

“Mais de quoi s’agit-il au juste?”

Nouveau champ et construction d’une logique institutionnelle

Resumé

Cet article examine le processus d’émergence et de stabilisation d’un nouveau champ institutionnel, en se concentrant sur les négociations multi-niveaux d’une logique institutionnelle pour ce champ. Considérant que l’interdépendance duale entre catégories et pratiques constitue le fondement d’une logique institutionnelle, il propose de mieux comprendre comment cette dualité est construite. Les résultats sont fondés sur une analyse multi-niveaux du champ de ‘la vente professionnelle sur les plateformes électroniques’ en France, entre 2005 et 2010, lorsque le champ a progressivement émergé et gagné en légitimité. L’article développe deux principaux arguments à partir des résultats. Premièrement, les acteurs à différents niveaux s’ajustent à la logique promue par les autres acteurs, selon la manière dont ils comprennent la catégorisation du champ et les pratiques qui lui sont associées. Deux modes d’ajustement sont identifiés – recadrage pragmatique et recadrage notionnel – qui, chacun, contribue à la construction d’une dualité entre catégorisation et pratique. Deuxièmement, il montre que de multiples ajustements sont réalisés par une série de mouvements centrifuges et centripètes, avec quelques acteurs émergeant comme des entrepreneurs institutionnels centraux, et simultanément une multitude d’autres réalisant un travail institutionnel de manière décentralisée.

Mots clés : manœuvres stratégiques, pouvoir/politique, étude de cas, théories néo-institutionnelles

‘Concerning tax liability, the fiscal administration is advised to retain criteria established in the report herein, defining the notion of professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ (Report on Internet commerce, Forum on Internet Rights, French Ministry of the Economy-Industry-Employment)

‘Our objective is to work hand in hand with the government to bring sellers to be more entrepreneur-minded and to incite the government to simplify the rules for people to launch their business.’ (FFC, Professional Sellers Segment Manager, eBay France)

‘With eBay, we make things evolve through clashes. It’s the only way. If you don’t raise your voice, nothing happens.’ (A professional seller, eBay France)

These three quotes depict the efforts by actors at different levels – governmental, organizational and individual – to influence the process of institutionalization of an emerging field: the field of professional sales on e-marketplaces. The process of field emergence and construction is a multilevel phenomenon, from the setting of new rules at the macro level down to the adoption of new practices at the micro level and legitimization of new organizational forms at the meso level (DiMaggio, 1991; Lee & Pennings, 2002; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Purdy & Gray, 2009). As explained by Friedland and Alford (1991), “Institutions set the limits on the very nature of rationality and, by implication, of individuality. Nonetheless, individuals, groups, and organizations try to use institutional orders to their own advantage.” (p. 251) In nascent fields in particular, interactions between different levels may take the form of conflicting groups’ interests and practices, disputed power structure, and competition between different political ideologies and norms (Holm & Nielsen, 2007; Purdy & Gray, 2009; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000).

New institutionalism has shown that in periods of institutional changes or field creation, conflicting institutional logics coexist and contribute to field’s instability until a dominant logic is established that re-stabilizes the field (Thornton, 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Townley, 1997). Institutional logic is classically defined as a set of material practices and symbolic constructions arising from institutional orders, with material practices comprising actors’ daily routines and performance criteria, and symbolic constructions being the institutional discourses and labels that categorize objects and actors in the field (Friedland, 2009; Friedland & Alford, 1991). In the process of institutionalization, categories

and practices become mutually constitutive, that is, categories give sense to the practices associated to them, and practices enact the categories to which they are applied (Friedland, 2009). When the categorical system and the actors' practices eventually cohere, the institutional logic is established and the field institutionalized (John W. Mohr & Duquenne, 1997). Period of institutional changes are characterized by a dissociation between categories and practices, the emergence of new practices, a re-categorization of the objects and actors within the field, and a progressive consolidation of categories and practices into a new institutional logic (John W Mohr & White, 2008).

Despite the asserted importance of the structural duality between categories and practices for understanding institutional logic and more generally institutions, the mechanism through which this duality is built in new fields remains largely overlooked by the literature, for two main reasons. Firstly, most works that study the role of practices in institutional logic (see for example Jones & Massa, 2013; Shipilov, Greve, & Rowley, 2010; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012) tend to assume a direct link between a change in practices and a change in institutional logic, without considering the associated effects of such a change on the categorization system. Secondly, apart from a few exceptions (Friedland, 2009; Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; John W. Mohr & Duquenne, 1997), the 'symbolic constructions' element in the definition of an institutional logic is generally not assimilated precisely to the system of categories that orders objects and actors in a field, but more comprehensively to discourses and stories (for example: Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), cognitive schemas (Beckert, 2010; Misangyi, Weaver, & Elms, 2008, among others), or scripts (see Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Voronov, De Clercq, & Hinings, 2013). Our first objective in this paper is thus to contribute to fill this gap in the literature. More precisely, we seek to understand how the structural duality between category and practice, which constitutes the core of an institutional logic, is built in a new field.

When multiple and competing logics coexist – as it is generally the case in emerging or not yet established fields – systems of meanings and practices vary among different groups at different levels, leading to potential conflicts and acts of resistance (Ezzamel, Robson, & Stapleton, 2012; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Purdy & Gray, 2009; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011). The institutionalization of fields supposes that these tensions, even if they do not totally disappear, give way to some consensus among actors over the practices, systems of classification, identities and symbols that organize and give sense to the field (Jones & Massa, 2013; Misangyi, et al., 2008; Shipilov, et al., 2010). How the transition from a 'battlefield' to an institutionalized field occurs is a question that has recently received

different – and sometimes contradictory – answers in the new institutionalism literature. One can distinguish between ‘centralized’ and ‘decentralized’ visions. According to the centralized vision, changes occur because some actors who have an interest in specific institutional arrangements use their superior power or resources to engage in a process of shaping the new institutions (DiMaggio, 1988; Levy & Scully, 2007; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Misangyi, et al., 2008). These ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ create new organizational forms, set new rules, new norms, new cognitive schemas, which eventually lead to a new logic supporting the field (David, Sine, & Haveman, 2013; Rowley, Shipilov, & Greve, 2012; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011).

Differently, arguments favouring a decentralized vision explain that institutionalization occurs because new practices emerge in the everyday work of individuals and progressively become legitimate, meaningful, and diffuse within the field, potentially giving rise to complex and heterogeneous fields where multiple logics may coexist (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Shipilov, et al., 2010; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets, et al., 2012). The concept of ‘institutional work’ (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011) promotes this decentralized vision of institutional changes. It invites to focus on the situated actions of individuals and groups in their attempt to impact institutions by creating, altering or protecting taken-for-granted discourses, practices, and field boundaries (Helfen & Sydow, 2013; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Our second objective in this paper is to contribute to this debate by clarifying the relational dimension of institutions, beyond the ‘centralized’ versus ‘decentralized’ divide. More precisely, we ask the question of how the interlocking relationships and strategic interactions between the different levels of an institutional order – micro, meso and macro – contribute to the emergence and stabilization of an institutional logic, that is, a structural duality between category and practice.

