



# **Institutional pluralism and the implementation of women's enterprise policy**

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**Institutional pluralism and the implementation of women’s enterprise policy**

**Abstract**

*Purpose:* This research paper generates new insights into the challenges of implementation in women’s enterprise policy. It argues that organisations involved in policy implementation need to be understood as operating in a context of institutional pluralism and answers: *How do organisations involved in the implementation of women’s enterprise policy manage the challenges of institutional pluralism?*

*Methodology:* Addressing the need for women’s enterprise policy to learn from the past, the research adopts an historical approach to the study of policy implementation through examination of the UK’s Phoenix Development Fund (1999-2008). It analyses a wide range of secondary sources to examine 34 projects funded and supported by the Phoenix Development Fund that targeted women entrepreneurs.

*Findings:* Potentially conflicting institutional logics associated with central government, mainstream business support and local communities were managed through four key processes: dominance; integration; constellation; and bridging. The management of institutional pluralism was effective in delivering support to communities but not in providing an effective platform for learning in government or establishing sustainable, long-term mechanisms.

*Originality:* The paper develops an empirical contribution to practice through identification of processes to manage the challenges of institutional pluralism and lessons for community-engaged policy implementation. A theoretical contribution to academic debates is provided by the conceptualisation of these challenges in terms of institutional pluralism and the novel concept of institutional bridging. The study also demonstrates the value of historical methods for women’s enterprise policy to learn the lessons of the past.

## Introduction

Women have disproportionately lower levels of self-employment than men (GEM, 2022). Women entrepreneurs are therefore a focus for policy action, with different approaches, initiatives and tools deployed to support women's enterprise (Wilson *et al.*, 2004). However, criticisms persist of enterprise policy interventions and business support for women entrepreneurs, including the dangers of overlooking deeply embedded social influences on women's participation in entrepreneurship (McAdam *et al.*, 2019).

To gain new insight into women's enterprise policy, we adopt an historical approach to answer the research question, *How do organisations involved in the implementation of women's enterprise policy manage the challenges of institutional pluralism?* Specifically, we analyse the UK's Phoenix Development Fund (PDF, 1999-2008), which sought to support excluded entrepreneurs and encourage community-based policy initiatives. We focus on the crucial implementation phase of the policy cycle, and the policy and business support organisations that implement key initiatives. We analyse the ways in which these organisations respond to a context of multiple institutional logics, that is, the multiple, and potentially contradictory material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules that shape implementation of women's enterprise policy. We argue that the organisations involved in policy implementation need to be understood in context and emphasise the importance of examining this context as one of institutional pluralism.

Our research advances gender perspectives on enterprise policy by developing an empirical contribution for researchers and practitioners through the historical analysis of a specific national case study, identifying the multiple pressures acting on those seeking to implement women's enterprise policy and how they manage these pressures. Further, we contribute theoretically by conceptualising the pressures involved in women's enterprise policy implementation in terms of a plurality of institutional logics and the ways institutional pluralism shapes policy implementation. We identify four different approaches to managing the challenges of institutional pluralism, extending other studies that have identified institutional plurality as a potential resource as well as a potential constraint. This includes our proposal

of the novel concept of ‘institutional bridging’. Finally, our study contributes methodologically by demonstrating the value of historical methods to the examination of women’s enterprise policy and learning the lessons of the past.

*Women’s enterprise policy*

‘Enterprise policy’ can be understood as encapsulating those policies aimed at both start-ups (entrepreneurship policies) and existing firms classified as small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME policies, Lundström *et al.*, 2014). Enterprise policies include a broad range of activities such as promoting an enterprise culture, entrepreneurship education, reducing barriers, provision of seed finance, start-up support (e.g. mentoring, incubators) and other, targeted interventions for underrepresented groups (Smallbone and Welter, 2020). Women’s enterprise policies are a subset of these activities, particularly concerned with women entrepreneurs and women-owned enterprises.

A Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report found that women are less engaged in start-up activity than men (10.4% of women surveyed, compared to 13.6% of men). In the UK, Alison Rose’s Review of Female Entrepreneurship (2019) reports that half the numbers of women start a business compared to men. Understanding the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in entrepreneurship requires recognition of social and economic structures, rather than a focus on women as individuals that overlooks deeply embedded social influences (Thébaud, 2015; Zhao and Yang, 2021). For example, gendered social structures and ‘inflexible labour markets’ (Wilson *et al.*, 2004, p.811) can force women into low paying self-employment and restrict the option of working in the business ‘full-time’ (Ekinsmyth, 2022). Further, Carter *et al.* (2001, p.7) argue that ‘gender is an important, but not the sole explanatory factor, in differences observed between women and men owned firms’. People have different positionality and, considered in terms of intersectionality, these positions are not simply additive (e.g. gender + race). As Henry *et al.* (2017, p.616) set out: ‘women’s entrepreneurship is multidimensional [and so] intersectionality serves as a means for providing granular analyses that can lead to more targeted interventions and inform women’s entrepreneurship policy’.

However, despite advances in understanding the underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs, the policy implications from such research remain underdeveloped. Foss *et al.*'s (2019, p.409) analysis of the literature found that, irrespective of the approach adopted, policy recommendations tend to be very similar, 'mostly vague, conservative, and center on identifying skills gaps in women entrepreneurs that need to be "fixed"'. This focus on 'fixing' individual women is a persistent finding in studies of women's enterprise policy. It represents 'an assumption that men inherently possess desirable entrepreneurial characteristics' and that women should therefore seek to emulate these characteristics in order to succeed (Ahl and Marlow, 2021, p.56). Enterprise policies have failed to recognise or engage with the specific challenges women entrepreneurs may face (e.g. Orser, 2022, on responses to COVID19 that disadvantaged women entrepreneurs).

