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*Valuing co-operation: motivation and reward for producers of education platform content*

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Valuing co-operation: motivation and reward for  
producers of education platform content

Darren Connolly

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2023

## Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
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## Abstract

The seed of this research comes from a desire to understand alternative routes to building sustainable online businesses, where workers are at the heart of planning, control and decision making. To challenge the dominance of global players on the internet, businesses underpinned by neoliberal thought. The purpose of this thesis is to assist in filling the void in the current literature with regard to the motivation and reward for individual producers of education videos for online platforms, to explore the value of co-operation amongst producers, and the potential role of co-operative principles.

An inductive, qualitative, interpretive approach was used to gather empirical data on individual producers. Online semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty producers within three comparative case studies: internal (employed), external (self-employed) and co-producers (employed or self-employed). Critical Systems Theory provided the authenticity to question producers' perceptions of existing systems and the paradigm out of which platforms and producers operate. A methodological contribution comes from utilising Meadows' taxonomy of systemic intervention points as a theoretical framework to identify potential system levers in reward systems.

This research provides insights into what workers value in a platform relationship and the implications of this for reward systems. The research identified distinct motivators and reward management practices specific to producer groups, as well as underlying features that were common across all producer groups.

If new systems are to challenge the existing stranglehold of venture capitalist backed platforms they will benefit from open platform membership, worker participation in both systems development and reward ownership, and worker autonomy and independence. This research provides a scope for change, so that individual content producers can see for themselves the possibilities to self-organise into new forms.

A limitation of this research is that data collected was based on the perspectives of individual producers, future research could include other actors to provide a rich picture of platform systems. It also does not fully address the capital problem of how to finance internet based businesses, but with worker-centric platform businesses there is a foundation for research into the integration of existing multistakeholder models.

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This research would not have happened without the individual video producers who were willing to take part in a project that appeared to offer little direct benefit to them. Their openness and willingness to discuss important and sensitive issues has provided invaluable input into a project that I hope repays them in the future in some way.

I would like to thank both the foundation president and director of the Colombian platform for providing access to a dedicated team of producers at the peak of the Coronavirus Pandemic, each producer gave valuable insights into what is possible with a cohesive group of people working with shared values and a platform with purpose.

This PhD journey was shared with colleagues (‘The Four Musketeers’) at The School of Business and Law who had their own research battles along the way, their mutual support and understanding was invaluable.

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# Table of Contents

Candidate Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Abbreviations.....	ix
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose of research.....	1
1.2 Rationale for research.....	1
1.3 Personal interest.....	2
1.4 Aims and objectives.....	3
1.5 Contribution to knowledge.....	5
1.6 Structure of thesis.....	8
1.7 Summary.....	10
2 Literature review.....	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Digital education platforms.....	11
2.3 Reward Management.....	16
2.4 Motivation.....	19
2.5 Co-operative Principles.....	22
2.6 Co-operatives.....	23
2.7 Combined literature.....	32
2.8 Summary.....	35
3 Research methodology.....	36
3.1 Introduction.....	36
3.2 Research philosophy.....	36
3.3 Research strategy.....	40
3.4 Research method.....	41
3.5 Methodological reflexivity.....	48
3.6 Reporting method.....	48
3.7 Ethics.....	49

3.8	Limitations .....	50
3.9	Risks .....	50
3.10	Timescale .....	51
3.11	Research evaluation.....	52
3.12	Summary .....	55
4	Analysis.....	56
4.1	Introduction.....	56
4.2	Data analysis.....	56
4.3	Producer background .....	64
4.4	Platform background.....	67
4.5	Summary.....	69
5	Reward for producers .....	70
5.1	Introduction.....	70
5.2	Internal producer reward.....	71
5.3	External producer reward. ....	75
5.4	Co-producer reward. ....	86
5.5	Reward summary.....	96
5.6	Reward leverage points.....	97
6	Motivation for producers.....	103
6.1	Introduction.....	103
6.2	Internal producer motivation.....	104
6.3	External producer motivation .....	111
6.4	Co-producer producer motivation .....	125
6.5	Motivation summary .....	136
6.6	Motivation leverage points .....	137
7	Power for producers .....	148
7.1	Introduction.....	148
7.2	Internal producer power .....	149
7.3	External producer power.....	154
7.4	Co-producer power .....	160
7.5	Power summary.....	166
7.6	Power leverage points.....	167
8	Co-operative platforms .....	175

8.1	Introduction.....	175
8.2	Co-operation.....	176
8.3	Valuing co-operation: reward .....	179
8.4	Valuing co-operation: motivation .....	187
8.5	Valuing co-operation: power.....	197
8.6	Co-operative framework .....	208
8.7	Summary.....	210
Chapter 9 Contributions to knowledge.....		212
9.1	Introduction.....	212
9.2	Reward for producers.....	214
9.3	Motivation for producers .....	220
9.4	Power for producers.....	222
9.5	Methodology .....	227
9.6	Research impact .....	228
9.7	Reflection on limitations .....	229
9.8	Future research .....	230
9.9	Personal reflection .....	230
References.....		232
Appendix 1 Ethics Review .....		246
Appendix 2 Survey.....		252
Appendix 3 Interviews.....		258
Appendix 4 NVivo.....		260



## List of Tables

<b>Table 2-1</b> Co-operative values and principles.....	22
<b>Table 3-1</b> Places to intervene in a system (Meadows) .....	39
<b>Table 3-2</b> Places to intervene in a system by chapter .....	39
<b>Table 3-3</b> Sources of data .....	46
<b>Table 3-4</b> Timescale of research .....	51
<b>Table 4-1</b> NVivo reported themes .....	64
<b>Table 4-2</b> Internal Producers .....	64
<b>Table 4-3</b> External Producers .....	65
<b>Table 4-4</b> Co-producers.....	66
<b>Table 4-5</b> Platform organisation .....	67
<b>Table 4-6</b> Platform user charges .....	68
<b>Table 4-7</b> Platform reward for producers.....	68
<b>Table 5-1</b> Meadows reward leverage points .....	70
<b>Table 5-2</b> PF1 monthly salaries based on job role .....	71
<b>Table 5-3</b> Producer reward by group.....	96
<b>Table 5-4</b> Reward leverage points .....	99
<b>Table 6-1</b> Meadows' motivation leverage points .....	103
<b>Table 6-2</b> Producer motivation by group.....	136
<b>Table 6-3</b> Motivation leverage points.....	141
<b>Table 7-1</b> Meadows' power leverage points .....	148
<b>Table 7-2</b> Platforms related to external producers .....	159
<b>Table 7-3</b> Platforms related to co-producers.....	163
<b>Table 7-4</b> Producer power by group .....	166
<b>Table 7-5</b> Power leverage points .....	170
<b>Table 8-1</b> Meadows' power leverage point .....	175
<b>Table 8-2</b> Co-operative Principles .....	177
<b>Table 8-3</b> Systemic reward issues and co-operative intervention .....	179
<b>Table 8-4</b> Co-operative platform reward.....	181
<b>Table 8-5</b> Co-operative membership reward .....	181
<b>Table 8-6</b> Producer options for Co-operative organisation.....	183

<b>Table 8-7</b> Systemic motivation issues and co-operative intervention .....	187
<b>Table 8-8</b> Co-operative platform motivation.....	190
<b>Table 8-9</b> Co-operative membership motivation .....	190
<b>Table 8-10</b> Systemic power issues and co-operative intervention.....	197
<b>Table 8-11</b> Co-operative platform power .....	199
<b>Table 8-12</b> Co-operative membership power.....	199
<b>Table 8-13</b> Dimensions of a Co-operative platform .....	208
<b>Table 8-14</b> Membership of a Co-operative platform.....	209

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 3-1</b> Multiple Case Study plan .....	43
<b>Figure 3-2</b> Timeline of research .....	52
<b>Figure 4-1</b> NVivo case classification .....	57
<b>Figure 4-2</b> NVivo case profiles .....	57
<b>Figure 4-3</b> NVivo Theory-driven nodes .....	60
<b>Figure 4-4</b> NVivo Data-driven nodes.....	60
<b>Figure 4-5</b> NVivo Theme Archive .....	61
<b>Figure 4-6</b> NVivo Final Themes .....	62
<b>Figure 4-7</b> NVivo Crosstab Query.....	63
<b>Figure 4-8</b> NVivo Framework Matrix.....	63
<b>Figure 8-1</b> Framework for a labour controlled platform .....	183
<b>Figure 8-2</b> Co-operative models in parallel.....	202

## List of Abbreviations

B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CBPP	Commons Based Peer Production
CP	Co-Producer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EM	Employee Member
EP	External Producer
IP	Internal Producer
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
KIF	Knowledge Intensive Firms
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MSC	Multistakeholder Co-operatives
OER	Open Education Resources
PM	Producer Member
SM	Service User Member
SSM	Soft systems methodology
WC	Worker Co-operatives

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of research

The purpose of this research is to investigate motivation and reward for individual producers of education platform content, to explore the value of co-operation amongst producers, and the potential role of co-operative principles. This purpose will be addressed through a study that seeks to develop an understanding of how producer motivation and reward management practice changes depending on the relationship between individual content producers and education platforms. Three specific groups of producers were researched: internal producers, external and co-producers. Internal producers are employees that work directly for a platform, external producers are self-employed and create content independently, co-producers are mainly self-employed and create content with an internal production team on-site at facilities owned by a platform, where the final product is a co-production between the individual producer and the platform. This research seeks to see if there are distinct motivators and reward management practices specific to producer groups, as well as underlying features that are common across all producer groups. The final phase of the research has reviewed the empirical research findings, to develop a theoretical framework of reward for co-operation between producers of education platform content.

## 1.2 Rationale for research

There are number of large EU funded projects that have recognised the potential to take control of the future of the internet: Next Generation Internet initiative is a European Commission programme focused on creating a more inclusive, human-centric and resilient internet by 2025 (Nesta, 2018). Internet activity is supported by a growing workforce of independent or freelance workers. McKinsey Global Institute (2016) have established that 162 million people in Europe and the United States are now engaged in some form of independent or freelance work, with about a third of them doing this work out of necessity. Langley and Leyshon (2017) highlight the issues of what they term platform capitalism that require the most urgent attention: the role of platforms in the degradation of work, and the sustainability of platforms that are now highly valued and heavily capitalized as a consequence of

venture capital investment. Digital education platform monetise value based on the activities of producers and users organized as data relations, which are subsequently systematically elicited, extracted and monetized (Van Dijck et al., 2018). The Royal Society of Arts (2017) published a report that reviewed the UK 'Gig' economy and the challenging issues surrounding worker's rights and business models used by online platforms. The terms of reference for this report appears to bring us back to fundamental issues raised by Marx (1976 [1887]) of property and personal rights, of divisions between capital and labour:

Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production.

In contrast to platform capitalism there is an alternative movement known as platform cooperativism (co-operativism). 'Platform co-operatives' aim to fundamentally redesign the ownership and governance of platforms (Scholz 2016). 'Open co-operatives' are based on commons-based peer production and the solidarity economy movements, platform co-operatives create an enabling environment for workers to mutualise resources and make positive contributions to the commons and more widely to society (Bauwens and Kostakis 2014, Pazaitis et al., 2017). The rationale for this research is to theoretically bridge the gap between the contrasting business models and online worlds occupied by platform capitalism where reward is focused on owners and platform co-operativism where reward is focused on labour, to highlight alternative routes to co-operation for education content producers. Rewarding capabilities and connections outside a single firm or formal partnership has the potential to contribute towards the 'Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade' (Mills and Davies 2013, Mayo 2014).

### 1.3 Personal interest

My personal interest in this research comes from experience as a management consultant and as an academic. As a management consultant I provided accounting systems advice to an e-learning company that was funded by venture capitalists, what surprised me was the level of management fees that were withdrawn each month by

these same investors at a time when the organisation needed cash to pay for resources needed to build the business. The management team were experienced, and the e-learning team were talented, it occurred to me that the employees of the business would be better served owning and running the business themselves. The business was closed a few years later.

As an academic I have made the most of online learning materials for myself and my students, for both formal and informal learning purposes, and recognise that education video content is a valuable commodity. I recognise the time, skill and effort that has gone in to making videos and have been naturally drawn to the models of reward on offer to content producers. This interest in the two key areas of employee ownership and online learning combined with a long term interest in business systems led me to undertake this research.

## 1.4 Aims and objectives

The purpose of this research is to investigate motivation and reward for individual producers of education videos for digital platforms, to explore the value of co-operation amongst producers, and the potential role of co-operative principles.

This research is looking to answer the following 'grand question': **“What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of digital education platform content?”**

The International Co-operative Alliance (2020, p2) recognise the importance of accessing a wider online community “new opportunities for collaboration; business connections and information sharing through a new generation of information technology and common IT platforms” and aligning these wider online communities with global economic, social and environmental issues.

Public sector digital education platforms, most notably those owned and controlled by the university sector are beyond the scope of this research. Third sector and private sector platforms are included in this research as they provide contrasting business models and interactions with producers of education content. At the time of the study there were no co-operative education platforms utilising video content, which led the focus of this study to be on the perceptions of producers supplying

content to platforms operating in the dominant capitalist paradigm. From a teaching and learning perspective, the focus of this study is informal learning rather than formal learning, education content in the form of instructional videos. Instructional videos provide a specific type of multimedia resource commonly used by platforms, and a consistent output to be used to contrast reward mechanisms across platforms. Individual producers of education videos were identified from three different type of producer group (internal, external and co-producer) to provide a rich source of contrasting data.

From an understanding of producers perception of reward, the study aims to place a veil of co-operativism over the findings of what producers value in a platform relationship, to establish if there is a place for platform co-operatives in informal online learning. Co-operative principles recognised by the International Co-operative Alliance have been utilised to explore the potential of co-operation amongst producers, because it could be argued that it is the principles of co-operation itself rather than the ownership structure, that sets co-operatives apart (Macpherson, 1995; Novkovic, 2008).

This research aims to develop a theory of co-operative reward for producers of education platform content. The following objectives will contribute to the achievement of this aim:

1. Examine the systems in which producers provide education content to platforms, through relationships between producer reward, motivation and power.
2. Identify systemic intervention points within existing platform systems, based on the motivation of producers.
3. Explore the role of reward within co-operative organised platforms driven by co-operative principles.

In order to address this research aim and objectives the following questions will be addressed:

- Q1) How are individual producers rewarded for education platform content?



Q2) Why do individual producers share education platform content?

Q3) What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?

More broadly this research intends to promote critical awareness and provide guidance to individual producers of the paradigm and systems in which they provide video content to education platforms, inform critical debates of the scope for alternatives to the dominant capitalist driven model, and promote critical awareness of the relationship between reward, motivation and power and the potential of co-operation amongst producers.

## 1.5 Contribution to knowledge

The key contribution to knowledge that this thesis brings is a study of reward and motivation for individual producers of education content and the unique value they place on relationships with platforms. It is from an understanding of alternative platform relationships (internal, external and co-producer) that this research provides insights into what workers value in a platform relationship and the implications of this for reward systems.

This study's contribution complements the existing literature and understanding of co-operative membership and co-operative principles and adds an extra dimension to the implications of both of these key areas for platform co-operativism and in particular for digital education platforms. Details of the contribution to knowledge have been extensively covered in chapter nine. This summary of contribution to knowledge focuses on three key areas: membership, co-operative principles, and platform co-operativism.

### 1.5.1 Membership

Maintaining co-operative principles and business sustainability are challenging for a global co-operative operating in a capitalist paradigm, even for the celebrated industrial business Mondragon (Bretos et al., 2019). Digital education platforms are predominantly owned by private companies that control the online learning landscape (Van Dijck et al., 2018; Robertson, 2019). This study contributes to an understanding of

the potential of co-operative organisation for education platforms, businesses that transcend geographical boundaries with global producers and consumers.

This study indicates that membership has the potential to differentiate co-operative platforms and attract a diverse supply of producers that are engulfed in the hegemony of existing education platform systems. In order to remain autonomous and independent, co-operatives could utilise member diversity in either a multi-stakeholder or worker cooperative, to attract both quality and quantity of supply and in doing so avoid over reliance on a few powerful suppliers (ICA, 2015, p.45). Open membership could broaden the focus of platform owners by engaging all relevant internal and external stakeholders, members to non-members, and platforms to society (Birchall, 2012). Voluntary and open membership could allow producers the option to contribute to platform development and levels of engagement that fit with their personal ambitions and capital contribution (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2019).

If co-operative human resource management is to engage producers across the globe, reward management practice and co-operative principles are more likely to be sustained by motivated core teams of networked 'platform clans' (Ouchi, 1980; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983). Carefully selected employees from local applicants that align with an organisations objectives and co-operative principles, sharing characteristics needed for production and service delivery (Benevene et al., 2019; Tortia et al., 2022), including self-leadership and self-control (Wren, 2020).

International employee co-operators could benefit from being able to see reward from both a local and international perspective. Recruited from local producers their pay should allow individuals to thrive in their local community (Wren, 2020), have an international parity with colleagues abroad, be based on technical competency, and aligned with responsibility and qualifications (Dickinson, 2005). The co-operative difference and added value comes from a surplus share of profit (Wren 2020) and having the option to take up an alternative membership to fit with changing individual needs. Pay stability and equality rather than performance, could reinforce egalitarianism (Basterretxea et al., 2019) and protect a platform's most valuable asset (Tortia et al., 2022).

Having established an international base of core co-operators to sustain the co-operative difference, additional producer members and non-members could be attracted to a platform based on bespoke rewards mechanisms and ownership benefits that fit with individual producer motivation and preference. Rather than have a hybrid organisation with a co-operative core and capitalist periphery (Bretos et al., 2019), co-operative platforms could be designed and sustained with regional co-operative clans that underpin ethical and sustainable growth.

### **1.5.2 Co-operative principles**

A core co-operative workforce enjoying security of employment and co-operative based rewards, offers stability and freedom for members to focus on issues beyond their immediate roles within a platform but also broader societal issues (Wren, 2020), an incentive to focus on education and training (Burdin, 2014) and co-operative principles (Piasecki, 2021). A platform with regional teams of co-operators within an education focused environment is more likely to provide the conditions needed to align member and non-member interest in cultivating co-operative principles (Cisi and Centrone, 2021).

This study illustrates the potential of all seven co-operative principles (Macpherson, 1995) to address systemic issues in existing platform systems in the third and private sector and in the design of co-operative platforms. However co-operative principles are not equally important in addressing systemic issues based on reward, motivation and power in digital education platforms serving global and local needs. Each co-operative principle could have a role to play in targeting specific systemic issues. If co-operative principles are key to defining and maintaining a co-operative difference (Novkovic, 2008) rather than co-operative organisation, then this study highlights the relative importance of education and community principles (Oczkowski, 2013) for co-operative education platforms, and their potential role as the building blocks to positively contribute to sustainable development.

### **1.5.3 Platform Co-operativism**

This research adds to a growing interest in systems thinking in order to broaden the horizons of members and potential members of co-operatives, to achieve

transformation (Novkovic et al., 2022). A methodological contribution comes from utilising co-operative principles and Meadows (1999) taxonomy of systemic intervention points to examine digital education platforms. This has provided a basis to identify systemic reward issues and potential intervention points in education platform systems, and the scope for co-operatives beyond the public sector (Winn, 2012, 2015; Noble and Ross 2021). It has broadened the focus and understanding of the digital education market (Robertson, 2019), control over education resources (Williamson et al., 2020) and the hegemony of platform systems. Because of the nature and scale of this study it is acknowledged that the co-operative framework provided in chapter eight would require further scrutiny from both a critical systems and co-operative principles perspective.

This research provides a contribution to knowledge by challenging the direction of travel in the literature that open co-operativism (“the commons”) is most likely to progress the co-operative movement, enabling digital education platforms to work beyond a capitalist paradigm (Vieta, 2010; Winn 2012, 2015; Bauwens & Kostakis 2014). Based on this study the levels of producer awareness of commons-based peer production (CBPP) and desire to protect producer generated content using existing copyright laws, there would need to be a period of education and marketing to inform and persuade producers to transition to a CBPP model, as well as government and political intervention (Papadimitropoulos, 2021). This research suggests that in order to bridge the gap between platform capitalism and platform co-operativism, producers could be provided with alternatives within the existing capitalist system as well as radical alternatives within a post-capitalist paradigm.

The research has the potential to benefit the growing number of independent producers worldwide that interact with online platforms, in identifying and modelling alternative reward models and mechanisms that recognise co-operative practice across digital networks.

## 1.6 Structure of thesis

The following section explains on a chapter by chapter basis, how the thesis is structured.

### **1.5.1 Chapter one - Introduction**

Chapter one has introduced the thesis. It outlined the research topic and provided a background to the subject area. It explained why it is a relevant field to study, both academically and personally, and highlighted the research gap to be filled. Concluding with the contribution to knowledge.

### **1.5.2 Chapter two - Literature review**

Chapter two provides a more detailed explanation of open education and education platform producers. The chapter then continues with a review of the limited literature that is currently available regarding reward management, motivation and co-operation in this field. From this a theoretical framework is built that forms the basis for the thesis, defining relevant concepts that are required. The knowledge gap is identified and from this, the overall research questions are identified and refined.

### **1.5.3 Chapter three - Research methodology**

Chapter three presents the research strategy and the justification for the methodology adopted to obtain the data, which was a case study, inductive approach. Data collection was split into two distinct phases; survey followed by interviews. It includes limitations, risks, timescales and ethics of the research and how the results are to be presented.

