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## **What lies beneath: organisational responses to powerful stakeholders**

### **Abstract**

This article takes recourse to a particular branch of French Pragmatic Sociology, namely, Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006 [1991]) 'orders of worth' paradigm, as a lens through which to both explore the misalignment between espoused values and retrospective discourses and illustrate the underlying motivations behind decision-making in an organisation within the creative industries sector. By virtue of its contributions at the organisational, social, and sectorial levels, our study contributes to extant debates pertaining to individual agency versus structural constraints as well as demonstrating the heterogeneity of modes of formal compliance to wider institutionalised legitimacy. In so doing, it builds upon recent work that seeks to broaden the notion of value in the creative industries, while, simultaneously, calling for greater heterogeneity in policymaking in the sector through an ongoing process of 'creative conflict'.

**Key words:** creative industries; French Pragmatic Sociology; orders of worth; conflict; legitimacy

## **Introduction**

In a policy document published shortly after its 1997 UK election victory, the New Labour government defined the creative industries as ‘those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property’ (DCMS, 1998: 4). This definition, maintained by subsequent UK governments, contains two imperatives, creativity and potential for wealth generation, whose interplay had been the subject of heated discussions for decades (Belfiore, 2004, 2015, 2020; Caves, 2000, 2003; Flew, 2012; Hartley, 2005; Hesmondghalgh, 2007; Jeffcutt et al., 2000). These ongoing discussions are characterised by a notable emphasis on art’s potential for wealth generation, rather than art being regarded as an end in and of itself (Belfiore, 2004, 2015, 2020; Vestheim, 1994; Cunningham and Flew, 2019), which suggests that policy makers consider a profit-driven rationale to be effective for legitimising public support in the creative industries (Throsby, 2010). While gaining a certain level of legitimacy amongst socially powerful groups, such as the government and the press, is a prerequisite for the sustainability of any organisational activity (Devers et al., 2009; Helms et al., 2019; Hudson and Okhuysen, 2014), the fact that the UK’s creative industries sector is primarily subsidised means that it also needs to secure a high level of acceptance from both the general public (upon whose taxes they depend) and artists who are applying for funding. Consequently, organisational actors with responsibility for funding decisions in the creative industries have the delicate task of meeting the demands of various stakeholders, whose values are almost invariably hard to reconcile.

This paper examines how this balancing act was handled by a national arts funder in the UK, which was established in accordance with a governmental demand for such bodies to adopt a distinctly commercial/industrial approach to all aspects of their work. We discuss

this case through the theoretical lens of French Pragmatic Sociology (FPS), with a particular focus on the 'orders of worth' framework developed by Boltanski and Thévenot in their book *On Justification* (2006 [1991]). We chose this paradigm because of its conceptualisation of conflict as an ongoing process of meaning-making, during which individuals and cultural/institutional frameworks both enable and constrain each other (Frère and Jaster, 2019; Silber, 2016). This perspective is thus expedient for studying an agency whose activities are characterised by a continual struggle to reconcile demands often grounded in conflicting values.

Through recourse to the orders of worth framework, we explore misalignments between espoused values and retrospective discourses as a means through which to unveil the underlying motivations of the key decision-makers within the organisation under examination. In this respect, our results can be said to make a contribution at the organisational, social, and sectorial levels. At an organisational level, we identify important misalignments between actors' actions and discourses as well as the reasons for this dissonance, which, in most cases, is driven by the pursuit of legitimacy. This ties in with broader sociological debates about individual agency versus the constraints of legitimacy-conferring institutional forces, insofar as our results shed light on the limitations that thwart individual actors' attempts (despite their critical capacities) to change the wider social order that they claim to oppose. Finally, taking into account the specific for the creative industries conflicting demands, we build on recent work that has sought to broaden the way in which value is defined within a sector dominated by profit-driven policies and rhetoric (Cunningham and Flew, 2019; Belfiore, 2020). In accordance with FPS's foregrounding of the power of actors' discourses to change the institutionalised social order through ongoing disputes (Frère and Jaster, 2019), we call for the inclusion of a broader array of dissonant voices within policymaking in the creative industries sector via a process of 'creative conflict'.