1. SETTING AND METHODS

The chosen empirical setting is the emergence and development of professional sales on e-marketplaces in France between 2005 and 2010. Professional sales on e-marketplaces became an institutional field when an institutional logic emerged, rules were set, and a structure was established. In 2005, negotiations between the government and the owners of the main marketplaces were launched to define ‘the exact contour of the notion of professional seller in distance selling’ and the ‘type of responsibilities of e-marketplaces’ in online transactions (Daniel et al., 2005). A report was published the same year under the title ‘Commerce between individuals on the Internet: Which obligations for sellers and e-

marketplaces?’ that provided the primary framework defining the field and grounding further institutionalization. Thus, I chose the year 2005 as the anterior time limit for data collection.

Three main levels were identified that played a role in the emergence of the field and the construction of its institutional logic: the French government (macro level), e-marketplaces (meso-level) and professional sellers on these e-marketplaces (micro-level). For the meso and micro-levels, the choice was made to focus on a single marketplace: eBay. Among the e-marketplaces operating in France at that period (for example PriceMinister or Amazon), eBay was the leader in terms of number of users and revenues. For that reason, eBay had a major influence on the construction of the institutional logic of the field. Moreover, eBay France literally accompanied the emergence of the field by professionalizing its e-marketplace between 2005 and 2010. As a result, the number of professional sellers on eBay France increased from virtually zero in 2005 to 80,000 in 2010¹.

1.1. DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected on the three levels that played a role in the process of institutionalization. Data on the macro-level concerned mainly government’s rules, bills, decrees, and laws and, for that reason, were based on archival material. Documents were retrieved from governmental websites, in particular the Forum for Internet Rights website, which remained open for archival search after the dissolution of the Forum in December 2010 (foruminternet.org), the archive section of the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Firms (pme.gouv.fr) and Légifrance, the French government entity that publishes and diffuses all legal texts, decrees, court ruling, European and international treaties and agreements online (legifrance.gouv.fr). Some other data were collected from non-governmental websites providing analysis and description of government’s decisions, such as industry unions (e.g. fevad.com), online newspapers (e.g. journaldunet.com, zdnet.fr), established business newspapers (e.g. lesechos.fr, latribune.fr), some other legal websites (e.g. legalis.net), and international sources (e.g. The Financial Times, the BBC).

Data on the meso-level concerned how eBay proactively and reactively contributed to the institutionalization of the field, and mainly consisted in archival data. The archive section of the eBay France website was extensively used, in particular messages published in the news section of the website between January 2006 and December 2010 (actualites.ebay.fr). Messages – around 200 per year – informed sellers about changes made to the platform, new rules, new tariffs, or promotional campaigns. Messages also explained what was expected

¹ Source: *interview of Yohan Ruso, eBay France CEO*, October 28, 2010 (<http://www.commentcamarche.net/news/5853349-yohan-ruso-ebay-le-succes-du-m-commerce-est-un-fait-etabli>)

from professional sellers, what they could expect from eBay, and how rewards and sanctions were decided. Other documents were collected from external sources, such as articles from news websites (e.g. journaldunet.com, zdnet.fr) or national newspapers (e.g. lesechos.fr, latribune.fr, lexpansion.lexpress.fr) informing the public about eBay's policy. Some complementary interviews were conducted with three managers at eBay France in 2008, and provided elements on specific points that required further explanations.

Table 1: Main data sources for the three groups of actors

Government	eBay	Professional sellers
<i>PUBLIC DOCUMENTS ON GOVERNMENTAL WEBSITES:</i> - foruminternet.org (Forum for Internet Rights) - pme.gouv.fr (State Secretary for SMEs and Commerce) - legifrance.gouv.fr (governmental archival website for legal texts) - apce.com (governmental agency for business creation) - lautoentrepreneur.fr (auto-entrepreneur/Novelli Law website) - senat.fr (Senate Chamber) <i>PUBLIC DOCUMENTS ON INFORMATION WEBSITES:</i> - legipme.com (legal information website for SMEs) - legalis.net (information website on legal matters) - journaldunet.fr (main information website about Internet matters) - lesechos.fr /Les Echos (main French business and economic newspaper) - latribune.fr /La Tribune (French business and economic newspaper) - news.bbc.co.uk (BBC) - ft.com (Financial Times)	<i>INTERNAL PUBLIC DOCUMENTS:</i> - actualites.ebay.fr (news and archived news on eBay France, from 2006) - eBay annual reports <i>INTERNAL PRIVATE DOCUMENTS:</i> - internal reports - Nielsen reports - brochures and leaflets for sellers <i>PUBLIC DOCUMENTS ON INFORMATION WEBSITES:</i> - journaldunet.fr - fevad.com (website of the FEVAD) - zdnet.fr (information website about Internet matters) - lesechos.fr /Les Echos - latribune.fr /La Tribune - lexpansion.lexpress.fr /L'Expansion (main French business and economic magazine) - lemondeinformatique.fr (supplement to Le Monde newspaper, focusing on Internet matters) <i>INTERVIEWS OF MANAGERS AT EBAY FRANCE HEADQUARTER:</i> - PW, professional seller segment manager - FFC, professional seller segment manager - TS, Sellers managing director	<i>INTERVIEWS:</i> 41 interviews with professional sellers

The only way to collect data on the micro-level (professional sellers) was through interviews, since no archival document was produced at that level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selection of 41 professional sellers in France representing all product categories listed on eBay websites, between 2008 and 2010. Questions pertained to sellers' experience as users of the platform, their assessment of the relationships with eBay, and their views of other actors operating on the platform, such as private sellers, buyers, and peers. These interviews revealed insider's perspectives on professional sales on e-marketplaces, and how eBay's rules and practices were perceived by sellers themselves. In total, 44 hours of interviews were carried out, all of which were recorded and transcribed in full. Table 1 provides a synthesis of the data collection.

1.2. ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The data were analysed in three steps. In the first step, I focused on the identification of the events related to professional sellers on e-marketplaces by systematically reading through all archival documents. These events consisted in decisions at the government level (bill, decrees, and laws) regulating online commercial transactions, and decisions at the marketplace level organizing professional sales and setting rules. A systematic search on

legifrance.gouv.fr, the French public service website that publishes and diffuses legal texts, permitted to identify the relevant bills that were voted (successfully or unsuccessfully) between 2005 and 2009. Similarly, an exhaustive search in the archive section of ebay.fr led to identify all decisions concerning professional sellers between 2006 and 2010. Events were tabulated in a continuous chronology, in which three main themes were identified. These three themes were the issues around which the field has been progressively built: ‘the definition of criteria for identifying professional sellers’; ‘the definition of rules of behaviour for professional sellers’; and ‘the promotion of an entrepreneurial mind-set among professional sellers’.