### **1.5.4 Chapter four - Analysis**

Chapter four explains in detail the process of analysing the data (a general inductive approach) that was collected during the research fieldwork proposed by the methodology. It also includes an overview of participants and related platforms.

### **1.5.5 Chapter five – Reward for producers findings**

Chapter five provides details of findings from the individual producers researched, specifically what was observed regarding how producers are rewarded, and understanding of potential co-operative intervention.

### **1.5.6 Chapter six - Motivation for producers findings**

Chapter six provides details of findings from individual producers researched, specifically what was observed regarding the motivation of producers to supply content to platforms and understanding of potential co-operative intervention.

### **1.5.7 Chapter seven – Power for producers findings**

Chapter seven provides details of findings from individual producers researched, specifically what was observed regarding power, how platforms utilise control systems to manage producer power and understanding of potential co-operative intervention.

### **1.5.8 Chapter eight – Contribution to knowledge**

Chapter eight utilises the findings from the previous three chapters on producer reward, motivation and power to identify the potential role of reward in the design of platform systems within a co-operativist paradigm. The contribution to knowledge is framed around co-operative principles and a co-operative platform system.

### **1.5.9 Chapter nine - Conclusion**

Chapter nine provides a summary of the research aims, key findings, contribution to knowledge, and potential impact of this study. A reflection on the limitations of the research, discussing what could have been improved as well as suggesting opportunities for further research in this area.

## **1.7 Summary**

This chapter has introduced the topic of the research, provided a rationale for its importance and why it is relevant to future education platforms, especially the timeliness of the thesis. This included an academic and personal justification for carrying out the research and given an overview of how the thesis is presented. The following chapter provides a more detailed explanation of digital education platforms and reviews the current literature that is available regarding reward management, motivation, co-operative principles and co-operative organisation.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

The literature review and contribution to knowledge is focused on reward, motivation and co-operation within a digital education platform context. Building on the work of Cornforth et al. (1988) motivation and alternative pathways to co-operation are examined in the context of individual knowledge workers, the advantage of member owned businesses (Birchall, 2004), multistakeholder governance models (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2019) and the impact of alternative ownership types on reward (Wren, 2016). In order to make a contribution to knowledge this research also explores the boundaries of platform co-operativism (Scholz, 2016), open co-operativism (Bauwens and Kostakis 2014, Pazaitis et al., 2017), digital education platforms (Robertson, 2019) and co-operative principles (Watkins 1986; MacPherson 1995; Birchall 1997).

The context for this research will now be introduced by examining digital education platforms.

### 2.2 Digital education platforms

In the following section digital education platforms are examined from a technological, educational and socio-economic context.

#### 2.2.1 Digital platforms

Van Dijck and Poell (2018, p.4) put forward the following definition of digital platforms:

An online 'platform' is a programmable digital architecture designed to organise interactions between users – not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies. It is geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, monetization of users data.

From this definition we can say that platforms have two key characteristics, they are based on a digital architecture, and they act as intermediaries facilitating exchange between users. Online platforms share key characteristics including the use of information and communication technologies to facilitate interactions between users, collection and use of data about these interactions, and network effects which make the use of the platforms valuable to other users (European Commission, 2016).

Network effects refers to the dynamic spiral growth in which the platform becomes more valuable for its users the more numerous and active they are (Srnicsek 2017). Platforms construct and lubricate network effects by collecting and manipulating ever larger amounts of data, which they manage to do through the participatory economic culture, a collaborative use of the Internet and the production and modification of online content by users (Langley and Leyshon 2017). Platforms coordinate multisided markets (Andersson Schwarz, 2017), meaning that platforms have significant pricing power over both suppliers and consumers. Langley and Leyshon (2017) point out that platforms organise market encounters in the market-making processes by bringing together actors that would otherwise not meet and thus lubricate exchanges that would otherwise not happen.

Platforms are designed to draw in users by providing a carefully designed and structured environment through the platform's user and software interfaces (Bratton, 2015). User interfaces called Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) and software interfaces called Application Programme Interfaces (APIs) are two key interfaces used by platforms (Kelkar, 2018). Whereas APIs are software interfaces: they allow platforms and software modules to communicate with one another, APIs integrate applications that are exterior to the platform into the platform itself and a key component in enabling singular websites to evolve into platforms as we know them today (Helmond, 2015). Like much infrastructure, platforms are often promoted as neutral and objective, but they in fact 'actively induce, produce and programme circulations' (Langley and Leyshon 2017, 19).

### **2.2.2 Digital education platforms**

Education platforms can be considered as intermediaries, utilising a platform architecture they bring together someone (content producers) or something (organisation) which has something to offer (education content) on the one hand, and platform users on the other hand (Srnicsek, 2017). As well as designing a learning environment, platforms set the rules of economic and social exchange between and establish codes of conduct that must be followed by stakeholders. As digital intermediaries, education platforms define and structure what counts as worthwhile, what is and is not permissible and valuable forms of exchange: they take part in the enactment of specific forms of governance (Robertson, 2019). Interventions such as



recommender systems, user ratings systems and selection by internal producers of what good education, learning and pedagogies looks like, means education platforms are not neutral facilitators of interactions and communications (Decuyper, 2019; Kelkar, 2018).

In addition to providing a digital architecture and a means to bring together different stakeholders, education platforms record, collect and analyse data on user activity. Activities on digital platforms are thus rendered as observable and measurable behaviour, which are on their side turned into transactional data, or what Zuboff (2019) calls behavioural surplus. These new mechanisms have generally been coined as platform capitalism: a market form which turns to data – and not only content provision – as a way to generate revenue and growth (Srnicsek, 2017).

### **2.2.3 Digital education market**

Platforms in this study engage in content publishing, encompassing content creation, management, organisation, discoverability, dissemination, and hosting (Falconer et al., 2013). Platforms owned by public sector organisations including universities are excluded from this research in order to contribute to existing knowledge in this field amongst private and third sector providers. Consequently this research does not examine university owned Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) or closed platform systems commonly used by universities such as Moodle or Blackboard (Decuyper, 2019). This research does not examine platforms specifically designed for business to business markets where the focus is online learning specifically designed for employees on learning management systems, and typically based on structured approach to learning recognised by certification for completion of a course (Moore and Kearsley, 2011). The focus of this study is business (platform) to consumer (user) education services beyond the boundaries of any contractual arrangement with an employer.

YouTube was the first video hosting platform (2005) to gain mainstream traction, from the outset there were no restrictions on who could upload content. YouTube benefited from being first to market, offering hosting and bandwidth infrastructure and an embeddable player for producers (Parker et al., 2016). Early adopters of digital education platforms using video content can be found in the private

and third sectors, including Lynda.com, Alison.com and KhanAcademy.org. Having previously loaded videos on to YouTube, Salaman Khan established the Khan Academy as a not-for-profit educational organisation in 2008 providing free video content to users. In September 2010, Khan Academy received grants of \$2 million from Google and \$1.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (khanacademy.org, n.d.). Lynda first uploaded education materials on to its platform in 1995, but it was not until 2002 that the first courses were integrated with video content and charged to users (Singel, 2011). Alison was launched in 2007 as a for-profit social enterprise offering free education based video content to users around the globe, the platform generates revenues from platform advertising and subscriptions (Alison.com, n.d.).

Education platforms encompass a broad range of business models; from platforms that offer free content funded by philanthropic investment, platforms that offer free content to users generating indirect revenues (advertising), and those that charge users for access to content generating direct revenues (monthly subscriptions/per course). The size of the commercial global digital education market is based on platform revenues from online courses to both individuals and organisations, segmented into self-paced courses and instructor led courses. This market excludes social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram that deliver content through mobile technology, and video based platforms not specifically targeted at an education market such as YouTube and Vimeo. In 2020 the digital education market was valued at \$7.6 Billion, by 2023 and after rapid growth during the pandemic it was worth \$19.4 Billion. The total global value of the digital education market by 2028 is expected to reach \$57.19 - \$66.7 Billion (Bloomberg, 2023).

#### **2.2.4 Digital education content**

Education platforms in this research provide either education video content used as a stand alone resource for users or provide video content combined with additional resources within a course structure. Courses may be supported by tutor support that is either asynchronous or synchronous. All of the platforms in this research provide video content commonly known as instructional videos. Instructional video refers to a video lesson that is accessible online, intended to help people learn targeted material, to learn a skill such as how to paint, how to speak a language, how to use a software

package. Instructional videos are a form of multimedia instruction that include visual, verbal and text material (Fiorella and Mayer, 2018).

Education platforms provide both formal and informal digital educational content to end users, users that are categorised by platforms as either individual or organisational users. The common characteristics of all platforms in this research is the provision of video content supplied by individual producers for informal learning rather than formal learning. Scribner and Cole (1973) made a distinction between informal (everyday) and formal (scientific) education, informal education includes a focus on the person, ties learning to specific 'real-life' activities, and has no goal of generalising the information learned. Boekaerts and Minnaert (1999) provide attributes of informal learning which include self-managed and self-paced learning, highly contextualised resources, and no compulsory assessment.

This research examines platforms that facilitate the exchange of educational content and activities without actively engaging in the production of education videos, and also platforms that are active producers of content including videos. Digital education platforms can be segmented into those that are actively engaged in education content production, and those that capitalise on processes of data exchange without being involved in the content production (Kornberger et al., 2017). This means that many digital education platforms not only act as some sort of 'digital broker' themselves, but that they equally take up an active role of provider of self-produced content (Williamson, 2019).

Not included in the commercial value of global digital education is what is termed open education resources (OER). Peter and Deimann (2013) cite public lectures, coffee houses, open universities, and the printing press as examples of open education, which existed before the digital age. Openness in education has historically been framed as a vision of a more inclusive, democratic, collaborative and flexible form of education. Open education is most frequently associated with open education resources, the designation of which first emerged at a UNESCO forum in 2002. OER include openly licensed and shared educational materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their use or re-purposing by others (Atkins, Seely Brown, & Hammond, 2007). All of the platforms in this research provide open access to video content for users, two out of

seven platforms provide free content to users, but none of the platforms allow users to freely adapt and repurpose video content available on the platform and therefore could not be categorised as OER or creative commons based platforms.

Winn (2012) provides a convincing critical review of OER in the public sector, providing a number of observations including questions surrounding sustainability that could equally apply to the private sector. Winn (2015) has put forward a number of arguments supporting the emancipation of labour within universities, and the potential to create 'co-operative universities' as an alternative structure for the higher education sector (Winn 2012; Neary and Winn 2017). More broadly 'open co-operatives' and commons based peer production (CBPP) have been advocated as a new, progressive organisational form to address the 'paradox' of immaterial abundance existing alongside material scarcity (Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). Theories of the commons normally refer to the challenges of managing common pool natural resources, such as rivers, fisheries, forests and shared irrigation systems (Ostrom, 2000). But this model has also been applied to worker co-operatives in capitalist societies, proposed by some authors as "labour commons" that generate commonwealth through their practices (Vieta, 2010).

This study will run in parallel with co-operative universities, open co-operatives and the commons, by exploring the potential of platform co-operativism.

## 2.3 Reward Management

Reward management is concerned with the formulation and implementation of strategies and policies that aim to reward people fairly, equitably and consistently in accordance with their value to the organisation (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007).

'Organisation' for an online business is not just tangible assets such as stock and physical technology, but the intangible elements including the platform and processes that underpin the business model. In terms of reward management should we be discussing the value to the platform, or the value to the organisation, or both?

Armstrong (2012, p.6) defines reward management as dealing with the "strategies, policies and processes required to ensure that the value of people and the contribution they make to achieving organizational, departmental and team goals is recognized and rewarded." The three main aims of reward management from a

management perspective are to attract the right staff to the organisation; motivate them to work and retain them in the organisation. The outcomes of the reward system (Armstrong 2012, p.10) are then:

- *Performance*
- To define/Influence behaviour
- *Attraction and retention*
- *Motivation and engagement*
- To add value

Of these outcomes of a reward system, this research predominantly focuses on attracting and retaining producers to a digital education platforms, motivation, engagement and performance. The emphasis being on worker perspectives rather than the manager or owner, and the implications of diversity in the relationships between individual content producers and education platforms.

Knowledge Intensive Firms (KIF) are described as companies where most work is of an intellectual nature and where well-educated, qualified employees make up most of the workforce. KIF are also characterised by their capacity to solve complex problems by developing creative and innovative solutions (Robertson and Swan, 2003).

A study by Tampoe (1993) identified four key motivators for knowledge workers:

- (1) *Personal growth* – the opportunity for individuals to realize their potential.
- (2) *Occupational autonomy* – a work environment in which knowledge workers can achieve the task assigned to them.
- (3) *Task achievement* – the achievement of producing work to a standard and quality of which the individual can be proud.
- (4) *Money rewards* – earning an income which is just reward for the contribution made and enables employees to share in the wealth created by them, through incentive schemes geared to their company's success but related to their personal performance.

Kessler (2005) notes the link between reward and the job (what is involved), the person (skills, knowledge, experience) and the performance (how well it is done). Reward can be one factor for motivating technology workers to produce higher quality results, but task design in terms of its instructions and user interface, can also affect the workers' perception of the task, thus affecting the quality of results (Finnerty et al., 2013). For an education platform with internal, external and co-producers, perceptions

of relative rewards can come into play, and influence the bases of pay differentials (Dickinson, 2005).

Non-financial rewards are also important, and these can take the form of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Armstrong 2012). Shields (2007) breaks extrinsic rewards into those that are financial, developmental and social. For intrinsic rewards he suggests a division based on job challenge, responsibility, autonomy and task variety. Job security is an important motivator for employees to become and remain co-operative members (Arando et al., 2015), in contrast the gig economy promotes work flexibility as a key driver for self-employed workers (Codagnone et al., 2016). Co-operatives are prepared to reduce wages during difficult trading periods to secure employment and maintain company sustainability (Navarra & Tortia, 2014). Compared to conventional firms co-operative turnover remain relatively low (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018), and exhibit greater employment stability and wage variability (Burdín, 2014; Bossler and Schild, 2016). However employee ownership and employment security can also create negative consequences including 'free-riders', higher absenteeism and mixed attitudes to participation and decision making (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018).

Co-operatives typically prioritise the recruitment of local applicants (Divini & Schiniotakis, 2015; Bossler and Schild, 2016), which may or may not apply to digital education platforms that could bring together digital workers from any part of the globe. Based on the principle of open membership, individuals self-select to join co-operatives (Navarra and Tortia, 2014), but in practice co-operatives often seek a recruit and select individuals who share basic values and a similar worldview (Wren 2016; Basterretxea et al., 2019).

Employees members receive an additional profit-sharing component in their compensation, the share dividend is distributed equally among all members, which reinforces egalitarianism (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018) but can make it challenging to establish a direct link between individual effort and financial reward (Wren 2016, Basterretxea and Storey, 2018; Bretos et al., 2019). Compared to conventional firms, internal wage differences in worker co-operatives are relatively low, as the ratio between the bottom and top wage rates has widened from 1:3 to 1:8 (Arando et al., 2015; Basterretxea and Storey, 2018; Bretos et al., 2019). Individual performance

based pay that increases wage differentials is perceived by member employees as undermining solidarity and co-operative principles (Basterretxea et al., 2019), which could have consequences for highly skilled platform producers being paid significantly less than the market rate (Arando et al., 2015; Basterretxea and Storey, 2018; Bretos et al., 2019). Pay equity and information sharing mechanisms contribute to fostering commitment and engagement among employees (Arando et al., 2015; Bretos et al., 2019).

This research will focus on individual producers that make a financial gain from video content production, rewarded by payments that could be linked to video content production (output), video usage metrics, or based on labour services (wage or salary). Intrinsic reward will also be examined for these producers.

## 2.4 Motivation

This research is focused on the motivation of the individual and the motivation of the collective, motivation related to reward and power.

A motive is a reason for doing something (Peters, 2015). Motivation is predominantly driven by self-influence (Bandura, 1991, p.248):

In social cognitive theory human behavior is extensively motivated and regulated by the ongoing exercise of self-influence. The major self-regulative mechanism operates through three principal subfunctions. These include self-monitoring of one's behavior..., judgment of one's behavior in relation to personal standards and environmental circumstances.

People are motivated when they expect that a course of action is likely to lead to the attainment of a goal and a valued reward, one which satisfies their needs and wants (Armstrong, 2015). According to Arnold et al. (1991) there are three components of motivation, what a person is trying to do (direction), how hard a person is trying (effort), and how long a person keeps on trying (persistence).

Motivation can be subdivided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that intrinsic motivation is based on the needs to be competent and self-determining. A job must provide sufficient variety, complexity, challenge and skill to engage the abilities of a worker (Katz, 1964). Extrinsic motivation occurs when things are done to or for people to motivate them. These include

rewards, such as incentives, increased pay, praise, promotion, punishments and criticisms (Armstrong, 2015).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) being cooperative involves 'mutual assistance in working towards a common goal', whereas a co-operative relates to a sphere of business or type of organisation, rather than just a basic human function or action. In evolutionary biology human behaviour could be explained in terms of 'selfish' genes (Dawkins 1976). This argument was developed further by insights from game theory that suggest that under certain conditions self-seeking individuals can learn to cooperate (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981). Some research streams in social psychology consider people as either innately competitive or cooperative (Argyle 1991). This contrasts with 'reciprocity' which is grounded in the logic of mutual aid, whereby equitable contributions to, and drawings from, mutual funds generate both individual and collective benefits (Ostrom, 2000).

Scholars define social dilemmas as situations where individuals have incentives to not contribute to the collective good, creating a tension between individual and collective rationality (Olsen 1965; Kollock 1998). Free riders - individuals pursuing their own interests to the detriment of collective interests - are inherent to social dilemmas (Ostrom, 2000), as people are less willing to cooperate toward a public good once they recognize free riders (Yamagishi and Cook, 1993). Experiments demonstrate that most people are "conditional cooperators" willing to participate in action for public good if they believe their efforts will not be exploited by free riders (Ostrom, 2000).

General levels of trust play a significant role in social dilemmas, positively predicting cooperation toward a public good. Action directed by self-interest can be organised jointly (Parnell, 2011). Co-operation recognises that self-centred behaviour can be moderated when "a more enlightened form of self-interest [that] takes account of the wider mutual interest" (Parnell 2011, p.8). Aldrich and Stern (1983) suggest that co-operatives are more likely to appeal to people who have purposive and solidarity incentives. Individuals working in OER initiatives are strongly altruistic in their motivations, and these ideals engender strong commitment and team working (Falconer et al., 2013). Birchall (2004, p.470) from a review of academic writings on collective motivation identified three key influences on participation:



The collectivistic approach is drawn from theories of social co-operation (Sorokin 1954; Mansbridge 1990; Van Vugt et al.; 2000; Argyle 1991; Axelrod 1984, 1997). It interprets human behaviour very differently, assuming that participation can be motivated by shared goals, shared values, and a sense of community.

Benevene et al. (2019) argue a sense of belonging is a consequence of effective co-operative HRM policies and practices, fostering commitment and engagement. Sense of belonging can come from relationships between colleagues at all levels, impacting individual morale, team spirit and job satisfaction (Arando et al., 2015). Co-operatives consider not only their direct employees but also the local communities in which they operate (Jackson et al., 2014). In co-operatives, solidarity and local commitment serve as defining characteristics, where members know each other, reside in the surrounding area, and collectively make decisions (Bretos et al., 2019). The ability of co-operatives to fulfil social needs and engage with various internal and external stakeholders, contributes to their long-term survival (Bontis et al., 2018). The different roles that members have in both the co-operative and the local community provide a natural opportunity for adopting an outside-in perspective Dyllick and Muff (2016), to promote sustainability in HRM with positive ecological and societal impact.

Members and employees tend to be more satisfied when they perceive trust within the network and the formation of it, the selection and recruitment of platform producers could have significant implications for producer decision making and self-control (Figueiredo and Franco (2018)). In contrast to collective motivation and the attraction of co-operatives, Cornforth et al. (1988) identified a number of barriers to co-operatives being formed which included the 'entrepreneurial problem' which derives from a culture that is both individualistic and materialistic, and only in exceptional circumstances will co-operatives appeal to potential entrepreneurs because they will have to share both the control of the enterprise and any rewards from it.

This research examines the motivation of individual producers of education platform content, exploring if there is clear blue water dividing the two paradigms of collectivism and individualism and critically evaluates if the divide is starting to narrow or merge, or in certain contexts has evolved into something new.

## 2.5 Co-operative Principles

As well providing a focus on reward and motivation, this research examines the potential of co-operative principles and practice for producers of education content for online platforms. Individual education platform producers that co-operate may not be involved in any formal co-operative organisation but may experience reward practice and motivation that is congruent with a co-operative organisation and values.

Co-operatives are organisations that are constituted on a set of values and principles that support the creation of member-owned, democratically run organisations (International Co-operative Alliance, 1995). Co-operatives follow a set of internationally agreed principles; the most recent version reported by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) has 7 principles (ICA, 2020). These co-operative principles have provided a lens to examine the breadth and depth of co-operation and co-operative practice in rewarding individual education content producers. Table 2-1 below summarises the values and principles adopted by the ICA at the 1995 Centennial Congress (Macpherson 1995 a; 1995b, as cited in Birchall, 1997).