The paper is structured as follows: we begin by outlining the main concepts and developments associated with the theoretical perspective that frames our research (FPS), paying particular attention to Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006 [1991]) orders of worth paradigm. We then explain both how this conceptual framework has been used to enrich sociological studies of organisations and why it is expedient for the present study that examines an agency operating within the creative industries sector. Next, we outline the methodology that was used, before then proceeding to present and discuss our findings in relation to extant research. We conclude by discussing the contributions of the study to the field.

### **Espoused values and organisational actors' reflexivity viewed through the lens of French Pragmatic Sociology**

The origins of FPS, which is sometimes referred to as either 'French pragmatist sociology' or 'pragmatic sociology of critique', can be traced back to mid-1980s France, a period that was dominated by Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociological thought. The latter has often been regarded as a sociology of culture (Silber, 2003), considering its strong emphasis upon the constraints imposed by cultural and institutional forces and the resulting internalised dispositional properties of social actors (Jagd, 2011). The need to move from a sociology of culture towards a sociology of action, which placed a greater focus upon empirical research and actors' critical capacities, was one of the main catalysts for FPS's emergence. The foregrounding of actors' discourses and their capacity to change institutionalised social elements via ongoing disputes (Frère and Jaster, 2019: 20) is a key element in the *rapprochement* that some scholars have made over the last decade between FPS and American pragmatism, particularly the work of John Dewey (Blokke, 2011; Cefaï et al., 2015; Frère and Jaster, 2019; Silber, 2016; Susen and Turner, 2014; Thévenot, 2011). Dewey's

approach to the role of social actors is wholly different to Bourdieu's<sup>1</sup>: while Bourdieu's critical sociology attempts to reveal the conditions of domination and social reproduction that are hidden from actors and to which they comply from a position of 'ignorance', Dewey focuses on actors' capacity for inquiry and critical adjustment in situations, which, in turn, call social orders into question.

FPS, and especially the orders of worth paradigm, includes both these levels of analyses and casts light upon the relations inherent between them (Thévenot, 2011). This branch of FPS emerged in the 1980s as a result of the establishment of a research unit entitled 'Groupe de Sociologie Pragmatique et Morale' at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. The scholars that comprised this research unit, some of whom had hitherto been adherents of Bourdieu's critical sociology, wanted to address the question of critique from a perspective that would enable them to utilise empirical data drawn from discourses produced by social actors themselves (Boltanski, 2011: 2327). Chief amongst this group were Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (two of the group's founders, along with Michael Pollak), who, combining theoretical analysis of classical political philosophy texts with their own empirical research, wrote the landmark treatise *De la justification: Economies de la grandeur* in 1991, which was subsequently published in English in 2006 under the title *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. In this seminal FPS text (Baert and Carreira da Silva, 2010; Barthe et al., 2013; Frère and Jaster, 2019; Silber, 2016; Taupin, 2015), the authors developed a system of evaluation that highlights the importance of making explicit the positions from which critiques are made. Here, the notion of 'position' encapsulates geographical, socio-political and hierarchical components. All these inform the present study, whose findings are framed by the socio-political context of the organisation in a specific country as well as the hierarchical positioning of all the participants.

According to Boltanski and Thévenot, when actors defend their own opinions and decisions (or criticise those of others), they invoke disparate concepts of what is just or coherent in order to attest to the justness or legitimacy of their own stance. The orders of worth framework provides a normative framework of ‘what is just’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 74) based on six archetypal constructions (‘worlds for worth’ or ‘polities’), which themselves are underpinned by six corresponding principles of what constitutes the common good: in the inspired world, creativity is the main value; the domestic world is grounded in tradition; in the world of fame, worth depends on reputation; in the civic world, the common good is determined by the collective will; the market world rests on profit generated via competitive trade; while the industrial world is based on efficiency. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the six worlds of worth identified by Boltanski and Thévenot<sup>ii</sup>.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Social actors involved in a given situation can shift from one measure of worth to another during the course of critiques and justifications, while agreements are more difficult to achieve when people invoke different orders of worth to justify their position (for example, in the context of the creative industries sector, someone who is seeking to legitimise their argument through the lens of industrial worth might wholly defend the introduction of easily quantifiable criteria through which to assess applications for receiving public funding).

