

Research Article

When Prominence Overrules Eminence Subsidization of the Cultural Sectors in the Netherlands

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Abstract

What processes determine the allocation of state subsidies to a selection of cultural and artistic organizations? In the case of the Dutch cultural basic infrastructure (BIS) two main criteria are issued, namely quality and reputation. In this article, no attempt is made to define measures for artistic quality and reputation. Instead, it is observed by which criteria decision makers, public media, and artistic leaders refer to these concepts. The way in which the selection and granting are performed shows striking similarity with processes described in the literature. First, the theory of social comparison asserts that people in a shared activity compare opinions and abilities in a strife for growth. When technical constraints and limits impede the progress in ability, effort and attention shift to opinions on abilities of the members. In this social dimension, growth is more easily attained. This decoupling results into stagnation and inferior learning processes. Second, in an implicit elaboration of the social comparison theory, a model is proposed in which perceived quality and prominence determine which organization will receive price premiums. Perceived quality is indicated by the quality of the inputs and productivity assets. Prominence originates from media rankings and elicited preferences of intermediary organizations and affiliation with high-status actors. Prominence has more bearing in social processes in the institutional field than on quality indicators. This model provides a base for reputation bias among stakeholders of organizations. The theoretical approaches have been operationalized into an analytical framework. The framework appears to offer a powerful and accurate instrument to describe and explain courses of action and outcomes in Dutch cultural sectors. In discussion, it is questioned if it is wise to base a subsidization policy on social comparison. The strive for prominence in the institutional fields tends to overrule the search for quality and eminence. It is recommended to reconsider social comparison processes by reduction of the arbitrariness in the performance assessment and evaluation. In this respect, promising and high-quality performers are supported in their access to large audiences. It is proposed that the framework can be applied in all situations where resources and performance opportunities are allocated to a selection of executing actors. Choices will be based on a mix of past and future performances. The situations suited for application may vary from philanthropy to hard core and non-profit sectors to private business industries.

Keywords

Subsidization, Cultural Sectors, Social Comparison, Performance Evaluation, Opinion Formation, Organizational Reputation

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1. Introduction

“The moral world, that has, perhaps, no particular objection to vice, but an insuperable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name” [1].

What processes determine the allocation of state subsidies to a selection of cultural and artistic organizations? In the case of the Dutch cultural basic infrastructure (BIS) two main criteria are issued, namely quality and reputation. In this article, no attempt is made to define measures for artistic quality and reputation. Instead, it is observed by which criteria decision makers, public media, and artistic leaders refer to these concepts. The way in which the selection and granting are performed shows striking similarity with processes described in the literature. First, a theory of social comparison processes [2] opposes growth of abilities to opinion formation. When opinion formation takes the lead, stagnation will occur. Further members of a groups who differ in ability and status from the inner core around opinion leaders may experience hostility and derogations. Second, a more recent study opposes quality aspects to reputation formation [3]. Quality aspects are easily surpassed by the impact of prominence. Prominence is a stronger determinant in the competition for prizes premiums. In combination, the two approaches are applied to the allocation of subsidies in Dutch cultural sectors.

This study integrates the theory of Festinger [2] and the model of Rindova and colleagues [3] into a framework suited for an empirical analysis of the subsidization policy of a cultural sector. The research is conducted in the form of case study in the Dutch cultural sector covering a period from 2008 to 2020. The research is done by means of content analysis of policy documents, news paper articles and interviews. The use of multiple sources enables triangulation, thus solving omissions and contradictions in the rich data. The selection of interviewees offers differences in the points of view. Comparison of three cases contributes to the insight into the exchange of arguments between evaluators and artistic organizations.

2. Theoretical Approaches

Two theoretical approaches are introduced in order to have an analytical framework for the allocation of cultural subsidies.

2.1. Festinger's Theory of Social Comparison

The problem of artistic and other performances measurement is addressed by Festinger in his essay ‘The theory of social comparison processes’ [2]. Festinger puts forward that people, involved in all kinds of activity, tend to compare their actions to those of peers who are involved in similar activities. It is a way to come to a stable response on confusing demands of an insecure environment. In that, the theory has a genetic social-ecological scope. The main proposition of Festinger is

that people compare both their opinions and abilities with others. This proposition seems rather counter-intuitive [2]. However, when people face uncertainty, they gather and seek answers to questions like ‘what is going on?’ and ‘what to do?’ They want to have a competent response to the situation. One would expect that when there are clear quality criteria for the assessment and evaluation of abilities, that than those would be preferred. However, this will happen only in instances when the criteria are easily and unarbitrary applicable [2]. In all other instances, vested opinions will be the basis for the evaluation.

Festinger points at the difference between opinions and abilities [2]. There are non-social, physical constraints to improvement which have to be overcome by learning and enduring effort. In contrast, opinions on abilities are not subject on these constraints. They can evolve much faster, especially when the connection between opinion formation and the application of abilities are rather loose. By consequence, the performance evaluation is located in two dimensions: the symbolic dimension of opinion formation and the substantial one of the application of abilities. Festinger assumes that within socially comparing groups abilities tend to evolve upwards [2]. However, when there is pressure to speed up the way to success while the improvement of abilities is hindered or slowed down by technical constraint, the abilities will only increase within the dimension of opinions. So, the social comparison processes will cause stagnation or even the decline of abilities.

Festinger contends that people prefer comparison to others whose opinions and abilities do not differ too much [2]. Socially comparing groups form around a center. Members close to this center exert more pressure to obtain uniformity and enforce conformity. People close to the center are more willing to adapt their opinions and abilities to the mode. Interaction with more distant member causes unpleasant experiences. This does not hold only for opinions, but for members inferior or superior in ability as well. Distant members are likely to be subjected to derogation and hostility. Proximity to an inner circle or clique to high-status members increases certainty about opinions, pressure to uniformity, and negativity in the interaction with outsiders [4, 2].

Festinger assumption that opinions lack a tendency to upward evolution [2] is questionable. Opinions intensify by the pressure to uniformity. Proximity of competing groups amplifies this process [2]. The process leads to a radicalization and polarization in the shared opinions, through the increase in certainty. There will be less inclination to reflect on their own opinions in the light of facts and ambiguous information. Opinions will be based on speculation and easily accessible information. Paradoxically, even when information which can provide certainty is available, people tend to prefer speculation. The one-sidedness of information entails irresponsiveness on the opinions of others. The polarization leads to

self-evidentiality of the shared opinions.

