

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hybridizing arts with efficiency in an Italian government agency

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Abstract

This paper explores how arts and arts-based initiatives (ABIs) are embedded in a non-arts organization with a pronounced imprint on efficiency.

When two unconnected and distant fields of activity coexist and collaborate, this is known in academia as hybridity. Scholars in hybridity are interested in studying the tension that emerges from the blending of otherwise distant fields and the coping actions that give stability over time. Conversely, studies on ABIs have mostly overlooked the tension arising from the coupling of arts practices and efficiency practices viewed in a long-term perspective.

To address this issue, we conducted a process research study on a government agency with a strong efficiency mindset and a focus on standardized procedures which had decided to promote its arts collection. The analysis was based on semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and archive data and focused on the tension and actions taken by the unit running the arts collection and the rest of the government agency. Our findings identified two types of actions, instant and enduring actions, which can be deployed with diverse temporality and by people with different hierarchical positions to navigate the tensions arising from

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art being incorporated within a non-arts organization over time.

KEYWORDS

arts, arts-based initiative, government agency, hybridity, temporality, tension

1 | INTRODUCTION

Internal and external boundaries in organizations are becoming blurred as these entities turn to new fields of activity in response to the current challenges in society, unpredictable external events, and changing market conditions (Biraglia & Gerrath, 2020). Growing numbers of organizations are exploring how to integrate the world of arts into their operations (Zelenskaya et al., 2022), as when fashion houses ask artists to create their collections (Chailan, 2018). Arts, and more precisely artists, force even government agencies to reappraise how they operate because they stimulate ways of working that are new to them and go outside their expected range of action (Taylor, 2021). In academia, the trend for non-arts organizations to embed arts within their boundaries for their own benefit falls under the umbrella concept of arts-based initiatives (ABIs) (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015).

According to Battilana et al. (2017), hybridity is “the mixing of core organizational elements that would not conventionally go together” (p. 129), and we have applied this concept to ABIs. We have specifically focused on the hybridity that comes into being as the consequence of an initiative (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019) to implant arts within the boundaries of a non-arts organization and allocate it to a precise unit.

If a non-arts organization, whether public or private, decides to embed arts within its perimeter and implement an ABI, this will inevitably lead to tension (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015). As with every hybrid, ABIs can potentially generate tension because of differences between the underlying logics of the arts world and the non-arts organization, where logics are defined as shared and taken-for-granted beliefs, systems of values, and practices that guide the actors’ behavior in a certain field of activity (Greenwood et al., 2011). The critical point here is that improvisation and creativity are two key factors that drive the success of endeavors in the arts world, whereas standardized processes and control systems are key to performance in the business world of non-arts organizations (Ancelin-Bourguignon et al., 2020). In this situation, the contrasting logics call for actions to cope with the ensuing tension and so create an environment of mutual acceptance where the two sides can coexist (Barry & Meisiek, 2015). However, if the ABI is expected to be a long-term arrangement, this and similar tension is likely to pop up again (Chailan, 2018), and further actions would be needed to calm the waters. Despite this being the case, the actions to manage tension between the arts and non-arts logics are currently overlooked in ABI-related knowledge, and there is no temporality perspective on the ABI phenomenon (Antal et al., 2018; Ippolito & Adler, 2018). By contrast, coping actions have caught academic attention within the hybridity debate, and scholars in hybridity have confirmed that temporality plays a crucial part in the studying of hybrid settings (Gillett et al., 2019), in that hybrids are sensitive to their context (Ramus et al., 2016), and different actions can be put into place at various times with a view to stability (Smith & Besharov, 2019).

Continuing from this point, our aim is to investigate “how arts are progressively integrated over time into a non-arts organization.” We explored our research topic through a temporality perspective and concentrated on two nodal points in the hybridization of two distant logics, that is, the tension arising and the coping actions employed.

For the purposes of this study, process research is applied to a single detailed case (Yin, 1994). We selected a large Italian government agency delivering state welfare services to all of Italy. The agency is of a size and reach that efficiency is necessarily a byword throughout, and it exercises control over all its operations; additionally, it has a highly developed standardization-driven mindset. The agency has been promoting its proprietary arts collection since 2012 with the twofold intention to keep its employees more actively engaged and also to rebuild its external reputation.

As part of our process research, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and participant observations, as well as using archive data, all of which were analyzed and interpreted through narrative and temporal strategies (Langley, 1999).

Taking a temporality perspective on the tension emerging during the process to integrate arts into the agency, we found two groups of distinctive actions that keep stability in place over time, albeit in a dynamic fashion, and these actions are deployed at different levels of temporality and by people occupying different hierarchical positions.

We have set out the paper along the following lines. The theoretical background is introduced in the next section, leading on to the methodology, the findings and then the discussion, where the distinctive actions are conceptualized, and each is linked to its (short- or long-range) temporality and the various roles in the agency's hierarchical structure. The paper concludes by outlining the study's contribution to knowledge on tension and coping actions in ABIs and to the academic debate on hybridity in a long-term perspective, along with the practical implications.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Organizations are constantly coming up with ways to meet contemporary challenges (Biraglia & Gerrath, 2020). Although this opens up potential for innovation (Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020), it also means handling the coexistence between sometimes very "distant" and/or new fields.

The arts are undoubtedly one of the most iconic elements in the current trend whereby most private (Zelenskaya et al., 2022) and a few public (Taylor, 2021) entities introduce arts into their operations.

Any organizational and/or management intervention enacted to embed arts within the boundaries of a non-arts organization is defined as an "ABI" (Schiuma, 2009). In ABIs, arts are seen as a management device and a business asset to be used in the development of the non-arts organization (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015). Nevertheless, it is not easy to open up the potential of using arts for management purposes in an organization. One reason is that the worlds of arts and of management can be seen as competing forces (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). Although the arts pursue creativity and accommodate improvisation, a non-arts organization pursues rationality and adopts standardized procedures to improve performance (Ancelin-Bourguignon et al., 2020).

In academia, hybridity is one of the lenses used to study situations where separate yet contrasting forces coexist and collaborate within the same organization (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Battilana et al., 2017; Greenwood et al., 2011), and this is our chosen lens to review ABIs.

2.1 | Arts-based initiatives read through the lens of hybridity

Hybridity is the condition in which usually distinct parts, with different logics, coexist or collaborate (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Battilana et al., 2017), where, by logics, we mean taken-for-granted beliefs, systems of values, and practices that guide the actors' behavior in certain fields of activity (Greenwood et al., 2011). Likewise, in an ABI, the practices guiding actors within the arts field merge with practices guiding other fields, such as business (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015).

Different systems of values, practices and logics can be combined at various organizational levels.

At the interorganizational level, such different systems come into play when private businesses, academia, state enterprises, and other organizations collaborate in a joint program (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Similarly, a consortium of private companies and museums (Ferry & Slack, 2021) can be modeled as a setting with interorganizational hybridity.