Enterprise policy interventions have embedded a dominant approach to 'mainstream' business support that is well-oriented to some but does not engage effectively with underrepresented and excluded social groups, including many women entrepreneurs (McAdam *et al.*, 2019). The persistent limitations of enterprise policy reflect an ingrained gender bias but also fundamental difficulties in the development and implementation of this policy agenda. Blackburn and Schaper (2012) summarise these problems in terms of poor learning from previous experience, poor use of the evidence base and poor collaboration between relevant parties. These limitations and failures are a vital area of research. As Arshed *et al.* (2019, p.553) argue, 'Explaining the underperformance of policy therefore remains one of the most pressing challenges for women's enterprise policy researchers.'

#### *Enterprise policy implementation: Business support organisations*

Despite their importance, and the persistent criticisms, specific studies of women's enterprise policies remain limited (Henry *et al.*, 2022). To advance these debates and to improve women's enterprise policy, there is value in analysing policy processes. Smallbone and Welter (2020) agree and emphasise the need to differentiate between the four phases of the policy cycle: agenda setting; policy formulation; implementation; and evaluation. Our focus is on the implementation phase and the organisations that work with policymakers to implement women's enterprise policy.

Enterprise policy interventions engage in a complex market for forms of business support, with an array of private services and publicly funded initiatives but with some social groups remaining underserved. For example, Beckinsale *et al.*'s (2011) study of ethnic minority business ICT adoption identified problems in the delivery of business support, including a lack of understanding of the specific issues and additional complexities facing these businesses. In their study of support initiatives for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, Lawton Smith and Owalla (2023) also identified fragmented support and networks. Atkinson and Penrod (2022), examining state-level women-owned business programmes in the USA, found a lack of engagement with specific contexts or with understanding client needs, suggesting a clash of perspectives between those designing and marketing programmes and the women business owners they sought to support.

A partnership approach seeks to address such clashes of perspectives through the creation of 'multistakeholder strategies' (Holman, 2013, p.83). Policymakers can co-produce with organisations possessing expertise, already working with excluded groups, engaging directly with communities and responsive to local priorities (Danson *et al.*, 2021; Johnston *et al.*, 2023). However, it can also create challenges in terms of the different forces shaping what is delivered. Johnston and colleagues' interviews with women entrepreneurs highlight factors such as bureaucracy that create challenges, including time and opportunity costs. Verduyn and Essers (2017) argue that organisations traditionally involved in policy implementation (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, government departments) can give guidance or adopt practices that, perhaps inadvertently, reinforce us-them divisions, even while attempting to support members of excluded groups. Arshed *et al.*'s (2019) study of a Regional Development Agency based in the West Midlands region of England found that both policy support measures and the actions of partner organisations contributed to the 'reification of women as somehow "lesser" or inferior to men' (p.576).

Difficulties associated with incompatible governance structures in a fragmented environment can hinder cooperation, while partnerships that retain top-down characteristics can limit scope for learning from the ground-up (Breda-Vázquez *et al.*, 2009). For example, target-setting and funding allocation mechanisms can maintain top-down influence, restricting scope for local solutions (Gherhes *et al.*,

2020). Without careful embedding within other aspects of local infrastructure, partnerships can be relatively short-lived, losing not only the engagement but the learning developed through such projects (Holman, 2013). These partnerships and how they may be developed and managed effectively are therefore a useful focus for understanding enterprise policy implementation. As we expand upon below, our position is that these challenges can be understood as emerging from pluralistic institutional logics.

### *Institutional pluralism and the implementation of enterprise policy*

Institutional logics serve as ‘organizing principles’ (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p.248). They are the ‘socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’ (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, p.804). Institutional orders each represent ‘a commonly recognized area of life’ (Thornton *et al.*, 2012, p.54). The cultural symbols and material practices associated with different institutional orders reflect ideal type characteristics associated with each order. For example, sources of legitimacy likely vary between the institutional orders of Community (‘Unity of will; Belief in trust & reciprocity’), State (‘Democratic participation’) and Profession (‘Personal expertise’) (Thornton *et al.*, 2012, p.73).

Group identities, ranging from gender identity to professions or social movements, become institutionalised and develop distinctive institutional logics. Identification with a collective involves identification with its prevailing institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). This establishes multiple sets of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules which, in a given context, will shape perceptions of legitimacy. Entrepreneurial activity is shaped by gendered institutional logics that ‘present as a disadvantage of experiences, opportunity, choice, outcome, and evaluations for women entrepreneurs’ (Ejaz *et al.*, 2023, p.12). Thébaud’s (2015) study of family-work policy and institutional arrangements in 24 countries reports that the ‘institutionally embedded incentives’ (p.699) that encourage entrepreneurship may operate differently for different social groups. For example, an absence of institutional supports for addressing work-family conflicts, affecting women’s participation in the labour market, may filter women into less profitable fields of self-employment. Further, Henry *et al.*



(2022) highlight ‘institutional fit’, between different policy levels and between potentially contrasting institutions, such that structures do not sufficiently develop to support the needs of women.

