too am emboldened to speak and write my own verses, to sit witness to spoken word performances eliciting sensory overload. This confirmation is a necessity. Because of this, I continue to exist.

Nobody fits

I understand that this particular journey is an apprenticeship. We hear this often – we're here to learn the skills we'll need to build and make our place in academia. Sometimes this makes it feel as though we could be studying anything – but whenever I observe something to this effect aloud, I am bumped back into place by a reminder that this project makes us an 'expert' in our field, that we're building knowledge where there previously was none. There is a balance, then, between the journey and the destination. Either way, what tries to pass itself off as freedom is a requirement to carve something out of nothing – but it's a very particular piece of nothing, with a shortlist of approved tools for carving. There are giant's shoulders that require standing upon.

I am a square peg in a round hole. There can be a point of pride, even amusement and fun, where a fear of not fitting is meant to be. My evident embrace and enjoyment of difference is a threat and a promise, questioned by other PhD candidates even as it is recognised. Somehow, my presence becomes a reassurance. If I have permission to be here in all my evident difference, asking questions of the theory we have all committed to shaping ourselves to, then any other person seeking to fit, to round their rough edges, can be confident that their chances are better than mine. We are a community drawn together by this particular experience, and yet we are learning how to compare ourselves – to decide on the strengths of others in relation to our own, to understand through a list of vaguely defined criteria who is 'the best' at which parts. We know soon we'll be competing for funding, places on lists, prizes to list on CVs and jobs. A neoliberal institution such as a university dabbles in concepts of collegiality and community, but it is quickly made obvious that these are things we ultimately must make for ourselves if we truly want them. We are invited and expected to shape ourselves – to fit in alongside others in a way that means our work can be kept separate. Still, stand-alone careers are built on collaborative projects and papers. I have got a wish list of co-authors.

The PhD journey is a beginner's guide to a world of competition we are going to be part of for the rest of our careers if we stay in academia. I am not meant to say it out loud, I know that. There is a pretence of protection from the harsh realities of the academy, but we all know, told by supervisors and senior staff, how things work. With this is the implication, always, of the value of fitting in. If I am to be a square peg, I should at least imply that I would like to be a round one. It should be made explicit that I am willing to fit, as best I can. Instead, I find myself in pleasant rounds of self-interrogation during weekly reflections on my project:

How was I an activist today?

Does my fondness for messiness make me an enemy of academia?

*I've already spent so much time on this work – the reading and writing about the crushing structures of oppression we're all chipping away at. Sometimes we're chipping carefully – a *tap tap* with a chisel made of arms and hands. Sometimes it's a huge hammer that doesn't land. Sometimes I think maybe we're doing the work of a river, wearing slowly and stubbornly until we're in a valley.*

I learn, as I go, to temper expressing my comfortability with not knowing. To keep quiet in particular spaces. I muse aloud that I'm still working out which theory is going to be the right theory for my work, and a slightly concerned fellow candidate takes it upon themselves to sit down beside me, help me work this out, as if we are not constantly shifting through this process. As if we are not all uncertain, fluid and able to be revised over and over (Adams & Jones, 2011). Speaking uncertainty, a tone with a question to it, a laugh at the periphery of it – again my physical body betrays the ways in which I cannot fit. I am losing my grasp on this metaphor, or it is losing its grasp on me.

I learn by unlearning

As a queer student working on a critical project grounded in intersectionality, perhaps I am not a typical management discipline PhD candidate. I am constantly shifting the language of my project to explain it to those outside my field; I end up using words I am working consciously against just for ease of description. When I say I'm examining diversity in start-up companies, this is acceptable as a noble goal. Perhaps some sense can then be made of my clearly feminist wry commentary; does it explain my short hair, tattooed arms, band t-shirt and button-downs; the pile of books by Hooks (1984), Ahmed (2006), Moraga and Anzaldua (1983) on my desk? When I work to explain that I am curious about ways in which to examine interlocking systems of oppression, the tensions between empowerment and negotiation, I am increasingly foreign to much of the crowd. A senior academic calls my project 'brave' at a conference after I deliver a paper, and I know this is not a compliment. A squarer and squarer peg.