Hybridity can also occur at the intraorganizational level when different fields of activity are blurred within the same organization (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), as is the case of social enterprises. Equally, arts-based ventures can be modeled as a hybrid setting when cultural and industrial practices work jointly and/or distinctly toward improving business performance (Lindqvist, 2017).

Lastly, remaining within intraorganizational boundaries, even single initiatives can be affected by hybridity (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019), when new perspectives and tools are used in a project restricted to a single unit. In a similar way, non-arts organizations may decide to import arts directly into their business through various artistic collaborations or by creating their own collections, thus benefitting from an induced interaction with the arts (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015). For instance, a non-arts organization could bring arts into its innovation department to uplift its in-house creativity (Dalpiaz et al., 2016).

In this paper, we concentrated our analysis on the hybridity that takes shape within this last form of ABIs. Our unit of analysis is the team that is responsible for weaving arts-based practices into the non-arts organization's other procedures.

The enforced interaction between very distinct fields of activity, a feature of hybridity, can scale up creative power (Dalpiaz et al., 2016) but, because of the competing logics in play, it also leads to tension, which can have serious repercussions (Maran & Lowe, 2021). In ABI literature, scholars have identified examples of the tension arising from embedding arts in a non-arts organization, which they mainly observed in artists-in-residence programs (Antal et al., 2018; Ippolito & Adler, 2018). In these circumstances, the artists may feel themselves trapped in an unfriendly space (Barry & Meisiek, 2015) and employees could start questioning the arrangement and distance themselves from the arts (Antal et al., 2018). However, in these circumstances, tension is something that should be actively pursued, being the point when artists and employees start talking (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015).

Because tension takes a central role in hybrids, scholars have studied coping strategies extensively (Battilana et al., 2017), arguing that, if an organization intends to leverage on hybrid initiatives, it must manage tension, and thus, it needs proper strategies to do so (Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020). For instance, proposals in previous studies include selective coupling or choosing elements from opposing logics to partially satisfy both (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), and mixing, combining, and giving legitimacy to values from various fields of activity (Grossi et al., 2022).

Although the actions taken depend on the logics in play (Jay, 2013), there is no particular reference in ABI studies or in the hybridity debate to the strategies for coping with the ensuing tension in arts-integration (Antal et al., 2018). Former studies have only cursorily suggested, and then only in the context of collaborations with artists, that tension could be resolved through a collegial discussion between artist and staff (Flamand et al., 2022; Ippolito & Adler, 2018). However, serious concerns remain on the hazy arts-integration objectives, which hamper the participants' motivation (Zelenskaya et al., 2022) or hide the fact that arts are being instrumentalized (Ferry & Slack, 2021).

Hybridity scholars have recently suggested that tension is long-lasting, in that hybrid contexts are sensitive to contextual change (Ramus et al., 2016), such as the stakeholders' demands (Ramus et al., 2021). A new policy or law, or a change to the context of the organization or its external environment, or new stakeholder expectations (Maran & Lowe, 2021) could awaken dormant tension, undermining the effectiveness of the coping actions previously adopted and the carefully won stability (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019). Equally, ABIs can be sensitive to contextual changes that could affect the priorities between arts logics and non-arts logics. For example, external stakeholders making "artwashing" accusations could reveal fake art (Ferry & Slack, 2021).

The contextual and instable nature of hybrids means that researchers must adopt a temporal and processual perspective to study how stability is reached over time (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020). Temporality is gaining attention among hybridity scholars (Smith & Besharov, 2019), but they have taken contrasting positions, revealing inconsistencies among the studies (Gillett et al., 2019). On one side of the argument are studies which suggest that the logics can be balanced and blended through the full hybridization of concepts, activities, and processes (Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020). On the other side, the assumption made in some hybridity studies is that balance is reached dynamically once the hybrid's members are encouraged to shift back and forth between the two opposite logics (Smith & Besharov, 2019), or when employees judiciously disentangle the competing logics and set wide objectives that enable them to complete the hybrid initiative (Gümüşay et al., 2020).

It is thus clear that, in hybrid settings, temporality is a key concept that must be factored in when studying long-lasting tension and the associated coping actions (Smith & Besharov, 2019), which can vary depending on when they

are taken (Gillett et al., 2019). However, only a scattering of knowledge has been produced on how to achieve continuing stability. At the same time, scholars in ABIs have mostly adopted a static approach to studying the introduction of arts into a non-arts organization (Flamand et al., 2022), and they only briefly touch upon the actions to cope with tension (Chailan, 2018).

The present study focuses on two nodal points in hybridization (tension and coping actions) and has the twofold intention to (1) fill the knowledge gap on the tension and coping actions that arise when arts are integrated into a non-arts organization over time and (2) inform the debate on the actions that can sustain hybridity over time, by studying tension shaped through the comingling of arts logics and non-arts logics (e.g., efficiency). We have thus investigated “how arts are progressively integrated over time into a non-arts organization.”

3 | METHODOLOGY

Process research (Langley, 1999) was applied to a single detailed case (Yin, 1994), as it is a suggested method to study how people deal with a certain event over time (Gehman et al., 2018), the event here being incorporating arts into a non-arts organization.

We analyzed our data through a combination of narrative strategy and temporal bracketing strategy (Langley, 1999; Gehman et al., 2018), seen as particularly useful in process temporal reconstruction.

The grounds for the case selected are given below, followed by details on the data collected and the steps taken in the data analysis.

3.1 | Research setting

To expand the debate on ABIs, our empirical case is an Italian government agency, labeled Hera for reasons of confidentiality. In 2012, Hera initiated a program to support and promote its own arts collection consisting of nearly 6000 20th century artworks plus a considerable number of historic buildings.

Hera delivers state welfare services to all of Italy. The agency has almost 26,000 employees spread over the country, it has an annual accrued revenue in the order of 500 million euros, and about 2 million people visit its website every day.

Hera's size and reach entail sweeping standardization across its internal processes to prevent any disparity in the services it provides to end recipients. Because of its widespread presence, Hera operates under the rules of efficiency and exercises control for reasons of transparency. Hera has a strong management-based ethos, and its main institutional pillars are standardization and efficiency.

Hera has often been the subject of media attention and national controversy and is unlikely to be on a list of favorite or highly rated workplaces in Italy. Against this background, Hera came up with the idea of an ABI to redeem itself and its reputation, using artwork to rekindle positive relationships with its stakeholders. However, Hera's efficiency-driven mindset and standardized procedures are in clear contrast with improvisation, creativity, and all the other typical features of the arts world.

This case is of interest not only for the differences between Hera's efficiency mindset and arts-related principles, but also because Hera intended to reinvent itself through artwork. We were also able to bring temporality into the arts-integration process, as we were given wide access to informants and secondary data (Langley, 1999).