We suggest that some of the challenges identified in the implementation of women’s enterprise policy can be valuably conceptualised in terms of institutional logics and, further, through consideration of institutional pluralism. Organisations, including those seeking to implement women’s enterprise policy, can exist ‘at the intersection of multiple institutional logics’, presenting various demands that can be hard to reconcile (Jancsary *et al.*, 2017, p.1150; Goodrick and Reay, 2011). As set out by Kraatz and Block (2008, p.244), such a context can be usefully understood in terms of institutional pluralism, which recognises that an organisation can find itself ‘subject to multiple regulatory regimes, embedded within multiple normative orders, and/or constituted by more than one cultural logic’. In practice this can give rise to tensions over, among other things, what constitutes success and how this is best achieved (Ocasio and Radoynovska, 2016).

Organisations involved in business support for disadvantaged groups are faced with potential contradictions through their engagement with ‘alternatives to the market logic’, for example with their business models shaped through their activities within community and professional logics (Ocasio and Radoynovska, 2016, p.302). For example, in their study of microfinance organisations, Zhao and Lounsbury (2016) identify the potential challenges for social enterprises shaped by both market and religious logics. This may also occur where organisations seek to transfer an initiative from one context to another. As Gümüşay *et al.*, (2020, p.6) note, ‘any instantiation of a logic from outside the interinstitutional system comes with institutional baggage that challenges an integration into a wider institutional context’, that is, problems of institutional fit and challenges that derive from the pluralism within the interinstitutional system.

However, the experience of institutional pluralism is not an all-out competition for dominance between contradictory logics. Over time, a context of institutional pluralism can lead to institutional change. For example, this may be achieved where forms of collaboration between organisations embedded in different logics resolve contradictions and develop new practices and potentially new assumptions,



values and beliefs (Reay and Hinings, 2009). In some instances, complementarities between different institutional logics can enable the organisation to simultaneously meet demands from different stakeholders (Kraatz and Block, 2008). For example, Mair *et al.*, (2015) have argued that conflicts between institutional logics can be overemphasised. They demonstrate how organisations can engage with multiple logics as resources that support creativity and innovation. Furthermore, even where complementarities do not exist, the constituent elements of institutional logics might apply to different areas of practice, enabling multiple institutional logics to coexist through a process of segmentation (Goodrick and Reay, 2011, p.379) that allows for viable ‘constellations’ of institutional logics to be formed (Goodrick and Reay, 2011, p.399; Jancsary *et al.*, 2017; Friedland, 2018). Organisations may therefore adopt different approaches to engage effectively with the challenges of institutional pluralism (Ocasio and Radoynovska, 2016). Specifically, we develop this approach in response to our research question: *How do organisations involved in the implementation of women’s enterprise policy manage the challenges of institutional pluralism?*

## Methodology

We adopted an historical perspective to address our research question. There remain relatively few historical studies of enterprise policies and initiatives, yet, recently, scholars have called for a re-engagement between entrepreneurship research and history (Wadhwani and Lubinski, 2017). Setting the study of entrepreneurship, and its processes, in their proper social and temporal context aids understanding not only of the past but also how this serves to influence current practices and perspectives (Wadhwani *et al.*, 2020). Further, Danson *et al.* (2021, p.10) argue that the challenges in successfully supporting women entrepreneurs are exacerbated by ‘A lack of attempts to engage with knowledge from previous policy and support initiatives’, reflecting criticisms of enterprise policy more generally (Greene *et al.*, 2008; Blackburn and Schaper, 2012). For our study, the historical focus is in studying the implementation of women’s enterprise policy through an examination of the UK Phoenix Development Fund.

### *The Phoenix Development Fund*

The latter part of the 1990s saw an increased focus from UK policymakers on supporting entrepreneurship and the launch of the Department of Trade and Industry's Small Business Service (SBS). This included increasing attention on women entrepreneurs. Carter *et al.* (2001) prepared a report for the SBS analysing the literature (academic, popular and online) on women and entrepreneurship that provides the context at this time. Women were 26% of the 3.2 million self-employed in the UK and this share of self-employment had remained relatively constant, although the rate of self-employed women amongst those economically active had increased from 3.12% in 1979 to 6.76% in 1997. There had been significant advances in both the quantity and quality of research on self-employed women, although Carter *et al.*'s review concluded that 'few studies have been designed to build systematically on previous work [and there had] been a broad failure to adequately conceptualise studies and build explanatory theories' (p.4). They also identified that there was no national strategy for women's enterprise and recommended significant action in this area.

The Phoenix Development Fund (PDF) was launched in November 1999 in response to the *Enterprise and Social Exclusion* report from a Policy Action Team working on the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (PAT3, 1999). This report concluded that 'too often, services are seen as inaccessible or unapproachable by people in deprived communities; provider agencies are often seen as part of the social mainstream, with little relevance to those who feel excluded; this is particularly true of Business Links' (1999, p.8). (At the time, Business Link was a government-funded, mainstream business advice service).

PDF was therefore set up within the SBS to tackle issues of access to business support and finance related to a market failure in mainstream provision of services to entrepreneurs from certain groups and locations. It also included Community Development Finance Initiatives (CDFI) and a national network of volunteer mentors, the Business Volunteer Mentoring Association. £12.6 million was initially allocated for 3 years and potential partner organisations were invited to bid for funds to support their projects supporting underrepresented groups to start-up and run their own businesses. Projects focused on supporting women and ethnic minorities were particularly encouraged. Funded projects also engaged with: the long-term unemployed; refugees; particular sectors; people with disabilities; social

enterprises; disadvantaged communities; over 50s; rural areas; ex-offenders; and young people. A second bidding round and then an extension to the initiative meant it was set up to run until 2008 with a lifetime budget of £65m (Ramsden, 2005).