In a second step, the focus was on inter-level linkages, that is, the noticeable tensions or explicit agreements between the macro- and the meso-levels, and between the meso- and the micro-levels, for each issue identified in step 1. There was no direct linkage between the macro (government) and the micro (professional sellers) levels, as the primary reference of the micro-level was the meso-level (the marketplace). Archival data were extensively used at that stage, as they help to ‘connect individuals, organizations or elements of a discourse system together into some more systemic whole’ (Ventresca & Mohr, 2005, pp. 815-816). For example, the news section of the ebay.fr website reported evidence of disagreement with, or support of, governmental decisions and sellers’ behaviours. Data from news website, newspapers or industry unions provided elements of investigation about tensions, negotiations, or partnerships, between eBay and the government. Data from interviews with eBay managers provided more private information about eBay’s lobbying activities towards the government. Regarding the relationships between professional sellers and eBay, interviews with professional sellers constituted the primary source of data. All fragments in the interviews that expressed a tension with eBay, such as disagreement, complaint, or more generally negative feelings, and tactics to release this tension, such as open dispute, adaptation, accommodation, or resignation (among others) were identified and selected for further analysis in step 3.

The third step was devoted to data display and theorization. Data display is understood as ‘an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). The main purpose was to identify the nature of the strategic interactions, and the tactics used by actors to accommodate or change the meaning given to the category and the practices associated with this category. For each of the three issues identified in step 1, data selected in step 2 were displayed in both a chronological narrative and a flowchart. The chronological narrative was used as a way to

link the different relevant pieces of data in a chronological and logical order. The flowchart was used as a way to give a synthetic view of the interactions between, and tactics by, the actors at different levels. The most determinant interactions for issues 1 and 3 ('the definition of criteria for identifying professional sellers' and 'the promotion of an entrepreneurial mindset among professional sellers') occurred between the macro- and meso-levels, with the micro-level having a very neutral role. For the issue 2 ('the definition of rules of behaviour for professional sellers'), the micro-level had a more affirmed role, and interactions took place between the three levels. Several iterations of going back and forth between data, chronological narratives and flowcharts led to successive versions of narratives and flowcharts and, progressively, to a theorization of how actors in interactions influence the institutional logic of the field. For example, working on data display led me to identify two types of tactics that actors would use when disputes or negotiations reveal impossible or unsatisfactory, which I conceptually refer to as 'pragmatic reframing' and 'notional reframing'. The next section presents the flowcharts for the three issues. Illustrative quotes, selected from the data on which each flowchart is grounded, are also provided.

2. FINDINGS

The three identified issues are now presented in the form of a chronological narrative retracing the key events, decisions and interactions at the different levels of the field. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the synthetic flowcharts and some illustrative quotes for each issue.

2.1. DEFINITION OF CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING PROFESSIONAL SELLERS

In 2000, the French Prime Minister decided the creation of a 'Forum on Internet Rights', financed by, and reporting to, the Ministry for the Economy, Industry and Employment. The main objective was to set up a discussion platform between members of the government, legal advisers and the main Internet players, about the development of Internet in France. In 2005, the Forum worked on a recommendation about e-commerce, with a particular focus on the not-yet regulated field of 'professional sales' on e-marketplaces. EBay, represented by its legal adviser and its CEO, took part to the negotiations. The final report listed the 'criteria for classifying a seller as a professional seller', namely the regularity of sales, the profit-making orientation of the activity, and the intention of pursuing a commercial activity (Daniel, et al., 2005, pp 36-38). The identification of professional sellers, though, would be based on their self-declaration and excluded any threshold of revenue from which a seller would be considered as a professional seller (Daniel, et al., 2005, p. 38).

About a year after the report was published very few sellers had decided to self-declare. The government, represented by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Commerce Renaud Dutreil, and the main market platforms, negotiated a new agreement and signed a charter in June 2006 through which platform owners committed themselves to ‘incite’ commercial sellers to self-declare as such (Dutreil & Momboisse, 2006).

eBay pragmatically reframed the self-declaration question by implementing increasingly coercive practices. Initially, eBay decided to provide incentives via its ‘Powerseller’ scheme, originally created to valorise and retain sellers with high volumes of sales and good feedbacks. For example, in January 2007, it took a series of measures aiming at professionalizing these Powersellers: a dedicated helpline, a better visibility on the website and free tools – business cards, header paper etc. - to help them develop their ‘eBay brand’ (ebay.fr, 2007c). In March 2008, eBay France took the decision to restrain the Powerseller scheme to self-declared professional sellers only (ebay.fr, 2008q). A series of privileges was also specifically designed for them, such as promotional offers (ebay.fr, 2008j, 2008m) and free advices from chartered accountants (ebay.fr, 2008s). In September 2008, eBay France took a more authoritarian tone by transforming ‘incentive’ into ‘obligation’ and, despite the no-threshold policy agreed with the government a few years before, set a ‘warning threshold’ that forced sellers to register as businesses. According to this decision, all private sellers making a monthly turnover of more than €2000 on eBay during three consecutive months had to self-declare as professional sellers and to provide all appropriate legal documents (ebay.fr, 2008t). In case of refusal, their account would be blocked (ebay.fr, 2008g, 2008o; Marichez, 2008).

Two months later, in November 2008, the Finance Commission of the Senate Chamber Philippe Marini drafted an amendment bill that would radically change the role of e-marketplaces in the regulation of professional sales, with the objective of tackling the problem of tax avoidance. This amendment (Projet de loi de finances rectificative pour 2008) stated that platform owners should report to tax authorities details of all sellers making more than €5000 of sales per year (Fauconnier, 2008; JDN, 2008; Tribune, 2008). eBay reacted to this decision by joining forces with its competitor Priceminister and disputed the bill. The two firms published a joint press release denouncing the project, putting forward the potential detrimental effect of this bill on their attractiveness for professional sellers, thus on traffic (Delahaye, 2008; Garnier, 2008). They were successful at defending their position, as the bill was definitively withdrawn in December (Deleurence, 2008).

