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## **The role of multiple ostensive aspects in practicing change and stabilizing routines: A case study of a university merger**

**Mehdi Safavi**

University of Edinburgh Business School  
Strategy and International Business  
mehdi.safavi@ed.ac.uk

### **Abstract**

Drawing on advances in Routine Theory, specifically recent debates on recursive relationship between ostensive and performative aspects in practicing change and stabilizing routines, this paper proposes a theoretical framework which can better characterize the mutual adaptation between existing multiple understandings and actual performances in organizations. This framework, combined with an exploratory case study of an academic merger between a university and an art college, enable us to better understand the structural variations in routines dynamic by depicting the recursive relationship between multiple ostensive aspects of administrative routines created by different pressures for consistency, on one hand, and change and stabilization in performances in the merged entity, on the other.

# THE ROLE OF MULTIPLE OSTENSIVE ASPECTS IN PRACTICING CHANGE AND STABILIZING ROUTINES: A CASE STUDY OF A UNIVERSITY MERGER

## ABSTRACT

Drawing on advances in Routine Theory, specifically recent debates on recursive relationship between ostensive and performative aspects in practicing change and stabilizing routines, this paper proposes a theoretical framework which can better characterize the mutual adaptation between existing multiple understandings and actual performances in organizations. This framework, combined with an exploratory case study of an academic merger between a university and an art college, enable us to better understand the structural variations in routines dynamic by depicting the recursive relationship between multiple ostensive aspects of administrative routines created by different pressures for consistency, on one hand, and change and stabilization in performances in the merged entity, on the other.

**Keywords:** Multiple Ostensive Aspects, Organizational Routines, Performative Aspects, Practice Theory

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning with the seminal works of Karl Weick (1979; 1991; 1995; 1998), a rich stream of literature scrutinizing the micro-processes of organizing has arisen in organization studies, providing new insights regarding the internal life of organizing routines (Feldman, 1989; Orr, 1990; Pentland, 1992; Brown and Duguid, 2000; Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002; D'Adderio, 2008; Feldman and Pentland, 2012; Turner and Rindova, 2012) and the micro-foundations of change processes inherent to them (Orlikowski, 2000; 2002; Feldman 2000; D'Adderio, 2001; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010; Rerup and Feldman, 2011; Pentland, Feldman, Becker, and Liu, 2012). Researchers have put routines at the centre of organizing (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963; Feldman and Pentland, 2003); that is, routines explain the behaviour of firms and the observed consistencies with past experiences (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Chia and Holt, 2006). As a result, organizational routines have opened up a new avenue in the investigation of the micro-foundations of organizing by offering a valuable unit of analysis to capture organizational change and stability.

Revealing the internal structure and the recursive relationship between different aspects of organizational routines, namely ostensive and performative aspects, has undoubtedly provided useful insights into many of the yet undeveloped queries in the study of organizational life (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). These insights, particularly, have drawn our attention to the tension between achieving efficiencies through behavioural standardization and consistency in routines performance, on one hand, and the dynamic nature of organizational routines, on the other (Cohen, 2007; Turner and Rindova, 2012). However, the complexity of this phenomenon means that the extant

research has only just begun to address the dynamics of routines' internal structure underpinning organizational phenomena such as change, transformation, adaptation, and stabilization (D'Adderio, 2008). Little empirical work to date has managed to provide useful insights into practicing change and stabilizing organizational routines (for a successful example of such studies see Turner and Rindova, 2012). In particular, we still lack a full theoretical understanding and empirical characterization of the micro-level dynamics underlying the recursive relationship between ostensive and performative aspects of routines in the presence of both endogenous and exogenous changes.

Organizational transformations, such as mergers and acquisitions, disrupt the steady state of organizational life. Under some conditions, these kinds of disruptions may actually alter the organizational and occupational structure of mundane everyday work, and hence the observed consistencies in organizing routines. Research has shown that these changes are indeed associated with disruption in routines performance, and, hence, negative organizational outcomes (at least in the short term). In spite of that, Routine Theory is still inadequate to the potential number of structural variations inherent in an organizational transformation. As Feldman (2000; 2003) theorizes, such disruptions to the stability or resilience of taken-for-granted routines lead to the change, flexibility, and adaptability of routines. At the organizational level, research has shown that it is difficult – if not impossible – to replicate organizational routines and practices in different contexts (Jensen and Szulanski, 2007; Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Nonetheless, ironically, empirical research has not yet adequately clarified where the difficulties in replication of routines lie with regard to the well explained internal dynamics of organizational routines, and also why organizations may, or may not, overcome these difficulties in different forms of organizational change and transformation (for successful examples see Howard-Grenville, 2005; D'Adderio, 2008). This research shows that an important source of difficulties lies in the existence of “multiple ostensive” aspects of organizational routines shaped by different pressures for consistency, which, under certain circumstances, can result in either divergent or convergent organizational performances.

Taking organizational routines as the unit of analysis (Pentland and Feldman, 2005), and focusing on their internal structure and dynamics and content-process interrelationships (D'Adderio, 2008), we expect to advance Routines Theory and contribute to the understanding of organizational change, adaptation and survival (cf. Cook & Yanow, 1993; Orlikowski, 2002; Becker, Lazaric, Nelson and Winter, 2005) by answering the question of how routine participants can balance multiple pressures for consistency and change and explaining the latent structural variations - and the recursive relationship between changes - in perceptions and actions of routine participants in an academic merger.

Looking through a practice lens, this study analyses the structural variations generated by the recursive relationship between multiple ostensive aspects of

administrative routines created by different pressures for consistency from two merging institutions (an art college and a university), on one hand, and change and stabilization in the administrative performance in the merged entity, on the other. Due to the very different nature of day-to-day academic activities and, hence, very diverse understandings of accomplishing administrative routines supporting the two institutions' daily tasks, and to the tension between these collective pressures for consistency in the merged institution, the merger provides a natural experiment to test how, and to what extent, routines and practices can be (re)shaped by consensus when robust multiple ostensive aspects exist. The study shows that individuals and administrative groups from the two organizations approach administrative routines with different orientations residing in their depth of knowledge. This leads to multiple, distributed ostensive aspects of administrative routines which can potentially result in divergent performance. However, the findings show that fast learners from the smaller organization withdraw their ostensive understanding of administrative performance and enact the bigger (and hence dominant) organization's understanding, resulting in convergent performance. The rapid socialization of routine participants into, and their habitual enactment of the dominant understating of pressure for consistency in, the bigger organization enable the replication of administrative routines and exploitation side of the merger to proceed in a straightforward manner. In contrast, slow pace of learning by less socialized participants tends to increase the potential of exploration and (re)creation of new administrative routines - hence to improve the aggregate knowledge of the merged institution (see March, 1991). Nevertheless, this is of strictly limited outputs due to (1) the limited ability of the merged institution to empower those opportunities resulting in divergent performances and organizational conflicts, as well as (2) the need for achieving planned economies of scale out of the merger. While emphasizing the role of agency in the change and persistence of routines, this puts 'affordance' (Gibson, 1979; 1984; Hutchby, 2001) of the merged institution and the organizational context (Howard-Grenville, 2005) at the centre of attention for future research in the stream of Routine Theory. The study also explicates that the multiple ostensive aspects of routines are not only highly distributed all over the organization, but also extend over the immediate boundaries of organizations into the institutional framework in which they perform.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. We first briefly review the central theoretical debates in routines research that shaped our theoretical orientation and intrigued our research questions<sup>1</sup>. We then explain our research setting and the case study in reasonable detail. This section would be followed by a discussion about our data collection and analysis methods. In the subsequent section, we present our first-order (emergent) findings about how our informants viewed and managed pressures

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<sup>1</sup> We have used a grounded, interpretive approach to derive many of the theoretical concepts presented in this study. Consistently with such an approach, we would normally present these theoretical constructs after presenting the data from which they are derived (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); however, we adopt the more conventional approach of presenting the theoretical orientation of the study first for the sake of clarity.

for consistency in the face of ongoing changes imposed by the merger. We follow with a theoretical discussion of these findings and conclude with the theoretical contributions and practical implications of our study.

## **2. MULTIPLE OSTENSIVE ASPECTS OF ROUTINES: PROBLEMATIZING WITHIN THE EXTANT LITERATURE<sup>2</sup>**

Consistent with a performative perspective, routines are defined in this article as “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent action, carried out by multiple actors” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 95). Organizational routines are complex phenomena since they are largely pictured as being comprised of two interacting aspects. These interacting parts include ‘ostensive’ and ‘performative’ schemata, which are constructed mutually, shaped and reshaped recursively, and have a distributed nature; that is, they are carried out by multiple actors in the organization (Feldman, 2000). The distinction, adapted from Latour (1986), between the ostensive and the performative is an expression of the difference between ‘the routine in principle’ and ‘the routine in practice’, respectively: “the ostensive aspect of a routine embodies what we typically think of as the structure”, while “the performative aspect embodies the specific actions, by specific people, at specific times and places”, that bring that routine to life (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 94). Scholars in this vein conceptualize routines as “generative systems created through the mutually constitutive and recursive interaction between the actions multiple actors take (the performative aspect of routines) and the patterns these actions create and recreate (the ostensive aspects of routines)” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011: 6). Research has also shown that the ostensive aspects of routines may be available in codified form as standard operating rules and procedures, or may exist at a more abstract level in the form of a taken-for-granted norm in the collective mind of the organization; alternatively, they may have a relatively high level of tacitness and exist in the form of procedural knowledge (Cohen and Bacdayan, 1994; Feldman and Pentland, 2003).

