

Johan Kolsteeg

Understanding complex practice in cultural and creative contexts

Abstract

This paper reflects on a longitudinal research project into strategic practice in non-profit cultural organisations and for-profit creative firms. The research aimed to acquire in-depth understanding of how organisational actors realise strategic action in daily practice in relation to finding a balance between artistic and economic interests of the organisation. The theoretical framework of the research is based on Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), the methodological framework is based in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Conclusions of the research pertain to how the artistic / economic deliberation affects managerial worries such as networking, leadership and growth. The research shows how the deliberation does or does not become routinised depending on the relationship with the context. Differences and similarities between non-profit cultural organisations and for-profit creative firms are explained from the practice angle.

The findings of this research will be briefly presented, but the focus of this paper is on theoretical and methodological implications for research into cultural and creative organisations. Experiences in this research with the non-reductionist perspective, the breadth of methodological options available (Golsorkhi, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2012) and the strategies for making sense of complex data (Langley, 1999) must lead to reflection and discussion for the benefit of organisational practice research in the arts and creativity.

Issues that are likely to be addressed are:

What are elements of theoretical foundation of this type of research?

How is theory of practice instrumental in understanding organisational strategy?

How does an ethnographic perspective relate to systematic analysis?

What issues are encountered with regard to sampling?

How can findings of ethnographic organisational research be generalised?
Is there a basis for a common methodological framework for practice based organisational research in the cultural and creative field?
How can we understand context in ethnographic organisational research?
What are implications of our understanding of the arts manager?
How can our understanding of complex practice of arts managers inform arts management curricula?

The paper will conclude with a suggestion for an agenda for further practice-based research in the context of arts and creativity.

References

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