Figure 1: Definition of criteria for identifying professional sellers

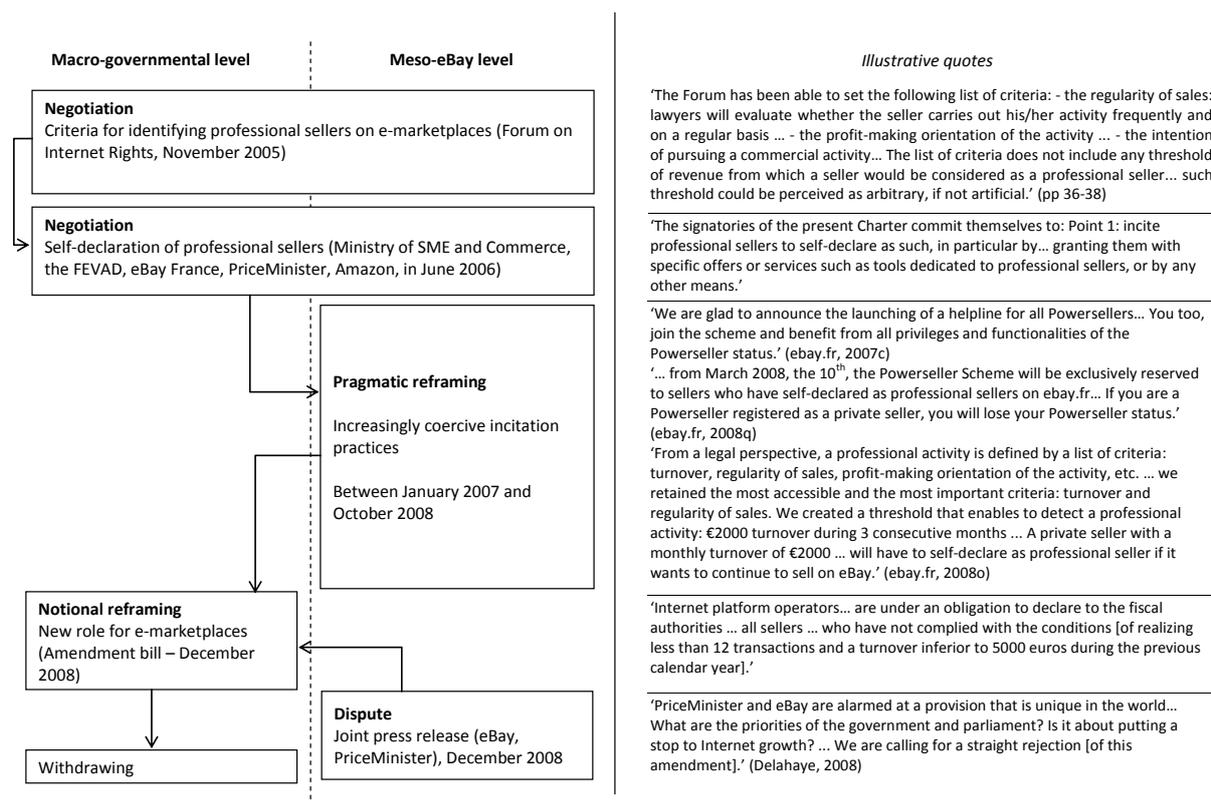


Figure 1 provides a synthesis of the process and illustrative quotes. As a summary, the criteria for identifying professional sellers, negotiated at a macro-level, became progressively linked to the concrete practices at a meso-level. Negotiations between the government and e-marketplaces led to relatively vague criteria that were of limited use for concretely identifying professional sellers. A second negotiation led to a further agreement on the necessity to create ‘incentives’ for professional sellers to self-declare as such, without specifying the concrete nature of these incentives. However, the term ‘incentives’ enabled eBay to set up its own, more and more authoritarian, practices that accommodated the argument in a pragmatic way, satisfying its own interest of increasing the number of professional sellers on its marketplace (pragmatic reframing). The government, following an interest of spotting tax avoiders, reframed the responsibility of e-marketplaces in the field, giving them the role of a tax official (notional reframing). Actors at a meso-level perceived this governmental framing as threatening their own interests. They decided to coalesce and disputed the decision, leading the government to finally step back.

2.2. DEFINITION OF RULES OF BEHAVIOUR FOR PROFESSIONAL SELLERS

The Forum for Internet Rights, in its 2005 report, stated that online professional sales should be applied some specific rules in addition to the general rules from the Consumption Code. According to these rules, sellers must have a transparent communication with buyers

about the modes of payment and shipping, and ‘if possible’ inform buyers of a date of delivery (Daniel, et al., 2005, pp 38-45).

Platform owners like eBay were keen to impose stricter rules to their sellers as soon as 2006, with the objective to reinforce the quality and reliability of sales. Between December 2006 and August 2007, eBay pragmatically reframed the decisions stated in the report by progressively tightening the rules applicable to sellers – including the range of sanctions – and denouncing a “small number of sellers responsible for a high proportion of bad experience on eBay” (ebay.fr, 2006, 2007d). In parallel, eBay implemented a more detailed feedback system that would include criteria such as communication or delay of delivery (ebay.fr, 2007a, 2007b).

In 2007, the Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, Luc Chatel, drafted a bill aimed, among other matters, at regulating online professional sales more tightly. The objective was to provide a higher level of security to buyers. The ‘Chatel Law’, voted in January 2008 (‘Loi n° 2008-3 du 3 janvier 2008 pour le développement de la concurrence au service des consommateurs’), reframed the notion of ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ by making compulsory to provide a precise latest date of delivery and valid contact details including a non-overcharged phone number, and giving the right to buyers to get both the good and the shipping refunded in case of retraction within 7 days after the purchase. Non-professional sellers were not subjected to these obligations.

eBay applied the Chatel Law 3 months before it was officially enforced, in March 2008, by making compulsory for professional sellers to provide their contact details and to make refunds of any returned items “in compliance with the Law” (ebay.fr, 2008a, 2008r). eBay also did some pragmatic reframing of the Law when it announced a series of radical changes aiming at putting more pressure on sellers. These changes were planned for June 2008 and included the impossibility for sellers to leave negative feedbacks to buyers, a stricter method for calculating their average evaluation score, and a ranking of sellers in the search results according to their evaluation scores (ebay.fr, 2008h). As a consequence, sellers with below average scores would have a reduced visibility (ebay.fr, 2008n). A letter to sellers published by eBay in May 2008 revealed that professional sellers sent ‘several comments’ and ‘feedbacks’ about the new evaluation system and negotiated a revision of the rules. In this letter, eBay announced that it would implement a series of measures to protect sellers – and particularly Powersellers – against neutral or negative feedbacks (ebay.fr, 2008i).

However, eBay maintained its policy overall, confirming a reduced visibility for sellers with a profile evaluation of 4.1 out of 5 or below (ebay.fr, 2008p), and the decision to

implement a more severe method of calculation for sellers' evaluation (ebay.fr, 2008f, 2008i). This policy led to further tensions with the micro-level early 2008, in particular a week-long strike of professional sellers in January (Collet, 2008). EBay made further concessions in July, by acknowledging that 'some changes were not appropriate as such to your [the sellers] activity of sales' (ebay.fr, 2008d). For example, eBay announced that it would restore the former, more advantageous, method of calculation of sellers' evaluation, replace the automatic system of suspension of accounts by a case-by-case check, and give sellers the possibility to negotiate amicable settlements with buyers to have a negative evaluation withdrawn (ebay.fr, 2008c, 2008d). In parallel, eBay launched two promotional campaigns exclusively for professional sellers (ebay.fr, 2008j, 2008m).