In theories of practice, especially structuration theory (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 1984; 1989), the performative and ostensive aspects of organizational routines are seen as having a recursive relationship; that is, the performative aspects (re)create the ostensive parts through everyday practise of the routine, while ostensive aspects, in turn, enable and constrain performance (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). This, therefore, creates an “on-going opportunity for variation, selection, and retention of new practices and patterns of action within routines and allows routines [participant] to generate a wide range of outcomes, from apparent stability to considerable change” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 94).

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<sup>2</sup> Our emergent findings enabled us to “come up with novel research questions through a *dialectical interrogation*” of routine scholars’ familiar position and its domain of literature (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011: 252). Our problematization methodology, hence, embraces both “challenging in-house assumptions” of, and gap spotting in the “internal debates and the interfaces” among routine scholars crystallized in its extant literature.

The multiple actors who shape and carry out the routines have diverse subjective understandings. Thus, although the ostensive aspects conventionally represent the structured, principled side of routines, variation can be observed across practitioners, giving rise to multiple ostensive aspects of routines even if the performance stays convergent and relatively unchanged day in and day out. These socially distributed understandings, like any socially distributed stock of knowledge, are not monolithic, and are likely to be distributed unevenly (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1967). As Feldman and Pentland (2003: 104) note:

“Everyone cannot know everything. Thus, it is very unlikely that there is a single ostensive understanding or a single goal of any significant organizational routine. The involvement of multiple individuals inevitably introduces diversity in the information, interpretive schemes, and goals of the participants. The individuals performing the routine do not all have access to the same information, and even if they did, they might not interpret the information in the same way”.

This becomes especially evident where routine participants have diverse backgrounds and levels of authority, and hence bring their own understandings of conducting similar routines in different contextual circumstances. In these situations, everyone who engages in a given set of activities is not necessarily seeking the same outcome. “As a result of these factors, their subjective interpretations of the appropriate course of action will differ. ... There is no single, objective routine, but a variety of different perspectives on what is involved” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 104). Here, the emergent meaning of the ostensive parts depends on the viewpoint of the routine participants. This means that routines’ ostensive aspects are multiple and no routine exists as a stand-alone entity (Pentland and Feldman, 2005; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Rerup and Feldman, 2011).

As mentioned, Feldman and Pentland (2005; 2012) suggest that routines may have multiple ostensive aspects, because different participants may have different understandings of how a routine should be carried out. They further explain that, however, “it is tempting to conceptualize the ostensive aspect of the routine as a single, unified object, like a standard operating procedure. This would be a mistake, because the ostensive incorporates the subjective understandings of diverse participants ... Each participant’s understanding of a routine depends on his or her role and point of view ... The ostensive aspect of the routine gains in apparent objectivity and concreteness as the views of different participants come into alignment” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 101). Ironically, still in the research literature and in practice, this multiplicity is often overlooked in favour of the simplifying assumption that a given routine has a single ostensive aspect, and that variety is found rather in the performative aspects of routines. For example, Feldman (2000: 622) theorizes that “ostensive routines may be devoid of active thinking, but routines enacted by people in organizations inevitably involve a range of actions, behaviours, thinking, and feeling.” Emphasizing flexibility in

actions, what is underemphasized undeniably here is multiplicity in the understanding, or the ostensive aspects, of organizational routines disclosed in deed or language.

In a state of relative stability and in spite of their internal dynamics, the variety in ostensive aspects of organizational routines may be overlooked. However, when organizations change, e.g. merge with or acquire other organizations, this multiplicity can no longer be overlooked, because the clash of processes and routines becomes a central practical concern for everyone involved. The multiplicity becomes specially important because it not only calls into question the consistency in past experiences, but makes predicting the future actions of organizational members nearly impossible: “while organizational routines are commonly perceived as reenacting the past, the performance of routines can also involve adapting to contexts that require either idiosyncratic or ongoing changes and reflecting on the meaning of actions for future realities” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 95). Now, if we accept the multiplicity in the understanding of actual performances, the questions that arise are: How does the multiple ostensive affect a specific action, in a specific context, at a specific time, by a specific group of actors engaging in an organizational routine while experiencing change and adaptation? And how (and why) do the multiple ostensive aspects of routines come together to shape the actual performance at a single iteration of the relevant routine, and how can one then justify the observed consistency in the daily accomplishment of that routine in the face of ongoing changes? The rest of this paper is an endeavour to answer these important, though unanswered questions within the organizational setting of the current study.

### **3. RESEARCH SETTING**

The findings of this case study can best be understood in its original research setting<sup>3</sup>. As mentioned, the research context involves a merger between two academic institutions, a university and a college of art located in the same city in very close spatial proximity, but with very diverse epistemologies and academic merits.

Prior to the merger, the art college was well-known for its pedagogical methods including practice-based or media-and-methods based disciplines in contemporary art, which are speculative and self-reflective. The disciplines include art, design, and architecture and landscape architecture. These areas are concerned mainly with tacit, experiential and embodied forms of knowledge gained through and understood by the acquisition of a practice as much as with more conventional scholarly approaches. The art college had developed customized (bespoke) approaches, systems and structures to support these aspects of its educational provision, ensuring that the distinctive culture

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<sup>3</sup> This setting provides an institutional configuration in which there are prominent institutional locales for the governance of knowledge processes. In particular, the possibility of studying knowledge processes is greater in an institutional setting in which “best practices and dominant designs are well institutionalized and widespread”, because such a setting “provides a homogeneous external context that enables the isolation of organization-specific sources of heterogeneity in the interpretation and use of knowledge as a resource” (Nag and Gioia, 2012: 425).

of an 'art college' education is nurtured and allowed to thrive. On the other hand, the university tended to take a more historical, literary and theoretically-informed approach than was the case at the art college. As one staff from the art college compared the two institutions:

“And, I think the other issue, particularly for the academic staff was being able to comprehend studio teaching because an art and design is studio based teaching and that’s quite intensive. It’s different to standing up maybe 2/3 times a week and giving a lecture to 200 students. In a studio, the tutor or lecturer is there all day, or most of the day, and they’re dealing with students generally on a one to one basis, talking about their work, their ideas, and it is quite intensive and relentless really.”

The structure of the university is based on three colleges of similar sizes. These colleges include several schools with some local autonomy and some centralized responsibilities; however, even with those local autonomies, the schools are all overarched by the relevant college to make sure that there is a degree of consistency throughout. As a result of this tight structure, the responsibilities are distributed at three levels: the university, the college, and the schools. As one of our informants from the College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS henceforth) in the university mentioned in an interview:

“Here in the postgraduate office, we help to set the quality assurance levels across the schools; we also link very carefully and closely with the central part of the university and the other colleges to make sure that we are all doing things largely meeting the same directives, the same policies, and where there is a degree of interpretation of policies and procedures, there is also a degree of consistency ... in other words, ‘we sing from the same hymn sheet but we may have different voices in the choir’”.

Therefore, the university had developed a culture of ‘public management’ (Ferlie, Ashburner, FitzGerald, and Pettigrew, 1996), a ‘process orientation’ emphasizing efficiency, accountability and rigorous quality control over all the departments, schools, and three colleges<sup>4</sup>.

As a result of those different methods and structures, different support systems were developed to support the two institutions’ day-to-day activities. The smaller size of the art college made it even more different (almost 300 versus over 3,000 employees of the university). Like a family organization, everyone knew each other and many of the day-to-day businesses and issues could be taken into account through face-to-face interactions and discussions, created somehow a kind of exception or one-off bespoke model in administration; while in the university, practice has been made more uniform

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<sup>4</sup> The university had also an academic provision in art and design-related areas. Its School of Arts, Culture and Environment (ACE) within the CHSS (merged with the art college and created a unified college of art – equal to a school in the university structure) drew together teaching and research in the subject areas of architecture, history of architecture, history of art and music. However, the methods of the university and the art college, even with regard to similar topics, differed to a great extent.

through systematized procedures (mainly built into its information technology infrastructure). Our informants from both institutes tell us the story:

“... Because the pedagogy surrounding art and design education is very, very different! Then, mainstream education where the majority of what the university teachings fits in to that mainstream box, and therefore it has to be, by definition, quite structured in the way they do things. The art and design are slightly different and although it has got a structure to it, it's quite complex in comparison to this very structured way the university does”.

“They've got online things [in the university] for that the college didn't have. The majority of staff [from the art college] that have come over will find that there's nothing coming on to the table for example, that they would know how to do. So, it's not that real deal with something completely different. It's the context of what they are doing in this devolved large Institution”.