Given that they are pluralistic arenas, organisations provide fertile ground for disputes insofar as social actors must engage with a wide range of values in the pursuit of common organisational goals (Thévenot, 2001), which helps explain why Boltanski and Thévenot’s framework has been frequently used by organisational scholars (Brandl et al., 2014; Jagd, 2011). While earlier studies tended to focus on controversies unfolding within a single polity

(de Blic, 2000; Dodier, 1993; Lafaye, 1990), over the last decade the framework has been used to examine conflict between different orders of worth (Holden and Scerri, 2015; Huault and Rainelli-Weiss, 2011; Nyberg and Wright, 2013; Ramirez, 2013; Reinecke, 2010; Taupin, 2012; Taupin, 2015). More recently, Cloutier et al. (2017) put forward an updated review of the manifold ways in which FPS is expedient for exploring processes of justification in organisations, alongside underscoring the importance of such processes in the creation of organisational and social order. Referring specifically to the orders of worth framework, Cloutier et al. (2017) recognised the important contribution made by scholars who have used it to complement 'more mainstream theories such as new institutionalism or the institutional logics perspective' (p.6) (e.g., McInerney, 2008; DiMaggio, 1988; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Patriotta et al., 2011; Ramirez, 2013; Taupin, 2012), while, simultaneously, encouraging scholars to make use of the framework's full potential 'as a theory that is worthy for its own sake' (p.6). Our study responds to this call by using the orders of worth paradigm as a stand-alone lens through which to explore and compare the underlying values of official communication and the retrospective discourses produced by former senior staff members of an organisation in the UK's creative industries sector. Given the antagonistic nature of prevailing academic debates and policymaking in the sector, the creative industries constitute a particularly appropriate arena in which to apply Boltanski and Thévenot's orders of worth paradigm, given that the analysis of conflicting values is at its very core. Indeed, the creative industries construct itself is predicated on an amalgamation of artistic and economic rationalities whose compatibility can be called into question (Lampel et al., 2000; McKinlay and Smith, 2009; Belfiore, 2020), thus echoing the cultural-commercial antithesis posited by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972 [1947]). Horkheimer and Adorno developed the term 'cultural industries' (from which the term 'creative industries' evolved) as an ironic composite through which to criticise the industrialisation and mass



consumption of culture in modern capitalist societies, which they deemed to be wholly incompatible with the notion of true art and culture. The initial instantiations of art and cultural policy in the UK were in alignment with this view, insofar as they drew a distinction between two types of artistic expression: one that represented a level of excellence that was not accessible to the masses and, as such, wholly deserving of support via public subsidies; the other commercial in nature and therefore financially supported by the market itself through mass consumption (Flew, 2012; Garnham, 2005). However, in a political context characterised by an accelerated 'state to market' shift, academic and policy discourses related to the cultural industries from the early 1980s onwards had an altogether stronger focus on the potential of artistic creativity to generate wealth and jobs. Against this backdrop, artists came to be seen as 'creative workers' whose activity contributes to the country's socio-economic betterment in a competitive global economy (Garnham, 2005). Accordingly, in the UK the term 'creative industries' (DCMS, 1998) would ultimately replace the term 'cultural industries' across all arts policy documents produced by New Labour after its 1997 election victory. This shift in nomenclature, which aimed to minimise policy dilemmas, failed to assuage disputes over subsidies for the arts (Belfiore, 2015, 2020; Cunningham, 2009; Flew, 2012; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Jeffcutt et al., 2000), as public funding bodies in the sector have continued to be the object of profound disagreement over both their purpose and remit. This is also the case for the organisation examined in this paper, whose establishment and subsequent development will be outlined in the next section.

### **Case context: the Agency**

In 1997, the New Labour government created a subsidised national organisation (hereafter referred to as 'the Agency') for the express purpose of promoting screen culture and film production within one of the home nations. The Agency, an amalgamation of four pre-

existing bodies dealing with various aspects of film and screen activity, had the status of an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body and constituted a hybrid organisation in the two senses of the term most often used by scholars and practitioners (Ménard, 2004): one, it consisted of characteristics from the public and private sectors, both in terms of its purpose and structure (Hibberd, 2009); and two, it combined divergent imperatives (Caves, 2003; Cunningham, 2009; Cunningham and Flew, 2019; Hesmondhalgh, 2012).