Interviews with professional sellers, carried on between September 2008 and March 2010, illustrate why and how disputes broke out. In general, professional sellers saw their relationships with buyers as extremely challenging, due to the specificities of online purchasing behaviours. They described the regular problems they encountered with buyers and explained that the increased pressure from eBay made them vulnerable to potentially aggressive or dishonest clients. The harsher constraints, asymmetry of the feedback system and its coercive nature through the ranking in search results were considered as inconsistent with their professional interests, and a signal that eBay implemented an egoistic policy of 'serving its own interests first'. Disputes occurred mainly via the Powerseller discussion forum, which became a way for individual sellers to express and share their discontent. Coalitions of discontent sellers appeared as well. For example, the association 'Erentole' was created to denounce the use of buyers' feedbacks to ban sellers and to put pressure on eBay to change its rules.

Interviews also revealed that sellers, alongside disputing eBay's policy in 2008 and 2009, also engaged in pragmatic reframing by creating their own practices and their own understanding of the category. For example, they took advantage of some discretion in setting their own terms of sales or in managing some aspects of the relationships with buyers to invent new ways-of-doing. For example, a seller of numismatic items explained that he decided to offer registered mails to clients who opted for second class mails; another seller stressed that he budgeted a certain number of refunds per year; yet another one described how she kept very distant when communicating with clients. These new practices, invented by professional sellers in an uncoordinated manner, with the objective to protect themselves against negative evaluations in a potentially hostile field, constituted a way to align their micro-level interests with meso-level interests. Sellers would possibly share their practices

online, via the eBay discussion forums, and educate new comers. These practices became normal ways-of-doing, as part of their understanding of the ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ category.

Figure 2 provides a synthesis of the process and illustrative quotes. In summary, the French government proposed a notional reframing of the field by creating specific rules for online professional sales in June 2008, with the Chatel Law. By the time the Law was enforced, eBay had already created its own rules through a pragmatic reframing of the 2005 Forum on Internet Rights’ report. The Law, however, gave eBay an opportunity to implement even tougher rules and practices, with the objective to improve the quality of professional sales and encourage more buyers to join. These new practices at the meso-level created tensions with the micro-level. Professional sellers reacted through disputes, by expressing their discontent openly and building coalitions against eBay. They also reacted through pragmatic reframing, by inventing and diffusing new micro-level practices to adapt to, and protect against, meso-level practices.

Figure 2: Definition of rules of behaviour for professional sellers

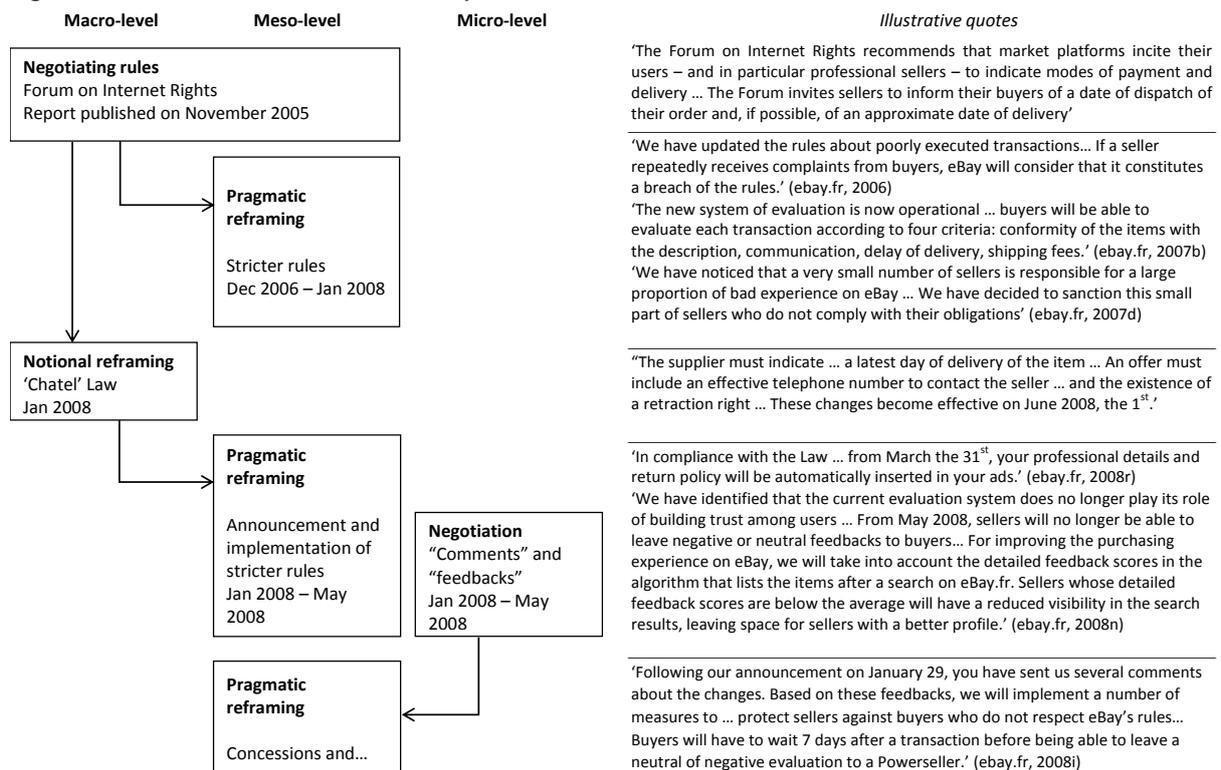
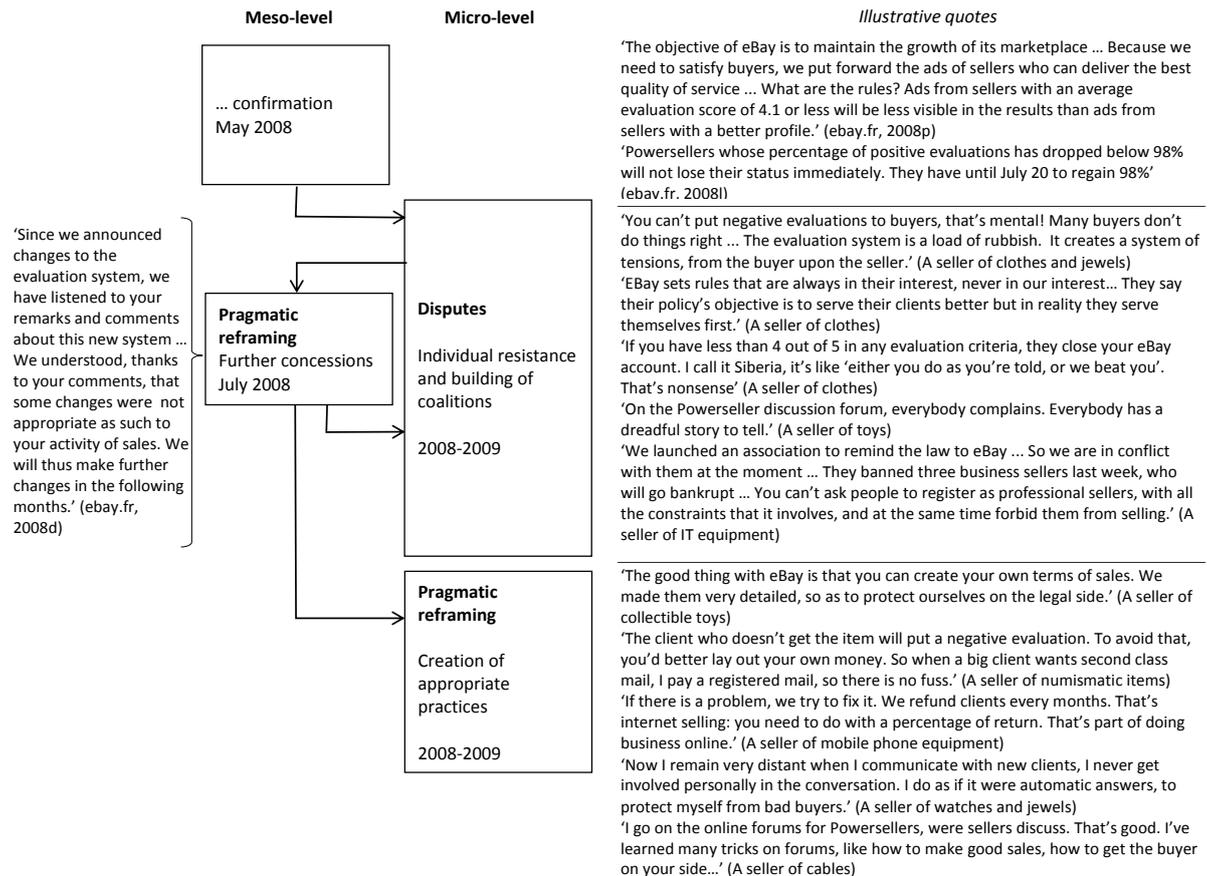