Because our focus is on initiative-level hybridity (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019), we studied the team at Hera in charge of running the ABI and of managing the arts collection. We refer to this team with its official name, that is, the “Valorization Team.”

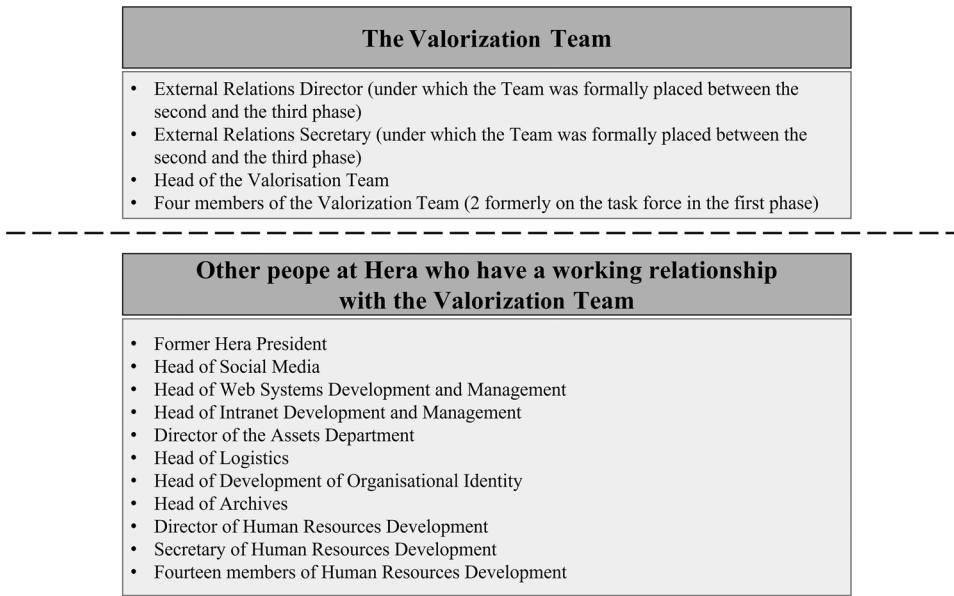


FIGURE 1 Interviewees.

3.2 | Data collection

We collected data from several sources in the form of 29 semi-structured interviews, 5 participant observations, and a cache of archive data.

The primary source consisted of interviews with key figures involved in the process (Langley, 1999). We interviewed the Valorization Team members and other agency people (see Figure 1), among whom the Heads of Social Media, Web Systems Development and Management, and Intranet Development and Management, because the Valorization Team had worked with these units when designing communication campaigns. We also met the Director of the Assets Department who had the final say on the collection's restoration, and the Head of Logistics who oversaw moving artwork for exhibitions. Lastly, we talked with the Head of Development of Organizational Identity and the Head of Archives who coproduced contents with the Valorization Team.

All informants were asked about their place in the initiative, their working relationship with other people involved and the challenges they faced. The interviews ran between October 2019 and 2020, and they lasted 90 min on average and were all audio-taped and transcribed. We held additional one-to-one interviews with two key informants to confirm the narrative and the timeline of events reconstructed from the data analysis (Langley, 1999).

Between September 2019 and March 2020, we conducted five observations lasting from 2 h to 1 day, these being project meetings and codesign workshops with the Valorization Team and an informal lunch with Hera's President and the Arts Unit Director.

These sessions gave us a running insight into the team's everyday work, rather than going back retrospectively (Gehman et al., 2018).

Additionally, we collected a cache of archive data in the form of internal documents, physical and digital artwork from the collection, social media pages and websites, and 16 newspaper articles (retrieved from Hera's press kit).

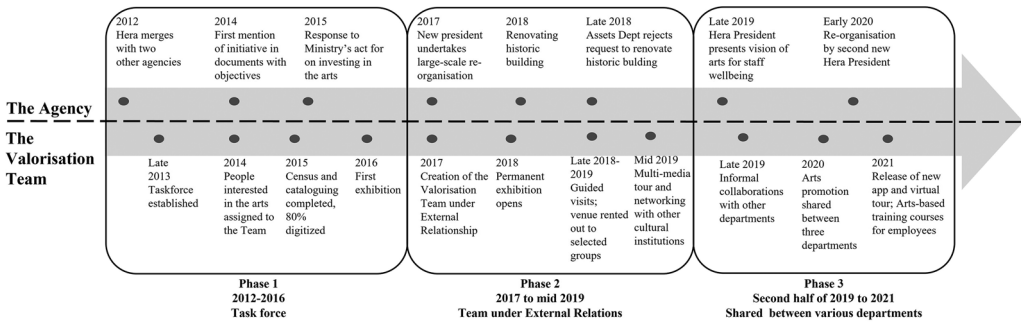


FIGURE 2 Timeline.

3.3 | Data analysis

For our analysis, we chose the narrative and temporal bracketing strategies suggested for process research with a temporal perspective (Gehman et al., 2018; Langley, 1999).

We applied narrative strategy to build the chronological history of the ABI at Hera, focusing on how the Valorization Team had progressed in its reporting structure, main objectives, resources employed, and arts events organized. In building our narrative, we assessed the data holistically (Eisenhardt et al., 2016) but kept an overview on Hera's official strategic plans, organigrams, and public performance plans. We intended this narrative to be a preliminary step and to use temporal bracketing strategy subsequently to define phases, that is, episodes separated by discontinuities rather than theoretical phases (Langley, 1999). We found discontinuity in how the Valorization Team was allocated to one or other of Hera's departments. We identified three phases, and, for each phase, we looked at the tension arising when arts and efficiency procedures were interwoven, as well as the ensuing coping actions, and we prepared timeline and temporal bracketing tables (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Moving back and forth between data and literature, after several iterations, we developed a systemic process model (Langley, 1999), shown in Section 5.

4 | FINDINGS

The temporal evolution of Hera's initiative brought up three phases, see Figure 2.

Coherently with our focus on hybridity at the initiative level, the timeline indicates what happens within the unit in charge of the initiative (our unit of analysis, the Valorization Team), and in the rest of the non-arts organization (the agency).

Concerning the Valorization Team, we found discontinuity as to which Hera department is reported to and its objectives, as shown in Figure 3, reconfirming the three distinct phases.

At each phase, we looked closely at the tension caused by arts-related matters entering the agency and the actions employed to cope with the ensuing tension, giving us the setting to investigate "how arts are progressively integrated over time into a non-arts organization." The associated tension and coping actions are summarized in a table for each phase.