**Table 2-1** Co-operative values and principles

Basic Values	Ethical values	Principles
self-help	honesty	voluntary and open membership
self-responsibility	openness	democratic member control
democracy	social responsibility	member economic participation
equality	caring for others	autonomy and independence
equity		education, training and information
solidarity		co-operation among co-operatives
		concern for community

These principles have evolved from original principles created by early co-operative organisations in the UK (Rochdale Pioneers), Europe and Canada, with the help of co-operative thinkers including Mercer, Goedhart, Watkins and MacPherson, and iterations generated by the International Co-operative Alliance (Birchall, 1997). Watkins (1986, p.13) overview of co-operative principles:

Co-operative principles are the general ideas which inspire and govern the application of the Co-operative technique and social organisation. These ideas result from inductive reasoning upon experience of fundamental and universal social realities. They lay down lines for the Co-operative solution of social problems to which those realities give rise. The principles are common to all forms of Co-operation in all times and in all places.

If established co-operative principles are to be used as a basis to examine existing platform systems, it should be recognised that co-operative values and principles are interconnected and should all be a focus of a co-operative organisation (Macpherson, 1995, p.13):

They are subtly linked; when one is ignored, all are diminished. Co-operatives should not be judged exclusively on the basis of any one principle; rather, they should be evaluated on how well they adhere to the principles as an entirety.

Birchall (2005) highlighted differences in the application and prioritisation of co-operative principles across co-operative sectors. The first three principles based on open membership, democratic control and the source and management of capital, can be seen as fundamental to the ICA principles, and to primarily serve members (Hind, 1994). Birchall (2011) argues that the first four principles are fundamental, while education, co-operation amongst co-operatives and community are secondary and aspirational. In contrast an empirical study of members from a diverse range of co-operative forms in Australia, considered the principles associated with education and concern for the community to be of primary concern (Oczkowski et al., 2013).

Despite issues utilising a standard set of co-operative principles and interpreting their relative importance, internationally agreed co-operative principles provide explicit guidelines by which co-operatives can put their values into practice. Because co-operative principles are well defined, they provide a basis with which to examine platform systems and to make a contribution to knowledge.

## 2.6 Co-operatives

To critically evaluate co-operatives as alternative organisations for worker-centric platforms, from a UK perspective the following section examines the history of co-operatives, typologies of co-operatives and co-operative organisational forms. The final section examines co-operative platforms from a global perspective.

## 2.6.2 Co-operatives industrial past

Co-operative history provides an important source of information and lessons from the past to critically evaluate contemporary theory and practice based initiatives for the co-operative sector. History provides examples of business success and innovation, periods of high growth and of stagnation, cycles of political acceptance and rejection, and evidence that co-operativism is a contested area when claims are made that the movement can offer a radical alternative to capitalism. The following section is focused on producer and consumer co-operative history in the United Kingdom, starting in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when co-operatives were founded in response to the negative social and economic effects of poverty and industrialisation.

Early attempts to form co-operatives were driven by a basic need to access to food at reasonable prices. One of the first consumer co-operative flour mills was set up in Hull in 1795 (Thornley, 1981: 12). Attempts to form co-operatives of workers were motivated by self-employed craftsmen trying to protect their jobs and their crafts against competition from industrial processes, influenced by the writings of Robert Owen. Owen's philosophy was based on his experience and understanding of the efficiency of his own factories and the needs of workers, but also based on the levels of unemployment and poverty of the early nineteenth century (Pollard, 1960). Owen saw in co-operation the key to both wealth creation and a just society. Unlike later Marxism, Owen did not reject the market as a source of social evil (Restakis, 2010). Owen's proposed solution was based on principles of co-operation not competition, on community ownership and organisation of agriculture and industry. Labour would not be exploited and would get the full value of its products by means of the direct exchange of goods (Pollard, 1960). However Owen did not provide the means for establishing co-operative communities. This would partly come from the writing of William King in 1827 and followed up by his paper *The Co-operator* started in 1828 based on co-operative associations establishing their own retail stores (Webb, 1928).

The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society is probably the most famous example of consumer co-operativism, founded in 1844 by local weavers in Rochdale, England. The Rochdale Pioneers were not the first UK co-operative earlier examples include the Fenwick Weavers' Association 1769 in Scotland. However the Rochdale Pioneers

provided the foundations for the co-operative movement through the rules created, commercial success and longevity of the organisation (Fairbairn, 1994). Following this success, in 1854 they established the Rochdale Co-operative Manufacturing Society as a joint stock company with shareholding open to workers and outside members. However in order to raise funds for expansion new external shareholders were introduced and this decision ultimately led to worker control diminishing over time, until it became a capitalist firm owned and controlled by external shareholders (Bonner, 1961).

During the 1850s The Christian Socialists funded and initiated a number of self-governing workshops for artisans. These workshops were designed top down, funded by promoters (philanthropists), and managers were chosen by promoters rather than workers themselves (Cornforth, 1983). These workshops were not successful, suffering from internal disputes, a lack of worker business experience, and supplier refusal to offer normal trade credit. More successfully The Christian Socialists sponsored the Industrial and Provident Societies Act passed in 1852 providing a legal framework within which co-operatives could operate and established the Co-operative Production Federation (CPF) in 1882, to promote and assist producer co-operatives (Cornforth, 1983). Up until 1914 this phase was relatively successful, a clear model was developed based on partnerships between consumers and producers known as co-operative co-partnerships, workers had rights to be shareholders, share in profits and take part in management (Jones, 1976).

Producer co-operatives were attacked by Beatrice and Sydney Webb (1914-1921) who argued they only benefited those who worked in them, whereas consumer co-operatives provided universal benefit (Bonner, 1961). Producer co-operatives would compete against one another and degenerate to the point that they would fail or convert into capitalist firms. They pointed to a lack of capital, poor markets, inadequate skills, poor management and dominated by external shareholders (Thornley, 1981). Consumer co-operatives continued to fund the establishment of producer co-operatives, but without a clear model and constitution for producers co-operatives, producer co-operatives were dominated by outside interests such as consumer societies, trade unions and other external shareholders, and numbers declined (Pollard, 1960). Despite the negative claims of the Webbs, Jones (1976) provided

evidence that producer co-operatives can survive for long periods of time, worker participation does not decline over time, capitalist companies are not more efficient than producer co-operatives, and of particular relevance to this research—worker resistance to technical innovation varied between industrial sectors.

In 1951 Ernest Bader transferred ownership of his chemical business into employee ownership to form the Scott Bader Commonwealth. In 1956 Bader formed 'Democratic Integration in Industry' to promote common ownership enterprises, which was renamed the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) in 1971 (Quarter, 2000). ICOM was more successful in promoting worker co-operatives and received the backing of a private members bill (Industrial Common Ownership Act) and a Labour Government in 1976 (Cornforth, 1983). The bill provided legal recognition to common ownership enterprises, funds to promote the sector, and a set of model rules developed by the ICOM Chairman Roger Saltwell, making it easier to register a new business or convert an existing business to a common ownership co-operative (Coyne and Wilson, 1981). In the 1970s practical structural support and promotion of worker co-operatives arrived with the formation of local co-operative support organisations (CSOs) and the Co-operatives Development Agency (CDA). The CDA distanced itself from 'rescues' and instead focused on converting existing businesses into co-operatives, but after little success focused on promoting co-operatives as another form of small business (Cornforth, 1984).

In 2001 the Industrial Common Ownership Movement merged with the Co-operative Union to become Co-operatives UK, an organisation representing producer and consumer based co-operatives in the UK (Coops4dev.coop, n.d.). In 2023 a new federal body independent of Co-operatives UK is planned to launch, the initial name is 'workers.coop', providing a body that will specifically represent the interests of workers and worker co-operatives in the UK (Workers.coop, n.d.). This decoupling of the umbrella co-operative federation, will provide worker members with independent and focused representation, but also it could be argued, highlight once again the natural tensions and challenges with producer and consumer co-operation. Evidence from a industrial past will be utilised to critically evaluate the implications of co-operative membership for worker-centric digital education platforms.

### **2.6.3 Co-operative typologies**

Typologies of worker co-operatives have an important impact on their performance, Paton (1978) argued that the characteristics of new co-operatives are heavily influenced by the way in which they are formed and the objectives of their membership. Cornforth (1983) identified five types of worker co-operatives; Endowed, Worker Buy-out, Defensive, Job Creation and Alternative Co-operatives. Endowed co-operatives are initiated by existing owners to transfer ownership of a business to the workers (such as the Scott Bader Commonwealth), whereas worker buy-outs are initiated by workers themselves to buy a business from existing owners. In the 1970s the 'Ben' co-operatives provided high profile examples of defensive co-operatives, these cases were formed out of failed private businesses where workers and unions resisted closure. Coates (1976) argued the 'Ben' co-operatives would face the challenges that had plagued previous producer co-operatives operating within a capitalist system, including market competition, access to capital and worker democracy. In contrast Alternative Co-operatives were formed with a strong shared commitment to democratic ideals and producing for social needs rather than profit. Sources of Alternative Co-operatives in the UK during the 1980s included printing, publishing and educational based co-operatives (Cornforth, 1983).

### **2.6.4 Co-operative organisation**

Worker co-operatives are trading enterprises, owned and run by the people who work in them, who have an equal say in what the business does, and an equitable share in the wealth created from the products and services they provide (Co-operatives UK, 2012). In this study multistakeholder co-operatives are also examined, as one producer group (external producers) in the study preferred to supply content to platforms as independent producers rather than workers or labour. Multistakeholder co-operatives are a co-operative with more than one class of legal persons or members' (ICA, 2015, p.101). Employee-owned firms are not a good example of multi-stakeholdings as they are either single-stakeholder co-operatives (if 100 per cent owned by employees) or hybrids (if majority owned by employees along with other investors). A firm that is owned by a combination of workers and investors is a kind of multi-stakeholding or at least "dual stakeholding," but some commentators see this as an unstable mix that

should be encouraged to lead to full employee-ownership (Ellerman, 1990). Wren (2016) highlights the impact of different types of employee ownership on reward strategies, providing empirical evidence from Trust, Direct and Co-operative ownership types. Each type of employee ownership demonstrated different culture models (and commonalities), which in turn effected performance and reward for workers.

In 2021 within the UK, there were 394 worker co-operatives established in a variety of legal forms including societies, companies and partnerships. Societies are registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and registered with Financial Conduct Authority, whereas partnerships and companies that self-define as a co-operative are registered with Companies House. When taking into account multi-stakeholder co-ops, self-employed co-ops and employee trusts—businesses typically characterised by worker ownership and control, there were 1,111 businesses with a combined turnover of £13.1 billion. (Co-operatives UK, 2021).

#### **2.6.4 Co-operative platforms**

According to Watkins (1986), three kinds of expertise are needed in co-operation: (1) that concerning technology of producing particular products and services, (2) that of co-operation and co-operatives as a form of enterprise, and (3) that of the environment (socio-economic context) in which the co-operative operates. The two strands of technology and co-operation provide a key focus for this empirical research in examining practice amongst education platform producers, whilst the examination of socio-economic context provide greater scope for a critical interpretation.

“A platform co-op is a digital platform that is designed to provide a service or sell a product that is collectively owned and governed by the people who depend on and participate in it” (Sutton, 2016). There are very few established education platforms based on co-operative principles, those that have been set up are either informal co-operative organisations such as the London Learning Coop (n.d.), and those that have been formally established as a co-operative organisation are relatively new and at a vulnerable start-up phase such as Mycoolclass Co-operative (n.d.) with relatively small numbers of producers (teachers) and limited investment.

The relatively small number of co-operative digital education platforms may have something to do with the dominance of established platforms in the public sector



(including universities) and the private sector in an already crowded online space. Alternatively, as already outlined, it may be that co-operative history has already shown that co-operatives struggle to compete with businesses based on a foundation of capitalism. Hudson (2009) provides three categories for social enterprises (which included co-operatives) in relation to capitalism; they are either a safety net for when capitalism does not work, a parallel option working with a capitalist system, or a radical alternative based on a post-capitalist paradigm. 'Platform co-operatives' that operate within existing market logics would be located in the category of an alternative online business mechanism operating with a capitalist paradigm, whereas open co-operative platforms based on 'new co-operativism' (Vieta 2010) would be based on communal ownership and stewardship of the commons—would be radical alternatives in a post-capitalist paradigm.

Despite the challenges of global competition, there are examples of co-operative businesses that have managed to survive and grow. Mondragon and many others co-operative businesses have historically demonstrated that there is a viable alternative to the capitalist organisation of production. In his 'Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association' Karl Marx (1864) praised "the co-operative movement, especially the co-operative factories raised by the unassisted efforts of a few bold hands" and "the value these great social experiments cannot be overrated". But Marx rejected the idea that socialism could be established by the process of setting up one new co-operative after another because of systemic issues. Marx (1864) in his Inaugural Address to the Working Men's International Association highlighted the challenges of co-operatives:

At the same time the experience of the period from 1848 to 1864 has proved beyond doubt that, however excellent in principle and however useful in practice, co-operative labor, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries.

Mondragon like many co-operatives before have become more integrated into capitalism in order to be competitive in global markets and to protect the jobs of employee members in the Basque region (Bretos et al., 2019). Multinational co-operatives transform into hybrid organisations with a co-operative parent company

and capitalist subsidiaries. Mondragon has accommodated itself to the practices of the capitalist market in order to survive, but from the very beginning the co-operative saw itself as providing an alternative within a capitalist system (Bretos and Errasti, 2018).

Marx (1864) proposed “To save the industrious masses, co-operative labor ought to be developed to national dimensions, and, consequently, to be fostered by national means.” National governments and political alliances such as the European Union recognise that global businesses such as Google, Amazon, Apple, and Facebook cannot be left to autonomously design and dominate global markets, which is why initiatives such as ‘Next Generation Internet’ have been instigated by the European Union. While political intervention takes time to manifest into real action, the owners of capital have delayed legislation through access to political decision makers and built an online infrastructure that has been commodifying general intellect in a networked society (Castells 2009), whereby capitalism is socially reproduced using information and communication technologies (Fuchs, 2014).

If individual co-operatives cannot compete long term without losing sight of the fundamental principles upon which they were founded, and likely to degenerate, is there any point in starting a co-operative if systemic change is not possible? Economist Alfred Marshall was very positive about the purpose and ethical compass of co-operatives, but also pragmatic about the economic challenges that co-operatives face in competitive markets including access to capital and co-operative practice being replicated such as a minimum wage. Marshall ([1890] 1920 as cited in Bankovsky, 2018, p.62) “cooperation’s preoccupation with the well-being of others more broadly makes its underlying ethics—the goal to which a society, be it cooperative or competitive in its organization, should aspire.” Rather than discount co-operatives in a capitalist system, Marshall argued that “cooperation should be framed by a competitive market economy since self-reliance and independence of judgment can be expressed, and promoted, by both competition and cooperation”. Even though Marshall recognised at the time that production co-operatives were more likely to fail than consumer co-operatives, producer co-operatives were seen as best suited for their role in developing workers and maintaining principles of “self-development, social service, opportunity, and nondomination” (Marshall [1889] 1925 cited in Bankovsky, 2018, p.55).

Marshall (1919, as cited in Bankovsky, 2018, p73-74) described 'constructive cooperation' as a situation in which multiple businesses in industry come to reciprocally rely upon each other, to each achieve private profit and ward off monopoly, applying the term to those specific instances of co-operation that arise under conditions of competition, evident in the emergence of the Lancashire industries (1919, 601). Co-operation amongst co-operatives from an industrial past provides valuable lessons for digital platforms of the future, but also warnings highlighted by Marshall and his peers, not least the danger of diminishing ethical standards as capitalism sets in.

Employee ownership can take the form of worker co-operatives, co-ownership or employee share ownership plans (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018). ESOPS provide employee ownership through shares funded by company loans, with shares held in trust on their behalf, a company will provide the security for a loan and pay it back from future profits (Blasi et al., 2019). Arguments in favour of ESOPS include engagement, productivity and motivation amongst employees, while negative elements include 'free-riding' and levels of employee satisfaction (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018). Membership of an employee owned enterprise whether a physical business or a platform business will face issues as the organisation grows, who are members and non-members? The John Lewis Partnership where nearly all employees are members, has used outsourcing and joint venture arrangements to grow the business, so that controversially some workers are now non-members. In contrast the vast majority of employees at Eroski are not owners, and those that are owners are distinguished between parent and subsidiary company employees (Basterretxea and Storey, 2018).

Conaty and Bollier (2015) distinguish 'old and 'new' approaches to co-operativism based on the division of benefits between co-operative members and wider society. They argue for a common good orientation in which new co-operativism deploys multi-stakeholder governance, co-production and social political co-ordination. Vieta & Lionais (2022) argue that co-operation amongst co-operatives is more likely to take place when co-operatives are more socially grounded, so that "commons co-stewardship" rather than a "member based shared ownership" takes place. They provide convincing evidence from Argentina's worker recuperated enterprises (ERTs) that building networks and sharing economic production between ERTs, but also

between ERTs and other co-operatives provides tangible benefits based on co-managed and collective stewardship of shared resources.

In the 'gig economy' labour-based platforms are premised on making the most of workers skills or time, workers who also have other commitments (Codagnone et al., 2016). Within the gig economy a large network of labourers provide the resources for organisations to meet their outsourcing needs through open calls in what is termed 'crowdsourcing' (Howe, 2008). From a neoliberal perspective the gig economy and crowdsourcing provides an autonomous, deregulated, and flexible market in which companies and independent contractors are both free to work outside conventional framework of time and space (Codagnone et al., 2016). Therefore, in principle at least, freelancers (self-employed) can accept whatever work they wish, at a time that suits them, leading to a better work-life balance.

In practice 'gig' workers are not free to work when they wish, are low paid and have very few or no benefits that employment would provide such as paid holiday, sickness pay and pensions (Scholz 2016). A survey conducted by the International Labor Organization found that in 2017, on average across five crowdsourcing platforms, a worker earned \$4.43 per hour compared to the minimum wage in the United States at \$7.25 per hour (Berg et al., 2018). In contrast, Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) argue that talent-biased technical change produces "winner-take-all" markets that widen income inequality all the more by increasing the gap between high performers in a field and everyone else. From an economics perspective this could explained by the marginal productivity of labour driven by a shortage of skilled gig workers (Papadimitropoulos, 2021), alternatively it could be put down to unfavourable information and power relations between workers and platforms (Newlands et al., 2016). In contrast, Scholz (2016) argues that platform co-operatives respond to the market failures by lowering transaction and retention costs, transferring surplus revenue to the members, protecting workers from exploitation, disincentivising short-termism and offering a prospect of data democracy.

## 2.7 Combined literature

Following a systematic review of potential literature, it is apparent that there is a lack of literature on the intersection of the three areas of reward management, motivation

and co-operation associated with digital education platforms. One potential reason for the lack of literature could be that the field has no relevance and is therefore not worth researching. However, as has already been argued, there has been there is a growing disquiet about the dominance of global online businesses based on neoliberal thought, where profit and growth aims are prioritised over the individual and collective interest of workers (Scholz, 2016). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in who has control over online education resources has heightened (Williamson et al., 2020).

Digital education platforms in this study provide instructional videos to support informal learning of individual users. Boekaerts and Minnaert (1999) provide attributes of informal learning which include self-managed and self-paced learning, highly contextualised resources and no compulsory assessment. Instructional videos are a form of multimedia instruction that include visual, verbal and text material (Fiorella and Mayer, 2018). Digital platforms can be considered intermediaries, utilising a platform architecture they bring together producers and users of content (Srnicek, 2017). As well as designing a learning environment, platforms set the rules of economic and social exchange between and establish codes of conduct that must be followed by stakeholders (Robertson, 2019), education platforms are not neutral facilitators of interactions and communications (Decuypere, 2019; Kelkar, 2018). Research to date has focused on pedagogic, data and technological aspects of platforms rather than adopting a critical gaze that scrutinises wider social-economic issues (Robertson, 2019), and power asymmetry of privately owned education platforms over internal and external stakeholders (Parker et al., 2016; Srnnicek, 2017; Van Dijck et al., 2018).

The literature to date on co-operatives in the public sector education has been focused on the need for and potential of co-operative universities (Winn, 2012, 2015; Noble and Ross 2019) and education co-operatives, but there is limited research into emerging formations, and “holistic view of the co-operative educational ecosystem” (Noble and Ross 2021). There are very few established education platforms based on co-operative principles, and none that provide digital education video content. Instead, established digital education platforms operating within a capitalist paradigm provided clearly defined systems to critique, and to establish how and why individual producers supplied content within the confines of these systems.

From a reward management perspective this study examines the attraction of digital education platforms to individual producers, producer motivation to supply content and engagement with platforms, as well as producer performance and retention. From a co-operative perspective the literature considers co-operative membership, co-operative principles, and co-operative organisation. Building on the work of Cornforth et al. (1988) motivation and alternative pathways to co-operation are examined in the context of individual knowledge workers, the advantage of member owned businesses (Birchall, 2012), and multistakeholder governance models (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2019). The impact of alternative ownership types on reward (Wren, 2016), and the potential role of co-operative human resource practice; including selection and recruitment (Wren, 2016; Basterretxea and Storey, 2018), employment security (Navarra and Tortia, 2014; Wren, 2016), training and education (Bretos et al., 2018) and commitment (Arando et al., 2015; Wren, 2016).