The bidding guidance explained that 'The Small Business Service and local practitioners will help develop expertise on the most appropriate measures for different circumstances [...] so that the lessons can feed into future policy and be disseminated widely' (SBS, 2000, p.2). The bidding guidance repeatedly emphasises a focus on finding novel solutions, referring to projects involving 'innovative ideas' (p.3), 'experimentation' (p.3), 'fresh thinking' (p.5), 'ground breaking' (p.6) and 'innovation' (p.7). Organisations bidding for funds were required not only to set out their strategy for achieving impact in novel ways, but also how they would widely disseminate their learning. Interestingly, no standard application form was provided for organisations seeking funds, although there was slightly more structure used for the second round. A list of criteria to be addressed in the application was provided, which included the nature of partnerships with mainstream organisations, including Business Link, Local Authorities, enterprise agencies and Regional Development Agencies.

Inviting project proposals, the government set out what they saw as potential challenges faced by underrepresented groups, which 'may be because they lack confidence, skills or commercial experience [as well as] the lack of appropriate support and advice when and where it is most needed' (SBS, 2000, p.5). There is some sense here of the limitations of the dominant institutional logics in terms of the material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules informing mainstream business support. The predominant focus is on the perceived limitations of individuals within the underrepresented groups, with no real acknowledgement of structural barriers, leading to a focus on the upskilling of individuals. Nonetheless, the call did attract a broad range of projects, the first round attracting 250 bids of which 50 were funded, the second round received 350 bids and supported 46 (SBS, 2004).

PDF delivered some significant successes: the final evaluation (Ramsden, 2005, p.71), reports that 'projects were effective at reaching out to some of the groups identified as priorities' and particularly at engaging with women. However, there has been little discussion of this policy initiative in the

literature on women’s enterprise policy or more generally (for important exceptions, see Blisson, 2020, 2022; and, on specific projects funded by PDF, Ahl and Marlow, 2021; Puechner and Diegelmann, 2006). The focus of PDF on working with different partners, engaging with different communities and trying to identify novel solutions is ideal for our focus on understanding the lessons from past women’s enterprise policy initiatives and how the organisations involved in implementation operate in a context of institutional pluralism.

*Data*

Implementation of PDF projects reflected a variety of approaches through a range of organisations, albeit predominantly locally based NGOs. Our inclusion criteria identified the projects that were targeted solely at women and those that engaged with a high proportion of women, many of which can be understood in terms of intersectionality. We excluded those projects that happened to engage with women but were not specifically targeting them nor involved in the implementation of interventions related to challenges facing women. From an examination of the 96 projects supported through PDF, we developed individual cases for 34 projects that met our inclusion criteria.

Our analysis of PDF is built upon diverse sources, developing a detailed picture of the initiative and individual projects. We incorporated policy documents (White Papers, Bidding Guidance documents), materials from the official website (archived at the National Archives), statements in Parliament (recorded in Hansard), government research and published evaluations. We then conducted extensive searches for data concerning each of the selected projects. These searches identified a range of sources such as articles authored by project leaders, local news features and similar items featuring the projects and those involved in their implementation. Searches were made of records at Companies House to ascertain whether the organisations were still trading. Where available, we also collected relevant data from individual project websites, project-specific evaluations and academic studies. In this way, we rigorously developed data sets to inform case studies of each project.

*Analysis*

We approached the analysis iteratively. From our initial research on PDF, we built our overall account of the policy and its implementation, then moving on to analyse the 34 distinct projects identified as relevant to our study. Following Gioia *et al.* (2013), we worked with our data to establish first order codes representing this range of approaches (see Table I). We sought to preserve the context of the relevant project and its area of intervention, while also grouping together similar responses to institutional pluralism. For example, any instance where an organisation sought to embed advisers within different communities. We then used thematic analysis to scrutinise these codes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) through repeated readings of the case materials and sharing of memos between the authors (Gibbs, 2007) to organise and interpret our first-order codes as second-order themes. In doing so, we had reference not only to the data but also regular consultation with the relevant literature ‘to refine articulation of emergent concepts and relationships’ (Gioia *et al.*, 2013, p.26). This supported the development of our analysis to more general themes across the various projects, for example different forms of feedback from communities.

These themes were then further distilled into four aggregate dimensions. These aggregate dimensions were developed with reference to our conceptual framework of institutional logics and sought to identify, at a more abstract level, the fundamental ways in which organisations engaged with and were shaped by institutional pluralism. Some organisations deployed more than one approach to institutional pluralism and our analysis did not seek to define each organisation in terms of a single approach. Rather, this analytical process grouped together practices with shared characteristics that we identified as responses of dominance, integration, constellation and bridging. We present these approaches below with evidence from our analysis.