Figure 2 (continued)



2.3. THE PROMOTION OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MIND-SET AMONG PROFESSIONAL SELLERS

The efforts by eBay to encourage more sellers to become professionals were confronted with some reluctance from these sellers due to the complexity of creating a business in France. eBay also expressed its ambition to inspire the category of 'professional sellers' with a more entrepreneurial state of mind, that is, more autonomy and ambition for growth (as revealed by an interview of FFC, professional sellers segment manager at eBay, and in ebay.fr, 2008k). eBay thus took part to negotiations and lobbying activities to incite the government to 'help individual sellers who make a high turnover on eBay to transform their activity into a business' and more generally to 'simplify the rules for people to launch their business' (interview of TS, sellers managing director at eBay).

In 2008, the French government launched an initiative to support job creation and entrepreneurship, under the responsibility of Hervé Novelli, Secretary of State for Small and Medium Sized Entreprises and Commerce. As soon as the bill was made public, eBay informed its sellers that it was 'strongly supporting these measures that [would] facilitate professional activities of sellers', and published a link to the text of the bill on its website in April (ebay.fr, 2008k). Other e-marketplaces showed similar support (Dumout, 2008). In June

2008, before the bill was voted at the Senate Chamber, eBay signed a partnership with the governmental agency in charge of promoting entrepreneurship (APCE) in the presence of Hervé Novelli, and ‘confirmed by this partnership the role it [eBay] intends to play in favour of entrepreneurship’ (see APCE, 2008; ebay.fr, 2008e).

The law was voted in August 2008 with the name of ‘Law for the modernization of the economy’ (‘Loi n° 2008-776 du 4 août 2008 de modernisation de l’économie’) and included a section about a new entrepreneur regime, called ‘auto-entrepreneur’, to be enforced from January 2009. Under this regime, the procedures for launching a business were considerably simplified, and the cost was reduced (as explained in details in Delporte, 2008; DGCIS, 2012; and on the dedicated website lautoentrepreneur.fr), which was particularly suited to professional sellers on e-commerce platforms (Thompson, 2010). Between August and December 2008, Hervé Novelli and other governmental representatives negotiated with the main e-marketplaces and signed several agreements through which these latter committed themselves to promote the new ‘auto-entrepreneur’ regime and to spread information about auto-entrepreneurship among their users (APCE, 2008; ebay.fr, 2008b; FEVAD, 2008).

After the Law became effective, in January 2009, the CEO of eBay France Alexander Von Schirmeister declared that he was ‘very pleased’ with the new auto-entrepreneur status, reasserting that eBay had always been ‘a strong militant towards the government and in favour of more entrepreneurship on e-commerce platforms like eBay’ and that this new Law was the ‘very realization of a battle led by eBay’ (Lévêque, 2009). eBay then initiated a notional reframing of the category of ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ by progressively likening ‘professional sellers’ to ‘entrepreneurs’. In 2009, eBay set up an online portal devoted to eBay auto-entrepreneurs (ebay.fr, 2009a), announced that it would now focus on transactions of items at a fixed price, departing from its original model of auction sales (Ktitareff, 2009), and took a series of measures intended to attract and retain professional sellers, including a new, more advantageous tariff structure for professional sellers (ebay.fr, 2009d; Fauconnier, 2010), a series of tools making the listing of a high number of items easier (ebay.fr, 2009c; JDN, 2009a) and more broadly a new architecture of the e-marketplace giving more visibility to professional sellers (ebay.fr, 2009b; JDN, 2009b). These changes led to the announcement of a ‘new economic model in favour of professional sellers’ in October 2010, with the objective to ‘develop the activity of the 80000 professional sellers in France’ (Fauconnier, 2010; ITR, 2010).

A year after the auto-entrepreneur regime was launched, the Fevad and the main e-marketplaces praised the new system for triggering ‘a change in mind-set’ and for originating

an increase in online sales (Thompson, 2010). In July 2010, eBay France, in partnership with regional Chambers of Commerce, launched the first ‘eBay Trophies for Entrepreneurship and Success’. The competition took place in 8 cities, with national finals in Paris. The objective was to identify and reward professional sellers who ‘perfectly illustrated the concept of e-entrepreneurship on ebay.fr’ (ebay.fr, 2010) based on three criteria: growth of turnover, professionalism (evaluations, creation of new customer services, etc.) and originality of the offer (Colombié, 2010; Neteven, 2010). The winners were described by eBay through terms like ‘ambition’, ‘dynamism’, ‘courage’, and ‘quality’ (ebay.fr, 2010). A second edition of the Trophy was organized a year later, in 2011 (ebay.fr, 2011).