Wilson & Maclean (2012) argue there is a lack of empirical literature on the relevance of co-operative principles, particularly in current contexts. There have been a number of quantitative studies on the relevance and importance of co-operative principles in practice, most of these have been surveys (Oczkowski et al., 2013). Rather than provide an empirical analysis of the meanings attached to co-operative principles this research aims to provide an empirical contribution and analysis of co-operative principles at a systemic level, based on worker centric digital education platforms.

History and economic theory has challenged the role of co-operatives while they remain within a capitalist system (Marx, 1864), co-operatives may be more likely to survive in certain sectors and benefit from co-operation amongst co-operatives, but they will inevitably struggle to maintain co-operative ethics due to market pressures (Marshall, 1919, p.329). Mondragon like many co-operatives before have become increasingly integrated into capitalism in order to be competitive in global markets (Bretos et al., 2019). Co-operative digital platforms it could be argued will simply repeat the cycles of an industrial past.

This research considers distinct fields of co-operative development and literature, *platform co-operativism* (Scholz, 2016) operating within the existing capitalist system and utilising existing copyright laws, *open co-operativism* which adopts a commons based peer production (CBPP) model which it is argued offer a

post-capitalist alternative (Bauwens,2016; Bauwens & Paitis, 2019), and *new co-operativism* based on the generation of labour commons and commonwealth (Vieta, 2010). In order to make an empirical contribution to knowledge this study specifically examines the potential role of platform co-operativism within the digital education platform sector, based on individual experiences of producers working in the third and private sector. By examining platform co-operativism this study will explore the possibility of alternatives within an existing capitalist system and run in parallel with radical alternatives within a post-capitalist paradigm.

## 2.8 Summary

This chapter has presented a theoretical understanding of the key components of this research, namely reward, motivation and co-operatives. It has explained the relevance of digital education platforms and looked at the intersection of it with each element (reward, motivation and co-operation) in turn. From it, the lack of combined literature has been highlighted. This neglected area paves the way for the following research to add to this limited area. The limitations of this research are recognised. However it fits the purpose of the research in answering the following questions:

**Q1) How are individual producers rewarded for education platform content?**

**Q2) Why do individual producers share education platform content?**

**Q3) What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?**

The next chapter consider the research methods to be undertaken to answer these questions.

## 3 Research methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to discuss the ontological and epistemological position of this investigation into motivation and reward for producers of education platform content, and to qualify the approach and research strategy employed. This section will therefore discuss the methodological underpinning of the research, providing a rationale for the philosophical position and a thorough evaluation of the research strategy adopted.

### 3.2 Research philosophy

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that in contrast to the speculative and a priori nature of deductive theory, theory that inductively develops out of systematic empirical research is more likely to fit the data and thus is more likely to be useful, plausible and accessible. In developing inductive theory, my research epistemology will be based on constructionism, but more specifically the idea of 'normal' constructionism which refers to those who construct their own knowledge while accepting the existence of independent, objective knowledge (Ernest, 2003). A constructivist stance based on critical theory and importance given to processes of self-reflection and emancipation (Gill and Johnson, 2010), is consistent with the aims and objectives of this research. Critical Realism provides a structured way of thinking about social and organisational problems, it starts with a realist ontology, which recognises social conditions (such as class or wealth) as having real consequences, whether or not they are observed. It then incorporates a relativist thread, which recognises that social life both is generated by the actions of individuals and has an external impact on them (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2003).

Bhaskar (1998) advocated that reality independent of our conception of knowledge of it exists, but this is not accessible to direct observation. But for critical realists, reality has causal powers and mechanisms, which can be experienced by their ability to cause or make things occur (Danermark et al., 2002). Ontologically, critical realism assumes that reality is multi-layered or stratified into three domains: the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1998). The empirical domain in this study is



examined from the experiences and perceptions of individual producers and is observable, the actual domain is the events and actions within the platform systems which may or may not be observable, and the real domain which comprises causal powers and mechanisms that cannot be detected directly but have real consequences for people and society. Critical Realism uses both positive and constructivist approaches, and advocates mix methods to promote understanding of the reasons for the complexity of the reality and not to translate it (Sobh and Perry, 2006). Critical Realism asserts that qualitative methods are used in obtaining rich explanations of existing mechanisms in the phenomenon of interest (Bhaskar, 1998) and if a better understanding of the situation is required to redirect and change these mechanisms, then testing the nature and strength of existing mechanisms can be achieved by quantitative means (Edwards et al., 2014).

### **3.2.1 Critical Theory**

Critical theory is referred to as a tradition of social science, including the Frankfurt School and later mingled with related authors and line of thought, such as Foucault, critical poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, and many versions of feminism (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2009). Critical theory questions the motives and impact of powerful groups and individuals and shows a concern for the interests of less powerful members of society. Habermas (1974a) argues that society leads to inequalities alienation, yet this is invisible to people who do not realise what is taking place. He introduced the important idea that knowledge is determined by interests, and that very often it is the more powerful people in society who determine what is regarded as 'true'. Consequently truth should be reached through consensus, rather than being imposed by one group on another (Habermas, 1974a). Critical theory in common with the intended strategy for this study, place a local object of study in a wider political and economic context, relating a focused phenomenon to broader discursive and material formations including capitalism. In gathering empirical data on motivation and reward to inform this research project, different producers realities have been represented based on a consensus theory of truth and interpreted through a research criteria that Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.114) describe as 'authenticity' in a social setting.

From an epistemological position, critical theory provides the authenticity to question the mindset or paradigm out of which the platform systems and the

individual producers operate (their goals, structures, rules and parameters) and to offer the potential for change and worker emancipation. Online platforms provide an additional dimension to studying the relationship between individual content producers and the organisations that own the technology, with the added complexity that the role of a producer will not always be that of an employee. Within this study to investigate motivation and reward for producers of education platform content, critical theory has been used to reveal how social orders, dominating practices, discourses, ideologies and institutions affect the way reward is framed and used to influence human behaviour.

### **3.2.2 Systems Theory**

As well as utilising critical theory, additional focus has been provided by systems theory. Rather than study individual elements of each system, this research uses systems theory to explore and examine the relationships of actors within a system as a whole. In elaborating on the challenges of the application of hard-systems methods to human social systems work, researchers such as Churchman, Ackoff, and Checkland turned to soft systems approaches and a more interpretive and subjective approach (Jackson, 1982). Soft systems methodology (SSM) provides processes for analysing social settings and attempts to bring together divergent views on how a system is supposed to work (Checkland, 2000). In this research SSM has not been used, because the focus has been on the perspective of one group of actors (video producers) rather than attempting to represent a shared view of a system for all actors, customers and owners. Instead, the work of Meadows (1999) has been utilised as a theoretical framework to present research findings. Meadows points out that there are leverage points in systems, places within a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything, leverage points are points of power. Meadows developed a taxonomy of systemic intervention points and arranged them in order of effectiveness from 1-12, with intervention point 1 being the most effective intervention point (see Table 3-1).

**Table 3-1** Places to intervene in a system (Meadows)

Places to Intervene in a System (in increasing order of effectiveness)
12. Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards)
11. The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows
10. The structure of material stocks and flows (such as transport networks, population age structures)
9. The lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change
8. The strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts they are trying to correct against.
7. The gain around driving positive feedback loops
6. The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to what kinds of information)
5. The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints)
4. The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organise system structure
3. The goals of the system
2. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system-its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters-arises
1. The power to transcend paradigms

System intervention points have been utilised and organised within the research findings chapters 5-8 in order to address the aims of the research and research questions (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3-2** Places to intervene in a system by chapter

Leverage Points	Chapter 5 findings
12. Constants, parameters, numbers	Reward for producers
6. The structure of information flows	
5. The rules of the system	
Leverage Points	Chapter 6 findings
11. The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks	Motivation for producers
10. The structure of material stocks and flows	
9. The lengths of delays	
8. The strength of negative feedback loops	
7. The gain around driving positive feedback loops	

Leverage Points	Chapter 7 findings
4. The power to change systems	Power for producers
3. The goals of the system	
2. Paradigm out of which the system arises	

Leverage Points	Chapter 8 findings
1. The power to transcend paradigms	Valuing Co-operation

Each of the findings sections highlight and illustrate how research themes apply to each category of producer, but also to critically probe the reported views and experiences of research participants within each platform system, between producer groups and platform systems and from a wider socio-economic perspective. Rather than study individual elements of each system, all three findings chapters use systems theory to explore and examine the relationships of actors within a single platform system. By examining relationship of actors (producers) within platform systems, the role of reward will become clearer. By identifying system leverage points in existing systems, social systems can change themselves by what is called self-organization (Meadows, 1999).

### 3.3 Research strategy

The research strategy has been aligned with the following research questions in order to be able to contribute relevant answers.

Stage 1 Reward models:

#### **Q1) How are individual producers rewarded for education platform content?**

Stage one identified potential interview participants based on answers to a descriptive survey accessible on a social media platform. Individual producers of education video content were asked open and closed questions based on which platforms they worked with, their relationship with these platforms, and how they were rewarded both financially and non-financially. From this data, purposive sampling was used to select individual producers across three groups, internal producers, co-producers and external producers.

Stage 2 Motivation:

**Q2) Why do individual producers share education platform content?**

Research findings from stage one was used to plan and design interviews with specific categories of producer to provide comparative cases studies. This inductive research was undertaken using online interviews with individual producers of education platform content, making a contribution to reward management theory from the empirical reality.

Stage 3 Co-operation:

**Q3) What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?**

This research stage used the research findings from earlier stages, to generate a co-operative reward based theoretical framework for producers of education platform content. Stages one and two established how and why individual producers share education content. Stage three involved triangulation of data from stages one and two, including a critical evaluation of platform systems and processes provided by additional sources beyond the survey and interviews stages. By examining relationships of actors within a system, the role of motivation and reward became clearer. By comparing and contrasting internal, external and co-producers through cross-case analysis, the research has highlighted the impact of producer roles and relationships within education platform systems, and from this the potential role of co-operative values and practice. We now look at the steps involved in producing the framework.

## **3.4 Research method**

### **3.4.1 Case study**

Discussion of a case study research strategy will demonstrate compatibility with the ontological stance of the research, whilst a multiple case study approach is found to offer a comprehensive and suitable research design. Once the type of case study has been justified in terms of appropriateness for this research, a thorough account of the research design is provided, covering broadly; how cases will be defined and selected;

the collection of data and undertaking of field work; and the approach to data analysis, both within and across cases.

Within Yin's (2013) comparative discussion of five alternative research strategies three conditions are identified that enable the researcher to distinguish between them, by evaluating their appropriateness for a particular area of research. The three conditions identified by Yin (2013, p.9) consist of:

(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control a researcher has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events.

The five strategies identified by Yin (2013) include: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history and case study. Of these, a clear rationale for the suitability of a survey and case study strategy will be established.

In distinguishing between research strategies, Yin (2013) argues that the most significant condition is the type of research question being asked. For an explanatory research project 'how' and 'why' questions are more suitable, because 'such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidents'. A survey was used to identify reward management practice, and how producers are rewarded for education platform content. This in turn provided a purposive sample for cases studies and the interviews carried out with individual producers, to explain why individual producers share education platform content.

The two remaining conditions identified by Yin (2013, p.12) are the "extent of control over behavioural events, and degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events". Experiments are not appropriate for this research as the researcher had no formal control over events being investigated. But it is recognised that a subsequent effort may be undertaken to influence worker behaviour as part of the methodological commitment to critical systems theory and some form of emancipation. This research was focused on contemporary events and current practice rewarding producers of education platform content.

### **3.4.2 Types of case study**

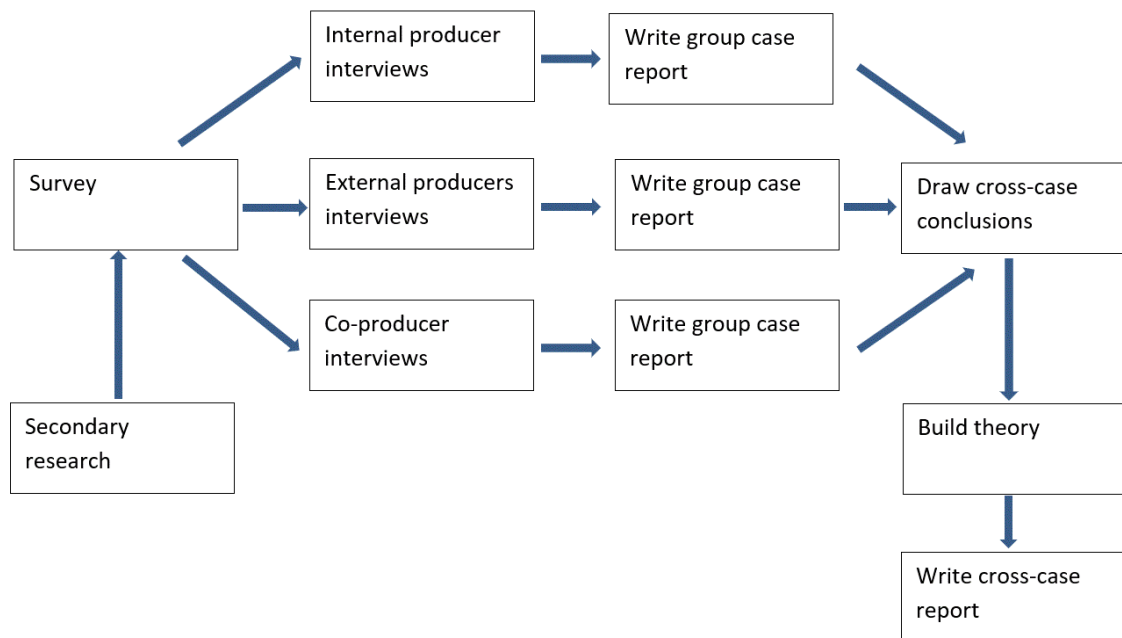
When discussing the use of multiple case studies, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p.25) explain that:

the central notion is to use cases as the basis from which to develop theory inductively. The theory is emergent in the sense that it is situated in and developed by recognising patterns of relationships amongst constructs within and across cases and their underlying logical arguments.

This research broadly utilises Eisenhardt’s (1989) approach to multiple case studies, using the steps of the process to guide case selection of internal, external and co-producers of education content for platforms. This research aimed to see if there are distinct reward management practices and distinct motivators specific to producer groups, as well as underlying features that are common across all producer groups.

### 3.4.3 Selection of cases

Eisenhardt’s (1989) roadmap begins with guidance on ‘getting started’ and case selection. The importance of identifying research questions in order to limit data collection and provide focus is highlighted. In addition, Eisenhardt (1989, p.536) refers to the ‘a priori specification of constructs’ in order to ‘shape the initial design of theory building research’. Three specific groups of producers were researched: internal producers, external and co-producers to produce comparative cases with maximum variation in the relationship between each case (see Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3-1** Multiple Case Study plan

Internal producers are employees that work directly for a platform, external producers are self-employed and create content independently, co-producers are mainly self-employed and create content with an internal production team. Co-produced content

is created in platform owned studios, where the final product is a co-production between individual producers and platform employees.

Producers contractually employed by an organisation were included in the research, provided their primary role was video content production. Producers were selected that could be identified as a single group (case), those that fit into more than one group were excluded from the interview stage. This offered the possibility of distinct motivators and reward management practices specific to producer groups to be identified, as well as underlying features that are common across all producer groups. Producer and content diversity was used as a filter in choosing participants to interview, with the aim of providing a broad spectrum of perspectives on platform reward and producer motivation. Diversity was based on video subject (art, languages, finance etc) in addition to producer demographics (age, gender etc). At least 5 producers from each case were targeted, with additional interviews added until saturation was achieved.

#### **3.4.4 Data collection**

Three stages of data collection will now be outlined, stage one and two were based on the collection of primary data, stage three was based on the collection of secondary data.

##### Stage 1 Reward Models - Descriptive survey:

A descriptive survey is concerned primarily with addressing the characteristics of a specific population of subjects, either at a fixed point in time or varying times for comparative purposes (Gill and Johnson, 2010, p.126). This phase of the research targeted individual producers of education videos for platforms, the survey was accessible from 21 May 2019 to 04 June 2019. Purposive sampling was used to survey individual producers, with the specific aim of identifying their suitability to be interviewed, and whether they are internal producers, external or co-producers. A survey of individual education content producers was undertaken, to provide the required number of good quality case studies, rather than providing a representative sample of the population. Individuals taking part in the survey were identified from social media platforms, direct from platform directories of producers, and from established trade associations and professional bodies. The survey was made available on a social media platform, by providing a link through to a Qualtrics survey.



Questions were based on reward, and not on motivation at this stage (see Appendix 2). The purpose was to provide a screening process to identify potential producer interviewees:

- profile - personal details, employment status, network
- education content - content produced, technology used
- working practice – sole producer, collaborative producer
- platform relationship – internal, external, co-producer
- platform data (type of platform, content supplied)
- reward management practice (financial and non-financial rewards)

The results from stage 1 informed the selection process and appropriate sample size for interviewees at stage 2 of data collection.

#### Stage 2 Motivation – Interviews:

The aim of the exploratory interviews was to identify why individual producers share education platform content, their motivation and the reward experienced. Interviews were focused on individual producers of digital education content, whether they were internal or external to the organisation, employed or self-employed. Practice interviews were conducted with education platform producers from existing personal connections, so that issues could be recognised and addressed prior to the role out of the interview phase. During the interview phase, producers were able to voice their opinions without the restrictions of pre-coded categories, with the purpose of exploring their experiences and perceptions. Within social constructionist approaches, the interview is seen as the co-production of a text, rather than as an account of any real-world phenomenon. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) highlight that from a constructionist position, how interviewees represent reality in the interview situation may have more to do with how they are understanding and constructing the discursive context of the interview itself, rather than being any reflection of an enduring, external reality. One-to-one semi structured interviews were carried out, based on guided questions but with the option to dig deeper with additional questions where deemed appropriate, but also to build up a rapport and trust between interviewer and participant. Interview questions were based on reward and motivation, using open ended questions to provide the breathing space for

interviewees to naturally respond from positions in either of the paradigms of collectivism and individualism (see Appendix 3). Each interview was carried out using Zoom software, lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, and recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding rich, qualitative data.

Stage 3 Triangulation:

Yin (2013) highlights the importance of using multiple sources of evidence within the case study in order to achieve triangulation, focusing therefore on data triangulation. Denzin (1989, p.236) refers to the conventional assumption that ‘triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the case study of the same object’. This methodological pluralist approach has been used to provide a micro analysis within and across cases, and also a macro analysis of platforms, platform owners, and wider society, in what Denzin (1989) argued as spanning and aiding the micro-macro divide. This research is concerned with motivation and reward for individual producers of education platform content, analysed across three case study groups. The choice of additional sources of data was primarily driven on validating the evidence provided from interview data, within each case study group and across groups. These alternative sources of data provided what Yin (2013) referred to as converging lines of enquiry contributing to the research findings.

**Table 3-3** Sources of data

Sources of data	Internal producer	External producer	Co-producer
Company published accounts		✓	✓
Financial markets data	✓	✓	✓
Platform terms and conditions		✓	✓
Platform information pages	✓	✓	✓
Press releases	✓	✓	✓
Blog post (producer)			✓
Employee pay scales	✓		

Published financial accounts provided information about the profitability of platform companies and the potential impact on producer rewards. Financial market data provided information on the legal entity status of platform companies, equity ownership and the use of venture capital funding. Platform terms and conditions provided a source of data to confirm the claims of producers from interviews with regard to reward and platform systems. Internal producer reward data (salaries) were provided by the platform director after interviews had taken place. Platform information pages provided data on reward dashboards that could also be cross checked with terms and conditions and producer accounts. Press releases provided information on the market as a whole, including market growth rates and mergers and acquisitions of platform companies.

It is recognised that the selection of data sources or methods can be influenced by researcher bias, leading to potential confirmation bias or cherry-picking of data (Bergman, 2008). In this study additional sources have been used to verify platform reward mechanisms and establish publicly available information about platforms and company owners, rather than to corroborate the motivation of producers which would have a greater risk of researcher bias. Employee pay scales were provided by the Director of PF1, this allowed for relative rates (internal and external) of pay to be examined. Because PF5 terms and conditions were not accessible, a co-producer blog (not a research participant) working with PF5 was used to confirm the royalty mechanism used to reward producers. It is recognised that some sources offer less weight of than others, a blog post unlike a set of audited and published accounts has not been independently verified and compliant with some form of reporting standards. However it also recognised that accounting information has the potential to offer multiple stories and is not without bias towards reporting a favourable position for those in power (Cooper and Morgan, 2013), and it could be argued more of a focus on value extraction for shareholders than value creation for all stakeholders (Mazzucato, 2018). Yin (2013) argues that no single source has a complete advantage over other sources, and provided other sources are complimentary, a good study will use as many different sources as possible collected via different appropriate means.

### 3.5 Methodological reflexivity

Critical theory allows for methodological reflexivity, which is 'critically scrutinizing the impact upon the research setting and findings of the researcher and his/her research strategy'. These should include reviewing the balance between being an 'outsider' or 'insider'; 'distance' and 'inclusion'; 'detachment' and 'involvement' (Johnson and Duberley 2003, p.1284). Alvesson and Ashcraft (2009) call for a systematic integration of critical theoretical principles and critical management studies research practices, urging 'reflexive fieldwork and interviewing', as well as a 'sharp eye on for the way in which critical analysis and writing can function to speak for and sometime silence participant voices.' Alvesson also encourages critical management researchers to 'consider and develop counterintuitive applications and combinations of methodologies - for example, questionnaires or surveys conducive to quantitative analyses'.