[Insert Table I here]

## Findings

In this section we present the four aggregate dimensions that emerged from our analysis in response to our research question, *How do organisations involved in the implementation of women’s enterprise policy manage the challenges of institutional pluralism?* The first aggregate dimension we explore,

*dominance*, is where one institutional logic was dominant, minimising institutional pluralism but with implications for the implementation of the initiative. In contrast, we have labelled a second approach *integration*, where potentially competing institutional logics are productively brought together through points of commonality. We then explore two approaches to managing institutional pluralism as forms of segmentation, which allows that competing institutional logics which cannot be integrated, nonetheless might find sufficient commonality to manage effective performance (Friedland, 2018). *Constellation* refers to when a particular combination of the available competing logics are positioned relative to one another to achieve a goal. We then present *bridging*, which was identified in our analysis as the ways in which different logics are segmented but points of commonality or compatibility are sought out and developed through the creation of linkages. For each of these four approaches to managing institutional pluralism, we provide examples from our analysis of PDF projects.

*Dominance*

The aggregate dimension of *dominance* refers to instances where organisations involved in the implementation of women’s enterprise policy operate under a predominant institutional logic, such that it dominates their practices and subordinates other logics. It is apparent from discussions leading up to the creation of the PDF that there was a clear attempt to limit the influence of state logics and prioritise community logics (SBS, 2000). By design, the focus on community-focused organisations and the steps to limit bureaucracy in the application and reporting processes for PDF sought to create a dominance for community logics and a subordinate role for state logics, reducing challenges created by institutional pluralism. A large number of the partner organisations, such as community-led social enterprises, were likely more attuned to the institutional logics at play (e.g. community logics) than centrally dictated attempts at enterprise policy (predominantly governed by state logics).

As we discuss below, there were instances where this approach supported successful projects. However, there were also instances where the logics traditionally dominating enterprise policy, such as state and market logics, persisted as a primary influence. That these logics ‘dominated’ does not mean that pluralism was removed entirely. In these instances, it was by conforming with, and potentially gaining



legitimacy by these dominant logics and *subordinating* others that the organisations managed the potential challenges.

The dominance of a particular logic in the existing environment for business support was clear. The mainstream players and the established business support landscape, such as the Chambers of Commerce or Business Link, were recognised as having limitations in their material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules that informed many PDF projects. The *Women's Business Network* project, for example, focused on supporting women who wanted to network but felt excluded from traditionally male-dominated environments or women-only networks comprised of established management high-fliers. Such projects sought to provide an alternative to mainstream provision and in doing so subordinate the associated professional logic, often to a dominant community logic. An article co-authored by the *Women's Business Network's* CEO describes its mission and focus and argues for its impact, reporting that the network positively influenced both women entrepreneurs' businesses and their personal development (Livesey and Rotheroe, 2007).

However, pressures, especially financial, remained on PDF projects to engage with existing provision and the associated dominance of particular institutional logics. The PDF was never intended to provide open-ended financial support (Sainsbury, 2006). Some projects, engaging a predominant market logic, actively sought commercial means for financial sustainability. For example, the *Hidden Art* project made efforts to explore a franchising model, a shop and a membership scheme (Blackburn *et al.*, 2007). Ramsden's (2005) evaluation reports that 12 projects were self-funded to some degree but that only the *Cats Pyjamas* had reported the use of earned income.

Accessing alternative funding sources often necessitated the involvement of established actors in the business support delivery landscape. For example, Business Link was involved in co-financing activity (e.g. with the *Women's Business Development Agency*) and Chambers of Commerce held leadership positions in some projects (e.g. the *Professional Returners Enterprise Partnership*). The presence of these mainstays of enterprise support suggests the persistence of a dominant professional logic in how business support is delivered. Other projects received funding from alternative sources, including high-



street banks, although the final evaluation expressed disappointment at the levels contributed (Ramsden, 2005). The largest contributor from the private sector was Barclays Bank with £187,000 of grant support across three projects, but this was set against the range of problems associated with access to business finance for those living in marginalised communities. The dominance of institutional logics associated with sources of funding was particularly the case the more dependent organisations were on these funders and significant concerns were raised about the lack of funding, especially as the PDF initiative itself came to an end (PROWESS, 2004a).

### *Integration*

Processes of *integration* allowed potentially competing institutional logics to be productively oriented towards a common goal. Integration of institutional logics might take different forms, but what the examples in our analysis have in common is the development of novel means of managing institutional pluralism based in areas of commonality between logics. For example, there are examples where there is a combinative aspect to the management of logics, with explicit engagement with existing logics providing a basis for legitimacy claims. This can most clearly be seen where actors sought to establish a new professional logic for those implementing business support targeting women entrepreneurs. For example, the *Surviving into the Mainstream* (SIM) project, which was focused on supporting people from BME backgrounds to grow their ventures, developed a 'Coach training toolkit' for purchase by organisations in other London boroughs (Blackburn *et al.*, 2007). Blackburn and colleagues discuss this activity in terms of 'mainstreaming'. The SIM project developed 'horizontally' into new areas and 'vertically' through sharing of best practices. Such activities disseminated and promoted ways of doing business support, presented in contrast to mainstream providers. For SIM, this included use of a rigorous selection process, meeting the requirements of state or market logics while rooted in the need for success within the community (rather than e.g. targeting a wider pool of applicants less relevant to the project's focus). Key to such offers was a nascent sense of what a new professional logic might look like in this area. Crucially, this nascent logic, through claiming a specific domain of expertise for the project leaders, would manage the potential tensions between state, market and community logics.