The combination of both the opinion and the ability dimension of social comparison is directly addressed in an empirical research of Rindova and colleagues [3]. This study will be discussed in the next section. Rindova and colleagues deploy the point of view of stakeholders of organizations, whereas Festinger takes the point of view of the executing actors themselves. In common is the question of how to evaluate and reward the productions of comparable executioners of an activity. These are two sides of the same coin. In this paper it is proposed that officials who are involved in rating of those actors replicate and reinforce social comparison processes.

2.2. A dual Mode Model of Reputation

Without being aware Rindova and fellow researchers elaborate on Festinger's theory. In their study in 2005 [3], they try to combine two approaches of organizational reputation. The first is economic of origin. In this approach it is assumed that organizations give signals about the quality of the inputs and assets which give stakeholders the impression good products and services will be delivered. This approach assumes that reputation is based on the perceptions of quality among stakeholders. The second approach has an institutionalist point of view. It is about the signals of the public media and influential third parties like sector organizations and high-status actors about the reputation of organizations. Organizations which evoke high expectations among these groups are regarded as prominent. Influential third parties can assess with scrutiny the quality of the resources, the production, and the resulting output. However, the influential parties tend to take part in the formation of opinions as well.

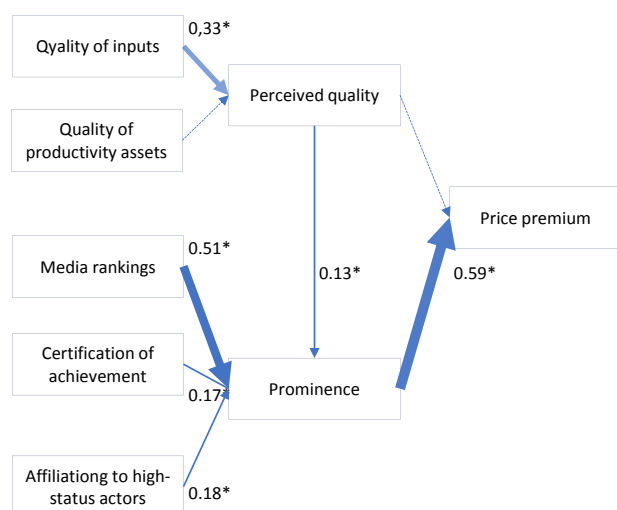


Figure 1. Simplified model and results by compilation of figures 1 and 2 from Rindova et al., [3].

The scholars have conducted a thorough empirical study among stakeholders of private business schools. The results

appear to be in line with the predictions that could have been made from Festinger's hypotheses and derivations. The aim of Rindova et al. [3] was to ascertain what stakeholders would bring to pay a price premium. Prominence appears to significantly explain the willingness to pay for the reputation. Figure 1 comprises the conceptual model and graphical presentation of the correlations. The model does not suffice to the requirements of regression analysis: the independent variables (five boxes to the left in both figures) are not too much correlated to one another [3]. The interaction between variables from the quality and prominence group indicates a disturbance in the conceptual order of the model. Nevertheless, despite the conceptual and statistical interference, the model in figure 1 obviously shows the dominance of prominence in the circulation of reputation among stakeholders. Correlations in the model are displayed by arrows with a varying width. It illustrates how narrow or broad the pathways to the price premium are. Non-significant correlations are displayed by means of dotted lines.

Figure 1 shows that Quality of inputs contributes to Perceived quality. However, Perceived quality does contribute directly to the willingness of stakeholder to pay a price premium. There is an indirect way by which perceived quality relates to a price premium, namely by contributing to a more prominent position. Prominence serves as an intermediating variable. The correlation value underlying the contribution is low, just above the significance threshold. Prominence has a moderate to strong correlation to price premium. All three independent variables contribute to prominence, but the variable Media ranking contributes the most to prominence. In sum, Prominence has clearly more weight in the prediction of price premium than Perceived quality. The results suggest that investments in Prominence indicators will pay out more. It is a token of common knowledge that people and organizations which operate within the symbolic or political dimension take the lead over others who stick to substantial and technical affairs.

In the results, the correlation between the independent variables have a value around 0.7, that is higher than in the causal chain [3]. By consequence, the model does not meet the requirements for linear regression. Even more serious are the violations of the conceptual order. Independent variables from the perceived quality group contribute to prominence, whereas independent variables from the prominence group contribute to Perceived quality. Furthermore, it is not clear in which direction the causality between these groups of variables is directed. In sum, the model is highly contingent.

In this article, two of these correlations are singled out for closer examination in the empirical section. These are firstly the interrelation between Media rankings and the signals given by high-status actors and secondly the interaction between high-status actors and the Quality of inputs. It is assumed the high-status actors keep the media rankings in mind, while media want to be where the high-status actors appear. Furthermore, high-status actors are supposed to opt

for affiliates on positions in boards of cultural organizations, where cultural organizations understand that such affiliates open doors to the ones in power.

The prevalence of prominence over strive for eminence is not a general law. In return to Festinger's framework, there is an upward drive to improve one's abilities. According to Festinger, opinions form faster than abilities improve, especially when technical restraints are countering the process of improvement. The study of Rindova et al. [3] is based on a cross-sectional design. Thus, the changes in the proportional weight of prominence versus perceived quality can neither be explained nor be tested across time.

A policy reform, for instance, means a serious disturbance in the environment. According to Festinger [2], groups compare their abilities and opinions in order to find a stable response. As change in the dimensions goes faster than in the dimension of abilities. Consequently, a disturbance causes a shift to comparison in the opinion dimension. Change in the ability dimension cannot pace the dynamics of this change under its own power. The impaired change is in favor of group members with an attraction to prominence and in disfavor of members who are dedicated to the quality of their performance.