### 3.6 Reporting method

Critical theorists deny the possibility of theory-neutral observational language (Habermas 1974a, as cited in Gill and Johnson, 2010). 'Critical theorists need to be self-consciously critical of the philosophical assumptions they are making, reflexively interrogate those assumptions and present and justify those assumptions to others in their dissemination of any findings' (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). Kincheloe and McLaren (2011, p.288) argue that researchers must 'struggle to expose the way ideology constrains the desire for self-direction, and...confront the way power reproduces itself in the construction of human consciousness' and in doing so they 'undermine what appears natural, and open to question what appears obvious'. In order to examine the potential of co-operation amongst producers operating in a capitalist system where capital owns labour, it was necessary to focus on change-orientated emancipation rather than using a management lens (Martin, 2001, p.269). There has been a conscious effort to articulate an alternative position that challenges conventional representations of successful platforms providing equitable reward to producers, by placing research participants and the organisations that reward them in a wider political and economic context, to broader discursive and material formations including capitalism. Research analysis and write-up has critically probed the reported

views and experiences of individual producers from a critical realist philosophical perspective, avoiding the epistemological quagmires of both objectivism and relativism (Sayer, 1992).

### 3.7 Ethics

The ethical aspects of the research were considered at all stages, but in particular prior to the research being undertaken, as they would have a profound effect on the research methodology. In the research design phase and prior to data collection, the Sheffield Hallam University ethics policy was consulted, and the researcher completed mandatory online research ethics training using Epigeum online training courses. An ethics review application was completed to ensure that the research was conducted to the highest ethical standards and to protect the integrity, impartiality and respect for data. The ethics review system is a module of Converis, the University's Research Management System. An ethics review application was processed in Converis to enable Sheffield Hallam University to record that the research to be conducted had been subjected to ethical scrutiny (see Appendix 1).

A key consideration of the research was whether to name individual participants and the related education platforms included in the fieldwork. However naming individuals and the related platforms would restrict the number of willing participants, but more importantly undermine the reputation of Sheffield Hallam University. This was deemed an unacceptable risk and not in line with the University's ethical policy (Sheffield Hallam University, 2017).

Ethical issues could have arisen in taking video recordings of interviews, consequently participants were informed, and consent requested at the start of each online interview. Similarly, confidential and commercially sensitive information was handled appropriately by denying public access both physically and electronically. During the fieldwork electronic data was collected and located on a secure password protected network and held in line with the University's data protection standard and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Sheffield Hallam University, 2018).

A Covid-19 risk assessment was carried out in June 2020 to ensure there were low risks for future participants in the study. Pre Covid-19 online interviews were

carried out at the University of Brighton campus using the researcher's own office and risk assessed university equipment. During the crisis, online interviews took place using facilities at the researcher's own residence and using the same university equipment (laptop). No new or additional hazards were identified.

### 3.8 Limitations

From a data point of view, the research collected data based on the individual producer point of view only. The view of the platform users and owners would have provided alternative perspectives on the actual and potential rewards for individual content providers, but this would have made the project too complex and unachievable with the time and resources available. Only education video content producers provided the research data, which reduced the breadth of the research and eliminated other content producers on the same platform. However, the sample provided greater authenticity and plausibility to the research methodology (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and provide the depth needed to address the research questions.

### 3.9 Risks

One of the key stumbling blocks to the process of designing this research was a premature marriage to the idea of the unit of analysis being at the organisational level or platform level. This created two issues, firstly it was questionable whether the company level analysis would address the research aims and objectives, in addition there was a high risk of restricted or no access to individual producers to provide the data. This risk did not altogether disappear but was significantly reduced by planning to interview individual content producers beyond the confines of a few uniquely identified platforms or companies.

This research was carried out using online interviews on Zoom. Deakin & Wakefield (2014) identified benefits and drawbacks of online interviews from their respective qualitative research projects, these issues were considered in the research design. One of the key ethical issues was addressed by obtaining verbal consent from the interviewees before interviews began, and by making it clear that recordings would be video and audio. As participants were producers of education video content, it was reasonable to assume interviewees would be comfortable with online interviews

and have the technology to undertake the interviews. Contingencies were put in place that recognised and allowed for a percentage of interview dropouts, and failed interviews due to technical issues. The very first Zoom interview was not recorded simply because the record button was not pressed at any point. No attempt was made to make notes after the interview, and the interview was excluded from the research. One producer agreed to take part in the research and an interview date was agreed, but subsequently withdrew their participation citing that they had read the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form and did not feel comfortable taking part but did not provide any specific reasons for their decision.

The next section provides a timescale for each key stage of the research. The start date for interviews is based on the unrecorded interview described above, the first recorded interview included in the data took place in December 2019.

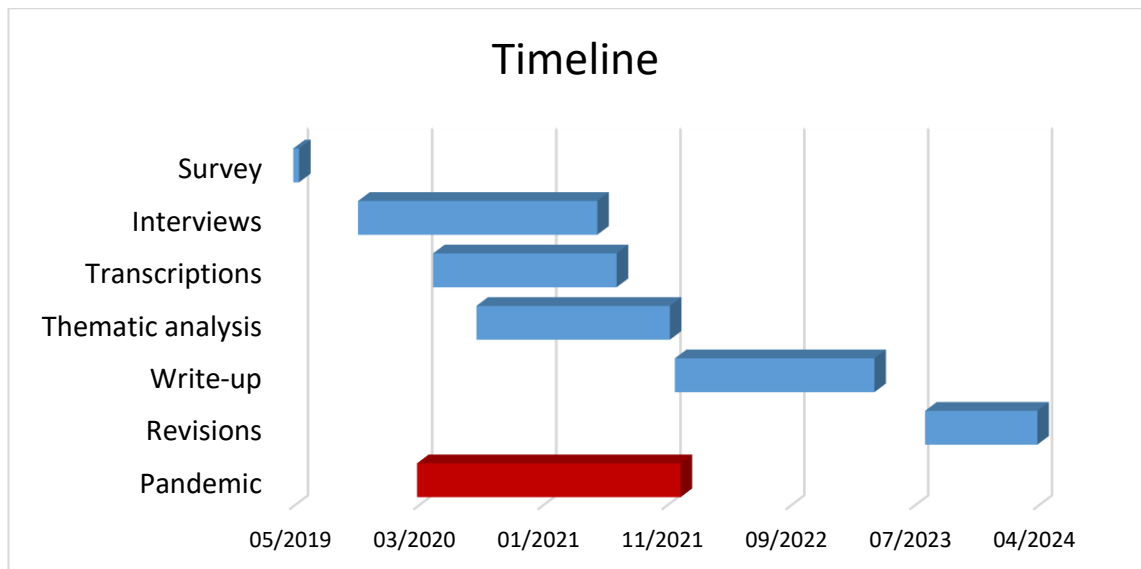
### 3.10 Timescale

The start and end date for each key stage of the research is shown below in Table 3-3.

**Table 3-4** Timescale of research

Task	Start date	End date	Duration
Survey	21/05/2019	04/06/2019	14
Interviews	25/10/2019	27/05/2021	580
Transcriptions	24/04/2020	13/07/2021	445
Thematic analysis	07/08/2020	19/11/2021	469
Write-up	01/12/2021	31/03/2023	485
Revisions	01/08/2023	30/04/2024	273

The following Gantt chart presents each research stage alongside the duration of the Coronavirus Pandemic (see Figure 3-1).



**Figure 3-2** Timeline of research

The period of the Coronavirus Pandemic is assumed to be from 16th March 2020 to 15th December 2021 based on a timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and measures (Institute for Government, 2023).

### 3.11 Research evaluation

From a critical realism and systems theory perspective, an important distinction in systems is whether they are deemed to be open or closed systems. Critical realism does not explicitly consider the external environment but emphasises internally related physical and social objects, whereas systems theory is designed to provide a holistic view based on boundaries. Both critical realism and systems theory argue against reductionism, however the difference lies in the definition of openness and closure, systems theory explains the difference in terms of the structure of the system, while critical realism focuses on its manifestation or outcome (Chick and Dow, 2005). The more clearly a social system is defined as closed, the more readily we are able to access what Bhasker (1998) refers to as the empirical domain and the experiences and perceptions of actors within systems.

As previously outlined a soft systems methodology (SSM) has not been undertaken in this research, because the focus has been on the perspective of one group of actors (video producers) rather than attempting to represent a shared view of a system for all actors, customers and owners. Ideally a shared knowledge of an existing system or desired systems would evolve from unforced consensus, established



through the argument and analysis embedded in democratic social relationships and without resort to coercion, distortion or duplicity (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). In contrast SSM will achieve little where there is an imbalance in stakeholder power, and the only consensus that can be achieved results from the exercise of power (Jackson, 2001). Instead, critical systems theory provides an opportunity to reveal the current state of a system including boundaries, stakeholders, power relations and potentially dissensus. Critical theory aims to empower and emancipate people who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised in organisations and wider society (Gill and Johnson, 2010, p.208).

Producers in this study are first and foremost workers, they are not owners, they do not have control over the platforms they work with, they do not have a vote at management or boardroom level in decisions that affect them directly. If producers were offered this power, it could be the case that they would not want this level of engagement and responsibility, just fair reward for their work. In order to assess what is fair and equitable, it is necessary to broaden the focus of producers beyond their immediate surroundings. What may not be known is the constraints of the platform or paradigm in which they operate relative to other platforms or paradigms. Producers are not necessarily aware that their understanding of normal practice is a social construction focused on the health of the organisations and platforms they work with, and an awareness of their own role in production and reproduction of platform practices and how they might intervene in the evolution of platforms and society.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that researchers with a critical theory based philosophy must demonstrate 'authenticity' in any social setting and this authenticity has five indicators, each of which are addressed in the context of this research.

*1. Different members realities have been included and represented in any account (fairness).* By identifying individual producers from a range of demographic backgrounds (see Table 4.2, Table 4.3 and Table 4.4) this research has provided a broad spectrum of perspectives on producer rewards and platforms. All of the twenty producer accounts have been included in the analysis and findings, every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of recorded dialogue, but also ensuring the essence of what was said was represented and interpreted as fairly as possible.

2. *They have helped those members to develop a range of understanding of the phenomenon being investigated thereby enlarging their personal constructions (ontological authenticity).* By targeting three different producer groups (internal, external and co-producers), the research has provided participants and other producers with a valuable insight into alternative relationships with platforms and the impact this may have on reward. This research may offer designers of future platforms with the scope and potential to utilise different producer groups to target production stability, quality and diversity.

3. *They have helped those members appreciate and understand the constructions of others (educative authenticity).* By consistently representing producer accounts within a systems framework and in the context of reward, motivation and power, it was intended that it would be possible for producers to directly relate their experiences to other producers, platforms and paradigms.

4. *They have helped to stimulate action on the part of those members to change their situation based upon their new understandings (catalytic authenticity).* It was clear during interviews, analysis and after further reflection that producers themselves were well aware of alternative platforms, ways of working, reward mechanisms and system initiatives, but hopefully this research serves to stretch the breadth and depth of that understanding. By critically evaluating the potential of co-operation and co-operative organisation, producers can see for themselves if this alternative to capitalist driven platforms is viable, and if it is a theoretical and practical alternative, whether or not it is desirable.

5. *They have helped members to undertake those actions to change their circumstances through their research empowering them (tactical authenticity).* It is recognised that without the direct feedback of members after reading this research it is subjective and premature to talk about action and empowerment, but there is sufficient evidence that this research has the potential to provide impact on individual producers, groups of producers and the design of more worker-centric future platforms.

### 3.12 Summary

This chapter has reviewed a wide range of methodological options for the research and explained the chosen one, which was a two-phased approach of survey and interviews. It detailed the selection criteria and briefly introduced the producers that participated. It has also highlighted the commitment to ethical research and some identifiable limitations of the research as well as criteria for evaluating it.

The next chapter provides explains in detail how the analysis of the data was carried out and gives a background to all the producers and platforms involved, from this the findings can then be reported.

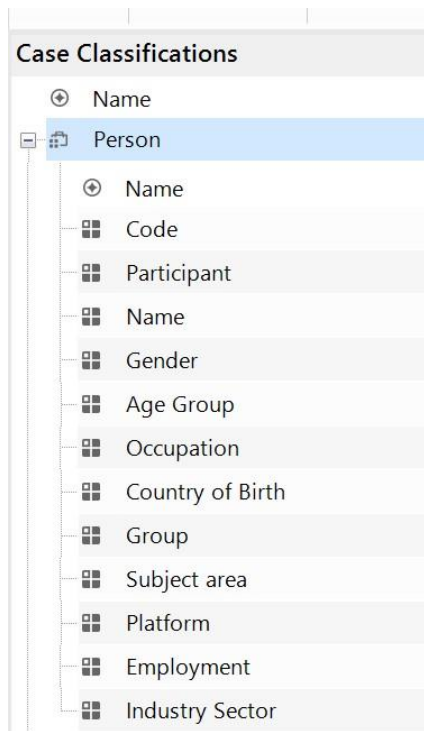
## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the methods used to collect data relating to the research questions were set out. This chapter explains how that data has been analysed as well as detailing what assumptions have been made to evaluate the research (Braun and Clarke 2006). Background information on all the individual producers, producer groups and platforms are given to provide a contextual and comparative perspective.

### 4.2 Data analysis

The data corpus (Braun and Clark, 2006) was made up of audio and video recordings of the interviews, platform terms and conditions, platform information pages, company published accounts, producer blogs, magazines and newspaper publications. This data and transcriptions generated from interview recordings were imported into NVivo software. Version 11 of NVivo was used at the outset, but this was subsequently updated to version 12 (R1). In keeping with this research, educational videos created by a specialist NVivo producer and academic at the University of Hull were watched to gain an understanding of the software potential to support the study (Fallin, 2021). These instructional videos highlighted a crucial step in NVivo if case analysis was to be properly undertaken, and this was the creation of cases and case classifications for each case. Case classifications record and store demographic information about the units of analysis in the research project, this research has undertaken the unit of analysis at the 'Group level' within which are internal, external and co-producers. Below (see Figure 4.1) are case classifications for producers in this study, highlighting attributes that would allow the data to be thoroughly analysed during and after thematic analysis had been undertaken.



**Figure 4-1** NVivo case classification

The key classification ‘Group’ creates an attribute that makes a distinction between internal, external and co-producers and for the purpose of this research, case analysis has been carried out using the ‘Group’ attribute of each participant. ‘Code’ creates an identification of the producer and the primary platform worked with, for example ‘IP1 - PF1’ is Internal Producer 1 and Platform 1 (see Figure 4.2):

	Code	Group	Platform	Gender	Age Group	Country of Birth	Occupation	Subject area	Employment
1									
2	IP1 - PF1	Internal	Platform 1	Female	41-50	Colombia	Content writer	Languages	Employed
3	IP2 - PF1	Internal	Platform 1	Female	20-30	Colombia	Video producer	Technology	Employed
4	IP3 - PF1	Internal	Platform 1	Male	31-40	Colombia	Developer	Technology	Employed
5	IP4 - PF1	Internal	Platform 1	Female	31-40	Brazil	Video producer	Technology	Employed
6	IP5 - PF1	Internal	Platform 1	Female	41-50	Colombia	Director	Languages	Employed
7	EP1 - PF2	External	Platform 2	Male	60+	United Kingdom	Accountant	Finance	Retired
8	EP2 - PF2	External	Platform 2	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Teacher	Technology	Employed
9	EP3 - PF2	External	Platform 2	Male	20-30	United Kingdom	Teacher	Languages	Self-employed
10	EP4 - PF2	External	Platform 2	Male	51-60	United Kingdom	Consultant	Finance	Self-employed
11	EP5 - PF3	External	Platform 3	Male	31-40	United States	Film producer	Film and media	Self-employed
12	EP6 - PF3	External	Platform 3	Male	51-60	United States	Consultant	Technology	Self-employed
13	EP7 - PF4	External	Platform 4	Male	20-30	Germany	Graphic Designer	Graphic design	Self-employed
14	CP1 - PF5	Co-producer	Platform 5	Male	41-50	United States	Graphic Designer	Graphic design	Self-employed
15	CP2 - PF5	Co-producer	Platform 5	Female	41-50	United States	Financial Advisor	Finance	Employed
16	CP3 - PF6	Co-producer	Platform 6	Male	31-40	United States	Video producer	Film and media	Employed
17	CP4 - PF6	Co-producer	Platform 6	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Artist	Art	Self-employed
18	CP5 - PF7	Co-producer	Platform 7	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Artist	Art	Self-employed
19	CP6 - PF7	Co-producer	Platform 7	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Lecturer	Art	Employed
20	CP7 - PF7	Co-producer	Platform 7	Female	20-30	United States	Consultant	Film and media	Self-employed
21	CP8 - PF7	Co-producer	Platform 7	Male	31-40	United Kingdom	Graphic Designer	Graphic design	Self-employed

**Figure 4-2** NVivo case profiles

With cases and case classifications established within NVivo, there was a logical basis and method to analyse the data created from nodes and themes, which was crucial for the final reporting stage. Braun and Clark (2006) see Thematic Analysis as the ‘foundational method’ of qualitative analysis and the first method researchers should use. The six phases of Thematic Analysis from Braun and Clark (2006, p.87):

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Thomas (2006) refers to a ‘General Inductive Approach for Analysing’ qualitative data, which allows for ‘The identification of any significant unplanned or unanticipated effects’. This is appropriate as no prior theory was assumed and no attempt was made to prove any theory through deduction, instead understanding was generated from the data. In keeping with the planned use of technology throughout this research, and because of the anticipated volume of data and time constraints, use was made of NVivo software. Data was coded using nodes, then themed and finally hierarchies established. This process allowed for themes based on motivation and reward to be identified within and across case study groups.

#### **4.2.1 Phase 1 - Familiarising with the data.**

Zoom interviews created downloadable audio and video files for all interviews which were saved on to the university secure file servers. Familiarisation took place in multiple steps:

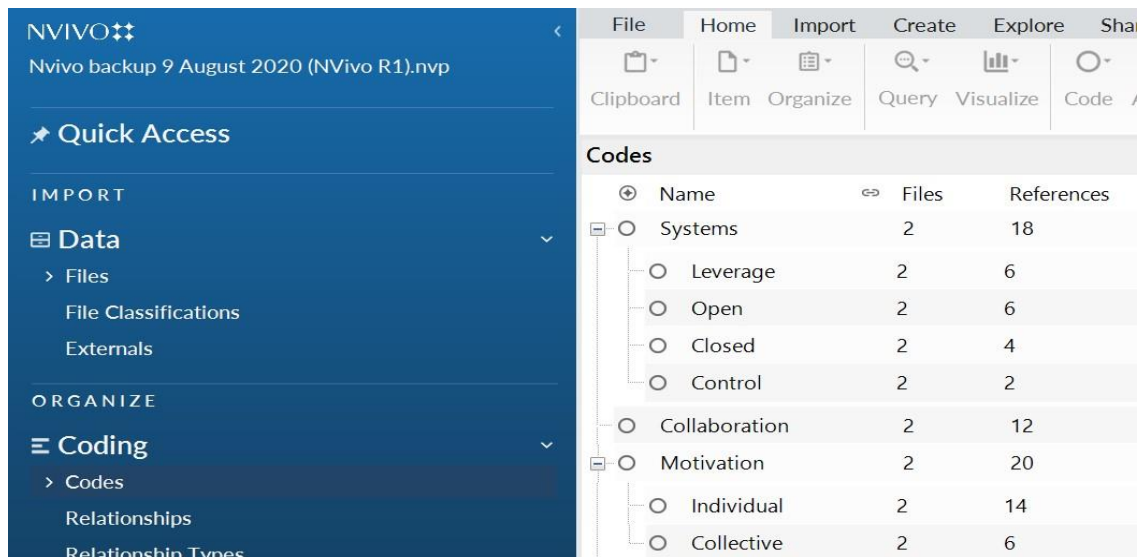
- Step 1. Watch the interview video recording
- Step 2. Read the transcript generated by the recording
- Step 3. Return to video or audio to resolve any discrepancies in the data
- Step 4. Make notes on the transcripts
- Step 5. Create codes in NVivo

In step two, three different transcription methods were trialled before one was used for the majority of interview transcriptions. Interviews were recorded on Zoom

but with the subscribed service there was no transcription facility available. As a result, Microsoft Word was used to transcribe, by listening to the audio recording for short intervals, pausing the sound and then carefully transcribing, this very slow process was very similar to that described by Riessman (1993), time-consuming, frustrating, but an excellent way to familiarise myself with the data. Once the Zoom account was upgraded the standard Zoom subscription service was available and transcriptions were automatically generated. There were issues with the presentation and quality of the transcriptions generated, so a third option was identified called Otter which provided a more accurate and easier to read transcription. Changes were only made to transcripts if there were any inaccuracies in the software output, or translation issues with participants where English was not their first language, otherwise interviews were recorded verbatim. This ensured the transcript retained the information needed in a way which is 'true' to its original nature (Braun and Clark, 2006). To properly familiarise with the data all transcriptions were printed out and read multiple times in order to absorb the data, in addition handwritten notes were made in the margins.