4.1 | Phase 1, 2012–2016

Hera's artistic venture began in 2012 following an organizational accident, as put sheepishly by the External Relations Director. Hera had merged with two other agencies, and its arts collection shot up from 760 to 6000 artworks and,

UNIT OF ANALYSIS: The Valorization Team	2012 – 2016	2017 to mid 2019	Second half of 2019 to mid 2021
STRUCTURE	Separate task force, the “Overseeing Committee for the sponsorship and ‘valorization’ of cultural assets”	External Relations Department, permanent team for the “Valorization’ of Cultural Heritage Assets”	The original team came under the Organisational Wellbeing, Safety and Logistics Department. It also worked with Human Resource Development, and Organisation and Communication Department. All three departments were officially involved in the “Valorization of cultural heritage assets”.
OBJECTIVES	Physical and economic accountability for artworks	Publicity and collaborations with external stakeholders to improve reputation	Legitimacy of ownership of cultural assets for internal wellbeing and accountability purposes

FIGURE 3 Phases.

more urgently, Hera found itself with twice as many people as before and not enough work for them all. In this messy situation,

“You must find something to do for everyone, so you take a director, you give that director some people and say: ‘now let’s see how we can promote and support our cultural heritage’” - External Relations Director

These two factors were the reasons Hera decided to embed art within its boundaries. The initiative was assigned to a newly formed task force in 2013, the “Overseeing Committee for the sponsorship and ‘Valorization’ of cultural assets” as per the official organization chart of that time, consisting of several “spare” employees with an operational mindset and led by a line manager with a background in economics.

The task force found the novelty of the initiative and the term “Valorization” both challenging and perplexing:

“Valorization? What does that mean?” - Valorization Team member.

Help came in the form of a strategic document from 2014. In it, Hera’s senior management first explained, albeit briefly, what the term “Valorization” meant and what was expected from the initiative:

“The agency currently owns an artistic-cultural collection of considerable interest, and the *Supervisory Board* believes we should prepare a catalogue of items with an updated estimate of their values” - Strategic Plan

With such a broad scope, the team struggled to complete the cataloguing and the arts estimates simultaneously. The operational people, not knowing how to catalogue the collection, were loath to carry out this complex exercise, seeing it as disconnected from Hera’s core operations.

As one of the informants said, the line manager came up with the brilliant idea to break down the overall job into smaller subtasks. Each subtask either dealt only with arts-related practices (i.e., cataloguing the items) or with practices pertaining to Hera’s standardization make-up (i.e., estimating the value of the items). The manager was thus able to reduce the complexity while making the work more feasible.

He saw the need for people to have arts-related skills, a real option as it is common at Hera for line managers to have significant decisional freedom:

“Managers can always move people around if they need to” - Human Resources Development secretary

Starting from the meaning applied to “Valorization” and what the Valorization Team was expected to achieve, as per the official documents, the line manager broke down the work and brought in new people.

He assigned the tasks dealing with the collection's economic evaluation to the people with an operational mindset, who saw the whole initiative as something hazy, fanciful, and unnecessary. The manager reasoned that the job to evaluate the collection tallied with these employees' preference to work within a standardized framework and their partiality for control. He encouraged these doubters to accept the “new” arts activity in the light of Hera's traditional logic.

He then identified three “oddballs,” so called by one informant, who were still “spare” and widely considered unsuited to Hera's core work. The line manager felt instead that they could be useful because of their strong interest in the arts and humanities. He asked them to catalogue the collection, a task closely linked to art's principles of beauty, thereby satisfying everyone. The Valorization Team got back on track under this arrangement:

“He created an oddly mixed but well-organised team, with operational people doing the value estimates, and the others, the arts enthusiasts, throwing themselves into the collection and the cataloguing” - External Relations Director

This stability was short lived. A new President was appointed in late 2014, and he soon realized that a new ministerial policy (inducing Italian firms to invest in cultural initiatives) could be an opportunity to restore the agency's somewhat battered reputation by holding a temporary art exhibition the following year.

In response, the Valorization Team's work was reviewed once again. The three “oddballs” took on the curatorship for the exhibition, whereas the operational staff had to retrieve the artwork. Some items located in the directors' offices were being held “hostage,” as the directors claimed that this had always been an acceptable practice at Hera:

“Removing items from rooms was a problem, because people would say ‘No, it's mine’ while instead it was ‘No, it's not, it belongs to Hera’” - Valorization Team member

Tension arose and the team sometimes left empty-handed, as one director proudly revealed during an informal conversation. Other times, staff cleverly got round the directors by pointing to their formal mandate from the President:

“If you show up because the President wants the exhibition, that's fine. If you haven't the weight of great officialdom behind you, then no way...” - Valorization Team member

The separation of artistic and administrative tasks and the emphasis on the initiative's “officialness” meant the team could open a free exhibition in 2016, which attracted more than 1200 visitors, according to Hera's official press kit of that period.

Figure 4 recalls the tension and the actions to improve matters in phase 1.

4.2 | Phase 2, 2017 to mid 2019

The Valorization Team was restructured in 2017, marking a new phase in the arts-integration process.

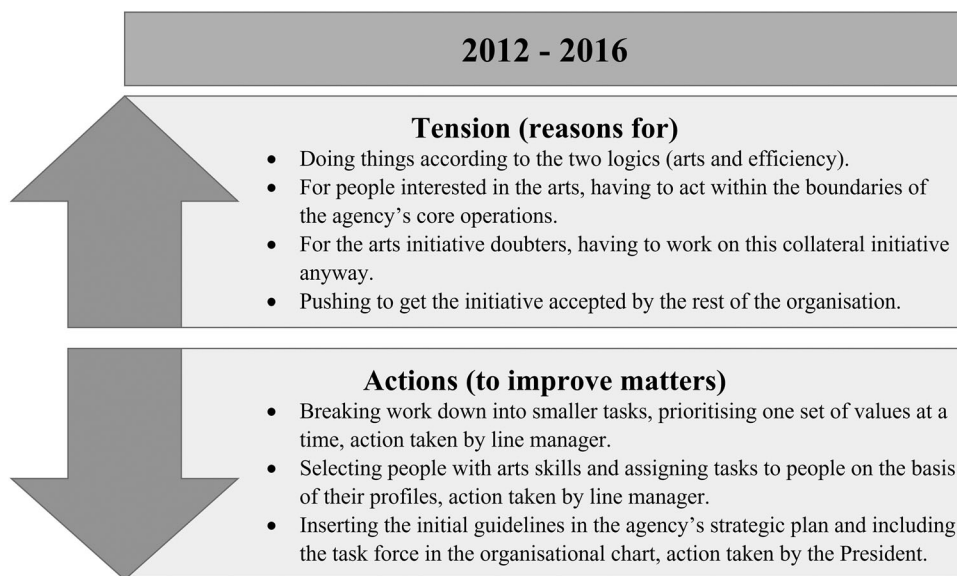


FIGURE 4 Phase 1.

In early 2017, the President totally reorganized Hera's departments, clearly stating that the arts initiative was a core activity. As recorded in an ex-post summary of his mandate, the reason for giving arts this official status was to attract positive attention and reignite Hera's lost relationships with external stakeholders.