As a publicly funded body, the Agency came under the scrutiny of various external stakeholders, such as the filmmaking community and the government, to whom it had to justify its use of public funds to engender greater screen and film activity in the country. Although there had been a strong preponderance for values related to culture and creativity in the predecessor bodies, the new organisation was required to comply with an emergent political trend that placed considerable pressure on the creative industries to demonstrate their commercial value (Flew, 2012). An extensive report commissioned by the UK government explicitly recommended that the new agency should both undergo a marked change in course from the politics of its predecessors and make an 'acknowledged change in emphasis from a cultural to an industrial/commercial approach to all aspects of its work' (Hydra Associates, 1996: 115). The ensuing tensions generated considerable debate centred on the purpose of the Agency (Hibberd, 2009), while the shift from a cultural to a commercial emphasis was neither smooth nor immediate, due to the reluctance of some of the organisation's senior members to abandon their predominantly cultural stance. As early as 2005, a new major restructuring that sought to amalgamate the Agency with another public body to form a single arts funding body for all types of creative activity was recommended in a report commissioned by the government (Cultural Commission, 2005: 233). This merger, which would mark the end of the Agency as a separate organisation

dedicated to screen activity, was officially announced in 2006 (Herald Scotland, 2006) and became effective in 2010.

## **Methodology**

Our data derives from two distinct but interrelated data sources. The first consists of a series of public documents (ranging from 1996 to 2006) that constitute an ongoing dialogue between the organisation and the government. From the government's perspective, there is an initial report recommending the creation of the organisation as well as two major reviews of its performance; from the organisation's perspective, we analysed the managerial statements that contain responses to these reviews. Our second dataset comprises six semi-structured interviews that were carried out in 2012 (two years after the Agency ceased to exist as a separate organisation) with senior employees of the Agency. All six interviewees (referred to as SSM1, SSM2, etc.) were with senior members of staff, including two of the Agency's three successive Chief Executives, who represented around a quarter of the agency's full-time personnel. They were not informed beforehand about the theoretical framework of our research and terms such as 'worth', 'values', 'justification' or 'conflict' were not included in any of the interview questions, so as to avoid introducing any unnecessary bias into the answers (Mason, 1996). We did not want to the interviewees to focus specifically on conflictual or contradictory elements. Rather, we wanted to compare the management statements they made during their tenures with their *a posteriori* discourses about both these statements and/or the decisions they made at that juncture. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed us to adjust the questions to the interviewer's former role within the Agency, while ensuring that we consistently discussed both the interviewees' awareness of the UK's cultural policy during their tenure and how it impacted upon their decision-making. The interviews, which lasted an average of 60 minutes, were conducted

face-to-face in various cafes or at the interviewees' place of work. All the participants agreed to be recorded and the interviews were transcribed by one of the authors.

All the documents were coded manually, to gain a deeper understanding of the narratives (Saldaña, 2015). Our open coding process was divided into three phases that broadly corresponded to the levels proposed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). The first phase consisted of an initial reading that sought to begin establishing links between our theoretical framework and our data (Ragin, 2000). Here, we identified references to different orders of worth by singling out the specific semantic categories developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), contained in Table 1. Once the semantic categories linked to specific orders of worth were identified, we began the second coding phase, which involved singling out critiques and justifications in order to discern in which orders of worth they were grounded. During the third and final phase, we compared actors' discourses about the Agency's remit and operations as espoused in official management statements with their retrospective discourses about these themes conveyed during the interviews. If misalignments between the two sets of discourses were identified, we then looked at actors' rationales for that potential dissonance as well as recurrent themes in their accounts.

The next section delineates the main findings of our study, which are organised chronologically and punctuated by two major governmental reviews of the Agency, each followed by a change of Chief Executive.

### **Findings: espoused values versus retrospective discourse**

#### *Agency's conception and early years (1996-2001): resisting a remit driven by industrial and market values*

In 1996, a report commissioned by the then UK government proposed the amalgamation of various screen production and distribution bodies, in one of the home nations, into a one-

stop agency (the Agency). The four bodies that would subsequently become the Agency were primarily driven by a cultural logic (Hibberd, 2009), where inspired and domestic worth predominated, whereas the report explicitly recommended that the new organisation should exhibit an 'acknowledged change in emphasis from a cultural to an industrial/commercial approach to all aspects of its work' (Hydra Associates, 1996: 115). Accordingly, 'managerial' terminology from the industrial and market worlds (driven respectively by the higher principles of efficiency and competition) are replete in the recommendations outlined in the report. Members of the Board, the report suggests 'should be drawn from such business sectors as the financial community, the television companies and film distributors' (p.115), a specification which explicitly leaves out members from the creative community (inspired worth), which is strange given that the Agency belongs to the creative industries sector. The Agency's first management statement, issued in 1997, demonstrates that the report's recommendations were taken into account, as evidenced by the following excerpt which accords significant weight to industrial worth (reflected in the use of terms like *promote*, *strategy* or *growth*):