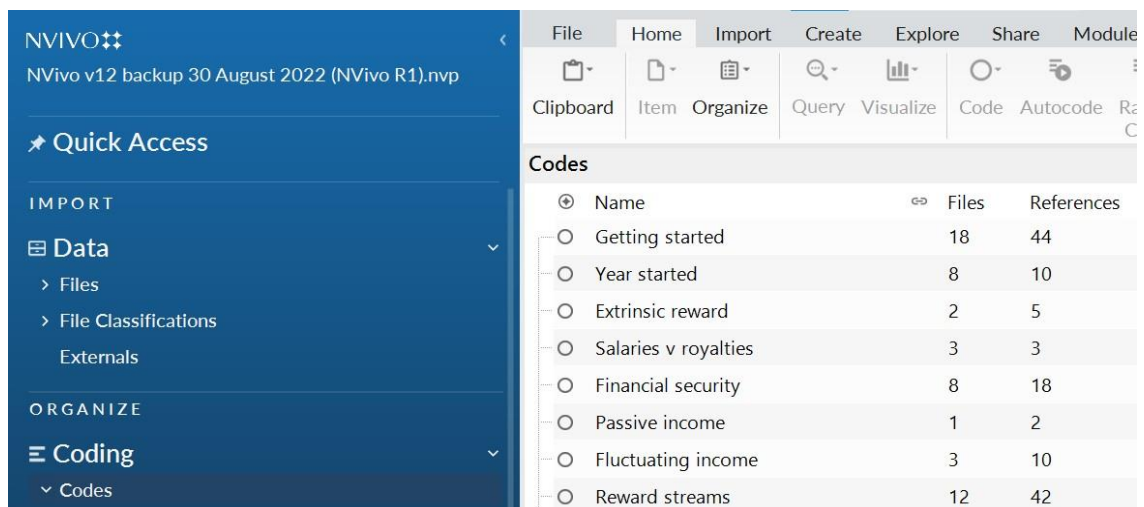
#### **4.2.2 Phase 2 - Generating initial codes**

Based on the notes written on the printed interview transcripts with each producer, initial codes were generated in NVivo, these codes were set up because they referred to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). To begin with the coding was 'theory-driven' but what soon became apparent was that there was not enough breathing space for themes to naturally evolve from the data, instead there was too much of a systems focus as shown in the extract below (see Figure 4.3):



**Figure 4-3** NVivo Theory-driven nodes

This approach was later abandoned, and coding restarted but this time the approach was ‘data-driven’ (see Figure 4.4). Each transcribed interview was reviewed and coded, and as recommended by Braun and Clark (2006), ‘full’ and ‘equal’ attention was given to each data item, identifying interesting aspects in the data to try and recognise repeated patterns (themes) across the data set.



**Figure 4-4** NVivo Data-driven nodes

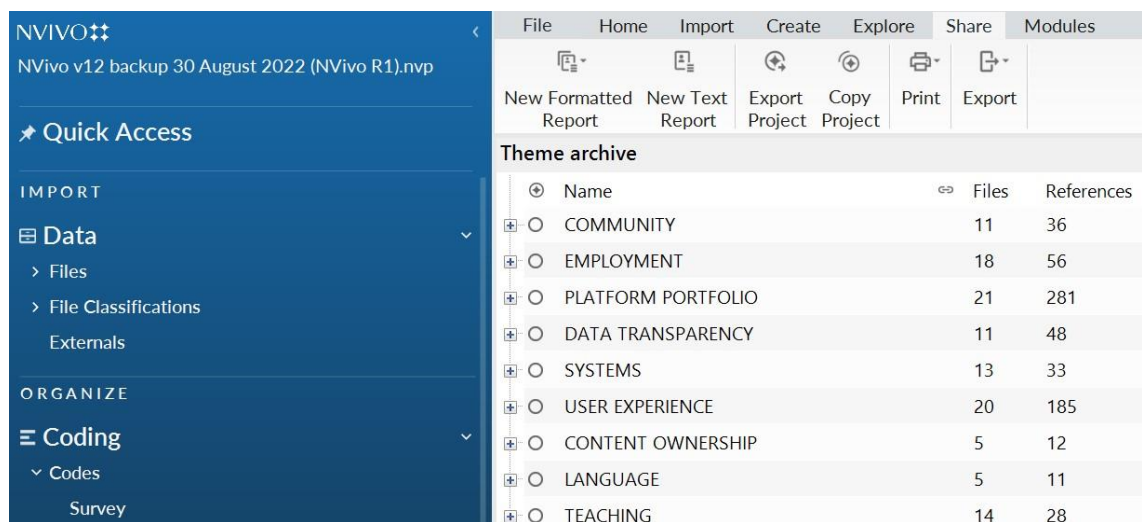
Some individual extracts of data were uncoded, coded once or coded in more than one node. Nodes that only had one extract of data were checked to see that they were relevant to the study and deleted if obsolete. A number of reviews were carried out of nodes and the hierarchy structure to determine if any changes were needed and adjusted if necessary. At the end of this review process a master set of 346 nodes had been created, which was then saved as a master set (see Appendix 4).



### 4.2.3 Phase 3 - Searching for themes

Having created a master set of codes (nodes) across the data set the next phase re-focused the analysis at the broader level of themes, by sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Some initial codes went on to form main themes, whereas others formed sub-themes, and others were discarded. Throughout the process of theme development, the central organising concept was based around the reward, motivation and power of individual producers within and across cases (internal/external/co-producers).

### 4.2.4 Phase 4 - Reviewing themes



The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. On the left is a navigation pane with sections for 'Quick Access', 'IMPORT' (Data, Files, File Classifications, Externals), and 'ORGANIZE' (Coding, Codes, Survey). The main window displays a 'Theme archive' table with columns for Name, Files, and References. The table lists 10 themes with their respective counts.

Name	Files	References
COMMUNITY	11	36
EMPLOYMENT	18	56
PLATFORM PORTFOLIO	21	281
DATA TRANSPARENCY	11	48
SYSTEMS	13	33
USER EXPERIENCE	20	185
CONTENT OWNERSHIP	5	12
LANGUAGE	5	11
TEACHING	14	28

**Figure 4-5** NVivo Theme Archive

There were 26 themes identified and saved in a theme archive (see Appendix 4), this stage of theme development served to provide a summation of nodes. The subsequent phase actively embraced what Braun and Clark (2006) refer to as moving from simple summation-based description into interpretation and telling a story about the data. This stage of theme development was an active creation of the researcher (rather than just passively ‘emerging’ fully formed from the data) to unite the data that at first sight might appear disparate, and often capture implicit meaning beneath the data surface (DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000). As part of this interpretation process, new themes were created from existing archived themes (see Appendix 4). The theme of ‘Social Impact’ replaced existing themes including Community, User Experience, and Teaching (see Figure 4.5), to encapsulate a key motivation for producers to share their

video content with platforms or work directly for a platform in creating content. Some themes were deemed beyond the scope of the research such as the COVID-19 theme, but relevant nodes within this theme were retained and moved to other themes where appropriate. The ‘Reward Ownership’ theme reflected the importance of producers wishing to have more control and influence over platform reward mechanisms. The ‘Systems Participation’ theme highlighted the levels of engagement and producer power in platform business models and systems development. The interpretation phase resulted in seven themes as shown below (see Figure 4.6).

#### 4.2.5 Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes

Name	Files	References
SYSTEMS PARTICIPATION	21	438
PROPERTY RIGHTS	19	111
REWARD OWNERSHIP	21	339
DATA TRANSPARENCY	20	176
CO-PRODUCTION	21	344
PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE	21	397
SOCIAL IMPACT	21	452

**Figure 4-6** NVivo Final Themes

#### 4.2.6 Phase 6 - Producing the report

Crosstab queries were used to check the spread of coding across cases and demographic variables, which showed how often producers referred to a particular topic or issue. Whilst this was not used for quantitative purposes, it was very useful to get a sense of the frequency a topic was mentioned and the spread between producer groups. The table below (see Figure 4.7) represents a crosstab query based on producer rewards, from the generated NVivo table it was possible to click on any of the numbers to drill down to the actual transcripts for producers, providing group based data analysis for the final report.

^ Crosstab Criteria Run Query | Sav

Crosstab codes against: Attributes Search in: Files & Externals Selected It

Codes:

- Nodes\Performance reward
- Nodes\Performance data
- Nodes\Paid per video
- Nodes\Part-time work

Classification: Person

Attribute 1: Group

Attribute 2:

Include "Unassigned" and "Not Applicable"

Person	Group = Internal (5)	Group = External (7)	Group = Co-producer (8)	Total (20)
Performance reward	3	8	6	17
Performance data	3	0	0	3
Paid per video	0	3	7	10
Part-time work	0	3	0	3
Advertising revenue	0	8	1	9
Altruistic reward	2	7	1	10
Financial security	2	9	8	19
Relative pay	6	0	0	6
Revenue per view	0	2	0	2
Reward streams	1	21	22	44
Royalties	1	2	8	11
Revenue transparency	0	15	14	29
Reward perception	8	8	15	31
Salary	12	0	4	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>210</b>

**Figure 4-7 NVivo Crosstab Query**

Framework matrices with auto summarisation were used to see coding intersections between two lists of items, providing patterns in coded data and access to the content that shows those patterns. Below (see Figure 4.8) is a query set up based on the intersection between individual producers (by group) and themes, which was invaluable when discussing specific themes related to producer groups in the final report.

	A	B	C	D	E
		A: CO-PRODUCTION	B: DISCONNECTED COMMUNITIES	C: PLATFORM LEVERS	D: PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE
1					
2	CP1 - PF5	So the way I was able to get better at art was by reading the manuals all the time. So I found Photoshop and for most people Photoshop is like a means to an end and they	I've been doing this a really long time so the feedback that I get is 99% positive. Oh like this course is enjoyable. Its great and it always means a lot to me and I always	They have now staff authors, that work for them and they are on the payroll and its cheaper for them to do that than to pay royalties based on how well the courses do.	I started out in 2000 I was a ***** subscriber and loved the videos and I also like teaching.
3	CP7 - PF7	I guess that comes from being too much of a perfectionist that if I was going to create pre recorded content, it would have to be edited perfectly, the art direction	I love doing that. I mean, that's one of my favourite things is just connecting with people and learning about different cultures and different countries and just	But when when there wasn't Corona, when there wasn't COVID I was like, travelling to different countries every month, like twice a month, I had a different	But when when there wasn't Corona, when there wasn't COVID I was like, travelling to different countries every month, like twice a month, I had a different
4	CP6 - PF7	So I started to experiment with bits of film to find different ways to engage people. So I literally the research I've been doing over the last four years now three years is	went freelance with crochet designing about seven years ago, and I've never made any photography or anything, but I've got opened an Instagram account.	So it was these two Spanish guys who was an architect and one was a graphic designer. And I think someone else has said, oh, where can I find this? And so they kind of	I used to work in local government, I was a transport planner for years and then started a blog about 10 years ago of crochet patterns, very quickly, I'm
5	CP2 - PF5	Three sessions of 60 minutes. It's like hardcore and I had a whole panel of moderators and they were texting each other but because of PI I couldn't be in their chat because I'm not part of their	Just in terms of feedback, like what's going on I get input every single day. Questions, people linking with me saying thanks for the content. So it's a really nice pulse. So I saw the sparks starting	I've been doing ***** for a long time  It was interesting this recent experience. It was 30,000 retail staff. It was not an insignificant	I've been doing *****for a long time  I'll just say very logic operations reach out and ask for bespoke education, so it's actually live. It's

**Figure 4-8 NVivo Framework Matrix**

After a systematic analysis carried out in NVivo, the final seven themes were identified (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4-1** NVivo reported themes

NVivo themes	Research focus	Thesis chapter
Reward Ownership	Reward	Chapter 5
Transparency	Reward	Chapter 5
Social Impact	Motivation	Chapter 6
Co-production	Motivation	Chapter 6
Autonomy	Motivation	Chapter 6
Systems Participation	Power	Chapter 7
Property Rights	Power	Chapter 7

The write-up itself provided evidence of these themes by producer group with data to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. Vivid extracts were used to capture the essence of these themes and to provide a narrative to illustrate the relevance of reward, motivation and power in addressing the research questions.

## 4.3 Producer background

### 4.3.1 Internal producers

**Internal producers (IP1 to IP5)** are employees contracted to a Colombian non-profit foundation; the Colombian foundation is a subsidiary of a US non-profit foundation. The US foundation has established three platforms serving different international markets, the participants were from the Colombian platform serving Spanish speaking users. Producers are all full-time employees creating content for the Colombian platform (PF1).

**Table 4-2** Internal Producers

Participant	Gender	Age Group	Country of Birth	Job Role	Subject Area	Employment status with platform
IP1 - PF1	Female	41-50	Colombia	Content writer	Languages	Employed
IP2 - PF1	Female	20-30	Colombia	Video producer	Technology	Employed

<b>IP3</b> - PF1	Male	31-40	Colombia	Developer	Technology	Employed
<b>IP4</b> - PF1	Female	31-40	Brazil	Video producer	Technology	Employed
<b>IP5</b> - PF1	Female	41-50	Colombia	Director	Languages	Employed

### 4.3.2 External producers

**External producers (EP1 to EP7)** are independent producers of education video content, they are not employed by the companies that own platforms, they are usually self-employed. Producers are free to choose which platforms are supplied video content, subject to the terms and conditions of platforms supplied. Producers provide content for multiple platforms, but in all cases, there is one platform that is their primary focus (PF2-PF4), with more time creating content and managing relations with their preferred platform than any other platform.

**Table 4-3** External Producers

Participant	Gender	Age Group	Country of Birth	Occupation	Subject area	Employment Status with platform
<b>EP1</b> - PF2	Male	60+	United Kingdom	Accountant	Finance	Self-employed
<b>EP2</b> - PF2	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Teacher	Technology	Self-employed
<b>EP3</b> - PF2	Male	20-30	United Kingdom	Teacher	Languages	Self-employed
<b>EP4</b> - PF2	Male	51-60	United Kingdom	Consultant	Finance	Self-employed
<b>EP5</b> - PF3	Male	31-40	United States	Film producer	Film and Media	Self-employed
<b>EP6</b> - PF3	Male	51-60	United States	Consultant	Technology	Self-employed
<b>EP7</b> - PF4	Male	20-30	Germany	Graphic designer	Graphic design	Self-employed

### 4.3.3 Co-producers

**Co-producers (CP1 to CP8)** are individual producers that work with more than one party in producing content, the third party may be an internal or external producer. The first of the co-producers interviewed (**CP3 - PF6**), worked internally for PF6, creating videos with external producers. They were a full-time employee, but not a director or owner. Except for (**CP3 - PF6**), producers are independent producers of education video content, they are not employed by the companies that own platforms. To curate the quality of video production, producers will usually work with an internal video production team. Producers are less likely to provide content for multiple platforms as they see the relationship with the primary platform (PF5-PF7) as a partnership, and there are usually more restrictive terms and conditions in sharing co-produced content with other platforms. Producers working with PF5 refer to the platform before it was acquired (PF5a), and post-acquisition (PF5b).

**Table 4-4** Co-producers

Participant	Gender	Age Group	Country of Birth	Occupation	Subject Area	Employment Status with platform
<b>CP1 - PF5</b>	Male	41-50	United States	Graphic Designer	Graphic design	Self-employed
<b>CP2 - PF5</b>	Female	41-50	United States	Financial Advisor	Finance	Self-employed
<b>CP3 - PF6</b>	Male	31-40	United States	Video producer	Film and media	Employed
<b>CP4 - PF6</b>	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Artist	Art	Self-employed
<b>CP5 - PF7</b>	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Artist	Art	Self-employed
<b>CP6 - PF7</b>	Female	41-50	United Kingdom	Lecturer	Art	Self-employed
<b>CP7 - PF7</b>	Female	20-30	United States	Consultant	Film and media	Self-employed
<b>CP8 - PF7</b>	Male	31-40	United Kingdom	Graphic Designer	Graphic design	Self-employed

## 4.4 Platform background

The focus of the research and case study design was individual producers, rather than the platforms that are supplied education content by producers. Following data collection and analysis on producer groups, secondary research on platforms highlighted that all of the parent organisations that own platforms PF1 - PF7 were based in the United States (US).

Platforms PF2 - PF7 were owned by commercial organisations and operated for-profit. Each of these platforms were funded by venture capital at some stage in their history, and in some cases these organisations had gone through multiple rounds of venture capital funding. All of the platforms had achieved year on year growth in sales, partly because of the growth of the online education market, but according to filed company accounts at the Securities and Exchange Commission, not all companies had achieved profitability.<sup>1</sup>

PF3 was the only platform that was not focused solely on education video content, it provided a platform to share videos on any topic. PF7 was the only platform business established outside of the United States, in Spain.

PF1 was owned by a non-profit foundation, it was also based in the US. The foundation was established by a Methodist minister from the US, who was also the foundation president. The platform was originally set up to provide English (US) content, subsequently the US founder and a Colombian based director set up a Colombian foundation and platform providing both Spanish and Portuguese content.

**Table 4-5** Platform organisation

Platform	Producer Group	Legal Entity in US	Company type	Equity type	Growth stage investment
PF1	Internal	Foundation	Non-profit	N/A	Philanthropic
PF2	External	Incorporated	For profit	Public	Venture capital
PF3	External	Limited Liability Company	For profit	Private	Venture capital
PF4	External	Incorporated	For profit	Private	Venture capital

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<sup>1</sup> Source (published company accounts) withheld for purposes of anonymity, validated using materials provided by producers and public information on platform PF2, PF5 and PF7.

PF5	Co-producer	Incorporated	For profit	Public	Venture capital
PF6	Co-producer	Incorporated	For profit	Private	Venture capital
PF7	Co-producer	Incorporated	For profit	Private	Venture capital

Platforms in this study offered either free or paid for education video content to users. PF1 and PF3 offered free content to users, all other platforms offered paid for content using either a course model or monthly subscription model (see Table 4-6)).

**Table 4-6** Platform user charges

Platform	Free content	Per course	Monthly subscription
PF1	✓		
PF2		✓	
PF3	✓		
PF4		✓	
PF5			✓
PF6			✓
PF7		✓	

Individual producers were reward by platforms using a contract *of* service (PF1) or a contract *for* service (PF2 to PF7). No performance based rewards were paid to producers of PF1, all other platforms offered performance based reward to producers based on the success of the video on the respective platform. Performance based rewards were either driven by direct metrics related to course fees, or indirect metrics related to a share of royalty payments or advertising revenues (see Table 4-7).

**Table 4-7** Platform reward for producers

Platform	Salary	Share of course fees	Share of royalties / advertising*
PF1	✓		
PF2		✓	
PF3			✓*
PF4		✓	
PF5			✓
PF6			✓
PF7		✓	



## 4.5 Summary

This chapter has explained how the data was analysed with the aid of NVivo software, the analysis process that was followed and how the themes were created from data. A general inductive approach was adopted (Thomas 2006) and data was coded, with the aid of NVivo software, to enable qualitative data reduction to take place. The data was interrogated using different types of query (including Crosstab and Matrix queries) to enable the investigation of individual and group motivation and reward. From this, themes regarding the producer groups (internal, external, co-producer and combined) were identified. Dimensions of reward, motivation and power are used to illustrate what was observed in the field. The themes for producer groups are then revealed, along with their explanation as well as examples of illustrative dialogue. These themes are now presented in findings chapters 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

## 5 Reward for producers

### 5.1 Introduction.

This is the first of three chapters to focus on the findings from the analysis stage. It considers reward for all three producer groups. It considers the research question how individual producers are rewarded for education platform content (Q1). More specifically the focus is on rewards provided directly by platforms to individual producers, in exchange for content supplied by producers to platforms. These rewards may be financial and non-financial. Financial rewards comprise all rewards that have a monetary value. Total remuneration includes base pay, bonuses, and benefits such as pensions, sick pay and health insurance (Armstrong, 2015). Non-financial rewards are also considered, but only extrinsic rewards provided by the platform, Shields (2007) breaks extrinsic rewards into those that are financial, developmental, and social. Intrinsic rewards are covered in chapter 6 and 7 where the focus is on individual producer motivation.

Utilising NVivo at the analysis stage, two core themes emerged across all producer groups that address the research question how individual producers are rewarded. These themes were **reward ownership** and **data transparency**. Each of these themes is explored in detail using the 'leverage points' (Meadows, 1999).

In this section, system interventions 12, 6 and 5 will be utilised to critically evaluate how each producer group are rewarded (see Table 5-1).

**Table 5-1** Meadows reward leverage points

Places to Intervene in a System	Leverage Points (Meadows, 1999)
12. Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards)	<i>"Corporations adjust parameters such as wage rates and product prices, with an eye on profit - the bottom line" (p5).</i>
6. The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to what kinds of information)	<i>"We humans have a systematic tendency to avoid accountability for our own decisions. That's why so many feedback loops are missing" (p13).</i>
5. The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints)	<i>"The rules of the system define its scope, its boundaries, its degree of freedom. Rules are high leverage points, power over rules is real power." (pp13-14).</i>

## 5.2 Internal producer reward.

### 5.2.1 Constants, parameters, numbers.

This system lever focuses on the financial rewards of Colombian based producers, full-time employees paid in exchange for making video content for a non-profit platform owned by a Colombian foundation.