2.3. Advances and Applications with the Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, a brief overview is given of theoretical advancements since the publications by Festinger and Rindova and co-authors. Almost simultaneously, Deephouse and Carter issued a publication about the relationship between organizational legitimacy and reputation [5]. Although differing in terminology and fields of empirical research, there is remarkable correspondence in theoretical vision. They view legitimacy as the social acceptance resulting from adherence to regulative, normative or cognitive norms and expectations. In contrast, reputation has been assessed in past definitions in terms of relative standing or desirability, favorability, and a competitive strive for status. Importantly, Deephouse and Carter contend that reputation may have the same base as legitimacy, but be assessed on 'virtually any attribute along which organizations may vary that can serve as a source of status comparisons. Roughly speaking legitimacy corresponds to factual signals of quality in the framework of Rindova et al. [3], whereas reputation in terms of Deephouse and Carter addresses items of prominence of the latter authors. Deephouse and Carter utilize the concept of social comparison, but neglect as well to refer to Festinger's theory as well. According to Deephouse and Carter [5], both assessments of legitimacy and reputation can help organizations in acquiring and safeguarding of external resources. In the opposition between economic and institutional conditions the two publications have the same purport. Deephouse and Carter show more awareness of the fluidity and elusiveness of reputation. In that vein, they are closer in correspondence

to Festinger's opinion formation. A group social psychologists have recently given a follow-up of the social comparison research [6]. By contrasting mastery goals and performance goals at the achievement motivation of persons, they posit their research in Festinger's dimension of ability. More generally, social comparison is absent in opinion formation research. Probably, this is due to the counterintuitive conceptualization. The theory is capable of predicting both proficient and detrimental outcomes. In this way, the theory is in contrast to other more current theories, like social influence theory and social identity theory. Recently, social comparison theory has come into the spotlights of social media research in which both the ability and the opinion dimension are deployed [7].

Social comparison processes are the basis for analysis of upward trends in the compensation of chief executive officers (CEO) in business industries. Starting point is that CEOs in their self-evaluation rank themselves higher than others would do. A whole population claims to be better than average [8]. Not growth in performance, but a circular process of status strive generates upward trends [9]. In the opposition of the economist and institutionalist views, the body of literature is familiar to the model of Rindova and colleagues [3]. In study of CEO behavior in a non-profit industry [10] the switch from a proficient to a detrimental period is observed. Although utilizing a different analytical framework, the finding support the social comparison theory: Opinion leading CEOs were regarded by their peer and institutional stakeholders as very able entrepreneurs. In this study, acquisition of reputation suppress the development of abilities and the search for improvement of performance. As well, the findings show a dominance of prominence indicators during the detrimental period. In this vein, the study provide support for the model van Rindova and co-authors.

The frameworks of Festinger [2] and Rindova et al. [3] are applicable in institutional contexts where organizations and their leaders compete for resources, and where assessments and evaluations play of role in the allocation of the resources. However, the application of the framework in de the studies aforementioned is not ready for use in this study of allocation of subsidies in a cultural sector. Therefore, a more tailor-made elaboration of the frameworks is provided in next session.

3. Operationalization into Topics

In the two previous sections, an introduction is given into the accounts of Festinger [2] and Rindova et al. [3]. This section contains a selection of concepts from these accounts which will be used to analyze cases from the Dutch state subsidization of cultural sectors. Although Festinger's account provides a more profound theoretical insight in the social comparison processes, the publication of Rindova and colleagues will be used as the core of the analytical framework. As they have deployed an elaboration from concepts to variables in an empirical study. Some concepts of Festinger

are not covered in this elaboration. Therefore, these concepts of Festinger are added to the framework. Festinger advances his propositions from intra-personal and inter-personal per-

spective on performance evaluation, whereas Rindova and fellow researchers regard the way the stakeholders compare and judge future performance.

Table 1. *From concept to topics.*

Concepts from Festinger [2]	Concepts from Rindova et al. [3]	Topics for the analysis of Dutch cultural sectors
A. Socially comparing groups gather around a shared activity.	Not elaborated.	A1. Groups of peers, as perceived by the executive actors in the cultural sector.
B. Abilities and opinions respectively technical and social references.	Technical Indicators: Quality of Inputs (future) and Assets (past performance).	A1. Groups of comparable applicants in the subsidization tournament.
C. Retarding constraints on growth of the abilities induce a shift to symbolic enhancement of abilities.	Sector organizations choose between quality and prominence signals.	B1. How do artist and artistic leaders weigh professional versus social indicators?
D. Properties of the opinion formation:	Not elaborated.	B2. How do stakeholders weigh professional and social indicators?
*pressure to uniformity and conformity.	Social proof, that is evidence by conforming opinions.	B3. In what way do the references differ in use between applicants and rating committees?
*derogation and hostility.	Media rankings.	B4. What is the balance between past and future performances?
*one-sidedness and self-evidentiality of opinions.	Affiliation to high-status actors.	C1. Stagnation versus development perspectives in the view of artistic applicants.
E. An inner circle around the highest in status monopolizes the information channels.	G. The interaction between media and high-status actors.	C2. Stagnation versus development perspectives in the view of rating committees.

The analysis will lead to an answer on the question: how does prominence overrule eminence in the application for subsidies? The question is a hypothesis based on the study of Rindova and colleagues of two cases of private business schools in the United States. In Festinger's theory, outcome of the contest between eminence and prominence is depending on conditions.

Table 2. *Prominence versus Eminence, concepts and topics.*

Concepts from Festinger [2]	Concepts from Rindova et al. [3]	Topics for the analysis of Dutch cultural sectors
Opinions are more easily changed than abilities. So, artists who opt for a prominence position surpass members who try to adapt their abilities.	Not elaborated.	Conclusion on the basis of the cases.
Not elaborated.	Investments in prominence form an easier way to price premiums.	Idem.
Opinions overweigh judgments on abilities.	Not elaborated.	Idem.
Not elaborated.	Media ranking overweighs other elements of prominence.	Idem.

In this study, three cases from the Dutch cultural sectors are selected in which the applications for a subsidy were rejected. All three organizations have objected and have set up a lobby supported by affiliates. Comparison of the cases may shed light on the

question by which means a contestation can be successful.

Table 3. Means to deploy a contestation of a rejected subsidy application.

Concepts from Festinger [2]	Concepts from Rindova et al. [3]	Topics for the analysis of Dutch cultural sectors
Not elaborated.	Improving the quality of the inputs.	Conclusion on the basis of the cases.
Not elaborated.	Stronger signals about the quality of the assets.	Idem.
Not elaborated.	Increasing media attention.	Idem.
Not elaborated.	Winning prizes.	Idem.
Not elaborated.	Getting access to affiliated high status actors.	Idem.

4. Subsidization of Dutch Culture

In this section, a description and analysis of the state subsidization to Dutch cultural organizations is given. First, the subsidization policy is explained. It is followed by an investigation into three cases presented in subsections per main topic. The section concludes with a comparison of the three cases.