“We had a village mentality. The college was like leaving in a village; so everybody knew everybody ... if somebody had a problem with something, they could ask somebody because there would physically be somebody they could go and speak to. And if that person didn't know, they would know who would be able to answer their question... and all of a sudden, we were moving to a metropolis; just massive, you don't know anybody, and instead of nipping next door to ask somebody in IT to fix their PC, they have to first of all, look on the web, go through staff system, find out where that IS website is, find out which of the 6 divisions actually helps their issue, look through the helpdesk systems, wait somebody to come back to them that might fix the problem but might not fix the problem!”

“The thing I found most strange about what I am now discovering about independent college of art was that everything was at really kind of individual levels. That if something cropped up and needed changing someone would have gone to the old principal, to the old secretary, to the old somebody in management and said: oh, we have got a problem; someone is being very difficult, this professor wants to do such and such. And there would always be a kind of exception made or one-off bespoke model created for that issue, whether it was a difficult professor, or changing the equipment, or something has been broken down, anything; it was kind of dealt with [on a] one-off basis. So that does not sound like that there were normal processes and practices for things! You always have to have deviations from normal; you are always going to have someone very difficult. But there was not that sense of saying like: look, this is the normal run of business and every known may get a deviation. But it was like everything was a deviation!”

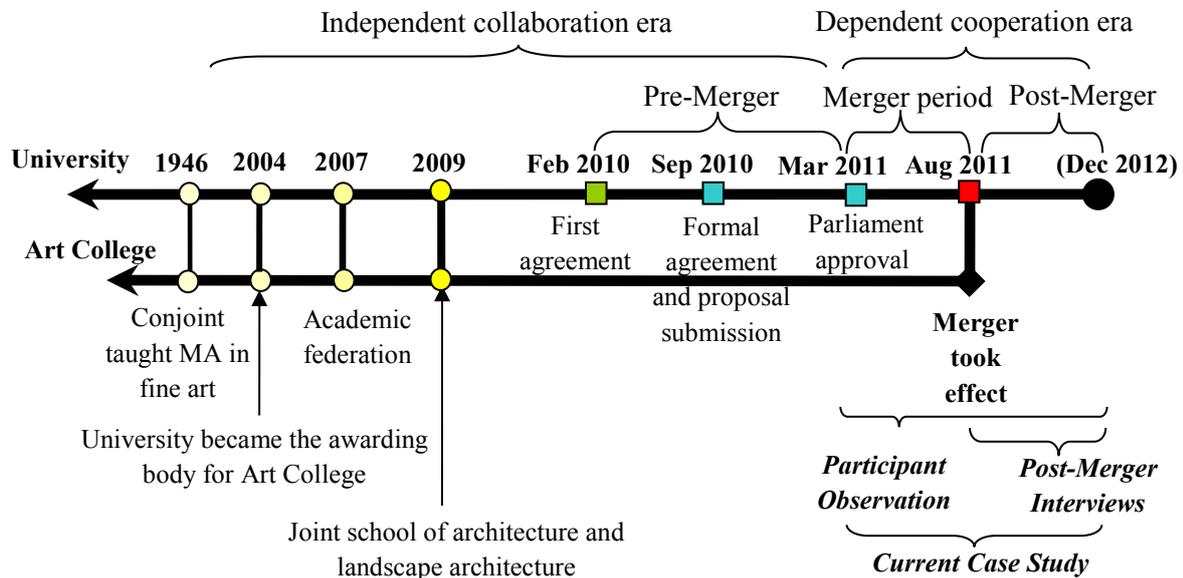
In spite of all these differences, however, the two institutions were not strangers to each other. Their pre-merger collaborations had created an evolving mutual understanding, which itself had created the backdrop for the merger (alongside the problematic economic situation that the art college, like so many other art colleges around the globe, was facing)<sup>5</sup>. Figure 1 depicts the timeline for this organizational merger and illustrates

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<sup>5</sup> We do not discuss this in this article since this did not affect the merger results in the way we look at it. However, it should be mentioned that the poor economic situation of the art college strengthened the intention for the merger and accelerated the integration processes; to quote the merger proposal (p. 7): “while the fundamental objectives of the merger are academic, merger should ensure that, within future funding constraints, the art college academic strengths can be maintained and enhanced in a way that

the main turning points in the history of previous collaboration between the university and the art college, together with the current case study research timescale.

**Figure 1: The Merger Timeline and Previous Collaboration History**



In the 1940s, the two institutions began working together by offering a conjointly taught programme. In the new millennium, the two institutions have taken strategic actions to significantly increase mutually beneficial academic collaboration, with the university first becoming the awarding body for the degree programmes offered by the college (2004), and later entering into an academic federation with the college (2007). On the eve of the merger discussions, they established a joint school of architecture and landscape architecture -ESALA (2009). Drawing from the success of previous independent collaborations and taking into consideration the barriers between the two independent organizations obstructing higher level of collaboration, and parallel administrative jobs, in 2010 a merger proposal was offered and submitted to the local government jointly by the two institutions. One of our respondents explained the reason behind the merger:

“Pre-merger, all we did was validating their degrees [for the art college], but that was the limit of the university’s influence, and very limited in terms of how we could financially, operationally, and academically help them, because then there was a strong desire to keep your own identity and to be independent. Post-merger, they are now part of a big institution, and therefore all of these things become easier to achieve, academically, operationally, financially, change process, transfer of knowledge; we’re one institution, the lines have been blurred”.

The merger was approved in 2011 and the academic year 2011-2012 opened with the new art college located within the university (as a sub-unit of CHSS), offering courses in

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would prove extremely difficult in the current and anticipated economic and public funding environment were the College to remain an independent institution”.

art, design, music, history of art, and landscape architecture. However, the independent nature of pre-merger collaborations did not prevent conflicts between the two institutions' way of conducting their daily routines in the post-merger stage. The merger plan included centralizing key administrative tasks for administrative cost savings, incorporating new systems and procedures suitable for bespoke model of the art college, transferring art college staff and student records into the university system, integrating the information systems of the two institutions, and creating new joint programmes and cross-disciplinary research centres. In most of these areas, nonetheless, the transformation did not occur straightforwardly. Dividing affected individuals in the art college and the university into three groups, namely students, academic staff, and non-academic staff, the latter group, dealing with administrative issues, faced the biggest amount of difficulties in the integration phase. As one of our respondents from the art college explained in an interview:

“So there were very different mergers. If you looked at it from [the point of view of] non-academic staff, academic staff, and students, you have three different areas of merger; very separate. For students, [it] is going to be almost entirely un-noticeable, practically not felt it at all. [The] only benefit you could think of [is that] they are going to have these facilities that this huge university provides them ... For academics, because the disciplines were so different you were not going to have any real duplication of effort. You have very separate courses that are run at the college that would still remain; there might be a long term threat. Some of the courses, some of the smaller courses, we knew we ran but we knew we were not cost effective. There was no threat to that side of some of these employment in short term at least; a threat that may come out as having a duplication of departments, in comparison, (would be) with HR, finance, registry (non-academic staff). So there were three very different mergers.”

Although it was originally planned to incorporate new systems and procedures suitable for bespoke (customized) model of the art college sitting within the CHSS, to reduce (and eliminate) unnecessary duplication of tasks and achieve planned economies of scale, the university had to centralize administrative processes (resettling previously local administrators in the art college into the university central offices in the process) as much as possible and as fast as possible. The immediate result of the merger was therefore to incorporate the art college administration into the university system and procedures, which resulted in centralization (through IT) and a high level of specialization in conducting administrative tasks. For the art college members this entailed some radical changes, because, due to the small size of the institution, job definitions were much broader and even unclear to some extent. As a result, aligning job specifications was a hurdle:

“The College was a small organization, a small team and I think there is often the perception that if you are small you are not busy. But actually in smaller organizations, you have to be much broader and get involved in lots of different things [at different levels].”

“The remit there [in the art college] being a more specialised institution was quite broad, and therefore as part of the merger preparations, I had to work closely with the head of registry aligning some of the responsibilities she had with the responsibilities I had, in particular with regard to student records and some of the quality assurance issues. I also had responsibilities for working with CHSS, with a view to the transition and management of the other parts of my remit, which were more relating to admissions, international students’ things and statutory reporting for things like the student delivery time and things like that. So, because it was a small institution aligning up with a very large devolved institution, we had to meet up with multiple heads of service in the university [at multiple levels]”.

“Being part of a small organisation [the art college], having quite a lot of autonomy and having involved in quite broad issues, not only just human resource issues, because of the size of the place, you have to wear many different hats; here [in the university] I only have to wear a couple of hats, and that’s where that’s different”.

Nevertheless, the art college administrators eventually had to accept that the art college should adopt the university’s way of doing administrative jobs, which necessitates specialization, to achieve the necessary economies of scale out of the merger:

“For example, the head of registry in the art college provided a profile for each of the members of her own staff, and profiles give us [in the university registry] the sort of detail of where they were mainly concentrating in a certain aspect of work. And then, what we did was we looked at these profiles and then looked for where they were best mapped on to this big registry. This registry has 85 people in it; they had 12 [in the art college]. We then did like a job matching ourselves and we negotiated with the staff and spoke to the staff about the transfer, and try to handle it very sensitively [so] that they knew what they were coming to and instead of having this spread that they had originally, what they were going to then become specialists”.