**Internal producers** are paid a salary based on a job family structure with roles defined by technical competency. The director of PF1 provided the following reward data after interviews were carried out with producers (see Table 5-2).

**Table 5-2** PF1 monthly salaries based on job role

<b>Instructional Designer Monthly Salary Colombia</b>		
Posición / cargo	Actual salario base Col\$	USD
Content Director	\$4,909,160	US\$ 1,291.88
Style Editor	\$4,255,925	US\$ 1,119.98
Audiovisual Content Creator	\$4,255,925	US\$ 1,119.98
Creative Director	\$4,750,800	US\$ 1,250.21
Motion Graphics Animator	\$4,280,000	US\$ 1,126.32
Graphic Designer	\$3,605,900	US\$ 948.92
Video Content Producer	\$3,210,000	US\$ 844.74

Exchange rate \$3,800

(Source: PF1 platform director)

The national minimum wage in Colombia for the financial year 2021 was **10,902,312** Colombian Peso's (COP) per annum, or 908,526 per month (Wageindicator, 2021). The director of PF1 emphasised the importance of paying wages above the minimum wage and paying wages that are seen as fair:

*“our conditions on labour conditions here at the foundation are pretty good. Like we are very fair, we have a minimum salary in Colombia. But once you give less of two minimum salaries (pay less than twice the minimum salary), you have to provide like a subsidy of transportation and other subsidies. We never do that. Because we think that if we have to give subsidies for people, it will be like saying you're not paying enough for them to get transportation, you know, so we try to pay fair wages.” IP5 - PF1.*

The lowest paid employee in (Table 5.2) above, is paid 3,210,000 COP (**38,520,000** per annum), which equates to over **3.53 times** the minimum wage. In addition to a being

paid a salary more than three times the minimum wage, employees of PF1 also receive holiday pay and sick pay:

*"Basically, it frees up so much energy. It is enough to live off, yeah, just not the way I live. Okay. I'm a bit spoiled, maybe, I don't know. But it doesn't matter. I'm going to go on holidays. I have paid sick leave." IP1 - PF1.*

The level of salary and benefits received is perceived to be higher than in other companies and the pay in education-based roles in Colombia:

### **What is your perception of your salary?**

*"Well, I think it's a very good salary compared to other companies here in Colombia." IP3 - PF1.*

*"In this country, not many people have the salaries that I have." IP5 - PF1.*

*"In Colombia is very difficult to have a good job. And this is a good job really, good pay, good people, good boss and they allow me to work in my home. The pay is good, my partner's friend work for the university, they are paid half of my salary." IP2 - PF1*

PF1 Colombian salaries are at least three times the minimum wage, but still significantly below colleagues based in the United States. A job advertised on the parent platform, for a US based 'Video Content Producer' paid a salary starting at 55,000 USD, the equivalent salary on the Colombian platform is 10,137 USD, which would indicate that US internal producers are paid approximately five times that of their Colombian counterparts for the same organisation. However, the Colombian and United States platforms are consistent in paying more than the minimum wage in their respective countries. The starting salary of 55,000 USD is **3.65** times the minimum wage in the United States of 15,080 USD per annum DOL.gov (n.d.), compared to **3.53** in Colombia.

## **5.2.2 The structure of information flows.**

This system lever focuses on the access of **internal producers** to system information and their accountability for this information. It examines the link between data and the rewards received by employee producers working for a non-profit platform.

Based on interview data, internal producers (employees) do not appear to consciously avoid accountability for decision making, instead there is a lack of feedback loops due to the limitations with platform systems. PF1 embeds video content that is hosted on

YouTube (owned by Google), which means that much of the data accessed is restricted to that provided by YouTube. In addition, Google Analytics provide data for the foundations own platform, which means that all PF1 system data is in the control of a third party, a for-profit multinational corporation.

#### **What data is used to assess staff performance?**

*“data comes from analytics in Google for our website, but there are some numbers that we still can't get from the two platforms. We are creating an additional system that combines two of them. We look at the numbers in YouTube that says, how many people watch, when people leave and the bounce rate, which part of the video they liked the most and the comments in YouTube. And e-mails that we get, or comments in social media, that helps us a little bit. We also, I also talked to people outside of the office, if I get the chance, because I am the one that travels the most. Well, before I used to travel more, but I am the one that is going into communities and talking to people and people talk to me” IP5 - PF1.*

PF1 data is accessible, and accountability is recognised by employees, but the data is not specific or current enough to provide a clear picture to individual producers of their contribution to user engagement with video content and platform growth. There are issues linking systems data with individual performance and recognition.

*“I think I'm responsible for the numbers. If the website is not increasing the traffic, it's a problem. It's a problem for me, I think I have part of the responsibility, because the new content comes from me. So, I think, obviously, I have this, I'm in charge of this kind of thing. But I think SEO is something really slow, it's not like immediate. And the other day, we increase traffic a lot. I think the organisation is aware of this. And most of the content is something I didn't do it, I think I made like 15% of the whole content, so I can't be responsible for all the traffic. I have to look at the numbers and see, I don't know if something is going well or trying to do something to improve this, but it's not like so immediate, and I think they are aware of this.” IP4 - PF1.*

### **5.2.3 Rules of the system.**

This system lever focuses on the implication for **internal producers** of being contractually employed by a single non-profit platform owned by a Colombian foundation, which in turn reports to an American foundation parent.

Internal producers are aware of the benefits of having a **contract of service** (employment) where additional benefits are also included, rather than a contract for service (self-employed) where all earnings are directly related to services provided:

**How do you feel about being employed?**

*“because you are contracted, because other places hire you because of something called service provider. So that kind of contract doesn't give you for instance, benefits like health insurance, all that stuff, you have to pay by yourself.” IP3 - PF1.*

*“Most of the people like video producers or content producers, are contractors. I think the fact we are employing employees are a good thing. It's kind of, I don't know safe, yes safer. I think we have this feeling we are okay. I think it's a good thing. And it's not that common. And I know a lot of people who work in this kind of job, and they are like contractors.” IP4 - PF1.*

Because interviews with employees were undertaken during the pandemic, job security and employment benefits were acknowledged:

*“once we started the quarantines (pandemic), a lot of people are unemployed, they expressed that they were very pleased to have a job. Yeah, because a lot of people don't have it. But we're the ones who were hired during the pandemic now, and the ones that came before. So, once they are in, and they found out that what we do and how we do it, they fall in love with the project. But I think that they are also grateful that they have a salary and that they have good conditions.” IP5 - PF1.*

The issue of **relative pay** comes into play when international workers are employed by platforms, as illustrated by a Brazilian employee of PF1:

*“in Brazil we have better salaries. But here in Colombia, the economy is different, and the wages are not similar to Brazil. So, I think my salary here is good for the country, for the situation. I'm not super happy, to be honest. Because I'm not a young person, I think that's important, I'm turning 39 years old, and I see in a different way. I have a Master's in Brazil. So, to be honest I think it's not a good salary for me at my age and my career. But it's the situation right now, I'm living here in Colombia, and I have to understand how things work here.” IP4 - PF1.*

**What would be your ideal reward?**

*“I think the ideal would be like a good salary, better than I have now. Because I think I can cover my principal, my main expenses, but I can't save much money. I think this could be like, an indicator or something, like if I could save money because my salary is good. So, I think it will be like a sign of being well paid. But for me personally, I think I would like to have more.” IP4 - PF1.*

Being employed will provide internal producers with job security, especially during economic downturns, but a contract of employment will provide restrictions on what employees can and cannot do. If producers were contractually independent of PF1, they could potentially be able to create content for any platform (including PF1). Producers could be rewarded for content based on international rates such as European or North American, rather than South American levels of reward. Alternatively, if part-time employment were offered at PF1, employees would have the opportunity to do additional contracted work for multiple platforms (subject to contract restrictions).

## 5.3 External producer reward.

### 5.3.1 Constants, parameters, numbers.

This system lever focuses on the financial rewards of freelance **external producers** in exchange for supplying video content to platforms.

External producers independently create video content, supplying videos to platforms under a **contract for service**. Platforms treat external producers as **self-employed**. Producers are not rewarded for producing content, instead reward is only be triggered once the content is supplied to a platform. One producer suggested a new reward model for PF3; pay producers for making videos (concrete labour) and an additional reward mechanism that recognises the value of the video to the platform (abstract labour).

*“I think you’d probably want to go more of a hybrid model, maybe what actors would do. Just give me a fair price per video, and then give me a royalty. I think that split would be better.” EP5 - PF3.*

One benefit of not being paid to make video content, is producers have greater flexibility to supply the same video content to multiple platforms. A single video on multiple platforms can be watched by a high number of users and generate reward running into thousands of US dollars.

*“So now I’m quite confident that I can make \$10,000 in the next 18 months out of the course I’m writing today, by doing no more than two- or three-weeks work and just getting it set up in the right places (other platforms). And then just sitting back and moving onto the next course. And not doing a whole load of additional promotion. My initial goal is to have an income of \$10,000 a*

*month. Which I haven't got to yet. But my other goal is to teach a million people.” EP4 - PF2.*

A successful producer employed other family members to provide support with indirect activities, such as marketing and administration, enabling the producer to focus on direct production activities.

*“Now. Looking at it I'm in a good position now. When I first started making the online courses money was a big thing and so I would just put them anywhere just to get the money, but then now, I don't want to brag but it's, now, my salary is quite big. So like my Mum's retired and my sisters retires now. They help me with the marketing and things now. And so I pay their wages” EP3 - PF2.*

One producer had set up a company to trade under, but did not hire employees, instead subcontracted work out to freelance producers.

*“I have like a company registered here in Germany. But I don't have like official employees, they are all freelancers like sending me invoices each month. So it's like a freelancer relationship.” EP7 - PF4.*

At the other end of a spectrum of earnings, some external producers receive relatively small and unpredictable levels of income from platforms, this income is secondary to income from employment and other revenue streams to support themselves financially.

*“I had two small children and a household. And I was working and trying to fit it in, too. And I think my consistency would fall off for a couple of years because I just had other things going on.” EP2 - PF2.*

*“Going forward I am trying to create at least a solid foundation, financial foundation- so I am not feeling like I am pressured every month. How can I get money to pay the rent kind of a thing? At the beginning of the pandemic there was about \$500 a month on [PF3]. I am down to about \$250 a month. So, it's a pretty serious drop off.” EP5 - PF3.*

Producers potentially have access to a wide range of platforms, each with their own reward model. Within the study, the following are the reward models of platforms that hosted content supplied by external producers.

PF2 reward external producers based on a **course model**. Producers can set the price of a video, but the platform will discount the price of a course to attract user purchases.



*“and then you put a price on it. So you either sign up or you don't sign up to their promotional where they give discounts on a regular basis. Well, to be honest, most people know that [PF2] give discounts, so. So you price it. It doesn't really matter what you price it at because they are going to discount it. And the discount is usually so low, about 10 pound a shot, a bit like a book. I think all my sales have been on that range.” EP1 - PF2.*

When a user purchases a course, producers will receive a percentage of the fee based on the latest terms and conditions of the platform. The percentage share will be based on a net amount, after taxes, administration fees and handling fees have been deducted by the platform and third parties.

*“they (users) actually have to buy your course. They use it, buy it for \$9.99 and [PF2] take about 30% and the instructor gets the rest.” EP3 - PF2.*

PF4 charge external producers for hosting content based on a **subscription model**. Producers are provided with an open online content creation platform (learning management systems) designed to allow producers to build, design, publish, and sell courses and services to their students. Producers pay a monthly subscription, the higher the cost of a service plan the more platform services they have access to. The platform transfers course revenues to producers after deducting administration fees, and third-party processing costs.

*“[PF4] is a subscription model. I think it's pretty good in general transaction fee. So the basic plan, you pay 5% for each transaction. And for the pro and business plan, you pay nothing actually, it's 0%, which is quite good. But they have the processing fee, which is like 2.9% plus 30 cents. So I switch to the highest business pricing plan because I needed to have more administration, and customised system where only co-workers can access this area, to maybe hide finance information from them or just manage the community or something like this. So I basically just pay a monthly or yearly subscription for that.” EP7 - PF4.*

Platforms that provide learning management systems for producers, expect producers to do their own marketing of courses to attract users.

*[PF4] you sort of own your own school and you can do what you want on it. And [PF4] just sort of take a rent on it. They take about 5p of every transaction that goes on- just so you can use their system. They don't advertise anything, so they're just taking the money.” EP3 - PF2.*

PF3 reward external producers based on an **advertising model**. Advertisements (Ads) are promoted at the same time as the video is accessed by users. Producers have to proactively take certain steps to be able to be eligible to earn revenue from video content supplied to PF3. The first step of this is to join a partner program, then set up an advertising-based account. Producers have to confirm which channels they intend to use Ads, and during the process of uploaded video files, they are required to choose an option to monetise with Ads.

*“The other option some [PF3] creators do is they create ads only on some of the videos not on all of them. So you can control it on a case-by-case basis.” EP7 - PF4.*

*“for a long time I never used to even run ads on my [PF3] videos and then somebody last year in fact I just started it last May probably. Somebody said hey why don’t you just turn on the ad feature and the money just comes. Some revenue keeps coming in. It’s not great, but at least I get somethings. So then I turned it on last year.” EP6 - PF3.*

It could be argued that producers should not have to ‘opt-in’ to platform reward schemes, as producers may not be aware of all options open to them, and even if they are, how to initiate the schemes. Instead, they should have to ‘opt-out’ of platform reward schemes and given the necessary guidance on how to do so.

Financial data is provided on PF3, but producers challenge the level of detail on how advertising revenues are generated.

*“I don’t think there is clarity on how revenue is generated, if they don’t give me \$5 that they really owe me I wouldn’t know, even \$100 for that matter. EP6 - PF3*

Producers understand that the algorithm used to calculate revenues is affected in part by the type of advertisements that are placed and the sponsoring firms, but it is not clear to what extent this directly affects their own videos uploaded on to the platform.

*“I mean they can show you how much you are making per day and what videos are making the most money and they can tell you what the cost per thousand is. But I just don’t feel like that’s transparent like who is advertising on my channel. I think I would like to see more transparency as to how the ad system works and how you get paid. Because to me it’s all just random and I don’t know how to make any sense out of it.” EP5 - PF3.*

External producers that supply content to multiple platforms will experience different payment methods and time periods to receive payments as defined in the platform **payment terms**. PF2 state in their instructor terms released in March 2021 that producers will be paid within 45 days of the end of the month in which the user has paid, or the course has been watched. PF3 pay producers monthly, whereas PF4 pay producers every 30 days.

*“It’s a monthly basis. And once you sign up you give your account details and bank account, [PF3] automatically once a month, put some money in there. So it is all automated in that sense.” EP6 - PF3.*

*“The system is they keep the money for 30 days. Because maybe some people want a refund, we have this 30 days, full money back thing. That means that they keep the money for 30 days, and then you get like 30 days later the pay out at the first of the months, for example.” EP7 - PF4.*

For a service fee PF4 will pay producers sooner than the 30 days standard period, which is evidence that quicker methods are available to platforms, and longer payment periods are primarily a commercial decision in the interest of the platform. This puts into question the justification platforms provide to producers for existing payments periods.

*“So I could switch to monthly, weekly, or daily pay out. And it's also landing directly on my bank account.” EP7 - PF4.*

PF4 has different service packages that reduce the burden on external producers in dealing with the **administration** associated with sales invoicing, cash payments and taxes. This appears to be appreciated by producers who wish to focus their time and energy on their online courses hosted by PF4.

*“And when I started with [PF4], they only had this, they have a system called back office, which you can enable for I think 2% extra fees, you have to pay. But with the plan, the higher plan, you don't have to pay anything for that, which is nice, then they do all the taxes for you and stuff like this.” EP7 - PF4.*

Platforms that do not provide a back-office support service will often engage with third parties to deal with **handling fees**. Individual external producers will have limited time and resources to cope with administrative tasks from multiple systems.

*“one aspect, the most important one, was getting rid of writing invoices, taxes, and all this stuff. So I wanted a system which is doing all this for me basically, [PF4] was the only platform which included it out of the box, all the others Podio*

*and Thinkific and so on, you needed to implement a third-party system to make this work, which again, introduce pain, additional costs, and so on.” EP7 - PF4.*

In addition to platform charges, third party firms will charge producers for processing payments. Charges for **currency conversion**, usually a percentage of the payment due, can vary significantly between service providers.

*“there's a big problem in PayPal when I receive the money in dollars. And then I have to convert this into euros, they have a hidden really big like 4% conversion fee, which is crazy. When you make 20k a month or something like this, you will lose a lot of money by just converting this. And by using Stripe, there's only I think 1% lost in between getting it from [PF4] to my bank account. And I got it immediately.” EP7 - PF4.*

In a commercial environment, platform owners and third parties providing payment mechanisms for platforms will try to maximise revenue streams. Commercial arrangements with multiple stakeholders, increases the risk of anomalies and inconsistencies in platform systems that are beyond the control of external producers. PF2 acknowledged in their instructor terms released in March 2021, that they had been handling the administrative and handling fee inconsistently across sales, markets, channels and devices, and a stated intention to ‘clean up’ how this is managed.

### **5.3.2 The structure of information flows.**

This system lever focuses on the data provided by platform systems in reporting financial rewards to **external producers** in exchange for supplying video content to platforms.

PF2 has a dashboard for external producers which provides data, graphs, and pie charts to communicate to producers on the performance of their videos and the money earned. Information includes total and monthly earnings and revenue, which can be broken down to specific sales channels and courses. Other information includes course refunds and promotion activity.

*“I probably go about once a month and have a look. Right. Because my income is not massive. So I tend to, because I've been focused about other things. I tend to just pop in and have a little look, see how much revenue I've had, is it enough for me to get a pay out?” EP2 - PF2.*

In addition to a dashboard that can be accessed by producers, PF2 send daily e-mails to producers to keep them up to date with course activity.

*“I get an email every day, so how many enrolments I've had. But they've tailed off because I think the algorithm on [PF2] in particular, the more active you are on the platform, the more engagement you get and the more hits you get and the more your course is seen by other people.” EP2 - PF2.*

In addition to PF2 dashboard data, some producers keep a track of their own data using spreadsheets. In the following example, it is not clear if the data just comes from the platform and/or from other sources, such as social media platforms on which users communicate with producers.

*“I track certain metrics which help me, but just fill them in from time to time. I've got various KPI [key performance indicator] spreadsheets and I just pop the metrics in every now and again and I can see the changes and the growth, but otherwise, no. I know what sells. Creating content sells. Putting stuff up consistently sells. And the best thing I can do is make more courses.” EP4 - PF2.*

No negative comments were made by producers about the data provided by PF2, the focus was more about their future video production for PF2. This would suggest that producers have the information they need to be able to assess the historic performance of courses and user engagement. There was also no question about the transparency and accuracy of the data provided on PF2.

PF3 provides data on earnings and video statistics for external producers. Data on how users watch content, such as audience retention and the video percentage or time watched by viewers. Statistics for traffic sources, traffic quality from various sources: how much watching time is brought by visitors and what is the average watching time. Engagement reports provide a subscribers count and engagement indicators such as likes, comments and shares.

The number of subscribers to a channel is a key indicator for producers and for PF3. You cannot register for advertising revenues with PF3 unless you reach a minimum number of subscribers, and producers recognise that subscribers provide a measure of the popularity of a channel and the videos that make up the channel.

*“I like it when I see some milestones for example this many thousand subscribers that's a good milestone. Each is a good milestone because it just gives me motivation to keep doing it. If there is no milestone. No metric then I don't know if I am just throwing it into the ether and somebody watches it or doesn't.” EP6 - PF3.*

The non-financial data provided on PF3 is comprehensive, and producers do not challenge the level of detail, instead there is a suggestion of information overload.

*“I am curious sometimes I check the stats, but hopefully I am not enamoured by it. But I don’t get too deep into the metrics. There are a lot of metrics you can get into in [PF3] like what is a drop off point when do people actually, what’s the best part in this video and so on. I don’t go deep into that. I think its analysis paralysis kind of thing.” EP6 - PF3.*

Users can comment on any video where the option to respond is enabled. This option opens a communication channel on PF3 with video producers and users.

*“I am obsessed, people will write comments and I will respond probably within 10 minutes or so. And I get sucked in and its stupid and I know I shouldn’t, but I get sucked into the arguments on [PF3] all the time. I do check the stats; I get obsessed over, and I enjoy the good comments they make my day a little bit brighter so it’s a big mixed bag. I think part of it is that I enjoy the sociability of [PF3]. On the whole yeh I think it’s been a positive. Yeah, there’s the negative stuff.” EP5 - PF3.*

Because of the lack of transparency with advertising revenues, producers find it difficult to forecast revenue streams.

*“It’s nowhere near equitable. It’s almost insultingly low for the amount of hours. I have seen at the beginning of the pandemic there was about \$500 a month on [PF3]. I was doing I want to say 100-200,000 views a month, and the thing is don’t extrapolate those numbers because you have no clue you know what that means. So that’s how much I was making and then the pandemic hit, and I haven’t produced a video since it started so I am down about \$250 a month. So, it’s a serious drop off.” EP5 - PF3.*

There is an understanding and acknowledgement by producers that PF3 is a commercial business, and as such will look after the interests of advertisers as well as producers of video content.