4.1. Culture Policy by the Dutch State

Once every four years, the Council for Culture advises the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) on the allocation of state subsidies to cultural institutions. The foundation for this system was made by the state secretary Medy van der Laan in 2005 [11]. Van der Laan's memo was turned into policy by her successor Ronald Plasterk [12]. Until 2009, there was a cultural note system in which funds, such as the Dutch Fund for the Performing Arts (NFPK), gave advice on which institutions would receive government subsidies. Major changes in the policy reform concerned a reallocation of the subsidies and reduction of the beneficiaries [13]. This was a free pass for distinct artistic companies. This privilege was accompanied with the argument that if they did not exist, we would reinvent them [14]. The reform issued cultural organizations to submit a thorough application means business plan, in order to demonstrate to be solid cultural entrepreneurs [13, 15]. In this respect, the reform moved Dutch cultural sectors to the realm of new public management. A transfer of discretionary power to the Council for Culture was performed in order to politically safeguard the minister in charge from contestation by losers in the tournament.

Since the introduction of the cultural system, there has been turmoil about the allocation of subsidies (mainly in the performing arts) every four years. At the end of the first period an administrative judge stated that the procedure has been performed irregularly due to prepossession, partiality, and conflicts of interest. For instance, advisors of some applying

companies were members of the commissions and have been allowed to participate in the judgments of competing companies [16].

The clamor increased every four years as did the pressure to correct decisions from affected institutions on the House of Representatives [15]. With the start of the 2009 - 2012 policy period, the new system came into effect [17]. The policy evolved to the establishment of the Dutch Cultural BIS. The system was initially set up as a framework in which the central government would only provide direct subsidies to a limited number of institutions that together form a Cultural BIS. Therefore, the Cultural BIS concerns art institutions which play a vital role in the regional cultural offering or fulfill a national function [17]. Within the administrative design of the Cultural BIS, a network of artistic funds is given a more important role for the artistic middle segment. For example, art institutions which fall outside the Cultural BIS can submit a (project) subsidy application to the funds. Cultural funds are closer to cultural practice, was the reasoning [12]. With the Cultural BIS, the national government takes direct responsibility for filling a number of functions to which institutions can subscribe. The filling of these positions must be of high quality and have to guarantee a diverse cultural offering [17]. Cultural institutions wishing to receive subsidies from the state must provide an application in which they describe their expenses, activities, plans for the coming years, etcetera. The applications have to be addressed to various committees, such as the dance- or design committee. These committees formulate an initial advice. The advice of the committees is then submitted to the Council of Culture, which in turn advises the Minister of OCW. The minister then makes a decision, usually following the advice of the Council of Culture [18]. For a cultural institution to be a part of the Cultural BIS, they have to submit a business plan together with its application. In addition, institutions must submit data regarding their performance. The data provides insight into the performance over the past four years. For example, the data comprises the amount of activities, the number of visitors, educational efforts, how many schools use the educational program and

the performance data annually provides the framework for the institutions' accountability [18].

After Minister Ronald Plasterk, several ministers made attempts to elaborate on the system. Under Minister Zijlstra, Minister of Culture (BIS period 2013 – 2016), the system was drastically changed. His goal, as described in 'More than quality: a new vision for cultural policy' [19] was less subsidy dependence and strict selection of institutions to be funded. The result was a huge cutback and therefore increasing competition for funding between cultural institutions. This trend can still be noticed in the current Cultural BIS. There is limited room for cultural institutions within the existing categories. Competition therefore takes place between cultural institutions for obtaining subsidy funds. Thereby, the business plans containing performance targets seem to be more important than the expected artistic performances, a policy change enacted before [14]. In addition, Bunnik [18] argues that little innovation takes place. For example, museums with important collections which can guarantee high artistic quality need to spend less time on other criteria and generally do not have to be concerned about funding. This group is almost automatically re-subsidized and can thus continue to develop. According to Hagedoorn [20], it can be seen as a vicious cycle in which the Cultural BIS confirms and strengthens itself.

4.2. Description and Analysis of the Cases

This section comprises two case studies from the Dutch cultural field that applied for the subsidy for the 2021 - 2024 policy period and one case study from the cultural note system in 2008. The negative decision in the first round, preceded four-yearly rejections up to the 2020 round. In total three case studies were examined. These three cases were chosen because of their high level of media coverage and the research is therefore exploratory in nature. It is expected that in cases with contestation of the allocation decision, arguments will be more salient. In the case of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra & Choir (ABO&C), the contestation in the 2008 round will be examined because at that moment more media attention was aroused. The topics from the previous sections will guide the analysis. The next three cases will be analyzed: Scapino Ballet residing in the city of Rotterdam, Frascati residing in the city of Amsterdam, and The ABO&C. The ABO&C applied for the subsidy in 2008. All three organizations were denied the subsidy from the Cultural BIS or the cultural note system which had disastrous consequences, such as potential bankruptcy. They tried to use the media and their prominence to get the judgment from the RvC revised.

4.2.1. Peer Groups

Peer groups, as named in Festinger's theory [2], are inherently linked to the assessment system of the cultural BIS in the Netherlands. Cultural organizations submit an application for a function, such as dance. Within this function, applica-

tions are compared and weighed against each other. Scapino Ballet applied for the dance function in which there were only four positions were grantable. A total of five cultural institutions applied. After uproar from society, the dance sector itself, and the politics, Scapino Ballet was finally admitted to the Cultural BIS as the fifth dance company [21]. Frascati therefore applied for the development function within the Cultural BIS [21]. This function within the Cultural BIS focuses on developing artists and generating space to reinvent genres and disciplines in order to innovate or try out. A development institution's core activity is to facilitate, guide, and develop talented or innovative creators. Within this category, 69 institutions applied. In where only 15 positions were grantable within this category [21]. Finally, the ABO&C applied for the function of ensembles and choirs. In total, there were 15 applicants and 7 available spots within the function [21]. In the 2008 round, positions were not a priori limited [15] but the cumulative outcome of decision per organization.

A number of observations can be made regarding the application of the three cases. First, the respondent working at Frascati states that the applicants cannot be compared within the function development. The respondent goes on to state that all the applicants were very different from each other. It was 'comparing apples and oranges.' No committee can competently judge that. The function dance and the function music ensembles and choirs were more homogeneous in nature. The ABO&C was completely waylaid by the decision to drop the subsidization. They were in a running conversation and opting for an increase of the amount of subsidization. In addressing the media, the last ensemble tried to alter the public and political opinion. As mentioned, this attempt has been unsuccessful.