For many administrative tasks (e.g., payrolls, incomes, outgoes, bookkeeping, etc.), the performances and the understanding of the expectations of those administrative jobs were quite similar in the two contexts; what differed was the artefacts the administrators conduct their day-to-day activities with. In this case, the art college administrators adopted the university’s procedure by taking some training to achieve the expected economy of scale of the distributed artefacts. However, for few administrative tasks which are more directly interconnected with students and academic staff performances (e.g., registry, admission, quality assurance, assessment, etc.), the way of conducting businesses and the understandings of the expectations of those administrative jobs were quite different:

“In some areas, that was fairly easy to do, especially on the financial side, because certain members of staff were working maybe with US loans, or were working on fees, therefore it was easy to put them into roles. It was harder for the academic registry staff because some of the work that they did nice sits down with the CHSS, some sits at school level, with the new college, and then other parts of it sit here [at the university level].”

To study where and why performances did or did not align in the merged entity, we pick up the admission routine among the second group of administrative routines, to focus on in this article. The admission routine is chosen specifically since it embraces all features of broadly accepted definition of organizational routines: It is repetitive (both daily and annually), it is a recognizable pattern of action, and it is interdependent (with registry, quality assurance, budget allocation), carried out by multiple actors (starting with students' applications, engaging academic staff and different groups of administrators). This provided us a valuable context for conducting our research. As one informant from the university admission office explains:

“Our role as a team in the admission office, we help to look after the admission’s work for postgraduate admit applicants, we look at everything for the students from inquiries all the way through to being an alumnus. And we get involved in the admission side - not all the admissions for all the school but a large amount of admission - we get involved in the matriculation side, the nurturing side, the on-programme side where our role is again to keep a light touch on the quality assurance oversight of what our schools are doing, but also have the control of certain things where we need to make sure that due processes happened”.

The application process in the university is very straightforward and strongly based on academic records and written documents such as academic grades, resumes, cover letters, research proposals, reference letters, or statements of purpose. But for the art college the story is very different. One of our informants telling us the story short:

“Art and design admit very differently, they admit by portfolio, as well as academic grades. Portfolios are those things that show the work that has been done, particularly by art, design and architecture people as part of their application. And these portfolios tend to be rather large digitally. A few years ago a portfolio was a large document; sometimes it was, you know, this large portfolio case, lots of pictures, lots of art works. Digitally these days they can be up to 10 Megabytes [MB], 20 MB [of] information. And therefore, there has to be an assessment of the portfolio and that’s an online process. So for example there was 4200 something applications for a 100 and something places. So, they’d have to withhold that sort of first layer down a little bit; and then make a provisional type of offers. We would split the process between the academic registry and the schools, and the schools would assess the portfolios independently. The academic registry staff would assess the academic qualifications, and then when it came to the next stage that we were going to invite some students to then come for an interview, they would then need to bring a bigger, more detailed portfolio which would then go through an assessment again. So before any offers were ever made, all of these processes are lined up, and there’s an algorithm that worked out whether the students would be able to be accepted or not. And that took into account things like weighting participation, and therefore, because there was an assessment process built into that, the academic staff were quite heavily involved at certain periods of time in the year. In the University, the way of admission for most of the main stream subjects, it’s still with, as an administrative process, with their just school year academic attainment; that’s different and you would find that in the art college, that you could have students ... The majority of times, when you did an overview assessment of

many of the portfolio assessment and the academic assessment, it will colour the best of both; they would still have to have X number of As, Bs and high scores in their portfolio. But, there was an allowance; I can't remember what that percentage was, but there was an allowance made every year that for students who had exceptional portfolios, but hadn't all academic qualifications, there was another sort of test built in to allow students to come in under a weighting access. [This was] because ... [in] any creative industries, there's a high percentage of people have got various forms of learning difficulties or very, very high levels of dyslexia. And therefore they could be incredibly talented and they don't particularly perform well in written. It's not that the outcome wasn't good, it's maybe that their written work wasn't good, and all of a sudden they have lost some sort of points on that. So it's quite a complicated process to someone that is not familiar with it. When you are familiar with it, it makes some logical sense if you know and understand the pedagogy surrounding how assessment in art and design works, and also because assessment starts at a point of admissions. That's different in the mainstream subjects where you will be readmitted and you will get to see the 1<sup>st</sup> exam in Dec/Jan or something like that that would be the first assessment. Whereas if you are coming into an art or design subject, the first assessment was taken place as of your portfolio, and that's an on-going assessment of that and that leads up into your next assessment. So, the assessment processes are very different as linked back to admissions. And to cut a long story short, that's where they're having a lot of problems just now in trying to align the admissions for the college of art into the University system".

The interaction between the performance and the multiple pressures for consistency (from students and staff and the interconnectedness of tasks in the art college, from the universities rules and procedures, and from the need to achieve economies of scale) would be explicated with more details in our emergent findings. Beforehand, we will have a look at our research approach and the methods we have used for the collection and the analysis of our field data.

#### **4. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS**

Following extant theory induced from the in-depth study of organizational routines within a single organization (Leidner, 1993; Pentland and Reuter, 1994; Feldman, 2000; Feldman, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005), this article closely examines multiple ostensive aspects of routines created and shaped by multiple pressures for consistency in the merged institution and identifies factors that can explain the flexible and/or persistence use of the 'administrative' routines over time in an academic setting. In an exploratory case-based research design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003), we adopt a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) based on 38 in-depth interviews, roughly twenty one months of participant observation, and primary and secondary document analysis in order to examine the aforementioned academic merger. The research primarily aimed at exploring the potentials, challenges and obstacles of organizational learning and knowledge exploitation and exploration which could be realized throughout the organizational integration processes. A case study methodology is seen as appropriate because of the exploratory nature of the task at hand: the examination of organizational transformation phenomena through a practice lens,

necessitating an in-depth inductive approach (since little theoretical precedent exists for conducting a deductive inquiry in the field). As shown in figure 1, our approach is essentially longitudinal, covering the three stages in the event of the merger: before, during, and after integration<sup>6</sup>.

#### **4.1. Research Procedures and Data Sources**

**Interviews:** Following Pentland and Feldman (2005, p. 802), who suggest that studies of the ostensive aspects of organizational routines draw on informant accounts that summarize multiple performances across multiple performance conditions, and more recent examples such as Turner and Rindova (2012), we analyse informant accounts from different hierarchical levels of these organizations to capture multiple views of how organizational members balance the pressures for consistency and change (see also Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Hence, in order to capture multiple perspectives on the merger and to develop the internal validity of the case, we conducted 38 in-depth interviews with the key players who were involved in the process, as well as with students and academic and operational staff who were affected by the merger from the two academic institutions.

The informants include the project manager, two project officers (one from each organization), the conveners of integration working groups (mainly from the university), the principal of the art college, the heads of school in the art college (including both old and new heads in cases where they changed), the heads of the departments in the university's school of Arts, Culture and Environment (ACE), the chief operation officers in different sections of both institutions, administrative staff from different levels including the university, the art college, the CHSS and schools within it, subject groups, PG and UG offices, registry, students and also student union representatives (Table I). As a result, we are confident that the interviews afford a cross-section representative of the two organizations. Three interviews were done before the merger taking place and during the preparation time and work of the joint integration working groups. The remaining interviews took place in the post-merger era. The interviews varied in duration from 30 minutes to 2 hours with an average of roughly one hour length (Table I). All but three interviews were recorded, and 33 of the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Initial interviews included broad questions which helped to draw a big picture of the merger and the intentions behind it (familiarization stage), while secondary interviews were more structured and focused, targeting the main challenges and the reasons behind those challenges in order to satisfy the necessary theoretical sampling for the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). At this stage, the interview questions probed such topics as the interviewees' day-to-day activities before, during, and after the merger, the changes in their perception of the benefits and costs of the merger, the biggest problematic areas in the integration process and the reasons behind their existence, the least problematic (most straightforward) integration processes and the reasons for the unproblematic nature of

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<sup>6</sup> However, almost all recorded interviews took place in the post-merger era.

those processes. These two stages were followed by few tertiary interviews, which were deeply conducted following the highest possible level of theoretical sampling probing issues such as the problems associated with the centralization of administrative tasks, the informants' perception of those problems, and their understanding of different pressures for consistency, and their various sources.