Figure 3: The promotion of an entrepreneurial mind-set among professional sellers

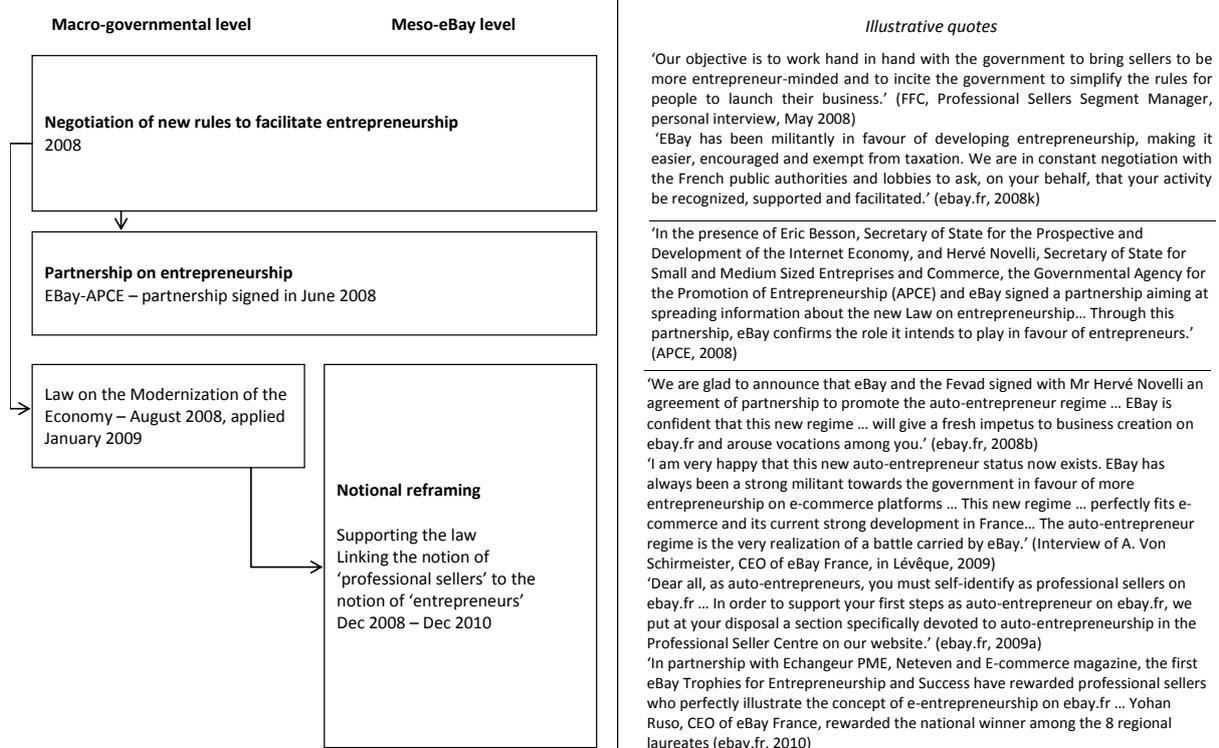


Figure 3 provides a synthesis of the process and illustrative quotes. As a summary, eBay engaged in negotiations with the government to defend its position on facilitating the process of business creation in France. While a new Law was in preparation, eBay lobbied and signed partnerships with government representatives to promote online entrepreneurship. When the Law was finally voted and adopted, eBay implemented a series of measures to support entrepreneurs who launched a business on eBay and organized some field-configuring events that put entrepreneurship at the forefront of the defining elements of a professional seller. By likening professional sellers to entrepreneurs, eBay promoted a new meaning for the category of ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ and encouraged new behaviours and new practices.

3. DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The stated objectives of this research were, first, to understand how the structural duality between category and practice is built in a new field and, second, to investigate the interactions between the different levels of the field during this process of institutionalization. In this section I make the link between the empirical evidence provided and analysed in the findings and the theoretical objectives of the research.

3.1. DUALITY OF CATEGORY AND PRACTICE AND THE BUILDING OF INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC

The organizational literature on institutionalization has explored the role of practices in the emergence of institutional logics and the building of institutional fields. When a field is not yet institutionalized, a variety of different practices appear. Some of them are abandoned, some remain marginal, and some others become norm. Through this process of practices variation and selection, a field's boundaries are progressively drawn, moved or reinforced as shown in the case of active money management practices in the 50s and 60s (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007), harvesting practices in the coastal forest industry (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), or ecclesiastical building design (Jones & Massa, 2013). More generally, the everyday practices of individuals and improvisations in the workplace, if they become justified, legitimized and widely adopted, may trigger the emergence of new field-level logics, an extension or a change of existing logics (Shipilov, et al., 2010; Smets, et al., 2012).

Another stream of organizational literature has studied the role of categories in ordering new fields. Categories are defined and delineated by sets of key features that serve as a basis for sensemaking (Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejnova, 2012; Negro, Hannan, & Rao, 2011). For example, Khaire and Wadhvani (2010) describe how the new category of 'Modern Indian Art' was enacted through the establishment of key 'constructs', such as 'the originality of aesthetics', including key themes for judging the value of works, such as 'the capacity of artists to combine Western modernism with identifiable Indian styles' and to do so by 're-examining Indian identity', and so on. During the process of categorization, the categories and the labels that apply to them acquire 'connotations', that is, some underlying meanings which come to be associated with categorized products and actors, beside the mere 'denotations', that is, the literal set of themes determining membership (Granqvist, Grodal, & Woolley, 2013). For example, connotations that the category of 'nanotechnology firms' was both 'sexy' and 'risky' created an ambiguous meaning for the category, conveying positive and negative values simultaneously (Granqvist, et al., 2013). Over time both the connotations and the denotations of categories evolve, leading ideally to a common understanding at the

field level and some degree of consensus about their meaning (Kennedy, Lo, & Lounsbury, 2011; Navis & Glynn, 2010; Zuckerman, 1999).

My findings clarify the link between categories and practices and the processes by which this link is built. The focus is on the emergence of institutional logics in new fields, considering that the ‘interdependent duality of category and practices is the core of an institutional logic’ (Friedland, 2009, p. 209). I show that the main mechanism behind the construction of a structural duality between category and practice is a succession of moves by which actors at all levels align with, or deviate from, the logic promoted by other actors. These moves are called ‘reframing’ in reference to the notion of ‘framing’, defined as the process by which actors transform a meaningless situation into something meaningful (Benford & Snow, 2000; Goffman, 1974). In this sense, a frame is not only a set of symbols and cognitive tools, but also a process through which practices are created (Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008; Kaplan, 2008). We identified two forms of reframing: ‘pragmatic reframing’ constitutes attempts to change the practices through which the category is enacted, while ‘notional reframing’ deals with altering the meaning of the category. ‘Pragmatic reframing’ involves the creation of new practices or alteration of current practices by a certain group of actors, with the objective to protect their interests while conforming to the emerging logic. Pragmatic reframing is also a way to orient the logic of a field in a certain direction, through the creation of practices. Generally, pragmatic reframing occurs at a lower level in the field, as a reaction to norms of behaviour proposed or imposed by actors at a higher level. For example, eBay carried out several pragmatic reframing of decisions negotiated or decided at a macro-governmental level, with the objective to defend its own interests. Pragmatic reframing also occurred at a micro-level, when professional sellers, in reaction to stricter rules imposed by eBay, invented new commercial practices to defend themselves against potential negative evaluations from buyers. This new set of practices, as they became more widely adopted, altered the connection between the category ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ and the associated practices at a micro-level.