Finally, there has to be made an observation about the peer group within the dance function. One respondent (an employee of Scapino Ballet) said the following: 'Until this period, there were four dance companies in the basic infrastructure. The Dutch National Ballet in the city of Amsterdam and Nederlands Dans Theater in The Hague are actually "too big to fail". The continued existence of those two organizations is never in question. In addition, you have Introdans in Arnhem. Introdans is located outside the Randstad which gives it a rock-solid position. Scapino is the smallest company in the basic infrastructure and also the third company in the Randstad' [22]. Prominence seems to have played a role. In addition, it seems that certain institutions are guaranteed a place in the Cultural BIS. They have an unofficial exemption and get the price premium.

4.2.2. Views on Quality

This section looks at artistic quality and social indicators corresponding to the abilities and opinions from Festinger's theory [2] and the quality of inputs and assets from Rindova and colleagues' model [3].

First, the artistic quality will be examined. Scapino Ballet positions itself in the dance sector as an approachable organ-

ization which programs dance performances which appeal to a wide audience in the Netherlands [21]. As an accessible and large-scale BIS organization, Scapino Ballet fulfills an important role, according to the RvC [21]. It incorporates music, circus, variety and live music in its productions and thus attracts a large audience. In this way, Scapino Ballet stimulates the growth of the dance climate in the Netherlands. In its recommendation, the RvC [21] considered such a 'promotional function' of dance in the country to be valuable. In other areas, the RvC [21] is more critical of the extent to which Scapino Ballet distinguishes itself from the other applicant. In this regard, the RvC [21] states the following in its advice: 'The council recognizes the high-artistic content quality of the work of the current four BIS dance companies, but also notes that a great uniformity has developed in the field of aesthetics. The offerings of the institutions in the 2017 - 2020 policy period are limited to large-scale ballet and modern dance based on a ballet tradition. New developments in the field of contemporary and urban dance, but also influences from pop and new media, architecture and installation art, contemporary theater, and performance or spoken word hardly find their way into the BIS companies with the occasional exception of an "excursion". The council believes that the BIS as a whole should reflect the developments in the Dutch cultural sectors' [21]. Frascati also receives good feedback from the RvC on their artistic quality: 'The Board considers Frascati to be a leading place for talent development with a high standard of quality, especially for theater, journalism, and documentary theater. The development paths result in a rich outflow: many of the creators who start at Frascati subsequently acquire appealing positions in the performing arts sector' [21]. Finally, the ABO&C will be discussed. The RvC [21] states that they see the choir as an organization with a rich history and a high standard regarding artistic quality. The RvC [21] states in their advisory report that: 'The ensemble is highly skilled, highly knowledgeable about historical performance practice, and thus presents interesting heritage. However, the signature of the ensemble is highly dependent on artistic director Ton Koopman. The Council for Culture points out that an ensemble in the BIS should not be an artistic signature and cannot depend on one artistic director.' Already in the report of 2008, the NPFK objected to dependency of ensembles on their artistic leaders as well [16].

For the perceived quality regarding the core activities of Scapino Ballet, the organization chooses a profile that is primarily focused on building a large audience for dance. According to the RvC, the institution has a good sense of what appeals to a large audience [21]. A respondent from Scapino Ballet states the following regarding the preservation of its artistic quality: 'There are relatively a lot of people working in the dance sector in the Netherlands. It is after all a small sector. That attitude, that umbrella keeps you on your toes. Every production you make is judged by people in your orbit. You talk about it with other people and you talk about it with peers. Then you get feedback and that's one way to keep you on your

toes. Another way to find out is: how badly do dancers want to dance with you and how badly do choreographers want to work for you? That also determines your standing in the dance world' [22]. The respondent from ABO&C [23] suggest that you cannot make judgements on the quality of the ensembles without arbitrariness. He explicitly conceives quality in terms of mastery references. New, experimental initiatives are welcomed by him under the condition that the aim is to create a new musical expression. Newness has to originate in professional criteria instead of social criteria. He regrets the dominance of social references in the discussion about subsidies. To his opinion the strive for mastery and excellence is not constrained by technical limits, but by shortage of money [23].

4.2.3. Legacy and Previous Performances

This section focuses on the legacy and previous performances as part of quality of assets. Scapino Ballet, Frascati, and ABO&C all get similar criticism from the RvC [21]. The organizations do not innovate their 'function' with their past and today's performances. Furthermore, both Scapino Ballet and ABO&C lean heavily on their artistic leaders, who secure the legacy of the organizations, but who would be an impediment to innovation. Frascati deviates on this topic, but that may be inherent in the type of organization and position being applied for. Namely, Frascati's goal is to allow talent to develop. All three organizations train talented creators to ensure their legacy, especially ABO&C. With regard to the quality of productivity assets, ABO&C has delivered a series of doctorates. One of the former students, Masaaki Suzuki, globally recognized as a prominent and eminent Bach interpreter. Ton Koopman has educated members of other ensembles like Holland Baroque [23]. However, both in the 2008 and 2020 this educational contribution to the Dutch music sector is valued rather as a minus than a plus [15, 21]. In the two reports it is argued that artistic education is the exclusive competence of vocational institutions. Proposal of master-to-apprentice learning do not suit the institutionalist way of thinking.

4.2.4. Formation of Opinions

This paragraph focuses on the formation of opinions. In Festinger's theory [2], this is described as the yearning for uniformity. Ton Koopman of the ABO&C describes it as follows: 'I am bothered by the certainty and irrevocability of opinions about me and my ensembles. There has not come a serious response to his objections to the negative decisions. From his point of view, their criteria for rejection are based on framing, like "You earn too much"' [23]. The commission appeared to be irresponsive to the argument that Koopman invests private equity and earnings from international guest conductorships into the continuation of his ensemble. This is a way of survival after the loss of subsidy and third party funding [23].

From the talk of the scene, Koopman took-up the next

reasoning: 'The Netherlands are too small for two of such ensembles. Frans Brüggen and his Orchestra of the 18th century were simply more in favor.' [23]. It is to be noted that the Dutch Bach Society and Holland Baroque were both in the first round [14]. In the introductory section of the subsidy advise, both organizations are set as examples of excellent cultural entrepreneurs [15]. It is a salient detail that their consultant happened to be member of the committee Music as well [15]. It is plausible that the prepossession and arbitrariness in the 2008 procedure [16], can be related to rejection of the application by the ABO&C.