**Table I: Interviews and Interviewees**

	<b>Organizational or Merger Project's Role</b>	<b>Organization (University or College)</b>	<b>No. of Interviews</b>	<b>Duration (in minutes)</b>	<b>Mode*</b>	<b>Timing (Pre- or Post-Merger)</b>
1	Project Manager	U	2	60/60	P/P	Pre/Post
2	Project Officer 1	U	2	120/--	P/E	Post/Post
3	Project Officer 2	C	2	60/105	P/P	Pre/Post
4	HR Manager	C	1	70	P	Post
5	Head of HR	U	1	60	P	Post
6	Head of HR	C	2	60/--	P/E	Post/Post
7	Head of Registry	U	1	70	P	Post
8	Head of Registry	C	1	70	P	Post
9	Staff Union Member	C	1	60	P	Post
10	Head of PG Office	U	2	75	P/E	Post
11	Operating Officer	Ext. Temp. for C	1	60	P	Post
12	Principal	C	1	50	P	Post
13	College Registrar	U	1	70	P	Post
14	Head of Admin	C	1	70	P	Post
15	Dir. of Crp. Services	U	2	90/70	P/P	Post/Post
16	KM Vice Principal	U	1	70	P	Post
17	Head of ESALA	C&U	1	60	P	Post
18	HoS of Art	C	1	90	P	Post
19	HoS of Design	C	2	70/20	P/P	Post
20	HoS of Informatics	U	1	30	P	Post
21	Head of ACE	U	2	90/--	P/E	Post/Post
22	Head of College	U	1	60	P	Post
23	Joint Program Dir.	U	1	50	P	Post
24	Join Centre Co-Dir.	U	1	55	P	Post
25	Join Centre Co-Dir.	C	1	70	P	Post
26	Student 1	C	2	30/55	P	Pre/Post
27	Student 2	C	1	60	P	Post
28	Student 3	U	1	45	P	Post
29	Student Union Rep.	C	1	40	P	Post
Total			38	2175		

\* Modes include in Person (P) and Email (E)

\*\* HoS: Head of School

**Observation and Archival Sources:** In addition to interview data, the researchers had the opportunities to attend meetings of the merger integration working groups (pre- and post-merger) for over a year and half. We used the observation and insights contained in the field notes to supplement the transcribed interviews. We also analysed the minutes of all meetings of the integration working groups, public merger documentations, and published news, articles and university bulletins on the subject of

the merger in order to enrich the research data. These data sources were used to corroborate informants' statements about organizational routines, specifically administrative routines and the admission routine in this article, and where relevant provide further details.

#### **4.2. Analytical Approach**

We triangulate insights from 38 interviews, roughly twenty one months of participant observation and the minutes of monthly meetings of the integration working groups with extensive analysis of secondary documents developed by the merger communities. The unique chance to observe a merger in practice, before, during, and after the integration processes advances the understanding of the phenomenon in a way which is impossible for post-merger studies. The mode of reasoning in this research project was primarily inductive. We inductively analyse the collected data adhering to case study research design techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003) and constant comparison techniques (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The data analysis is conducted in an iterative fashion in order to satisfy the development of inductive theory. As a result, we were constantly traveling back and forth between the collected data, emerging findings, and extant literature (Locke, 2001). We also analysed the data collected in the familiarization and sampling stages using analytical techniques for qualitative content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994),

The rich data resulting from this approach, accompanied by appropriate coding and memoing, form the basis of the discussion in the next section. We heavily relied on constant comparison of multiple respondents over time in order to discover the similarities and differences. This enabled us to detect conceptual patterns in our qualitative data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Given our focus on the ostensive patterns of the routines, we performed both "first-order analysis" to capture actors' understandings in the terms in which they thought about the research questions at hand (Figure 2) and "second-order analysis" which enabled us to move to a theoretical level (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

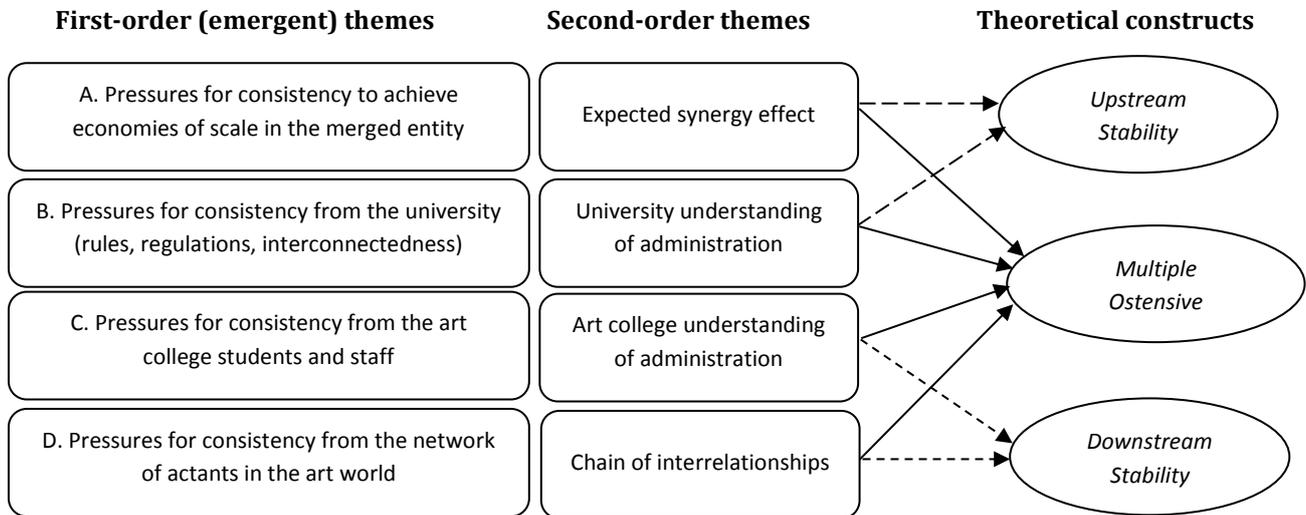
Following the methods of examining the validity of inductive inquiry, we checked our emerging findings with our key informants by asking them to reflect on the derived insights. The theoretical findings of this study have also been presented at a number of academic conferences and managerial workshops on relevant topics – mainly merger between universities - as conference paper or key-note talk. This enabled us to incorporate their questions and comments in our process of theory development. Hence, our presented theoretical framework in this article has undergone several major revisions through time.

### **5. EMERGENT FINDINGS**

As our observation of the merger progressed, moving from the familiarization into the sampling stages, we became increasingly aware of the existing, diverse pressures for consistency in conducting administrative routines concerning the new college of art's

day-to-day activities<sup>7</sup>, and the diverse (sometimes conflicting) rationalities behind their presence in the merged entity (figure 2). Based on these explanations, we categorize our first-order themes (empirical observations) into 4 groups as follows.

**Figure 2: Emergent Findings Structure**



### **5. A. Pressures for consistency to achieve economies of scale in the university**

First and foremost, as the merger dictated, there was a need to achieve an economy of scale by reducing (or eliminating) parallel tasks in all the administrations, including the admission routine. To do so, the university had to centralize administrative processes and resettle previously local administrators in the art college. Due to the huge difference in the size of the two institutions, it was reasonable to both groups of administrators that the art college should adopt the university’s way of doing admission. As one administrator from the art college mentioned in the interview:

“When you compare the size of the university with that of the college, you would find them miles apart, since college had 300 staff while the university may have over ten thousands [exaggerated]. So if there was something that we were doing better than the university, it is of course much easier for that 300 people to change to the ways of over 10,000 than if it is for 10,000 to change to the ways of 300”.

Consistent with the findings of Turner and Rindova (2012) and D’Adderio (2008), according to informants interviewed in the familiarization stage, achieving efficiency and economies of scale in administrative routines depends most of all on the nature of the process technology employed in the organization; i.e., automated versus manual. Here, centralized technologies as a distributed artefact help the routinization to guarantee consistency in actual performances of the administrative routines. The codified knowledge of conducting the admission routine embedded in the technology was, hence, a tool for the university to achieve efficiency and economies of scale (as well as assure the continuity of ‘best practices’ in the admission processes). We title this

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned before, we focus only on the admission routine in this article.

group of observations ‘pressures for consistency to achieve economies of scale in the merged entity’ in our first-order themes (figure 2). This corresponds to the ‘expected synergy effect’ in our theorization of the phenomenon among our second-order themes. As a high level manager in the university’s admission office predicted at very early stages of the post-merger era:

“We have many academic members of staff who are coming in to see our student system for the first time and it is very daunting. And they have been used to one system which was partly electronic, partly paper, coming to a system which is mainly electronic, and it is completely different and as we know it’s not totally intuitive the way it works ... at the end of their transition, they would say ‘I cannot believe how we were working before! This is much easier’”.

### ***5. B. Pressures for consistency from the university’s rules and regulations***

Also, from the university’s point of view, the existing central rules and procedures for admission routines (linked with other routines, such as registry, quality assurance, budget allocation e.g. for scholarship purposes, accommodation services e.g. for accommodation allocation purposes, etc.) work as an umbrella concept for overarching all the sub-units of the institution. This umbrella concept allows the subunits (three colleges and schools within each individual college) to have slightly divergent interpretations of administrative routines, and, hence, to perform their daily routines in marginally different ways in order to meet their somehow unique local needs. This was not an exception for the recently joined art college as a subunit of CHSS. As one respondent at the CHSS admission office explains:

“So it is this balance between making sure that we are all doing the right sort of things or at least meeting the right sort of outcomes in the right sort of way without saying hey this is necessarily a one size fits all; because the way of doing something in the business school might not be exactly the same way of meeting the same ends of another school... We are actually doing things in the best way that actually suits the school’s needs while still meeting the quality assurance requirements and the university’s needs. ... [It] is essential that we tell the new college of art how they need to adapt their old processes and adopt our processes. ... And then overarching all of that is training, linking together and making sure that again people can understand how to do their business when it’s a new business, a business that we have been involved in for some time so that we can say ‘we can help you’”.