The President placed the Valorization Team in Hera's organization chart under the External Relations Department, and he set the Arts Unit clear but high objectives:

"The *Supervisory Board* confirms these action lines: increase our artistic and cultural heritage by identifying opportunities for collaboration and update our policies for conserving and publicising our artwork, including through new technology" - Strategic Plan for 2017

Spurred on by the desire to reestablish relationships through art, the President was drawn to the idea of a permanent art exhibition. His reasoning was that it would be a one-off investment, maintenance costs would be low, and a venue was available (a historic building restored in 2016), all in line with Hera's drive toward efficiency.

The President asked the Valorization Team and the Director of External Relations to carry out a feasibility study and install the exhibition in the historic building.

The Valorization Team soon looked for a compromise between opening the exhibition, which implied knowing the heritage sector norms, and ensuring its economic sustainability, one of the agency's foundation pillars.

This situation led to confusion and uncertainty on how to proceed, as the new request to establish a permanent exhibition was invalidating the previous division of procedures.

The External Relations Director appointed a "charismatic" manager "with a passion for the arts" and a strong penchant for public relations (in her words) as Head of the Valorization Team. They immediately brought in a seasoned administration person, gambling on him taking over the regulatory matters:

"I'm an admin person and have been doing this job for 40 years. I defined and wrote the museum's statute and internal regulations. I did all the admin stuff, including our cultural heritage regulations"

- Valorization Team member

Together, they broke down the work into smaller tasks, separating curatorship work (e.g., the selection of paintings) from back-office work for the exhibition (e.g., the logistics). The “oddballs” were assigned to the curatorship work, the operational staff to the back-office.

Under this arrangement, the team succeeded in pulling off the exhibition’s inauguration in 2018.

Before long, the team had to find another compromise between promoting the collection and its economic sustainability. Legally, the site had to be adapted to its new use and external audience. Tension soon arose between External Relations and the Assets Department, when Assets procrastinated over the permits requested by External Relations, feeling it not advisable in the light of the agency’s focus on efficiency. The Valorization Team was soon plagued with inertia:

“Until this thing of investing in the building is sorted and up to scratch, we’re stuck” - Valorization Team member

The External Relations Director and the Head of the Valorization Team came to the rescue with their ingenuity. The Director astutely realized that the mention of new technologies and collaborations in the strategic plan for 2017 could provide release from the tension built up between the team and the Assets Director and avoid closing the exhibition. He commissioned a multimedia virtual museum, which was completed by mid 2019, and arranged to loan artwork to international museums. The Head of the Valorization Team, equally ingeniously, organized a series of events at the historic building, tapping into her personal connections. Guided tours of the exhibition were offered as an extra at these events. This scheme allowed the team to establish relationships through art, but it also worked for the exhibition’s self-sustainability and, ultimately, for the agency’s principle of efficiency:

“What if a foreign group comes to one of our events or wants to hire the building? We could sell a cultural visit as an additional service...” - Head of the Valorization Team

Figure 5 recalls the tension and the actions to improve matters in phase 2.

4.3 | Phase 3, mid 2019–2021

Another twist in Hera’s arts-integration process came in the second half of 2019. A second new President was appointed, and further reorganization was on the cards.

The President, acting through concerns of efficiency, started by planning to sell Hera’s underused property to the local authorities. He specifically excluded the historic building housing Hera’s permanent exhibition and several other prestigious buildings in Hera’s portfolio. The President was aware that he needed to find a justification for this decision:

“We have to fill them with useful and interesting exhibits, and make them pay their way. Now they are under-utilised. We must prove we are using them” - conversation with the President during a working lunch

Accepting the difficulty of opening a permanent exhibition, the President abandoned the idea, emphasizing Hera’s roots in efficiency. He contemplated instead the possibility of “Valorizing cultural heritage” for internal stakeholders, with the hope of reducing, in his words, the *long queues of unhappy people outside my office*.

The President informally briefed the Director of External Relations on the new strategic direction. The Valorization Team soon found the uncertainty surrounding the role of arts a challenge when given the frenetic and confused request to come up with a recurrent way to use the arts collection and so give it legitimacy.



FIGURE 5 Phase 2.

To keep arts under his joint responsibility, the External Relations Director asked the “oddballs” to design new content to show off the agency’s profitable use of its arts collection. The “oddballs” were initially keen to retain their creative work but soon became exasperated by the frantic search to see how to use the collection on a continuous basis, whereas the entire team was unsure about the purpose of integrating arts into their organization full stop. We observed two team members discussing the point of this exercise from contrasting positions without reaching a conclusion. One, a longstanding member of the Valorization Team, wondered whether the collection could be used for institutional and external advertising. The other dismissed this idea saying *Let’s not go for that, the media will jump on us*, instead suggesting that the collection could be used to train employees on the agency’s values.

In all this confusion about the reasons for integration, even the announced but still pending reorganization generated tension within the Valorization Team:

“We still don’t know where the team’s going, it could be under Organisation and Communications, but they’re also talking about putting it under Assets...” - External Relations secretary

Mired in disorientation, the External Relations Director and the Head of the Valorization Team were forced to involve other departments. They approached the Head of Archives to search for synergy and experience in cultural heritage. Then, in their quest to find people with the right skills for the updated program involving internal stakeholders and external accountability, they started working with two other departments, Human Resources Development and Organization and Communications:

“We have agreed who does what. The Valorization Team selects the works, Identity Development and Membership takes care of the content and Communications manages the writing and editing” - Head of Development of Organisational Identity

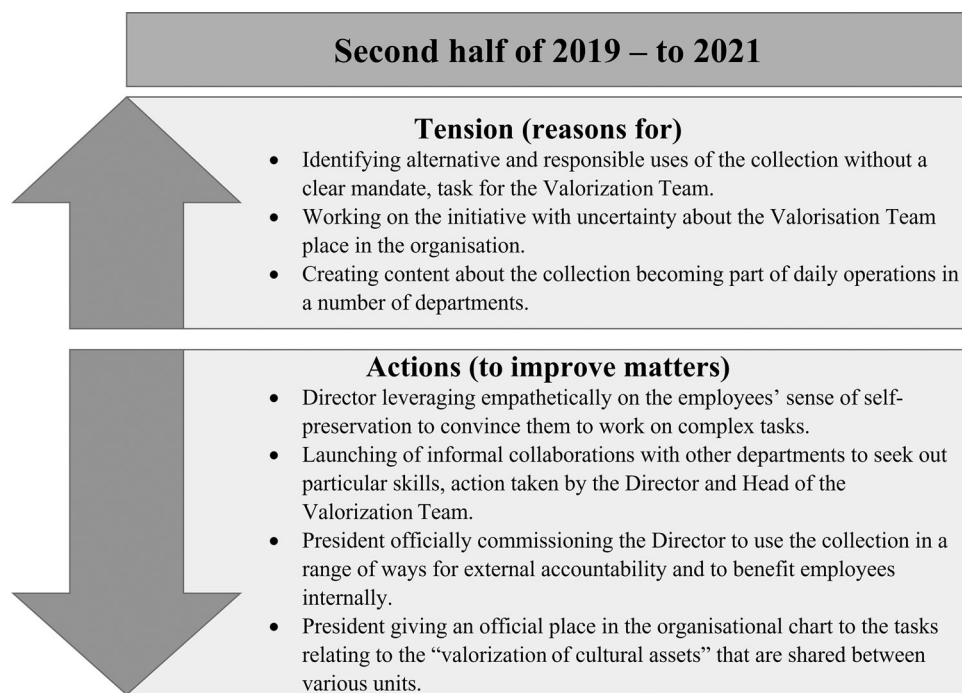


FIGURE 6 Phase 3.