In the most recent round [21], the ensembles were actually preferred over the ABO&C. When Koopman reached out to his counterparts, they did not show any willingness to have a discussion on the basis of professionalism and of accounting facts. Koopman argues that they are partly 'people never heard of'. He regrets the departure of knowledgeable people with a true affinity to musical practice and culture in general. It is symbolized by the statements of a former state secretary who told the media that he never visited theaters and concert halls. Koopman tells that he is selective in his contacts. He is aware that his expressions of objection and indignation in the media have not been wise. 'I was simply too angry. It did not serve our cause.' According to him, his eminence is not recognized in the Netherlands, at least by the people who decide on the grants. He receives invitations to perform as guest conductor in international concert halls. His ensemble has made tours all over the world. He regrets the lack of recognition in his own country [23].

The respondent at Frascati states the following in this regard: 'That this was going to be a big jumble was already known. We had addressed this in the previous conversation with the Council for Culture. It's not a bad thing that it's a big jumble, only an important question is how you are going to assess it. That is the most important question of all. Who gets the complicated task of thinking about video art, hip-hop, fashion, architecture, performing arts, etcetera? Who can do that? I myself have been in the arts for thirty years and I too cannot do it. It is an impossible task. As far as I am concerned, their people have gone out of their way. We were positively evaluated and they found us good. Of course then they look for some sticks to beat us with, because we were not honored and you need arguments for that. These arguments are improper as far as we are concerned. Unfortunately, it is complicated to make this demonstrable because there is an opinion underneath' [24]. The prepossession and arbitrariness of the judgments are demonstrated in comparison to the explanations in the BIS 2020-2023. Frascati's request was rejected because the planning lacked strictness. In contrast the Dutch Bach Society was praised for being an agile organization [21].

4.2.5. Media

In this section, the media coverage of the contestations of subsidy applications is examined. Within Festinger's theory [2], this is called 'channels of information'. Rindova et al. (3)

instead refer to 'media rankings'. The media acts as a general intermediary and provides the society with information. In this way, media coverage can influence the public opinion. To measure Scapino Ballet's media reach, three Dutch newspapers were chosen for a limited analysis: NRC, De Volkskrant, and Trouw. The coverage (articles, opinion pieces and reviews) was analyzed over a time period from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020. In total, the NRC wrote 23 times about Scapino Ballet, De Volkskrant 15 times and Trouw 11 times. Judging from these numbers, it can be said that in a span of two years the Scapino Ballet managed to reach the media. Opinion pieces were also written about the Scapino Ballet's loss of government subsidies. All of these opinion pieces argued at the time for preservation. For example, Hofstede states the following in his article How cruel that Scapino cannot now fight back [25] in the NRC: 'How cruel it is to lose your subsidy, now, at a time when you are only allowed to perform in front of a handful of people (authors: due the Corona virus), when otherwise you would be playing in front of full auditoriums everywhere to stay afloat and fight back?' Notable in this regard is the spike in media coverage that could be observed between June 4 and June 29 in which it was made public that Scapino Ballet would initially no longer receive a subsidy until the moment at the end of June when Minister Van Engelshoven revised her decision. During the period, newspapers wrote (in the form of articles or opinion pieces) about Scapino Ballet significantly more often (NRC 7 times, De Volkskrant 11 times and Trouw 7 times).

For Frascati, a similar research has been conducted. In total, the NRC wrote 26 times about Frascati, De Volkskrant 33 times, and Trouw 7 times within the period under study. Judging from these data, it can be said that over a two year period, Frascati managed to reach the media. Opinion pieces were also written about the removal of the subsidy for Frascati. All of these opinion pieces argued for preservation at the time. For example, Wensink states in her article I'll say it flat out: no state subsidy for Frascati is a mistake [26] in De Volkskrant the following: 'I'll say it flat out: that's a mistake. Just consider this list of makers who once started at Frascati: Jetse Batelaan, Sadettin Kirmiziyüz, Naomi Velissariou, Davy Pieters, Laura van Dolron, Marjolijn van Heemstra - now all important voices in the Dutch theater world. That path should also be there for a new generation of directing students, but for them the void threatens once again' [26]. A striking feature of newspaper coverage is the peak which could be observed between June 4 and November 23. During this period, it was publicly announced that Frascati would initially no longer receive a subsidy until the end of November upon which Minister Van Engelshoven decided to support Frascati on a one-time basis. During the period, newspapers wrote about the Frascati significantly more often (NRC: 5 times, De Volkskrant 8 times and Trouw 3 times).

Lastly, the media coverage on the ABO&C is reviewed. In total, NRC wrote 16 times about the ensemble, the Volkskrant 15 times and last, Trouw 8 times. In these newspapers it is

mentioned that the international press ad taken up the news of ABO&C's loss of subsidy. The author, Anthony Fiumara, of the article 'A dramatic amputation' [27] in Trouw states: 'Even within the older music, the committee's inconsistent choices are denounced from within. When I look at the music landscape, remarkable things have happened to say the least. The subsidy stop for Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, after all the Concertgebouw Orchestra of early music, should not have passed with the Council.' Finally, the support for ABO&C and its artistic leader has been constant over time. When in 2009 the performance of the St. Matthew Passion had to be canceled for financial reasons, a television recording dating from 2005 was rebroadcasted on Good Friday. Recently, Ton Koopman has been interviewed in the series of the Dutch masters of classical music. In this way, Ton Koopman has been ranked at the top by the public media.

In conclusion, it can be stated that all the organization know their way to the media and sometimes they can use the media to pursue their own goals, but this may work to their disadvantage.

4.2.6. Professional Recognition

This section further explores the professional recognition from external actors. The theory of Rindova et al. [3] provides guidance. They link professional recognition to contributions from funds and certifications.

Fundraising relies largely on trust and relationship management stemming from previous performance and an organization's image. Secondly, the normative frameworks within the dance sector should be examined. This can be done through certification, but also through memberships of branch organizations. These branch organizations draw up normative frameworks to ensure quality and professionalism within the sector. Scapino Ballet states good results in terms of financial commitments in 2019. For example, the Cultural Fund supports Scapino Ballet's anniversary production [28].