However, this means that at least two levels of pressures for consistency exist in the university structure on the top of the school level (note the college of art sits at the level of schools in the university structure). We call this group of observations ‘pressures for consistency from the university (rules, regulations, interconnectedness)’ in our first-order themes (figure 2), which corresponds to the ‘university understanding of administration’ in our theorization of the phenomenon among our second-order themes. These two groups of our emergent empirical observations together also make our first theoretical construct. We label this construct ‘*upstream stability*’, since both

groups of observation are depicting the top-down, managerial willingness for continuity of practices and achieving stability (see figure 2); in other words, stabilizing the 'best practices' of the university in the administration of college activities.

### ***5. C. Pressures for consistency from the art college students and staff***

However, the reality is not shaped only by management desires, or upstream pressures. As we see from Cohen's (2007) paradox of the (n)ever changing world of organizational routines, or D'Adderio's (2008) tension between upstream and downstream pressures in manufacturing, there are cases in which the higher level authority - here the university - clearly sees either no alternative in conducting the downstream activities - here the art college daily routines - or (in very rare cases) admits the superiority of the partner's procedure, given specific circumstances. As a result of the latter, the university had to modify its 'best practices' and adopt the art college way of conducting them. In some cases where this was possible, this occurred immediately; more often, it became a long-term plan while temporary routines were produced in the meantime to deal with the issues in hand. This is specially the case in our setting since academic institutions are very bottom-heavy (Clark, 1998), and hence resistant from the bottom-up pressures to dominate very long. Here the difference is not only in the performance of the routines, but also in the artefacts that have been used by routine participants. Our informants have provided us a few scenarios where there were clear conflicts between the way the university conducts the admission processes and the way the art college academic staff and students have to do their admission routine. One of them includes the portfolio-based application process:

"One example was the means by which portfolios, which tend to be rather large in digital terms, are given to us. Digitally nowadays they can be up to 20 MB information. And one of the problems is that the university electronic application system does not accept it; 2 MB is the absolute maximum. The art college had an online, what they called the mini-portfolio systems. When somebody uploads an electronic copy of their portfolio, that is available for everyone to see, and then there is no need for a paper, there is no need for CDs, things do not get lots in the post, things do not get broken, it is there electronic and this is the way actually people have got used to operating, students, young men and women. This is bread and butter for them this is not unusual. So what we have become to look at now is to say: well we know that we cannot use the mini-portfolio system at the moment for postgraduates, because the resource on the IT side is not there at the moment; though I think the intention is to look at adopting it. But what we have done in this office with the school was saying: there are commercial things out there things like Dropbox on the web where you just upload something a whole bunch of data, you can get 2 GB for free which costs you absolutely nothing. And why don't we set up a system and to say to the students when you apply don't send us a CD or something, put it [upload it] onto a dropbox, put the link in with your application and that is it. This is what we are looking ahead. That was brought about because of what the art college was doing and it triggered us to think we may not be able to adopt exactly what they do but we can do something that maybe it has the same outcome".

We call this group of observations ‘pressures for consistency from the art college students and staff’ in our first-order themes (figure 2), which corresponds to the ‘art college understanding of administration’ in our theorization of the phenomenon among our second-order themes.

#### ***5. D. Pressures for consistency from the network of actants in the art world***

The degree to which a given organizational routine is embedded in broader organizational settings can influence its flexibility, and, more importantly, will likely shape the ongoing consequences of its changeability. “A strongly embedded routine, one that overlaps with many other structures, whose overlap is significant in the sense that a change in the enactment of one type of structure would be consequential for the others, and whose artefacts and expectations are reinforced by those generated by other structures, may be quite difficult to change over time” (Howard-Grenville, 2005: 632). This is especially the case for the art college, belonging to a unique world of art, and the merits it has developed in order to achieve world-wide renown. As two academic staff members in the art college told us:

“I don’t know how else to do it [admission routine]; because then we wouldn’t be able to sync with the rest of the art and design sector. You know, they can’t afford to do that, because the whole purpose of the art college, now sitting within that CHSS, is to build on that success, not to unpick it.”

“You know, what I am saying is that it will be still the art college academic staff that will assess the portfolios; there is no way around it in a creative industry such as art and design. Because it’s clearly linked with other practices we do in the art colleges; things like continuity of fair assessment, or being aligned with other art colleges. We cannot afford any other kind of admitting students since we will lose the best students out there in the art and design fields”.

In other words, as Feldman (2000) observes, within the process of conducting organizational routines, there is an association between the level of the individual agent and the collectivity to which the individual belongs. The normative side of the art and design world is collectively strong enough to dominate. Although actions are still taken by individual artists, the understanding of the outcomes and how they relate to ideals and values is often socially constructed in a much broader sense; too broadly for a single art college to deviate. We refer to this group of our observations as ‘pressures for consistency from the network of actants in the art world’ in our first-order theme (figure 2). This group of emergent findings corresponds to the ‘chain of interrelationships’ in our theorization of the phenomenon among our second-order themes. The last two groups of our emergent empirical observations together form our second theoretical construct. We label this construct ‘*downstream stability*’, since both groups of observation depict the bottom-up, practitioners’ (artists’) willingness for continuity and stability of their practices; in other words, for stabilizing the ‘best practices’ of the art world in the administration of art college activities within the university’s structure. All our first and second order themes (the four major pressures

for consistency) indeed form our third and main theoretical construct, which is the “multiple ostensive aspects” in admission routines (see figure 2). Table 2 provides more supporting quotations for our first-order, emerging themes in our empirical observations depicted in figure 2.

**Table II: Themes, Categories, and Representative Quotations**

1 <sup>st</sup> Order Themes and Data Categories	Representative Quotations
A. Pressures for consistency to achieve economies of scale in the university	<p>A. 1. It wasn't a two-way process: it wasn't what did the university do well and what the college do well; that wasn't the approach. It was: we are the university, we are this size, we can't adopt your policies, procedures, systems, etc.</p> <p>A.2. There have been problems with matriculation at the art college. I think that's disappointing because the art college had a very, very good system and it was recognised throughout the country. So, these kinds of things were disappointing that there were aspects of really good practises that impacted directly on students that weren't kind of picked up upon because of the much smaller scale [of the art college].</p> <p>A.3. Art colleges are incredibly expensive to run. [There is a] high staff-student ratio. It is very intensive teaching, big studio spaces, you need the latest equipment. All those sort of things can be shared in a larger university. That sort of investment is far easier to make. Then you can open up to other uses.</p> <p>A.4. I think when you look at the size of the University and the size of the College, comparably they're miles apart. The College really has 300 staff, here you have 10,000. So if there are things that we've done well and there were some that we've done better than the University ... but the point I'm trying to make is that it is easier for 300 people to change to the ways of 10,000 than if it is for 10,000 to change to the ways of 300.</p> <p>A.5. I think a lot of the merger depends on not too much fresh air and newness. I think of the things you have to ... the sort of language being used is more about continuity, continuing good practice [of university].</p> <p>A.6. Here [in the university] is a very, very clear understanding of the norm, and everyone gains a variant of flexibility to move fast. I think that's the biggest contrast for what I can see; there [in the art college] is less shared understanding of the normal, correct procedures.</p> <p>A.7. They [art college] got more dependent on individual people. But you cannot do that within an institution like the university. There have to be a set of things that is the norm, policies that are the norm, and you can deviate from, you can respond quickly if something crops up. But it is very knowingly done as a deviation from the norm.</p>
B. Pressures for consistency from the university's rules and regulations	<p>B.1. Now, we are at the stage where we are literally just looking at it and saying this looks really exciting, so we want to say this is something we could possibly adopt. And we've got to think how does this adoption of the system, can we do it literally and how much we can use it? Does that require us to change some of our policies in the university? And some of our policy documents may refer to sending things out in a certain way and getting signatures and that sort of thing.</p> <p>B.2. Our experience to date, with going to the [university] senates, the higher level committees, to say here is something which is a little bit out of the ordinary and here is a case, can we do this or what do you think of that? There has always been tremendous response, there has been interest, there has been enthusiasm. And usually, it results in an “ok, that seems reasonable”. And if it results in something less than that it is because it has been really a good discussions, open pros and cons discussed and we all understand that maybe yes for a greater good we can't do something.</p> <p>B.3. If it comes to an issue we have to go to the [university] senates to say: we know the art college way of doing this by doing something a bit wacky and strange, but this is how we will like to try, we know that we will have a very receptive audience who will be very challenging of us to say why, why do I do it, why couldn't I do it this way? But if we put an argument up [for why] we are going to do something a bit different, then they would give us a good hearing.</p>