There were also efforts to support learning within the projects as they were given scope to experiment and adapt. For example, the *Estate Based Enterprise Support* project worked in some of London's deprived estates. The project pivoted from its initial goal of generating IT entrepreneurs towards more foundational support. The project learned that many of its participants lacked some of the basics to engage with the material practices or assumptions of other, more mainstream agencies, such as a bank account. The project therefore broadened the scope of its support to address fundamental problems and to be relevant (Bootstrap Enterprises, 2008). In this way, the project had begun to develop an offer accommodating both the demands of market logics and those derived from community logics in an integrative fashion, gaining an important form of legitimacy both within the community and externally.

Integration can also be understood in terms of how interventions were designed. The *Asian Business Support Programme*, for instance, working with retailers around the West Midlands, opted to approach potential participants directly rather than via general marketing activities. Adopting this approach, the project leaders recognised that mainstream support was often viewed as ill-suited to many business owners in the target groups, so a tailored approach was required. Furthermore, addressing a need for businesses in deprived areas to enhance their marketing and IT capacity to access wider and more lucrative markets was designed with the target businesses in mind (Nazir Associates, 2008). Similarly, the *Women's Enterprise Centre of Excellence* was designed in recognition of the difficulties faced by women in starting a venture. Women business advisers would appreciate the challenges that women face when entering business (Lancashire Telegraph, 2001), building on a track record of business support in the region provided by the project lead organisation (Blackburn *et al.*, 2007). Such projects effectively developed in order to integrate the logics associated with state funding with more community-engaged approaches.

Established mainstream providers of business support also demonstrated instances of designing more community-engaged approaches. *Business Links for Communities* operated in West Yorkshire communities affected by multiple forms of exclusion and maintained close connections with mainstream providers such as the Chamber and Business Link. The project located advisers within different communities to demonstrate commitment and to learn, effectively integrating elements of the

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logic informing mainstream support and a community logic (SBS, 2004). In Birmingham the Chamber of Commerce’s *Professional Returners Enterprise Partnership* programme involved the team knocking on doors to inform potential participants in the community about their offer and designing support that was relevant (*ibid.*). Set against traditional ideas of business and hierarchy, such projects demonstrate the value of integrative approach that confirm with key elements of mainstream provision while also ‘based on consultation, cooperation and respect’ (PROWESS, 2003, p.9) and therefore integrating key elements of relevant community logics.

*Constellation*

Viable ‘constellations’ (Goodrick and Reay, 2011, p.399) of institutional logics are established where a particular combination of the available logics are positioned relative to one another. We are here focused on the patterns that emerge as viable ways of operating to facilitate the effective management of institutional pluralism. The overall design of PDF tried to address institutional pluralism through the use of locally-focused organisations and degrees of freedom that could maintain a degree of distance between limited state logics (adhering to specific rules, reporting etc) and a responsiveness to distinct community logics that might differ from project to project.

For example, the Women’s Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU), based in the East of England, was originally set up in 1987 and operated an effective micro-credit scheme prior to PDF. The funding received allowed for the project’s work to be extended and, by using the PDF with its relatively light touch application and reporting, these funds could serve an existing project without compromising its commitments to existing community logics, while maintaining the state logic of reporting at a distance. Many projects like this were not viable without the government funding and so the state logic always maintained some influence and there was a need to maintain legitimacy and effectiveness with multiple audiences. In the case of WEETU’s *Full Circle* model of micro-financing (which eventually wound up in 2013 owing to reductions in available government funding, Heritage, 2020) it actively resisted achieving financial stability because it was viewed that this necessitated compromising on its core purpose and aligning with mainstream forms of support (Pearson and Watson, 1997). In this way,

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3 it sought to maintain different areas of activity within a sustainable pattern rather than, for example, a  
4 professional logic of mainstream support becoming dominant.  
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8 Successes in PDF implementation were not solely due to its initial design but also the ways in which  
9 the projects were operated. An example can be seen in the *Economic Outreach in East London* project,  
10 which supported Bangladeshi and Somali women in a deprived area. This was set up by the East End  
11 Micro-Credit Consortium (which supported peer group micro loans) and adopted a 'hub and spoke'  
12 model for delivering support to target participants. Different organisations were involved in different  
13 aspects of the project, so one organisation managed the loan portfolio while three other local community  
14 organisations engaged directly with clients (with PDF used to fund outreach workers). In this way, there  
15 was scope to understand and address the root causes of exclusion facing these women through  
16 meaningful forms of outreach, creating a constellation of institutional logics (separating state and  
17 community logics but also potentially different community logics) through an organisational design  
18 that could secure legitimacy from different stakeholders (EEMC, 2008).  
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### 32 *Bridging*

33 Constellation is about identifying ways in which different institutional logics can co-exist, through a  
34 form of segmentation that maintains a degree of distance between adherence to potentially competing  
35 institutional logics. In contrast, institutional bridging captures the ways in which these different logics  
36 are segmented but also more strategically linked to one another. The points of commonality or  
37 compatibility are sought out and developed through specific bridging activities engaged in by the  
38 implementing organisations.  
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47 Institutional bridging activities included the ways organisations sought to create linkages with  
48 mainstream support, which was generally governed by a different logic (e.g. state, market or a  
49 professional logic), while maintaining a distance that facilitated the management of potential tensions  
50 and avoidance of a subordination of community logics. For example, the Women's Business  
51 Development Agency *Bridge Over Troubled Waters* project sought participants by working through  
52 connections and communications channels already used by women, in contrast to many mainstream  
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providers who tended not to target their outreach strategies (Ramsden, 2004). As Blisson (2020, p.165) explains, ‘The concept was to form a link (or ‘Bridge’ – hence the title of the bid) between these women and the existing small Business Support infrastructure’. A similar idea informed the *Business Support Network* project in Birmingham. A Senior Operations Manager at Birmingham Business Link described this as working with community groups to develop trust and ‘act as a bridge between service providers and inner city business owners’ (cited in SBS, 2004, p.20).