Frascati enjoys as well the trust they get from funds. Several funds have expressed their confidence in Frascati through monetary contributions. An example is the VSBfonds which has been contributing to productions and mentoring young talent for years. The BankGiro Lottery Fund also supports Frascati with multi-year funding. In addition, funds such as Ammodo support Frascati for the benefit of talent development. Other funds and private financiers are equity fund Young Artfund Amsterdam, Stichting Melanie, Stichting Imagine Change, Dioraphte, Fonds 21, and Het Cultuurfonds [29].

The ABO&C also receives trust from funds. Several funds contribute to the ensemble, like Het Cultuurfonds. The ABO&C has received a special recommendation from the city of Leipzig, the place where Bach wrote the major part of his oeuvre.

The performing arts sector - which includes among others dance, theater and choirs- has one large branch organization, Netherlands Association for the Performing Arts (NAPK),

which, to a lesser extent, draw up normative frameworks for their members. It sets some conditions for membership. Scapino Ballet, Frascati and ABO&C are affiliated with NAPK.

In hindsight, it can be noted that the granting and rejecting of subsidy applications have a signaling effect on the other suppliers of funds and future decisions, thus causing a financial cascade [23]. In the case of the ABO&C, loans were withdrawn immediately. The applications in subsequent application rounds were received in negative frames. The request in 2020 was not even taken into consideration. Such a kind of treatment by the rating committee will have a negative impact on parties who would otherwise consider to support the organization.

4.2.7. Affiliation to High-Status Actors

The next section explores the relation to high-status actors. In the theory of Rindova et al [3] this is described as affiliation with high status actors, for example well-known people. As described in the previous chapter, Festinger [2] describes high status with the following indicators: the protection of the inner circle, one sided opinions, having a monopoly on information flows and the highest status holder often pulls the longest straw.

In the case of Scapino Ballet, they often work with leading or well-known figures (mainly known in the Netherlands) within the dance sector which creates prestige. In addition, Jan Kooijman, actor, TV personality, and former dancer with Scapino Ballet, has worked to keep Scapino Ballet in the Cultural BIS [30].

Scapino Ballet also knows how to influence politics. They managed to create a fifth place within the Cultural BIS through effective lobbying. Frascati tried a similar approach. A respondent, an employee at Frascati, stated the following about this: 'We are the largest production house within the performing arts in the Netherlands. We have a good relationship with the art schools and we serve the whole country. For this reason it is very strange that this happened. The schools were also very angry and this helped us. So, we gathered many voices from the field to speak for us and thus bombarded politicians with a video, among other things. We also made many publications and hired an agency to help us bring Frascati into the spotlight. The end result was, in December 2020, that at the last art budget hearing the minister found money for our joint plan with Plan Brabant (a partnership between cultural creators in the southern region of the Netherlands). This collaboration was important because it gave us a link outside the Randstad (the four major Dutch cities). For the Christian-democrat party and the liberal party this was an opportunity to be sympathetic. The whole process no longer has anything to do with your plan, but with politics. You have to find an entry into politics somewhere' [24]. The ABO&C differs from the others. They have an outspoken selectivity in the contacts to high-status actors outside the music sector. Koopman (ABO&C) will not try to become

friends with people whose main focus is on position and power. When a politician is seriously interested in music and culture, then there is a basis for acquaintance and friendship. Koopman admits that colleagues of him are better in the interaction with the powerful. In contrast he criticizes the privileged position of the Dutch Bach Society. He suspects that this position is based on the fact that the prime minister and other members of the government visit its performances of the St. Matthew Passion every year [23]. This would be justified because of the reputation of the ensemble. Koopman objects to this way of reasoning. Such a privilege is right for the Concertgebouw Orchestra, simply because this ensemble contributes to the international cultural reputation of the Netherlands [23]. During the protest in 2009, ABO&C appeared to have affiliations to prominent actors as well to the former prime minister, former ministers of culture and other prominent politicians. A group of them wrote a letter of adherence to the Dutch parliament. However, it was in vain [31].

4.3. Contestations of Rejected Subsidy Applications, Three Cases Compared

The three cases have in common that non-artistic arguments have been determining in the rejection of the subsidy requests. A difference is found in the course of action and the outcome of the contestation of the decisions. Frascati succeeded in mobilization of support from third parties in the cultural sectors and from the public media. In contrast to the Scapino Ballet casus, the city of Amsterdam did not (publicly) support the contestation. Though Frascati manages to break through the safeguards around the minister, the protests did not change the decision of the RvC. Scapino finds its way in the governmental networks and knows to effectuate a revision of the decision. It has been done by mobilization of the public media and prominent supporters like the city of Rotterdam. The first rejection of the application of the ABO&C occurred in 2008. The mobilization of support in the public media and among prominent actors outclassed the former contestations. In spite of this impressive support, the pressure did not change the decision. A probable explanation is the fact the policy reform was in the start of its implementation. The fortification around the Minister of Culture had to be kept closed. An alternative explanation could be that a major competitor had a role of supplier to the court. A final alternative explanation can be found in a statement of the chair of the NFPK, George Lawson [32]. Not only the ABO&C, but the ASKO-Schönberg ensemble of Reibert de Leeuw and the Willem Breuker Collective were unexpectedly faced with radical cuts. Lawson argues unpersuadable: 'Even though they have the support of prominent friends, eminent conductors have to deliver an eminent plan as well' [15]. It was argued that the ABO&C no longer would be protected by its untouchable status [15]. Reinbert de Leeuw of the Asko/Schönberg ensemble had a high-status as well, but his eminence and prominence did not justify a privileged treatment of the ap-

plication. This last explanation is in line with prediction of Festinger [2], that group members superior in ability are tolerated as long as they remain outside of the sphere of the opinion formation. If not, they will meet derogation and hostility from the members of the inner core around opinion leaders. Notably, these artistic leaders have attained prominence via the narrow pathway from eminence. The comparative analysis points at the importance of information channels [4]. It is about finding and bringing in protagonists in the policy networks. The three celebrities failed in this respect. For instance, De Leeuw lost his influence within the RvC [23]. Koopman had not be aware that his application was judged by a protagonist of his direct competitors.

5. Findings

What processes determine the allocation of state funds to a selection of cultural and artistic organizations? In the case of the Dutch cultural basic infrastructure (BIS) two main criteria are issued: quality and reputation. Organizations in the cultural sector need both quality and reputation, but a problem can arise when quality and reputation become disconnected. Some organizations obtain a "protected status" based on reputation, while artistic quality stagnates or even declines.

