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Origins and Development of CEO

Abstract: This chapter outlines the evolution of Cultural Enterprise Office over 15 years, tracing its development from the initial feasibility study in 1999, through its launch and four phases of operation. The final section sets out the shape of the organisation and its main business support activities during the period of observation (2013–2014). The chapter addresses the role of institutional narrative; CEO’s changing geographic remit; the way the organisation has drawn on and modified operational models from elsewhere; how it has intersected with and adapted itself to the existing local and national business support infrastructure. It concludes that the quest for survival has required CEO to continually adapt, re-orientating itself towards different sources of funding and responding to current policy trends.

Keywords: business support; incubators; NESTA; organisational narratives; Scottish policy

Despite its lack of a consistent stream of core funding, CEO has operated continuously in a precarious sector for 13 years. In this time, various other cultural support organisations have fallen by the wayside. Consequently, one of the goals of this book is to understand how CEO has survived and developed over time. The sketch history of CEO presented here has been conceived with an eye to two interconnected questions. First, how has the organisation managed to make and remake a place for itself within a shifting policy landscape? Second, where do CEO’s ideas, practices and values come from and how have they evolved over time? In this chapter, we map the forces that led to its creation as well as the routine working practices we encountered when we entered the field. In Chapters 4 and 5, CEO’s value systems, continuing challenges and forward strategy will be explored in greater depth.

The wider context for CEO’s development lies in the growth of creative industries and creative economy thinking at the UK and Scottish levels outlined in the previous chapter. Here, we concentrate on the case of a single historically and geographical situated agency. This permits us to show how quite general concepts embodied in British policy discourse are applied in practice, in relation to a specific local and national agenda in Scotland. As O’Connor and Gu note, “creative industries,” though often defined in the placeless language of the “knowledge economy,” “creativity,” and “innovation,” are rooted in and held to exemplify complex local histories and cultures. Therefore, we trace CEO’s development from an initial, limited, perception of a need to provide specialist business skills support for emerging artists in Glasgow in the late 1990s to its current incarnation as a body with ambitions on a broader scale. In its present form, CEO seeks to deliver business knowhow, Scotland-wide, to a range of creative sector micro-businesses and sole traders at different stages of their professional and business development. In particular, we wish to demonstrate how three interrelated factors have been crucial to creating the version of CEO in operation as we write: the way the organisation has drawn on and modified operational models from elsewhere; how it has intersected with and adapted to the existing local and national business support infrastructure; and how its quest for survival has required CEO to re-orientate itself continually towards different sources of funding and align itself with different policy agendas at key moments.