In the House of Lords, Lord Sainsbury explained the need to ‘ensure that the innovative approaches that have been developed are built on by mainstream providers of business support’ (Sainsbury, 2006). Such bridges, as links between different forms of support legitimised and influenced by different logics, were a core element in the design of PDF. Some of this work was centrally coordinated, such as a series of PDF Regional Roadshows to promote the lessons learned and facilitate connections for future activities, including between Local Authorities, Business Links, other business support advisers and local community groups (SBS, n.d.). The SBS also sponsored the ‘Shifting the Gears’ conference hosted at Durham University (Hewitt, 2001). PROWESS, a women’s enterprise advocacy organisation, also organised a conference, ‘Realising the potential of all women entrepreneurs: sharing and learning’, in 2003 to ‘capture the know-how built up by projects funded by the first round of PDF’ (PROWESS, 2004b, p.5)

Learning and collaboration was also sought through what we could consider bridges between projects. However, there are indications that not all such bridging efforts were successful. WEETU developed its *Full Circle* model of micro-financing in an operations manual, so that others could replicate it (Full Circle, 2000). According to the final evaluation, while there were some signs of success, most did not pursue its implementation and there were difficulties in adopting a methodology developed elsewhere (Ramsden, 2005). This may be because, while engaged with community at the general level as an institutional order, the different logics across communities and contexts may limit portability of approaches to specific community logics. In this way, approaches to managing institutional pluralism (such as embedding mainstream providers in communities) may be replicable across communities but

transferring more specific approaches to implementation or project design may not always be achievable from one community setting to another.

## Discussion

Women's enterprise policy, and enterprise policies in general, have been subject to persistent criticisms over their inability to make effective interventions. Our research has sought to extend understanding of women's enterprise policy through a focus on the implementation phase of the policy cycle. In particular, we focus on policy initiatives that seek to engage with marginalised and excluded communities that are not being sufficiently supported by mainstream support and the organisations such policy initiatives partner with. Challenges can emerge in such initiatives because of differences between the organisations and contexts involved (e.g. between the government, mainstream providers and communities). We conceptualise this as a problem of institutional pluralism. Established approaches to women's enterprise policy reflect dominant institutional logics (e.g. state, market or professional logics) that risk excluding those who do not align with the associated material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs or rules.

To contribute to these debates, we conducted an historical study of the UK Government's attempt to engage with the challenges of institutional pluralism through the Phoenix Development Fund (PDF, 1999 to 2008). PDF represented the first time a UK Government had pursued practical interventions to support inclusive enterprise (Ramsden, 2005, p.126), funding projects run by organisations engaged with the people and communities the government hoped to reach. Analysis of the PDF and 34 of the projects it supported has examined how potentially conflicting institutional logics were managed by the organisations implementing women's enterprise policy. We identified four approaches: dominance; integration; constellation; and bridging. Importantly, the examination of each of these approaches demonstrates some of the ways in which multiple institutional logics can create challenges but also be managed in productive and potentially impactful ways.

There were several key lessons for effective women's enterprise policy interventions that were identified in our analysis. PDF projects that were enabled to engage closely with community concerns



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(and community logics), demonstrated an ability to effectively manage institutional pluralism (e.g. through constellation approaches). This benefitted from the wider policy adopted in the design of the PDF itself. The potential restrictions of a state logic, which can be subordinating of community logics, was achieved by seeking to limit bureaucracy and restrictions created by reporting or the need to adhere to rules and practices. Instead, PDF encouraged novel approaches and experimentation. Not only did PDF represent a move against one-size-fits-all approaches but it also allowed for further tailoring of more focused projects that were able to fully engage with communities, reaching people hitherto excluded from mainstream support.

For some projects, there were gains from operating within a context of institutional pluralism and the ways in which the mix of logics, can be productive as well as challenging. These projects were engaged in ‘both value and values creation’ (Gümüşay, 2018, p.213). This can be seen in integrative projects where the identification of points of commonality, for example between state and community logics, shaped the way organisations operated. There were significant attempts to develop a new professional logic for community-focused business support that could maintain legitimacy in multiple spheres. There were also bridging approaches, where structures were put in place to facilitate the identification of commonality between potentially competing logics. Identifying and effectively building from these points of commonality created opportunities to not only manage the challenges of institutional pluralism but to develop and diffuse alternative approaches for women’s enterprise policy implementation.