'[The Agency's] Board is established to encourage the development of the screen arts and has the following functions: to develop and implement a strategy for the growth of the screen industry; to promote [the country] as a location for film-making; to stimulate and promote interest in and access to film in [the country].' (Management Statement, 1997)

However, during their interviews, the three former senior staff members (SSM1, SSM2, and SSM3) that either produced or backed this management statement, expressed notable resistance to and/or utter disconnect with the industrial/market values embedded in the statement. One of these actor's discourse relied heavily on the domestic values of personal relations and hierarchy based on tradition. The interviewee highlighted the importance of

good personal relationships between the Agency's staff and the civil servants who oversaw the creative industries brief:

'Luckily, I had very good relationships with these people, but you have to work at it, and the last thing you want is to be at odds, you don't want to be watching things like the Leveson Enquiry.' (SSM1)

The above is in stark contrast with the 'impersonal' element of Weberian bureaucracy (Weber, 2019 [1921]), which is a mode of bureaucracy anchored in the civic value of impartiality. The interviewee's motivation for introducing a predominantly domestic value into a field traditionally grounded in civic worth becomes apparent in the very final part of the quote, which introduces yet another form of worth. Specifically, with the sentence 'you don't want to be watching things like the Leveson Enquiry', the agent justifies his views from the position of the worth of fame (based on reputation) by evoking the media as a legitimacy-conferring institution, based on its enormous power to influence public opinion.

The other two senior staff members in this early period of the Agency also justified their resistance to the expected commercial shift on the grounds of domestic and inspired worth. With respect to the former, SSM2 talked about wanting to support 'something that is seen as traditional', while in relation to the latter, SSM3 espoused that the subjective question 'is this going to be any good?' should be at the root of funding decisions. In another statement that reflects resistance to the rigour of the industrial approach recommended, SSM2 grounded his discourse in the inspired world, where spontaneity is considered a virtue of the worthy (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 159), by encouraging those with decision-making power over funding to be daring, so that they may 'stumble upon things which you might otherwise have passed over because of the rules.' (SSM2).

It is this combination of domestic and inspired worth that dominated funding decisions in the initial years that ultimately led to a ministerial request to review the Agency's role and

performance. The conclusions of this review open our examination up to the Agency's middle years under a new management team after the resignation of the first Chief Executive, who was accused of favouring a small group of filmmakers that were already known to the Agency's board (Hibberd, 2009).

### *2002-2005 Moving from domestic worth to civic and fame worth*

The first major review of the Agency, published in 2002, concluded that, although there was evidence of achievement in certain respects, the organisation had nonetheless fallen short of expectations in several key areas that formed part of its remit: some of its activities and programmes lacked specific objectives or evaluation measures, not to mention that their impacts were uncertain. The recommendations in the review to correct these problems rested primarily on elements from the industrial world (strategies, greater coherence, scheme development, support for film production, collaboration with other agencies) and, albeit to a lesser degree, the civic world (inclusion, transparency). In this respect, it echoed the industrial/market recommendations of the Hydra report and served as a reminder that the Agency had insufficiently addressed them.

Regarding the Agency's response, the new managerial team did not change the organisation's management statement (which was not obviously misaligned with the commercial shift requested by the government), so at least in its official communication the Agency continued to show a willingness to comply. However, during his interview, the second Chief Executive (SSM4) expressed negativity towards the governmental reviews, which he considered to be detrimental to creating 'a unified body'. He overtly criticised the government's lack of clarity over what was expected of the Agency:

‘I think [the government] – and this is not excusing any kind of failures or problems at [the Agency] – didn’t know what it was doing. No one really knew what it was they were trying to create.’ (SSM4)

In the absence of clearly stated expectations or guidelines from the government, the new managerial team responded to critiques of the Agency’s distribution of funds through enacting a measure based on the civic worth values of collective fairness and inclusion: they decided to spread the Agency’s resources amongst low budget projects, rather than focusing on a limited number of applicants who were familiar to the board like their predecessors had done (a practice grounded in domestic worth). Alongside this, SSM4 attempted to improve the Agency’s reputation and visibility by enhancing their presence at festivals, largely by funding short films shown at these festivals. Another senior staff member justified this approach through recourse to a stance based on the worth of fame, stating that these funding schemes, despite their limited value from a purely financial perspective, were ‘calling cards’ (SSM5) for filmmakers and the Agency itself.