Finding a place for queer theory in critical entrepreneurship studies might be simple – after all, there are very few papers to work through for my literature review. I guess we call this the much desired research gap, but to me it feels like the sort of gap that could swallow me whole, squared edges or no. The round hole becomes larger and larger; I am pushed ever outwards. In contemplating just how I might queer my project, from theory to methodology to findings, I seek broader considerations of queering within organisational studies. Rumens (2018) offers me something of this feeling of being seen and understood I find often in queer work; he offers his own pursuit of 'queer' as an intellectual and political practice of resisting the 'regimes of the normal' – the normal, we assume, a rounded shape. He explains that traditional research calls for loyalty to convention or discipline; queer methodologies are by their nature disloyal, the way queer theory is disloyal, to binaries, hierarchies, concrete definitions built on norms and assumptions (Rumens 2018).

I grapple with queering my project as I grapple with being queer in a discipline historically adverse to considering other ways of living, loving, seeing, being and working. Embodied, unstable, messy ways. I am learning my way around the ideas and the ways of speaking that are called for and appropriate to adhere to as an apprentice. Critical theory. Social constructionist. Post-structuralist. Dialectical. I say 'adverse to' and 'appropriate'; challenging this (white) gentleman's agreement to respect an academy built on hundreds of years of understanding the right way to be and do is so foreign as to be implicitly discouraged, rather than viewed as any real threat. What would they say if they knew my critical voice and my academic agenda are fuelled by this disloyalty to hierarchy? How might I belong somewhere I am not backing continued success for? Is there some other way to fit?

Queering the PhD journey, like queering my research, starts with a particular way of seeing systemic shaping of processes and ends up, as always, about structures of power. I seek approaches founded on challenge and disruption that concede that they are works-in-progress, working to be flexible and mobile (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). "We have come to realise that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we – white black straight queer female male – are connected and interdependent" (Bambara, 1983, p. 1). If we are connected, what lies between? What lies beyond? What can we make of this, from this?

We build skills that become passages of access to legitimacy. We seek even the slightest of footholds in a smoothed, rounded surface. I place my feet atop the steps of many others. Sturdy places to step, if not a place to rest. A place to make a mark, a signal – this way. This way has been traversed by other academics disloyal to categories, to fit, to process. I too work to allow for the messiness of my chosen field, and refuse to abandon work because it is complicated (Crenshaw, 2017).

A different journey

Queerness is a constant and inescapable dialogue I hold with and within myself. Queerness is seeing that the norms we have all learnt and that shape our day-to-day lives are flawed and full of contradictions. For me, right now, to be queer is to be unsurprised by a failure of a system that promises to work for us. To allow us to believe that we might fit. To be resolved to constant negotiation of power dynamics in the research process (McDonald, 2013). Queerness is squareness coming face to face with roundness.

This PhD journey does not have a beginning or an end. It began for me years before I sat at this desk, when I first began to write and revel in the power of words on pages. It will not end at submission, or graduation. Some parts will weave their way into my work for years and years to come. As researchers, we might do better to accept and believe that we are always in the middle, and can only know from there (Ashcraft, 2018).

We are speed-reading; handing in imperfect papers and applying for conferences with abstracts that do not have our full confidence.

I learn the rules as I go, like learning a language that will help me get from place to place. There is room to move – ways to abandon absolute squareness in favour of fuzzy edges from which unexpected things might emerge to be known (Ashcraft, 2018). I am growing to realise that the powerful knowledge I can hold in the face of uncertainty is an understanding of how fluid and malleable my research is and will be. I have membership in the ongoing, collective project of unlearning and relearning.

I do not fit. Sometimes that is the only thing I know for sure. I hold into it until I can find ground under my feet to step back into my earnest analysis – the critical stance I still find difficult to say aloud in places where many systems of oppression live and demand particular performances from my brain, my hands and my body. I push back; I try my best to know and interrogate myself as a researcher working on constantly shifting ground. I am a square peg in a round hole, intrigued by the points of connection and the spaces between.

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