The way in which the selection and granting is performed shows a striking similarity with processes described in the literature. First, the theory of social comparison [2] asserts that people in a shared activity compare opinions and abilities in a strife for growth. When technical constraints and limits impede the progress in ability effort and attention within the group shifts to opinions on abilities of their peers. In this social dimension growth is more easily attained. This decoupling results in stagnation and inferior learning processes. Second, Rindova and colleagues [3] have proposed a model in which perceived quality and prominence determine which organization will receive price premiums. Perceived quality is indicated by the quality of the inputs and productivity assets. Prominence originates from media rankings, elicited preferences of intermediary organizations, and affiliation with high-status actors [3]. Prominence has more bearing in social processes in the institutional field than on quality indicators. This model provides a basis for reputation bias among stakeholders of organizations. In addition to Rindova and colleagues, not only the gaining of the price premium is at stake. Organizations seek for conditions favorable to their operations. Getting priority or a free pass in procedures, and more generally, exemptions from regulation and taxation are aimed at in the lobbies of creative and other industries. Some organizations even covertly receive a 'protected status' and with those organizations, there is no need for concern about receiving the subsidy. This privileged treatment is not accounted for in the reports of the funding council.

The theoretical approaches have been operationalized by an analytical framework. The framework appears to offer a powerful and accurate instrument to describe and explain

courses of action and outcomes in the Dutch cultural sectors. In discussion, it is questioned if it is wise to base a subsidization policy on social comparison. The strive for prominence in the institutional fields tend to overrule the search for quality and eminence. Moreover, the emphasis on prominence induces partiality. Further, as applicants and executing artist are not assessed on the quality of their performance, leeway is given to maltreatment of people who are valued as superior or inferior in ability and status. According to the analysis in this paper, quality criteria in the evaluations should gain weight to remedy partiality and abuse of status.

6. Discussion

The research of Rindova and colleagues [3] demonstrates that tokens of the quality of production lose out to the features of prominence. Economic factors are surpassed by institutional aspects. The industry of their study differs from the sectors of arts and stage performance. The undervaluation of quality standards suggests a dominance of institutional determinants as well. Only the importance of affiliation to high-status actors seems much stronger than in the results of Rindova et al. [3]. It is the well-known Maecenas effect. This said some reflections follow. The counts of media items reflect the support media creators observe among audiences. In the cases of the business schools of Rindova et al. [3], the media rankings are prevalent. In contrast, the cases in the Dutch cultural sectors show a prevalence of the judgments of the sector organizations and of the affiliations to high-status actors.

First, the reform of the allocation of the cultural subsidies has been implemented with references to new public management narratives. The resulting allocation processes show a transition from the economics of creative production to politics. Hayek [33], founding father of neo-liberalism, contends that the beneficial effect of competition is impaired when collusion occurs. The creative industries are highly competitive. One can observe struggle for the attraction of audiences and an ongoing tension between revenues and costs. The subsidization process rather disturbs than supports the competition. Not the brightest in production and the ones with the best appeal to audiences wins the tournament, but the smartest with the best entries to political power. Similarly, Hayek [33] argues that innovation is not impeded by technical constraints but by unequal entry to markets and unequal access to resources. This inequality is apparent in this study. Innovation is substituted by an in the opinion formulation socially constructed surrogate. Applicants have to schedule cross-over performances. For instance the combination of an ensemble of baroque instruments with a gospel choir. Not complying to this innovation construction is responded by rejection of the proposal and a loss of subsidies for a period of four years (Koopman on the rejection of Capella Amsterdam: [23]). The concepts of artistic innovation and cultural entrepreneurship are construed by actors who set prominence above originality

and an enduring strive for artistic improvement [13, 15].

Second, the distinction between winners and losers of the subsidy tournaments reveals an institutionalist phenomenon of isomorphism. The applicants who adopt a way of operation similar to the allocators and raters receive more legitimacy than applicants who show a behavior that suits the production of the intended services [34]. These institutionalist authors speak of 'smoke and mirror' surrounding these processes.

Finally, there is a clash of models of leadership. In 2020, ensembles which rely on the leadership of eminent long in tenure operating artistic directors appeared to be excluded from subsidization. In the core, it is a difference in motivation structures: the artistic mastery achievement motivation versus a need for prominence and power of political (opinion) leaders. It implicates a difference in career tracks as well. Dutch politicians and high-ranked administrators circulate every four or eight year. Ensembles like the ABO&C and Scapino Ballet need to present succession schemes in order to be not excluded from the application procedures. It reveals a contrast between to be master or to be obsolete. This study shows what happens when the strive for prominence overrules the search for eminence.

7. Conclusion

Making decisions on future productions of art and stage performances feels at first glance as groping into the dark or looking into a crystal ball. In the allocation of subsidies to Dutch cultural sectors, the arbitrariness is induced by trivializing references for artistic quality. In contrast, expert reviews of actual production often show similarity or even unanimity. However, the cases of the allocation of subsidies to the Dutch cultural sectors demonstrate a prevalence of social and political criteria. On the other hand, giving priority to criteria of artistic quality and appreciation by the audiences biased and malicious opinion formulation can be suppressed. Of course, some partiality will occur eventually. Thorough evaluation of decision procedure may help to detect these lapsus. According to Festinger's theory [2], opinion formulation on group members whose perceived abilities are superior or inferior to the inner core of the group tends to be responded with derogations and hostility. Taking this phenomenon in consideration, it is recommendable to select raters who rate the applicants in terms of knowledge and cultural experience match. It reflects the principle of peer review.

This study was exploratory in nature and examined a select number of cases. For follow-up research, it is necessary to increase the research population in order to determine the extent to which social comparison influences subsidy assessment. A research conducted by means of Qualitative Comparative Analyses might be considered. This method helps to ascertain the conditions necessary or sufficient for courses of action and outcome of policy processes.

The mechanism of eminence and prominence can be drawn more broadly than just the cultural sector. Follow-up research

could also focus on other sectors like education. It is proposed that the framework can be applied in all situation where resources and performance opportunities are allocated to a selection of executing actors. Choices will be based on a mix of past and expected future performances. The situations suited for application may vary from philanthropy to hardcore commercial industries and non-profit sectors.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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