The worth of fame also played a large part in the interview with SSM4, who not only insisted on the benefits of being present at festivals, but also underscored the importance of the relationship between the Agency and the press:

‘What we didn’t do in any kind of proactive way was make friends with the journalists, get the press on our side. I think we could have done more in that kind of regard.’  
(SSM4)

The phrase ‘get the press on our side’ once again indicates a clear awareness of how powerful an agent the press is in terms of legitimacy. Overall, this respondent’s statements suggest that he did not consider inspired worth to be a powerful enough driver for the Agency in and of itself, and that it needed to be coupled with the legitimacy of a good reputation



conferred from the press and a strong presence at festivals, something which he and his management team 'did try and milk for all it was worth, as one would!'. (SSM4).

Similar to the interviews with decision-makers who worked under the first management team, those interviewees who belonged to the second management team also did not speak favourably of industry or market-driven measures. While one could argue that festivals are vehicles for generating market value, even in the statements about festivals the focus was always on reputation and visibility (fame worth) rather than commercial value. This new form of misalignment between the Agency's management statements and actual operations prompted another negative review from the government. Published in 2005, it stated that 'serious concerns were expressed from many quarters that [the Agency]'s role and remit requires reconsideration' (Cultural Commission, 2005: 200). The Agency's second CEO resigned that same year.

#### *2005-2010 The Agency's final response to the persistent demand to undergo a commercial shift*

Under its third and final managerial team, the Agency underwent some important structural and operational changes in pursuit of a stronger alignment between its stated remit and actual practices. Upon taking up his post, the new Chief Executive (SSM6) declared that he would be reporting on the emergence of a new agency, one that 'has a clear sense of purpose, a clear sense of identity and the confidence to lead.' (Management Statement, 2005). According to SSM6, his priority was indeed to give it a 'a clear sense of purpose'. He admitted in the interview that part of the difficulty in achieving this stemmed from 'internal divides', but he agreed with his predecessor that the other major challenge was that the government simply 'struggled to understand the [creative industries] sector.' (SSM6)

Although under his charge the new management team displayed a stronger effort to align its operations with governmental demands by introducing ‘very clear procedures, guidelines and protocols’ (SSM6), the third and final CEO did not justify the value of these measures by defending the intrinsic value of industrial or market worth; rather, he vehemently criticised the procedures he helped to implement, stating that ‘having clarity in all of those things can be very restrictive’, but yet he thought it was important to have them in place because ‘we didn’t want to end up in the [national press].’ (SSM6 interview). This last comment, which echoes the views of his predecessor (SSM4), shows his awareness that the press (a major vehicle of fame worth) is a powerful legitimacy-conferring stakeholder.

In 2006, less than a year after the final Chief Executive took his post, it was announced that the Agency would be merged with another national funding body to create a new organisation, in an effort to solve ‘this lack of clarity about who’s responsible for economic development’ (SSM6). However, the government’s documents in which they stated the remit of this new organisation were described by the final CEO as ‘a bit of a fudge’ (SSM6). Ultimately, the new funding body experienced exactly the same kind of problems that the Agency did: negative reviews from stakeholders, bitter disputes over funding, criticisms pertaining to a perceived lack of purpose, bad press, and resignation of senior members in the midst of controversy (BBC, 2018; Miller, 2018). In a clear case of history repeating itself, a purely structural reform that amalgamated several bodies struggled to assuage the tensions, deriving from antagonistic values, from spiralling into dysfunctional conflict.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our findings, based on two data sets that allowed for the comparison of senior staff members’ retrospective discourses with both the values they espoused and the decisions they made during their tenures at the Agency, shed light on the different orders of worth that

underpinned actors' rationale and motivations. In terms of funding decisions, the first management team anchored their arguments in domestic and inspired worth (based on personal relationships and subjective perception of artistic quality, respectively) to justify their resistance to the commercial shift demanded by the government. After the first (negative) governmental review of the Agency, the second and third managerial teams gradually moved away from the combination of domestic and inspired worth in their decision-making. Operations under the second team's lead were dictated by a rationale grounded largely in the worth of fame (reputation), whereas the third team displayed the closest alignment with governmental demands, insofar as they incorporated industrial/market worth elements within their funding decisions.