This impulsive step to bring in more people with specific expertise was not itself without tension because practices differed unit by unit. The Valorization Team instinctively adapted their previous ways of working to the new practices, for their own self-preservation. Meanwhile, the Directors were vying to take on the now desirable management of the arts collection.

In early 2020, the preannounced internal reorganization began. The duties of the former Valorization Team and its informal collaborations with other departments were all outlined officially in the organization charts. The former Valorization Team was moved to Assets and Investment, a department with the wider responsibility of "overseeing the management, 'Valorization' and rationalization of security assets at the Institute" and a new team was formally placed under Human Resources Development to cultivate human capital through the *Valorization of cultural heritage*. Work in the field of arts and cultural heritage was allocated to the Organisation and Communications Department, as it *supports initiatives to promote the Institute's cultural and artistic heritage*. The team managing the historical archive and institutional library at the Department for Organizational Wellbeing, Safety, and Logistics was given new functions in synergy with the arts collection for "the preservation and 'Valorization' of the Institute's artistic, bibliographic, and documentary heritage."

Once the distinctive objectives and organizational positions were defined clearly, the Valorization Team and the other departments involved were able to overcome the inertia that had been blocking everyone. They were soon coming up with ways to use the arts collection regularly and continuously to give it legitimacy as the President desired. For example, Human Resources Development held three training courses using works of arts as evocative images.

Figure 6 recalls the tension and the actions to improve matters in phase 3.

In our chronological reconstruction, tension emerged when arts practices were combined with the agency's standardized procedures for operational efficiency, and also when creative and administrative staff found themselves working together. The level of tension increased every time there was a new President who would take decisions on Hera's (re)organization and the place of the Valorization Team, because any change overturned the previous

arrangements. Across the three phases, by and large the actions, we observed proved particularly useful to cope with this tension. The managers responsible for the Valorization Team overcame the agency's operational complexity by swiftly decoupling the artistic and administrative tasks, selecting employees with arts-related skills, and concocting ploys to get round the barriers erected by other departments.

However, every time the context changed following a new reorganization, the previous actions became progressively less effective, and managers were forced to find another way through. In this adaptation merry-go-round, managers came up with new contextualized coping actions in the light of the President's instructions to integrate arts within the agency. Our findings revealed that the President's action to frame the purpose of the arts collection and its position in Hera's strategic documents and organization charts settled the tension flowing over from other departments, as well as giving the Valorization Team a voice and a distinctive place in the agency.

5 | DISCUSSION

This paper is the outcome of a study on how an arts collection has been managed in a government agency for 9 years. Being a nationwide outfit, its institutional pillars are grounded in efficiency and standardization, principles extraneous to the arts world (Ancelin-Bourguignon et al., 2020), giving us an insight into the actions taken to manage tension, an inevitable consequence of bringing arts into a non-arts organization.

Our findings on an organizational form of ABI reveal that the process of combining the logics of arts with the logics of non-arts (efficiency) is built on dynamic equilibrium. In this setup, the two logics hybridize in some elements, but they also continue to exist as separate entities in others. Our detailed observation of the micro-dynamics in play allowed us to go into the specifics and determine two types of actions to cope with the ensuing tension, and these we labeled *enduring* and *instant* actions.

First, we cover how we framed our concepts of enduring and instant actions, with their distinctive characteristics (Section 5.1). Then, we discuss our framework in relation to the two nodal points in the hybridization of distant logics over time (Gillett et al., 2019), tension and coping actions (Section 5.2).

5.1 | Framing enduring and instant actions

Our findings show that the tension arising when arts are integrated into a non-arts organization can be managed through two types of actions, which we call *enduring* and *instant* actions. The two types of actions differ in terms of (a) temporality, (b) who carries out these actions (more specifically, where these people are on the hierarchical ladder), (c) the expected outcomes of integration, and (d) what these actions achieve or produce. Together, these actions lead to the dynamic integration of arts into a non-arts organization, which we can show as a sinusoidal wave pattern in a systemic process model (Langley, 1999) (see Figure 7).

We called the first type of actions we found in our case study enduring actions, represented with the symbol of a compass in Figure 7.

Enduring actions are used by upper management in their progressive search for hybridization. The term "enduring" refers to the long-term design underpinning the action in question (to guide the process of integrating the logics) and its continued effect over time. Enduring actions are intended to ensure lasting integration, and at their center is the search for connections between the two otherwise distant logics, and between the past and the anticipated future. Operationally, enduring actions produce formal outputs, such as strategic documents, approved budgets and organization charts, where the integrating of arts is officially secured and embedded in the non-arts organization's strategy and structure. Enduring actions can also be the channel to set up initiatives for the staff or an external audience, thereby showing that the non-arts organization is open to integrating arts within its own structure. In our case, the inclusion of

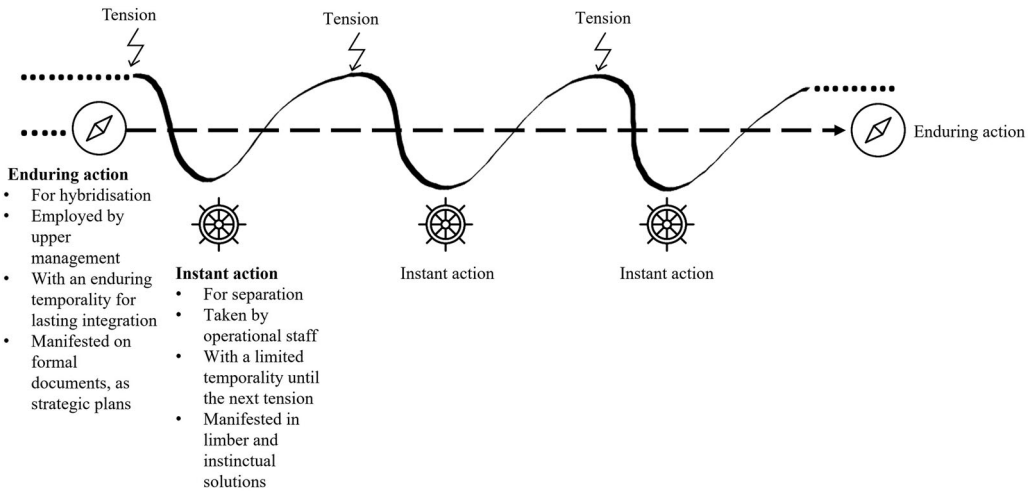


FIGURE 7 Enduring and instant actions.

the Valorization Team and its purpose in the agency's strategic documents is an enduring action, as is the chain set in motion when the President instructed the External Relationships Director to set up exhibitions for the benefit of the agency.