**1<sup>st</sup> Order  
Themes and  
Data Categories**

**Representative Quotations**

	<p>B.4. There has been a need for modification, I mean clearly we've got colleagues that are now coming in with some important differences in academic traditions and pedagogy, and so the whole university regulatory framework is hard to adjust, to accommodate the necessary and sensible difference that comes from what the school of design does, which is quite different than any of the existing departments in the university.</p> <p>B.5. My perception was a reticence that although there seem to be a PG research office, there wasn't a PG taught office, cause PG taught and the undergraduates were linked very closely together in the old art college. Whereas we link the postgraduate taught and the postgraduate research together.</p> <p>B.6. For example, at the university, we don't allow re-sits at PG level for courses that are failed, you pass or you fail them. Now the art college, they do allow resits. Now if you have resits, then what happens? Is that the student then, apart from anything else, the actual mechanics of when they do the resit and what is the effect on their total timeline on that resit, means that people exit with all sorts of different dates, and how do we record that on our systems so that everybody can look at the same thing and understand what each of these individual students are taking resit, what's happening. And in the long term, do we want to continue with this, or do we actually want to say: well no, that's something maybe was allowed before, sorry, that's not the way we do the things in the university.</p> <p>B.7. How about the QA [quality assurance] we've got; the QA practises that are well developed in the university, we have seen some of the ways the art college were doing their work in the early days, we have seen some of the ways that you worked. Are you happy that you can meet our QA requirements?</p>
<p>C. Pressures for consistency from the art college students and staff</p>	<p>C.1. So I would think that it's just a learning curve for a couple of years, but I can't see that the fundamentals that underpinned the pedagogy for art and design would be taken away, because that's how you can't assess art and design in the way that you would assess law; you can't do it by a written exam. Although there's a written dissertation, you can't assess creativity in written; so no, I don't think that would change.</p> <p>C.2. I think change for any individual is quite a difficult thing, but in higher education, and especially in art colleges I think, staff turnover is quite low, so [academic] staff tend to be there for a long time, and of course they are used to a particular set-up for conducting their research and teaching.</p> <p>C.3. I think the staff in the art college generally knew that they have a very unique, very local way of working, and they knew there will be changes, and because they didn't know what those changes would be, what it would entail, how it would impact them, that's what was caused I suppose their concern and their worry of interrupting their tasks.</p> <p>C.4. I definitely think the admin staff have had much more difficult time because they are just having to learn new stuff and different processes. They are the ones that often are trying to keep the student registration coming in while still so worrying about all the new processes. Not wanting to disrupt what an individual student's processes. And trying to run two processes together [the old one and the new one], and to match them. Huge anxiety! Huge stress!</p> <p>C.5. In all sorts of other areas [other than academic practices], more attached to operational departments or core university support departments, like finance and HR, and estates and all of these big sorts of corporative things, you will get economies of scale in there; I think for some of the academic related things, they won't be as noticeable.</p> <p>C.6. It's a two-way thing. We need to understand what causes them [art college staff] grief, what it is that caused them to go around with long faces, maybe it's the way that we do our business in the university. Do we need to explain it better? Do we need to explain the benefits to them better? Or do we need to understand from them that maybe their way of doing things was actually better than our traditional way of doing something?</p> <p>C.7. I am used to a smaller organisation where generally, I would actually just get out of my office and walk next door or go down to the floor below and actually just speak to somebody. Here is so</p>

1 <sup>st</sup> Order Themes and Data Categories	Representative Quotations
	<p>big; it's difficult sometimes to find out who you actually need to speak to, and then it's difficult to find out how you will go about speaking to them. Emails are difficult things to do when you have never met that person, to just email them out of the blue, is that appropriate?</p> <p>C.8. Over a period of years since I have been there, the academic staff have seen themselves more as educators and that's because there has been an awful lot of work done in the college about excellence in teaching and learning. Academics were engaged with the application processes from the very first day with students. I think there was some concern that that wouldn't be recognised in the university.</p> <p>C.9. I believe that the academics will ensure that that [the admission routine] doesn't change!</p> <p>C.10. I think there were a lot of complications around the student records; you know merging into a huge big system. And again because it doesn't matter ... there's never two institutions set out their student records systems the same; they are all set up entirely different. But again, because the art college was set up to deal with a different types of application, different types of assessment method, and [hence] the structure was different, the reporting process, the statutory reporting was different; so there's been a lot of a frustration in that area [for staff and students].</p>
D. Pressures for consistency from the network of actants in the art world	<p>D.1. There have been some problems identified very, very quickly. And particularly for the undergraduates, there's one of the senior staff who has moved over has been given that as part of his remit to manage the transition for admissions, because they can't afford for the numbers to start dropping down because it was a very elite institution in the art world, and they can't afford to lose that sort of prestige. So there are a lot of challenges I think here, and that will take a lot of care for management over a period of time, but there is someone who got an overview of all of that, and that is an art college person.</p> <p>D.2. There was a sort of university roadshow which was set up, I think, the day or 2 days before the final degree show had to be set in place! And these are nuances which are specific to the art college, and you couldn't necessarily expect the university to know about them, but nobody really asked. So, that's one of the difficulties, you know, nobody sort of says what will be a suitable day for us to come and do a roadshow, or if they'd asked, I don't know who they asked.</p> <p>D.3. The two academic registries actually worked in a co-operative way from April, not just from the first of Aug, and that was because there were processes running that there were interdependencies on, like, application, assessment, graduation and things like that.</p> <p>D.4. I think what you are saying here is the conflict between a big academic university, taking on a subject which is very creative, and where they don't have the experience of the assessment of the creative side.</p> <p>D.5. I mean that's the other thing within higher education, the pension providers aren't certainty in the College of Art, the pension providers aren't the art college pension providers. They are separate organisations, quite bureaucratic organization. So you have to go through various motions and procedures to find out information from the pension people and that can take several weeks. They send you a letter which you have to hand to the person and etc; they have to consider it. So, yeah, it was hugely time consuming.</p>

### 5. E. Outcomes:

We will discuss the interaction between these pressures and performances in the next section in more detail. But first let's have a quick look at the current state of play in the merged entity. Because of the decision to move all procedures as of the first of August 2011 with no disruption to academic practices of the art college, a lot of the electronics systems (including, for example, student records and art college online processes) were all shut down at the end of July, and therefore the work that the staff had to continue

doing in the subsequent months (August and September) had to be done manually. This added a considerable amount of additional work. Our informants tell us the story:

“One of the big problematic areas is the migration of their students, their records, from the art college system to the university system. I think what we had hoped was that the information could come directly from their system to our student system, in a pretty seamless way. This was because they had students on their electronic system, and we have got our students on our electronic system, and both student systems come from the same source, from TRIBAL [a software package] and basically, ours is a development of theirs. And it didn’t happen as easily as expected. Talking to my colleagues in the IT world, there’s been several issues where student records haven’t migrated properly across. There was also an element where the way the art college did their business required their student system to be set up such that their process could be recognized within their electronic system. So there’d be several fields in their systems that had no equivalents in our system”.

“One of the learnt points I think we have taken out of this was that we found it quite difficult to get people to engage with the complexity of the work that the academic registry in the college of art actually supported, and there wasn’t this expertise set in below them at subject level ... And I think the transition period has shown that to be true. And we feel that’s one of the points that the new administration is now struggling with, that their sort of catch-all administrative culture had gone and there isn’t any underneath it to replace it; so that’s been a big challenge.”

“I think actually that the transitional period needed to be much longer and it would have been probably a better decision to have let the original administration structure in place for maybe the first 6 months and then phasing it out. Rather than this, everything stops on the first of August night; in fact that didn’t work, because on the first of August, it was immediately apparent that the new administration were getting themselves located, getting themselves sorted out, discussing with the new Head of College what he wanted to structure. And in the meantime, the operation was still needing to run! So, we had to immediately agree that the admission team had to go back to ECA and continue to work for two months there.”

As a result of these conflicts, the higher order authorities in the university started to think of changing their centralized administrations concerning the art college admission processes:

“While the new cross-art college graduate school will make it easier for staff and students to work across disciplinary boundaries, it is clear that the lack of physical proximity and insufficiently close working relationships between the administrative staff and academics in some disciplines have presented challenges in the first year. It may be possible to address this through adopting elements of multi-site delivery while retaining a cross-art college administrative structure. The latter issue is also likely to be a consequence of administrative staff not yet having developed a knowledge of the particular requirements of the different disciplines in the new art college, and will resolve itself as relationships mature. The art college will monitor the delivery of graduate school services and consider

if a multi-site delivery model is an option.” (official report on the meeting of the university court, released 10th of December 2012).

Based on our emergent findings, we are now able to model the findings and their relationship as depicted in figure 2. As the model shows, the emergent themes led us to a better understanding of the existing multiple ostensive aspects of the administrative routines in the merged institution and their recursive relationship with the day-to-day performances in the college and the university.

## **6. Discussion and Framework**

Consistency in the performance of organizational routines is a means of achieving organizational efficiency. It has been argued that this can be achieved by simultaneous reduction in deliberation and organizational conflict and facilitation of learning and coordination (Stene, 1940; Becker, 2004). As Turner and Rindova (2012: 24) noted, “these positive effects, however, depend on the stability of operating conditions, and research has shown that changing environmental conditions are indeed associated with routine disruption and negative organizational outcomes”. These negative outcomes, we believe, can be ascribed to the multiplicity of understanding the routines, created by multiple pressures for consistency, including upstream or down-stream pressures in practicing change and stabilizing routines.