However, beyond these three distinct ways of responding to an explicit demand to introduce an 'acknowledged change in emphasis from a cultural to an industrial/commercial approach' (Hydra Associates, 1996: 115) within the Agency, there were two notable elements that appeared in all the organisational actors' *a posteriori* discourses during their interviews, now that they are no longer working for the Agency and, hence, free from the mechanisms, structures and institutions that constrained their organisational decisions (Barthe et al., 2013). Firstly, there was a shared negative view of the commercial shift they were repeatedly asked to adopt. Even members of the final managerial team, under whose tenure we saw the highest degree of consistency between stakeholders' demands and organisational activity, were just as critical of the governmental demands as their less compliant predecessors were. Those critiques were sometimes overt: they explicitly stated the constraining nature of industry/market-led reforms in a creative industries organisation or criticised the civil servants in charge of the creative industries brief for their lack of knowledge or clarity. Sometimes their critiques were covert: rather than mobilising elements grounded in industrial/market worth to defend the justness of the reforms they implemented (i.e., show

alignment between action and rational justification), they justified those reforms as a means to avoid getting bad press. This fear of getting on the wrong side of public opinion was the second element that appeared in all the actors' retrospective discourses about the Agency, irrespective of the different orders of worth they either mobilised in their actions or evoked during their interviews. They all show an acute awareness that the press is a powerful legitimacy-conferring stakeholder by virtue of its power to influence the public, whose taxes contributed towards financing the Agency's activities. This suggests that throughout the Agency's lifetime, their top decision-makers were motivated by a quest for legitimacy, which was reflected in practice by trying to avoid a conflictual relationship with the press. Such underlying motivation helps to explain the dissonance between the values those agents espoused, their actual decisions, and the critical views they later expressed about some of those decisions.

By situating organisational actors' actions and retrospective discourses within the neoliberal rhetoric that dominates the UK creative industries sector (Belfiore, 2020; Cunningham, 2009; Cunningham and Flew, 2019; Hesmondhalgh, 2012), our empirical findings make three contributions with respect to power struggles between individual agency and legitimacy-conferring institutional forces (Frère and Jaster, 2019; Silber, 2016). First, at the organisational level, this study reveals significant misalignments between actors' espoused values, decisions, and retrospective discourses about them, in addition to shedding light on the underlying motives for this dissonance. By examining organisational actors' official and non-official discourses through recourse to Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006 [1991]) framework, we could distinguish between those elements that the actors perceived to be legitimate in their own right (i.e., justifiable with arguments grounded in the world of worth to which they belong) or merely legitimacy-conferring (i.e., actors can only justify them as a means through which to gain the approval of their stakeholders). The degree to which, by

their own admission, these actors were willing to comply with legitimacy-conferring stakeholders with whom they disagreed serves to indicate how (un)balanced the relations of power were between those individuals and the institutions the stakeholders represent. By using the orders of worth paradigm's potential as a stand-alone theoretical and analytical tool (Cloutier et al., 2017), we were able to identify that the desire to avoid conflictual relationships with legitimacy-conferring stakeholders was a common driver for all the senior decision-makers in this creative industries organisation.

This case study ties in with broader sociological debates concerning individual critical capacities versus institutional constraints. The use of FPS in this study was largely determined by its proponents' belief that what is considered to be institutionalised can be changed through disputes and arguments (Frère and Jaster, 2019: 20), hence the importance of approaching conflict not necessarily as a pathological situation that needs to be resolved, but rather as an inevitable, continuous and even desirable process inherent to the ongoing building of the social order (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]; Boltanski, 2011). We argue that the orders of worth paradigm is an efficient analytical tool for showcasing the heterogeneity of the hidden views that lie beneath compliance to wider institutionalised legitimacy. However, along with these critical voices, our findings also underscore the challenges individual actors face (despite their critical capacities) in attempting to change a wider social order they claim to oppose when confronted with the oppressing power of legitimised structures (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]; Jenkins, 2014), as evidenced by the level of compliance shown by all of the interviewees to powerful stakeholders. This by no means suggests that individual agency is powerless to significantly influence the social order; rather, despite the findings of this study concerning actors' limitations within a specific context at a particular juncture, we join FPS researchers in emphasising the ever-changing nature of the social order and individuals' capacity to call