Enduring actions contribute to mitigate tension because they recognize that there is space for arts in a non-arts organization, and that they have their own place in the organization's hierarchy. At Hera, for instance, when they collected paintings for their temporary exhibition, the Valorization Team tapped into officialdom, in the form of the President, to gain legitimacy. Enduring actions can also dampen tension because formal documents draw up wide-ranging objectives and so can guide the arts-side people through the perplexities of combining arts and efficiency. The President's decision to use arts internally steered the Valorization Team in its work to employ the collection for organization-wide well-being.

Taking all the above into consideration, in Figure 7, enduring actions are represented as a compass that always points toward the integration of logics. Enduring actions are akin to sailing through the "waves" of tension during integration with the help of a navigation instrument that points the ship toward hybridization.

We called the second type instant actions, and they are represented as a ship's helm in Figure 7.

Instant actions are taken by people in the unit responsible for arts, mainly to separate the two distant logics as soon as tension surfaces. The term instant recalls both the impulse behind the action (swiftly settle the incompatibility between logics) and its limited durability in time. One instant action can be replaced by another when something in the context changes and new tension blows up between arts and efficiency, and, importantly, there is never the need to question its consistency with the past. Staff carry out instant actions so that they can move forward in their daily duties.

One feature of instant actions is that people must be free to introduce fast solutions at any moment to cope with tension felt at that specific point in time. Operationally, instant actions produce agile and flexible temporary solutions to manage daily complexity. These "escape routes" can take the shape of dividing work informally among the staff to keep the contrasting logics apart. Complex tasks where the two logics are both present can be split into smaller tasks, each dealing with only one of the two logics. The simplified single-logic tasks can be assigned to employees on the basis of their personal interests and affinity with arts or efficiency.

Informal and spontaneous collaborations with other departments can also be forms of off-the record instant actions initiated by the arts staff to source professional arts- or efficiency-related skills. In our case, instant actions include splitting tasks between the administrative boffins and the arts enthusiasts to tone down complexity, or

arranging unofficial collaborations with Human Resources Development when the focus of the arts collection shifted to the agency's own employees, all of which imply working in the direction of integration.

Instant actions mitigate tension because staff do not have to take difficult decisions about what logic to prioritize, as the two are kept separate, a second feature of instant actions. At Hera, tension was quashed when the line manager came up with the ploy to separate the administrative job of calculating artwork values from the curator work of cataloguing the collection, so that the task force could get up and running. Moreover, instant actions relieve tension because employees remain within their comfort zone (in arts or efficiency). Subdividing the work into smaller tasks and assigning the standardized duties to operationally minded employees sorted out the problem of their feelings of misplacement and disconnection from Hera's institutional pillars. At the same time, selecting the three "oddballs" with artistic knowledge was perceived as a daring yet clever solution to source people with the right mindset to engage with the distant logics of arts.

In Figure 7, we show instant actions as a ship's helm, which can redirect the course of navigation when tension causes an off-course deflection. Instant actions are equivalent to navigating by sight alone, adjusting to the "waves" by separating conflicting logics through nimble and instinctive solutions.

We have used this framing of enduring and instant actions in the next section as the basis for our discussion on the two nodal points we uncovered in the dynamics of introducing arts into a non-arts organization (Antal et al., 2018) and the progressive hybridization of two distant logics over time (Gillett et al., 2019): tension in integration and coping actions.

5.2 | Integrating arts into a non-arts organization: the nodal points

Tension is a central topic in hybridity (Grossi et al., 2022) and is defined as the outcome of contrasting situations that emerge from the diversity and sometimes incompatibility among different logics in play (Smith & Besharov, 2019). Tension has also been found in previous studies on ABIs, where researchers have mainly investigated artists-in-residence programs in a positive light (Antal et al., 2018; Meisiek & Barry, 2018; Schiuma, 2009; Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015).

In our case, we studied a different form of ABI, that of managing an arts collection in a non-arts setting. The ABI was conceived and run by people already in the organization, so they were there on a permanent basis rather than being transitory outsiders. The tension was caused by the operational complexity of combining arts logics and efficiency logics in everyday tasks, rather than because of a jumbling together of employees and incomers with artistic skills (Ippolito & Adler, 2018). Furthermore, our study reveals that tension can have negative consequences, not only create positive change (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015). We found that tension can manifest in short-term inertia and confusion among employees and can cause obstructionism and rivalry from the rest of the organization. In this form of ABI, negative tension leads to strategic organization-wide changes, rather than inducing the employees to work in new ways (Antal et al., 2018), because it impels upper management to endorse the arts formally and calls for operational staff to self-organize in their everyday duties.

Regarding the coping actions, several works in the literature on hybridity suggest that tension is only managed through the complete hybridization of competing logics over time (Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020). Other studies claim that the only way to survive is to establish a dynamic balance between the logics and to act on them separately (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Smith & Besharov, 2019).

We here, instead, propose to bridge the two opposite streams of studies, as our framing outlines a process where the two logics hybridize but also continue to exist on separate planes.

We found that the two sides, arts and efficiency, become a hybrid unity through the enduring actions introduced by upper management; in other words, recording in strategic documents that the arts have a place and role in the non-arts organization. This formal recognition gave people a handle on their reciprocal positioning and was particularly useful to abate obstructionism from elsewhere in the organization. This study also highlights that arts logics and efficiency logics remain poles apart because of the instant actions taken by the people in charge of the arts side, who can organize themselves autonomously, separating the two logics and running them in parallel in their daily operations. We found

that this “keep-them-apart” approach mitigated tension when staff had to set priorities between the principles of arts and the pillars of efficiency and standardization.

Given that we have taken a longitudinal perspective on the integrating of arts, an approach missing in former ABI studies (Chailan, 2018), the next point for discussion is the temporality factor in our two proposed types of actions, because the coping actions’ validity and their effects can diminish over time (Gillett et al., 2019; Jay, 2013).