‘Notional reframing’ is a form a rekeying (Goffman, 1974), that is, a transformation of how the category is understood. Notional reframing requires that actors at a higher level are able to alter the principles that govern the category and, indirectly, its associated practices. Actors who join an emerging field generally carry with them the logic of their home institution – or order of worth (Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011) – such as a ‘bureaucratic state’ logic for government officials, a ‘market logic’ for firms, and a ‘professional’ logic for competent workers, among other possible logics, leading to potential

tensions between these groups at different levels (Holm, 1995; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Purdy & Gray, 2009). In our case, the label ‘professional sellers on e-marketplaces’ initially carried different meanings depending on the logic of the home institution of the actors involved. For the government, the label constituted a way to regulate online commercial relationships and collect more taxes. For e-marketplaces, the label was associated with strategic objectives of growth and improved quality. For the sellers themselves, the label had some connotations of self-realization, independence and professionalism. Our findings show that a field-level common understanding of a category is built through successive deployments of notional reframing. Each group having different home logics, they develop different meanings of the field. Notional reframing constitutes an attempt to create a consensual meaning out of a diversity of meanings. For example, the ‘Chatel’ Law constituted a notional reframing that put quality and reliability of commercial transactions at the centre of what a ‘professional seller on e-marketplaces’ should stand for, leading to a new shared understanding of the category. Meanwhile, the law encouraged the adoption of new practices at the meso- and micro-levels. Thus, the law renewed and improved connection between the category and the practices, contributing to the construction of the institutional logic of the new field. Notional reframing also occurred at the meso-level when eBay lobbied for a new law on entrepreneurship, publicized the new law on its platform, encouraged and rewarded those among professional sellers who chose to become auto-entrepreneurs. Through this active involvement, eBay put entrepreneurship at the centre of what defined a ‘professional seller on e-marketplaces’.

Both pragmatic and notional reframing contribute to the building of a structural duality between category and practice in the new field. Actors at a lower level adjust to injunctions coming from higher levels by inventing new practices that defend their own view of the category to some extent. Actors at a higher level progressively prescribe some specific connotations to the category, such as ‘quality’ or ‘entrepreneurs’, and, in so doing, institute a meaning to it that eventually translates into practices.

3.2. INTER-LEVEL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE BUILDING OF INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC

How new fields emerge and develop is the result of both structural conditions and individual agency. Structural conditions include pre-existing power and status relationships, and pre-established networks of actors, which tend to self-reproduce when fields evolve (Beckert, 2010; Purdy & Gray, 2009). The structure of the field, to some extent, determines the capacity of actors to use their agency (Beckert, 1999; DiMaggio, 1991). In particular, previous research have shown that some actors, because they have inherited or gained

superior social skills, some degree of power and higher status, are able to justify and legitimate new logics, leading to new institutional order and new organizational forms (DiMaggio, 1988; Levy & Scully, 2007; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Rao, et al., 2000; Tracey, et al., 2011). These institutional entrepreneurs may operate in emerging fields (see for example David, et al., 2013; Maguire, et al., 2004) or more well-established institutional contexts (Misangyi, et al., 2008 among others; Zilber, 2007). However, some criticisms aroused that the institutional entrepreneur view restricts our understanding of institutional dynamics by suggesting some form of ‘heroic agency’ (Lawrence, et al., 2011, p.56) while overlooking the decentralized work of a wide range of actors in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Institutional work focuses on the decentralized efforts from individuals to alter a field’s dynamics and consists in different types of activities, such as changing the discourses that support the practices in a given field (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), altering the boundaries between groups and associated practices (Jones & Massa, 2013; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), negotiating new organizational forms or the preservation of current institutions (Helfen & Sydow, 2013), among other possibilities.

My findings contribute to link these views by demonstrating that fields emerge through a complex intermingle of centralized and decentralized agencies. First, even if emerging fields have a relatively ill-defined power structure compared to established fields (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003; Purdy & Gray, 2009), I show that some non-governmental actors spontaneously emerge as institutional entrepreneurs from the very early stages of the development of the field. More precisely, in a field that is not yet structured, some actors happen to centralize efforts to structure the field. This paradoxical phenomenon is made possible because these actors benefit from superior knowledge about the potential structure of the field, and more extended cross-level networks than other actors in the field. For example, eBay benefitted from superior knowledge due to a longer tenure in the field and more extended networks derived from its structurally central position connecting the macro and micro levels. My findings also clarify the nature of the work that the institutional entrepreneur in an emerging field carries out. Both superior knowledge and more extended networks facilitate some form of political work, including negotiations and disputes, seeking to influence the way the category is designed (definition, rules of behaviour, etc.) and the connotations it conveys (e.g. ‘quality of transactions’, ‘entrepreneurial mind-set’). Access to the micro-level makes possible for the institutional entrepreneur to justify, promote or impose a view of the field that is coherent with its interests in the field.

Secondly, my findings show that centralized institutional entrepreneurship triggers decentralized institutional work at lower levels in the field, in particular when an institutional entrepreneur promotes a logic that is incoherent with the practices or the categorical understanding of actors at lower levels. Work is decentralized in the sense that individuals do not hold a central position and lack power or cross-level networks to directly influence the logic of the field. These individuals, without apparent coordination, may negotiate and dispute decisions taken at a higher level, potentially leading to concessions if they can reach a mass effect. Coordinated work can also take place, in particular through coalitions (e.g. associations to negotiate and dispute an imposed logic), or means of communication (e.g. discussion forums to share disagreements about the emerging logic of the field). My findings confirm that, besides negotiations and disputes with institutional entrepreneurs, actors at lower levels try to influence institutional logic by focusing on the practices. Through pragmatic reframing of higher level injunctions, they compensate for their lack of power or extended cross-level network, to re-create the connections between category and practices at a local-micro level.

4. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study presented herein is based on a case that has certain specific characteristics. However, the study brings to light phenomena that go beyond the case specificities and might be further extended through research conducted along comparative lines. In particular, future studies could consider how technology impacts the capacity of lower-level actors to impact the institutional logic of a field and influence the way a new field becomes institutionalized. Technology can be used by actors who control it as a way to orient the institutionalization process in a certain direction. For example, the technological possibility to set up an evaluation system on e-marketplaces made it possible for platform owners to opportunistically reframe the notion of ‘quality of the transactions’, proposed by the government, into something quite different, which related to high evaluation scores. Professional sellers used online forums to spread some form of resistance and share practices. How technologies contribute to opportunistic reframing and orient institutional emergence or change is a question that could be further explored in settings where technology is an essential parameter of the field, such as high frequency trading in the finance field or nanotechnologies. In particular, in such high-tech environments, the rise of some actors as institutional entrepreneurs and institutional work by others may be linked to the varying capacity of actors to control the technology that is at the centre of the field.

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