it into question (Boltanski, 2011; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006 [1991]; Frère and Jaster, 2019). This, in turn, underscores the importance of including dissonant, 'hidden' voices within sociological research. This leads to our third contribution, which specifically concerns the creative industries sector with its idiosyncrasies. Our findings beg the question: if decision-makers in one of the major UK arts funding bodies appeared to be powerless to deviate from policies dictated by the dominant neoliberal rhetoric in the sector, then what kinds of difficulties do less prominent actors in the sector face when they do not wish to comply with an instrumental approach to arts funding? To explore this important issue further, we offer empirical research that can 'inform action in cultural politics' (McGuigan, 2006: 138) by exposing the insidious power of neoliberal profit-driven rhetoric and policies in the creative industries (Belfiore, 2004, 2015, 2020; Vestheim, 1994; Cunningham and Flew, 2019). The present study constitutes a response to renewed calls from scholars and practitioners to broadening the perception of value in a sector overwhelmingly dominated by financial-oriented rhetoric and policies that, in turn, legitimise social relations of inequality (Cunningham and Flew, 2019; Belfiore, 2020). The paper demonstrated that the orders of worth paradigm is an expedient analytical tool through which to showcase the heterogeneity of views bubbling underneath formal compliance to wider institutionalised legitimacy. Bringing these dissenting values to the surface through ongoing debate, rather than consistently legitimising some to the detriment of others, can contribute to a continuous process of what we call 'creative conflict'. To further the understanding of this, we call for more empirical research into the hidden elements in power dynamics between institutions and individual actors; research that allows actors to reflect upon and explain the motivations driving their decisions.

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<sup>i</sup> A comprehensive review of both Bourdieu and Dewey's contribution to sociological debates about structure versus actors' agency is beyond the scope of this paper. For a detailed account of Bourdieu's approach to this and other major themes in his work, see Jenkins (2014); with respect to Dewey's view on the matter, Stiegler (2019) offers a contemporary in-depth analysis.

<sup>ii</sup> According to Boltanski and Thévenot, this list is not exhaustive, insofar as sociocultural changes can result in the emergence of new orders of worth. In fact, new orders of worth have been identified since the publication in French of *On Justification* in 1991: 'projective worth' based on networks and adaptability (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), and 'green worth' based on environmental values (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000).

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**Table 1**  
**The Six Worlds of Worth as depicted in**  
***On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006[1991])**

	<b>Inspired World</b>	<b>Domestic World</b>	<b>World of Fame</b>	<b>Civic World</b>	<b>Market World</b>	<b>Industrial World</b>
Higher common principle	Inspiration	Tradition	The reality of public opinion	The pre-eminence of collectives	Competition	Efficiency, performance
State of worthiness	Inexpressible and ethereal	Hierarchical superiority, wise, discreet	Reputed, recognized, visible	Rule governed, official	Desirable, salable	Efficient, functional, reliable
Subjects	Visionaries, artists	Superiors and inferiors	Stars, journalists, PR agents	Public collectives, offices, federations, members	Competitors, clients, businessmen	Professionals, experts, specialists
Objects	Mind, body, unconscious	Etiquette, good manners, rank	Brand, message, press, interview, campaign	Legal forms, measures, policy, statements	Wealth, luxury	Means, resources, tasks, direction
Investment	Escape from habit, risk	Rejection of selfishness, consideration	Giving up privacy and secrets, reveal	Renunciation of the particular, solidarity	Opportunism, attention to others	Progress, dynamic

Relationships	Create, discover, quest	Reproduce, recommend, thank, respect	Persuade, influence, convince, attract, promote	Unify, mobilize, assemble, debate	Interest, buy, sell, negotiate	Function, put to work, organise, control, standardise
Test	Vagabond -age of the mind	Family ceremonies, conversation, nomination	Presentation of the event	Demonstration for a just cause	Market	Trial, launching
The fall	The temptation to come down to earth	Lack of inhibition	Indifference and banality	Division	Enslavement to money	Instrumental action