Enduring actions produce formal documents, which are expected to remain valid for a long time but also work in daily undertakings. To achieve this purpose, upper management needs to carefully reflect on how they formalize the initiative in question upfront, even though it is something managers are not always eager to work on, and where the often vague terms can be disconcerting (Maran & Lowe, 2021).

Interestingly, in our case, throughout the 9 years of the process and in a wide assortment of strategic and organizational documents, upper management always used the same expression, “Valorization of Cultural Assets,” to give formal status to the integrating of arts. This official position provided continuity with the past, whereas upper management’s endorsement of the arts was continuously recorded in many official documents. To give it substance time after time, and to maintain validity in routine business, the meaning of “Valorization” was elastically extended to include novel wide-ranging sub-objectives with every newly appointed President to address contextual high-level policies concerning the overall organization. We found evidence that working on officialdom and strategic formalization (over time and across multiple documents) bonded tension to the integrating of arts in the collective mind of the Valorization Team and the entire agency.

Our study gives the other side of the story on formalizing hybrid initiatives. Previous studies indicate that upper management’s reluctance to formally express the purpose of the hybrid initiative could potentially cause instability (Ferry & Slack, 2021; Gümüşay et al., 2020; Zelenskaya et al., 2022). In our view, carefully formalizing the hybrid initiative in strategic documents can help to regulate it, and this exercise in “intensive framing” can “cool tension” in hybridization (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019).

When enduring actions are given a well-calibrated formal structure, this contributes toward retaining their lasting validity, but it is not so for instant actions. Instant actions produce temporary and sometimes impulsive solutions based on necessity, and, by separating the competing logics, allow staff to get on with their work. As instant actions manage contextual tension, they remain valid until new tension emerges. The short-term validity of instant actions, coupled with new tension, calls for flexibility and self-organization. A *modus operandi* based on informality and not tied into strict official procedures can prevent belated reactions to tension.

In our proposal, instant actions are the means to react promptly to tension by separating competing logics, without going off the hybridization course set by enduring actions. We propose a combination of smoother actions to navigate tension in hybridization than the continuous “stop and go” suggested by Jay (2013) or the “bumping between two guardrails” suggested by Smith and Besharov (2019).

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Our research objective was to investigate “how arts are progressively integrated into a non-arts organization over time.” We studied an ABI put in place by an Italian government agency, itself conducted under the logics of standardization and efficiency.

Our findings contribute to the ABI field (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015) and to the literature on hybridity (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

In ABI literature, our contribution adds to knowledge on the tension arising from the meeting of arts and non-arts logics. Scholars have previously focused on collaborations between artists and companies (Antal et al., 2018; Flament et al., 2022), whereas we looked at an organizational form of ABI, similar to a merger and acquisition process in that the ABI formally becomes part of the organization. In this ABI form, we found that tension takes a different perspective than in former studies. In artists-in-residence programs, tension is viewed as both pivotal and positive

(Antal et al., 2018; Schiuma, 2009), and making sense of tension collectively is one way to move forward (Ippolito & Adler, 2018; Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015). In the organizational form of ABIs, we found instead that tension can also be negative; it spawns inertia and interrupts operations. We have set out evidence of this diversity in tension and discovered that daily clashes between arts logics and non-arts logics can be minimized by taking “instant actions,” whereby work is broken down by prevailing logic, allocated by personal inclination and managed through informal relationships. Our study implies that tension may be experienced differently in different ABIs and so may require diverse coping actions. These results open the way to scholars exploring whether the form of ABI can determine the type and extent of the tension, and consequently the most suitable coping actions.

A second contribution to the ABI debate concerns our considerations on the effort to institutionalize the ABI through enduring actions. Enduring actions produce strategic documents that contain the formal, high-level aspects of the initiative, its function, position and objectives, as part of assuring its validity in the long term. Formalization is based on a set of wide-ranging objectives that are adapted and adopted as and when on a temporary basis. Consolidating an ABI into a non-arts organization is said to be a complex task for managers (Meisiek & Barry, 2018), because ABI outcomes are multi-faceted, manifest themselves after considerable time, and have no stable links to the company's strategy (Antal et al., 2018; Straub, 2018). Moreover, although formalizing an ABI helps coordination, excessive formalization may curtail the spontaneity of arts (Ancelin-Bourguignon et al., 2020). Managers who take on board our thoughts on utilizing an elastic type of formalization will be able to put across their commitment for the arts in a way that dampens tension in their organization. At the same time, they can outline the expected outcomes in a less uncompromising fashion and so prevent the pitfalls of rigid formalization (Flamand et al., 2022; Zelenskaya et al., 2022). Our results pave the way for future studies on how managers formalize ABIs in strategic documents.

Concerning the literature on hybridity, we contribute to current knowledge with a case on the hybridization between the logics of arts and those of efficiency, which has only been touched upon in the literature so far, with little attention paid to arts combined with another logic. Even when researchers have explored the logics of arts within hybridity, it was mainly from the viewpoint of integrating management logics into a cultural institution (Ferry & Slack, 2021).

Our longitudinal perspective on the hybridization of arts and efficiency plus the concept of enduring and instant actions is a step forward in the otherwise scattered knowledge on temporality in hybridity. Former scholars have suggested that full hybridization (Kastberg & Lagström, 2019; Thomasson & Kristoferson, 2020) and the disentangling of logics (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Ramus et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011) are two ways to achieve lasting stability. In our paper, the two sides are instead hybridized in official documents and, over time, through enduring actions, yet they remain totally apart in those daily operations shaped by instant actions. Enduring actions tend to mitigate tension arising from the coexistence of two opposites under the same roof, whereas instant actions relieve tension stemming from the difficulty of combining the two distant logics operationally.

The qualitative approach of our study and the case selected enabled us to reach a new conclusion, unraveling the contradictions in previous studies (Ancelin-Bourguignon et al., 2020; Gillett et al., 2019). However, they are somewhat specific and need to be further explored. In future studies, it may be interesting to investigate tension alongside our concepts of enduring and instant actions in other organizational forms of ABIs. Hybridity scholars could also study cases where hybridity is the outcome of integrating arts into fields of activity different from arts and with different relative distances to arts. This would reveal whether upper management's struggle in the formalization process is a consequence of the distance between arts logics and non-arts logics. There would be also space to see if the impulse behind instant actions is valid because the arts logic comes into play, and whether these instant actions can be applied in other contexts.

Lastly, our study proposes two practical actions that could help practitioners get to grips with ABIs in both the public and private sectors. Our concepts of instant actions and enduring actions can be valuable to solve recurring tension when endeavoring to introduce arts into a non-arts organization. For instance, enduring actions, having official status, can support management in transparently accounting for funds used on secondary initiatives, thus giving the ABI

internal legitimacy, especially in the eyes of the skeptics. Instant actions, where tasks are distinct and based on separate logics, could instead help to motivate staff working on collateral initiatives, keeping them productively engaged in the organization and the ABI alike.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

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