However, the lack of sustainability of PDF projects once funding was completed may also suggest how some of the approaches to managing institutional pluralism were not only facilitated by the PDF approach but dependent upon it. As the final evaluation made clear, multiple funders means multiple reporting requirements, which creates a significant administrative burden and a drain on resources (Ramsden, 2005). The need to find and engage with alternative funders brought new rules and requirements and more dominant institutional logics. This can create significant inefficiencies and internal tensions at odds with the successful implementation of the project. Few of the projects were able to sustain their responses of institutional pluralism in the face of financial pressures and increased



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3 salience of market logics or those associated with more restrictive state funders. This raises concerns,  
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5 and potential limits, on the successes of the initiative.  
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8 Further, in the long-term PDF appears to have been poor on diffusion and establishing lessons that could  
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10 be more broadly taken up in the design and implementation of enterprise policy for marginalised and  
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12 excluded groups. It is not clear that, within the UK, the lessons of PDF have been learnt or applied  
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14 (Blisson, 2022). Given that this was a central aim of the PDF, this is particularly disappointing. As we  
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16 explored in our analysis, many of the attempts at bridging between different logics set out to achieve  
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18 this. There was undoubtedly learning at a local level, for individuals and some social enterprises.  
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20 However, there is little indication of long-term impacts from the innovation or experimentation  
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22 supported by PDF. Evaluations remarked favourably on cases where projects provided a gateway into  
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24 accessing mainstream support. However, notwithstanding attempts to record and disseminate best  
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26 practice (e.g. Hallahan, n.d.; Hewitt, 2001; SBS, 2004, 2006), meaningful changes resulting from the  
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28 innovations PDF supported are difficult to identify in subsequent enterprise policy or changes in  
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30 government support structures to make them more inclusive. Further, the 2007-8 financial crisis and  
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32 2010 introduction of austerity policies to cut public spending accompanied a reversion to 'more generic-  
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34 based enterprise policy models' (Ahl and Marlow, 2021, p.55).  
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## 38 39 **Conclusion**

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42 Our paper contributes to important debates on women's enterprise policy, with a focus on the persistent  
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44 challenges associated with ineffective interventions. Our examination of policy implementation through  
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46 the UK Government's Phoenix Development Fund (PDF) has examined an effort by policymakers to  
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48 acknowledge the limitations of mainstream structures of business support and a range of different  
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50 projects with different organisations and different approaches to the challenges they faced. In doing so,  
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52 our paper contributes analysis of implementation mechanisms within a policy context that was seeking  
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54 to overcome the constraints of its traditional structures (Foss *et al.*, 2019).  
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58 We provide an empirical contribution to understanding of women's enterprise policy through an  
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60 historical case that sought to address the challenges in a novel way. Our analysis identified several

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valuable ‘lessons’ for how to manage these challenges and some of the limitations of these approaches. However, relating our empirical study to recent critiques of women’s enterprise policy underlines that, while practical efforts to improve its implementation have suggested potentially viable approaches, these lessons do not appear to have influenced subsequent policy implementation. In doing so, we have also demonstrated the value of historical approaches to the study of women’s enterprise policy and the value of learning from past experiences for support providers, policymakers and academic researchers.

Our theoretical contribution develops these insights through our conceptualisation of challenges in implementing women’s enterprise policy as resulting from institutional pluralism. This represents a valuable lens on the key ‘organizing principles’ (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p.248) that shape the implementation of women’s enterprise policy. The approach facilitates understanding of the potential value of effective engagement with institutional pluralism, extending studies that have highlighted potentially contrasting institutions and problems of ‘institutional fit’ (Henry *et al.*, 2022). Further, our analysis has identified and discussed different approaches to institutional pluralism that build on concepts drawn from across this literature (dominance, integration, constellation) and the development of a new concept in this theory through our proposal of ‘institutional bridging’. Institutional bridging refers to the strategic and deliberate attempts to develop linkages between potentially competing institutional logics.

However, while we have drawn important empirical and theoretical lessons from our analysis of the PDF initiative, there are also salutary lessons to be drawn. Close examination revealed that, while the different approaches to managing the potential challenges of institutional logics for the PDF programme enabled novel, targeted delivery of support, it did not create effective pathways to change at the centre. Further, few of the approaches to institutional pluralism managed to establish long-term sustainability. We therefore believe that there is value in further research on how to achieve more sustainable solutions to managing institutional pluralism and in further understanding the potential for institutional bridging. Regrettably, it is not clear that, within the UK, the lessons of PDF have been learnt or applied. Our paper therefore concludes with a call for further engagement with the history of women’s enterprise policy and the opportunities this provides to deepen our understanding of effective implementation.

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First order codes	Second order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Close collaboration with mainstream organisations	Partnership creates emphasis on a particular (professional) logic	Dominance
Limiting formal requirements placed on implementation projects	Lessening bureaucracy and centralised control	
Greater flexibility for projects within the PDF		
Extend existing arrangements to sustain projects	Funding pressures heighten relevant logics (e.g. state / market / professional)	
Co-funding from established mainstream actors		
Grants from commercial bank		
Market / franchise model		
Developing new networks	Developing a new professional logic (network organisations creating an umbrella function)	Integration
Creating a ‘coach training kit’		
Direct approach to potential participants	Build offer acknowledging pluralism	
Community-based advisers		
Changing the support offered to existing target groups	Pivoting in response to pluralism	
Changing the groups being targeted		

Structures of support (government) and implementation (community-based and other) distinct	Programme design segmenting core tasks	Constellation
Conducting a feasibility study	Focused areas of project-based activity	
Funding/ extending existing work (with limited change)		
Identifying most appropriate approach		
Regional roadshows	Learning through community building (planned / coordinated)	Bridging
Conferences		
Links between community and existing infrastructure	Projects creating links	
International collaboration and diffusion	Portability (and key contextual challenges)	
Regional diffusion of innovations		

Table I: Analysis of Phoenix Development Fund project approaches to managing institutional pluralism