Several factors emerged from the data as central to multiple ostensive understandings created by multiple pressures for consistency and their impact on performative routines. First, the study shows that different individuals and administrative groups approach organizing routines differently (Howard-Grenville, 2005), resulting not only in multiple ostensive aspects of routines but also potentially in variation in performances. This puts agency at the centre of our attention once again. Second, fast learners from the smaller organization have been found to withdraw their ostensive understanding and enact the bigger organization’s ostensive aspects, resulting in convergent performative routines. The rapid socialization of routine participants into, and their habitual enactment of the dominant routines of, the bigger organization enable the exploitation side of the merger while simultaneously tending to reduce exploration opportunities:

“I think that will be dependent very much on individuals and particularly their background or the length of service and things like that, because some of them [who] haven’t had a long service would have a breadth of knowledge but no depth to it necessarily because they hadn’t been there long enough. Those [who] were there for a long time have got the breadth and the depth.”

In contrast, the slow pace of learning by less socialized routine participants with a considerable depth of knowledge tends to increase the potential for exploration and to improve the aggregate knowledge of the merged institution (March, 1991):

“There is an awful lot to learn from the art college and especially in terms of the assessment and feedback and things like that, to utilise their knowledge in terms of developing that assessment model and assessment tool to bring the university up. That’s a huge step, and fantastic transfer of knowledge and a new process”.

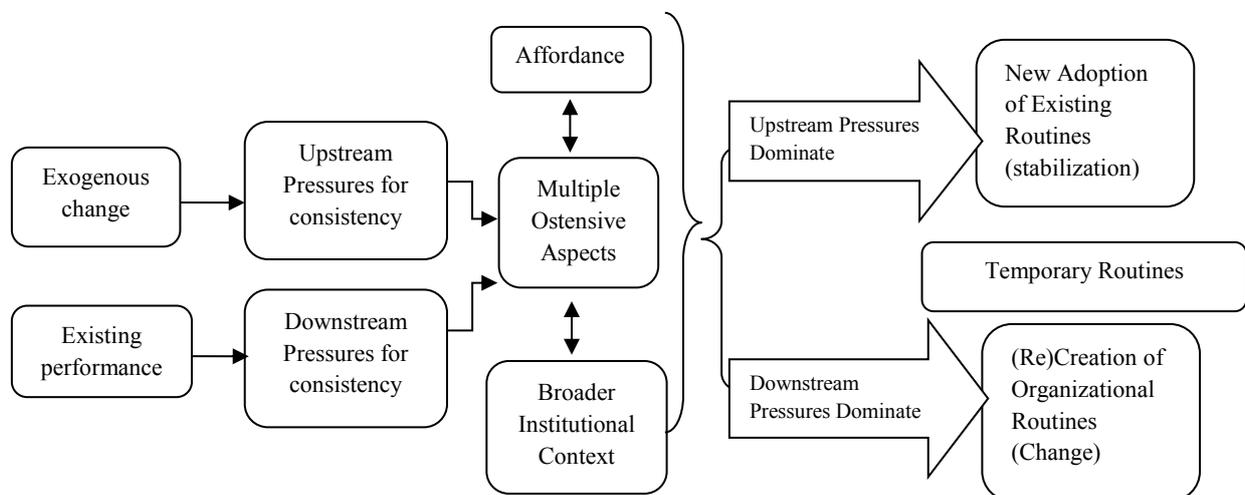
“I’ve got personally mixed feels about it, the area I’m going to is an area I’ve got a lot of expertise in, and therefore I think I can actually do a lot with my experience to benefit the area that I am now responsible for; so I think there is an advantage to the department and I think I just need to have a personal awareness I think of trying to make sure that I stay informed and involved in the things that perhaps I had a lot of knowledge and experience in before that won’t automatically be on my desk now!”

However, this is of strictly limited outputs due to (1) the restricted “affordance” of the merged institution to realize these opportunities (Gibson, 1979; 1984; Hutchby, 2001), (2) the drive to achieve economies of scale out of the merger and to avoid conflict. Since routine performances are embedded in the organizational contexts of the merging organizations, the affordance of the bigger organization constrains the adaptation and new uses of administrative routines. As noted by Nicolini (2012:4), organizational artefacts also add to these difficulties since organizational “objects in fact, both make practices durable and connect practices with each other across space and time”. One informant mentioned in an interview:

“I don’t think that they will change it in the short term because of too much risk attached to changing it fundamentally. I think what they will try to do over a period of maybe a couple of years is to try and align as much of the administration attached to it into CHSS as they possibility can, without damaging the academic side of the admission process; I mean the portfolio side.”

While we do not deny the importance of agency in the change and persistence of routines, our findings make the “affordance” of the institution and the organizational context as central as agency (see figure 3).

**Figure 3: A Model for Practicing Change and Stabilizing Routines**



As already noted by routines scholars, the ostensive aspects of routines are not only the result of existing performances and exogenous changes (hence upstream and downstream pressures for consistency), but are also “influenced by institutional dimensions such as the complex web of historical local institutions and systems of routines in which subroutines are involved” (Labatut, Aggeri, and Girard, 2012: 65). In our case study, this was demonstrated by the way the broader institutional context in the art world can shape the chain of interrelationships, resulting in multiple ostensive aspects and leading to both stabilization and change in the performance of admission routines.

In line with Feldman and Pentland (2003), we also found that modern management, in order to control the actual performances, needs to control the decisions made in the course of conducting a routine. As a result of this upstream pressure, any variation would be regarded as resistance. In their words, “this analysis might suggest that the ostensive aspect of a routine is aligned with managerial interests (dominance), while the performative aspect is aligned with the interests of labor (resistance)” (Feldman and Pentland, 2000: 110). However, in contrast to their findings, ours show that the ostensive aspects can be aligned with different constituencies within an organization (including managerial, institutional and/or labour interests), and that the performance in practicing exogenous change might be aligned with managerial (dominance, or stabilization in our model) or administrators’ (resistance, or change in our model) interests, depending on the domination of upstream or downstream pressures for consistency. This is also in variation with what Zbaracki and Bergen (2010: 13) found in their longitudinal study of price-adjustment routines:

“Consider first adaptation of routines, which we treat as a process of endogenous change. We find different processes depending on the magnitude of the change. For smaller changes, the performative aspects dominate. The routines define a ‘zone of discretion’ (from Nelson and Winter, 1982) in which the marketing group changes list price and the sales force then negotiates an acquisition price. For larger changes, the ostensive aspects dominate”.

As their argument implies, the more abstract ostensive aspects are usually dominant in larger changes, as upstream pressures from managers determine the courses of action and overcome downstream resistance. Our findings, in contrary, show that whether in small or large changes, both upstream and downstream pressures may dominate and shape the course of action.

What was largely ignored in previous research by routine scholars is the creation of temporary routines in which neither upstream nor downstream pressure dominate, but the course of action is shaped by symbiosis or consensus of different pressures for consistency. This was the case of portfolio management in our case study, where the use of an external artefact was agreed on as an interim arrangement while the merged institution developed the capacity to incorporate the technological complexities of the college’s practice.

In line with Feldman (2000) and Feldman and Pentland (2003), our findings also confirm that organizational context, which is the result of the interaction of internal upstream and downstream pressure and external institutional pressures, shapes the course of action by making it easier, and hence more likely, to take some actions, while making other actions harder, and therefore less likely. The resultant performance, in response to external and internal changes, creates and recreates the ostensive aspects of organizational routines through time, which makes change conceivable from one action to the next.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that the multiple ostensive aspects of routines are not only highly distributed over the organization, from bottom to top, but also extend over the immediate boundaries of the organization into the institutional framework in which the organization performs. As D'Adderio (2008: 770) has observed, "abstract understandings of routines are not simply people-embodied but highly distributed across a complex web of people and everyday artefacts".

## **7. Conclusion**

Revealing the internal structure of, and the interaction between, different aspects of organizational routines has undoubtedly provided useful insights into many of the under-researched aspects of organizational change and stabilization. However, there is still a lot to explore. Specifically, although the extant literature has noted that routines may have multiple ostensive aspects, because different participants may have different understandings of how a routine should be carried out, this multiplicity is often overlooked and the simplifying assumption adopted that a given routine has a single ostensive aspect. When an organization experiences an exogenous change, such as a merger, this multiplicity becomes a vital issue. This paper tried to make a contribution towards filling these important gaps in the understanding of the dynamics of routines. First and foremost, it provided a finer-grained picture of the micro dynamics of interaction between multiple ostensive aspects of routines and actual performances. It also allows us to incorporate the effect of affordance of the organization and the institutional framework surrounding it into this picture. The article extends Routine Theory by explicating the formation of multiple ostensive aspects, as a result of multiple pressures for consistency distributed throughout the organization, from bottom to top, and extending beyond the boundaries of the organization in which it performs.

We have also contributed to the understanding of how an organization's canonical knowledge may be subject to variation across the organization's membership, due to the presence of various, possibly conflicting, interests, both within the organization and beyond its boundaries. This suggests that in situations of significant shocks such as organizational mergers, it is not only the most tacit aspects of organizational culture that may pose roadblocks on the way to integration, but also unlooked-for inconsistencies in canonical practice of which those given responsibility for execution of the merger may be unaware. What may appear to them as resistance may in fact be the

result of cross-organizational differences in the understanding of relevant routines that need to be resolved by dialogue that begins enough before an exogenous organizational change, such as a merger, by building an understanding of the circumstances giving rise to variation in routine performance and makes it possible to arrive at a convergence in practice.

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