*“You don’t know who’s buying the ads. Or what percentage of ads are playing. Or what exactly is playing. You have a little sense of where your ads are playing like if they are integral ads. So, there is very general stuff, but nothing specific. Maybe that’s to protect the advertisers I don’t know.” EP5 - PF3.*

PF4 provide a dashboard with periodic statements for classroom activity and earnings. Data and graphics present the number of new users, the amount of revenue generated by sales, the earnings in total earned by the course after transaction fees and commissions have been deducted from sales. The number of active students (users)

logged in to a course, the number of lectures completed by students, and the number of courses completed by students.

*“in the sales section, you can see this person bought this course. And then if you click on this, you can see a listing like, this is what he paid. This is what [PF4] get, this is what the affiliate gets, this is the discount removed, here are the taxes and stuff like this. So and then in the end, you'll see this is what you get. You can even check the reports for videos. So they are like detailed reports for each course you can see, like, which video was played, how many times were in the video, people like stopped and watched and so on. So there's pretty deep data on that if you're into these things.” EP7 - PF4.*

Because PF4 is a learning management system designed to provide an online classroom for students and teachers (producers), external producers have access to useful data about both students and video activity, which can then be directly linked to earnings.

### **5.3.3 Rules of the system.**

This system lever focuses on the business model of platforms and the terms and conditions that impact the rewards received by **external producers** in exchange for supplying video content to platforms.

PF2 reduces the price of video content as a marketing tool to attract users. A key aspect of this is the lack of control external producers have over the level of **discounting**. This will potentially impact the supply of video content to PF2, as producers may only supply basic courses designed to give users a taster of content provided on other platforms.

*“And there's a lot of criticism for [PF2], in the fact that people say, well, they can't get a lot of money for their courses. And that's so heavily discounted. A lot of them will put basic courses on there and they'll put their higher value courses they'll self-host them and try and get the traffic to come from [PF2]. Where the masses are and try and get them to buy their higher ticket videos elsewhere.” EP2 - PF2.*

Platforms with multiple commission models, discounting policies and promotions, add to the challenge for producers in tracking and forecasting their income.

*“You can create, you can do your own promotions with coupon codes. Also it changes your income. So the commissions are different. If you've promoted your course, I'd given someone a code. I think I get 98 percent of the commission as*

*opposed to 50 percent of the commission because I've driven my own traffic using my code.” EP2 - PF2.*

Producers on PF2 have the option to put a price on a video, but once a producer signs up to the promotion process, they have no control over the final price of the video to users.

*“and then you put a price on it. So you either sign up or you don't sign up to their promotional where they give discounts on a regular basis. Well, to be honest, most people know that [PF2] give discounts, so. So you price it. It doesn't really matter what you price it at because they are going to discount it. And the discount is usually so low, about 10 pound a shot, a bit like a book. I think all my sales have been on that range.” EP1 - PF2.*

If you do not take part in the PF2 discounting scheme, the platform does not provide the same level of promotion, which reduces the visibility of a course to users.

*But there's a problem first, they have this promotion system. That means your course is always offered for \$9.99 or something like this. And if to opt out and want to offer your course full price, then your course gets hidden somewhere. And basically, it will never be displayed to anyone. So you will just get very few sales.” EP7 - PF4.*

The discounting on PF2 means that many more users need to see a video for an external producer to earn an equivalent amount of money on other platforms where higher prices are charged.

*So in the end, I got like \$2.50 for the sale for one sale. And like I calculated this, back, then I also run it on Gumroad. And I needed roughly 200 people buying it on Gumroad to, to earn the same amount as 4000 people on [PF2].” EP7 - PF4.*

External producers that supply video content to multiple platforms, will be faced with different **terms and conditions** for each platform, and each platform will periodically change its own rules of reward. Prior to March 2021, PF2 had the following terms and conditions for sharing revenues with producers:

- Paid channels - students purchase the course via PF2’s paid ads on Google, Facebook or any other paid channels, PF2 receives 75% of the course revenue and **producers receive 25%**.
- Organic channels - students visit the website and purchases the course without a coupon code or referral link, the platform receives 50% of the course revenue and **producers receive 50%**.



In March 2021 PF2 changed their terms and conditions, a key change being the paid and organic channel model for revenue sharing between the platform and producers:

‘a blended share of **37%** for sales not driven by producer promotions, and the platform will keep the existing 97% rate for producer driven sales. This will replace the **25% and 50% rates** previously assigned to paid and organic channels. ‘If we change this payment rate, we will provide you 30 days’ notice.’

On the face of it this is very similar to the previous model, but only if producers have a 50:50 split of paid and organic channels, otherwise producers’ income will be affected. In addition, producers will only have 30 days’ notice of changes in terms and conditions, which may not be significant in the above example, but the following illustrates how a **26% fall** in producer earnings could be experienced:

‘If you have not opted into any of PF2's optional pricing programs, your revenue share will be **50%** of the net amount less any applicable deductions.’

PF2 Instructor Terms September 2020

‘If you have not opted into any of PF2’s optional pricing programs, your revenue share will be **37%** of the net amount less any applicable deductions.’

PF2 Instructor Terms March 2021

External producers face uncertainty and volatility in earning with continuous changes in platform terms and conditions, as well as platform authority to withdraw content at any time.

*“[PF2] have been changing a lot of their terms and conditions, and they’re my biggest, the one that I earn most money from, and so somebody else was on there saying they’ve been changing their terms and conditions and they can decide this that and the other based on your courses, they can decide to take it off or to market it more. Then there’s one person got removed from [PF2] and I thought goodness if I got removed from [PF2], then that’s a huge knock to your income.” EP3 - PF2.*

Some producers believed they had complete control over the publishing rights of the content they supply to platforms.

*“I’m like a publisher, a book publisher where the publisher owns the rights. And you get a royalty with [PF2] or any other one, you retain the rights to the program. You can sell it to as many people as you want. And you get a royalty.” EP1 - PF2.*

PF2 producer terms from March 2021 state that producers give permission to share their courses free with platform employees and with selected partners, and producers will not receive compensation in these cases.

## 5.4 Co-producer reward.

### 5.4.1 Constants, parameters, numbers.

This system lever focuses on the financial rewards of **co-producers** in exchange for making and supplying video content to platforms.

Of the co-producers interviewed, one producer worked internally for a platform, creating videos with external producers. They were a full-time employee with a **contract of service**. They were not a director or owner of the platform. During the interview with producer **CP3** - PF6, there was no reference made to performance related pay, such as bonuses or commission from the success of video content created with external producers.

*“for me it’s a salaried job. It’s been a full-time employee (of PF6). I don’t take a cut or anything like that.” CP3 - PF6.*

Of the co-producers interviewed, seven were external to the platform, creating videos with internal producers under a **contract for service**. These producers were treated as self-employed by the platform. Performance based reward is common practice on commercial platforms, and an accepted reality for producers.

*“For video content I think it has always been performance. Every other training company that I’ve worked for has been performance based, and I like that” CP1 - PF5.*

The level of reward for self-employed producers can be significant, in some years exceeding other regular sources of income.

*“It has been good; I think most years I will make between and extra \$30-\$40,000 with [PF5b]. So that’s real money. And in skinny years running your own business it’s a lifesaver, other years it’s a ‘nice to have.’” CP2 - PF5*

Equally for other producers, platform earnings must be supplemented by paid employment and other source so of income.

*“I get paid as a content creator and lecturer. I write articles, I've got a column in a magazine, I sell my own designs, and I lecture. So having another 150 quid (£150) from somewhere where nothing else is happening. That's the food shopping for two weeks, it's a no brainer.” CP6 - PF7.*

In some instances producers have been able to buy domestic and commercial property based on the earnings from PF7.

*“to give you like some sort of idea, we launched a class last year, and I'll probably be able to purchase a nice apartment on the flat in Barcelona, by the end of this year, so all cash, right, so just cash up front.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“It's amazing. It's beyond what I could, it's life transforming. I put an offer on a shop, it's going through now, you know, so it's like, yeah, financially, it's incredible.” CP5 - PF7.*

For some producers, platform earnings may be slow to build up and will not be significant over the life of a course.

*“I kind of got tired of having to tell people that they would only make a few thousand dollars you know. And not giving them a clear answer because it is algorithmically decided months later. And that's not very enticing, they'll be like 'yeh I'll spend all this time on a course with you guys and I'll get maybe a couple of thousand dollars in six months?'” CP3 - PF6.*

Platform reward received by producers from non-business sectors, such as arts and crafts can have a significant impact on the overall earnings of an individual producers. Artists that joined platforms during the pandemic highlighted the importance of having an online income, as people were often not able to physically visit galleries to buy work, and online earnings could supplement unpredictable artwork sales.

*“we've locked down literally overnight, the gallery said that they didn't want any more pieces. So prior to that it was in a in a contract by which I supply the galleries, the publishers with as many as I can knock out in a month, they pay me on 30 days. So literally overnight, that stopped.” CP5 - PF7.*

*So I know at the moment, I'm looking at least \$2,000 this month in payment, fantastic. You know, which is pretty good, and it will probably go up even more so. And you know for an artist who never really knows where they stand with money financially, you know, you never know what's going on, that it's just a game changer.” CP4 - PF6.*

Artists involved in crafts, can spend hours making items that have a relatively small commercial value. Once an item is physically sold, it no longer provides any value to

the artist. In contrast, education videos made by artists will continue to earn money while the content is watched by users and hosted on platforms.

*“And so when I’m crochet designing, for example, and I do a lot of designing for magazines and stuff, I’ll get about £80 for a pattern, and that might be £80 for something that’s taken two weeks to make, a blanket might get £120, but a blanket will take you two weeks. So you’re not getting much per hour as a designer in that context.” CP6 - PF7.*

*“And really like the idea of being able to make something that then just goes on to generate profit. Yeah. Because there’s not many things like that in my line of work.” CP8 - PF7.*

Producers recognise that having a **portfolio of earnings** is important for financial stability and earning **passive income** from video content is an important part of that portfolio.

*“But then there is the monetary reward and for me this has been, and I actually do lecture to this, that everyone should have a side hustle and you should think in terms of a portfolio of income versus just a single job. So I am practising what I preach.” CP2 - PF5.*

*“So in terms of the passive income stream that I’m generating from it, like I don’t need to, I am making enough to not have to work and not have to chase clients? I’ve never been chasing clients because clients chase me since I started. So thank goodness for that.” CP7 - PF7.*

When a producer signs a contract to create a course on PF5, the first half of a **royalty advance** is paid. When the course is published, producers receive the second half of the royalty advance. Once course earnings pay off the advance, producers begin receiving royalty payments every month.<sup>2</sup> In publishing, royalties are traditionally paid quarterly, but in educational video publishing, the norm is to pay producers monthly.

*“royalties are difficult for authors, and we want people that are really going to commit to this so we’re going to pay them monthly. And everyone else is like, ‘no we pay quarterly’ and [PF5a] founder remembers what that was like as a book author having to wait three months for another big payment. So she was like we’re going to pay monthly.” CP1 - PF5.*

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<sup>2</sup> Source [PF5 instructor blog] withheld for purposes of anonymity, validated using materials provided by producers.

PF6 reward co-producers based on a **time model**. An individual producer is rewarded based on the amount of time that each video is watched by users. PF6 November 2021 Terms of Service state that the platform distributes at least 30% of its monthly recurring revenue from membership to producers on a monthly basis. The algorithm used to the monthly share is based primarily on each producer's share of the total number of minutes watched on the platform. The specifics of the distribution calculation are subject to change from time to time.

*"it's the minutes. So if somebody can watch your video over and over again, and it just accrues more and more money. So they literally break it down. They, they look at how many minutes of watch time, basically. And so as a teacher, you just get there divvy up each month, what goes in the pot and share it out between the teachers." CP4 - PF6.*

*Well the way that [PF6] do it where they pay you per minute, what they do is that the student pays \$10 a month to be on [PF6] and they can access any of the thousands of courses, and then if they happen to watch your course you get 6p per minute of that." EP3 - PF2.*

PF6 also reward co-producers with a **referral model**. Producers that refer new users to PF6, receive an award of \$10 for each new user that visit the platform through a unique referral link, provided the user pays for their first month (or year) of membership.

*"And you also get referral money as well. So \$10 every time you refer if you referred somebody. I try and plug things on Instagram and Facebook. And so if somebody clicks on the link that goes through my class to then sign up to [PF6], they can see that, and they give you the money for that. So it's really big incentive to try and push your class. So it's quite clever really." CP4 - PF6.*

PF7 reward co-producers based on a **course model**. Course fees are shared in set percentages with producers, depending on whether users have gone straight to the platform or been redirected to the platform by producers.

*"if I sell the course directly, I get 70% of the taking. If I let them sell the course, they take 60% of the takings. So even if I'm motivated to promote it, but even if I don't, it does its thing, I still get paid at the end of every month. I get about 150 quid [pounds] from doing nothing, basically, they obviously get loads, which is what they need." CP6 - PF7.*

PF7 also reward co-producers based on an **affiliate model**. Based on PF7 terms and conditions, producers that refer users to the platform receive a 40% commission of the total sale (of any course on the platform). If it is a recurring purchase, producers get a 20% commission. If users sign up for the platform but do not make a purchase, producers receive \$2.00 for each user referred.

PF7 also reward co-producers with a **production fee**. Producers are paid a fix fee to create video content with an internal production team. This upfront cost is a recognition of the skills and time taken by producers to make a video at the production studios owned by the platform.

*“as long as you can do the prep up front, and that's the thing, they pay you £3000, no one else offers you any money, they just say we'll give you a percentage of the final thing. They paid me £3000 to go and do it. So they were taking into account how much work that was in prepping, because it's a lot of credit. Yeah. Then they obviously flew me to Madrid had me in Madrid for a week. And then sent me home with my monthly income. So in terms of the package, like why would you say no?” CP6 - PF7.*

**Administration and handling fees** managed by **third parties** including money transfer and currency conversion costs, are deducted from the final payment made by platforms to reward producers.

PF6 pays producers on the same day each month, for transactions that have occurred in the previous calendar month. PF6 issues producer payments in US Dollars through a third-party payment platform that handles payments via PayPal and other electronic methods. PF6 covers transaction fees associated with producer payments (except wire transfers), whereas foreign exchange fees are the responsibility of producers.

Course fees for PF7 are remitted to the producer via PayPal payments. PF7 producers are paid on the same day each month, payments are for transactions that have occurred in the previous calendar month. PF7 producers are responsible for all income, sales and other taxes associated with fees earned from their classes.

#### **5.4.2 The structure of information flows**

This system lever focuses on the data provided by platform systems in reporting financial rewards to **co-producers** in exchange for supplying video content to platforms.

Platform algorithms have been identified by producers as a key driver of producer reward, but a common producer complaint is there is little transparency on how this algorithm works, and the impact on their monthly personal earnings.

*“It matters a lot and again I am glad that this is completely anonymous, but it is a black box, I should be getting it any day now, but I will let you know how it goes, but I magically get paid (by PF5) almost the same every month. The algorithm has clearly assigned a value to me, and it pays me that value. The transparency is very low, like I can tell on just a per view basis what I get paid, but there is absolutely no way for me to validate the viewings.” CP2 - PF5.*

Algorithms designed to execute reward models based on current terms and conditions, are also required to maintain integrity from third parties trying to game platform systems. This partly explains the need for complexity.

*“within that royalty pool it used to be very simple, based on enrolments, and then as it grew to millions of students people started gaming the site (PF6), and our team built a much more sophisticated algorithm, that I wouldn’t even be able to describe to you.” CP3 - PF6.*

Producers that communicate directly with users have informal methods of assessing user activity and interest in their courses, either on the platform where their video content is hosted, or via other social media platforms. This sense check could indicate anomalies with producer rewards.

*“But what I can validate is the number of learners who have asked to connect with me on [PF5b] ...or asked questions and I do know in the past month it’s probably, if not 10 times its probably 7-8 times the volume of inbound. So I would expect, just to extrapolate, the same in terms of the traffic. But they say it on a month-to-month basis. I think it’s just averaged over a year, is my guess.” CP2 - PF5.*

After PF5a was acquired by PF5b, co-producers noticed a change in the pattern of reward they received. Fluctuations in reward under PF5a, were replaced with a more stable reward pattern under PF5b.

*“[PF5a] had a lot more variants. There was a way bigger delta (incremental change) each month, so I felt like that was actually based on the previous months usage. I think the algorithm probably changed at [PF5b] and again after the parent company acquisition, where you know it’s within a 5-10% delta, which is crazy.” CP2 - PF5.*

Co-producers with content on PF5a and PF5b, highlight contrasting approaches to communicating reward with that of other platforms.

*“With [PF5a] and [PF5b] they give you vague information but they’re not super transparent. Every once and a while they’ll try a new test pilot programme where they will give you feedback from your courses and that helps more with the transparency, I guess. And then they stop doing that and they don’t give you anything back again. So they’ve always done a pilot for around a month.” CP1 - PF5.*

*“[PF2] is like here’s everything that’s happening with your course and here’s how many people watched it where they live and all that kind of stuff. Totally transparency and that’s pretty fun and because that data is just helpful for me. It’s cool and it’s interesting to know whose watching, when and from where, but I also like the transparency I like knowing who’s watching what and what not.” CP1 - PF5.*

The PF6 dashboard shows total earned revenue including royalties and referrals across classes. Charts show minutes watched and the number of students across classes, and earnings are breakdown periodically. Estimated earnings for royalties and referral bonuses are also available on the dashboard, PF6 was the only platform where estimated earnings data was provided to co-producers.

*“it (estimated earnings) was quite a recent thing I think they did, just about when I started, or when I joined, yes. After that. So it's only been for a year, probably that they've done that.” CP4 - PF6.*

*“Because [PF6] are so good at what they do. Yeah. And they're so good at communicating from everything. I mean, they do the teacher stats. They tell you your statistics constantly. How many people are watching your class, you can see graphs of over the month when people are watching your class, they tell you how much they're predicting that you're going to get paid at the end of the month. So you can budget. I know it's brilliant.” CP4 - PF6.*

Making a direct connection with senior people that work for a platform, may influence a producers’ perception of platform data, and accountability for the information provided.

*“I don't think [PF6] was as transparent. When I went on [PF6]. It's all to do with each teacher has a slice of the cake in according to the viewing minutes that you've had, and who's to say, how many people have viewed the [PF6] app? Yeah, whereas [PF7] at least you can see that people are joining, it comes straight onto your sheet. I trust [PF7], as daft as that might seem, I've met the director on Zoom and stuff like that, still quite a young company. [PF6] feels like*



*some type of big, faceless object that, you know, I didn't feel that they have that accountability.” CP5 - PF7.*

The PF7 dashboard provides co-producers with earnings from users that have gone direct to the platform, this included users that have found the site via platform promoted links. A separate earnings category is provided for users that have been referred by the producers themselves. Dashboard earnings are presented so that producers can see earnings on a given day or month, as well as total earnings.

*“the only sort of data I'm looking at with the [PF7] is literally how many sales I've made. And if I promoted myself, is that been reflected in sort of an upturn in sales? But then I can also see, I see a distinction between courses that I have brought the sale to, which have sold anyway, that is very clearly delineated” CP8 - PF7.*

Co-producers using PF7 can make a direct link between earnings and the payment they receive from the platform. It is not clear if third party charges (for money transfers) are included in the dashboard.

*“But it just tells you the amount of sales you've made, the amount of sales, they've made, the amount of sales per month, the amount of sales through, what sorts of promotion, and then it tells you the amount you're going to get each month. And then they send that straight over to you.” CP6 - PF7.*

The PF7 revenue model is based on individual users paying for each course, and as a result producers can make a direct link between users, sales, and earnings on the platform.

*“you get a percentage of each course sold, every time somebody purchases, they (PF7) get a cut.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“there's a dashboard inside the back end. And you can see every purchase and where the purchase, what country the purchase is coming from, what their screen name is. It's an affiliate network, basically. So it's based off an affiliate system, and all the teachers are affiliates for their own courses.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“But I mean, at the moment, I don't have any data to go on. Other than that, really, the amount of courses that I've sold, it's also fine. So you get you get a percentage of your sales. I get my sales record come back to me, so I can see every individual sale that the course has done, and then if I go through, a purchase” CP8 - PF7.*

Platform business models will have a direct impact on the structure of information flows and the type of data access made available to producers. A revenue model based on users paying for a single, clearly defined course, rather than a royalty share, will have an advantage in communicating reward mechanism to producers.

Human interaction will influence producer perceptions of reward mechanisms, transparency, and accountability. Independent self-employed co-producers, create content with employees of platforms, and this contact along with face-to-face contact (in person and online) with managers of platforms, can create an element of trust.

### **5.4.3 Rules of the system.**

This system lever focuses on the business model of platforms, and the supporting terms and conditions that impact the rewards received by **co-producers** in exchange for supplying video content to platforms.

PF7 terms and conditions state that the platform reserves the right to change any fees or charges for using any services provided on the platform, at any time. Co-producers have no control over **content pricing**. Alongside each video on the platform is a list (original) price and then a discounted price. The discount is in the range of 60-80% off the list price, and users will pay the discounted price if they choose to watch the course. One producer questioned the validity of the original course price and the time frame it had been available to users.

*“I liken it to DFS (UK furniture retailer). Does it start the starting price (list price) for like, 20 seconds or something, and that is it?” CP7 - PF7.*

Producers on PF7 referred to the high quality of the production process and final video, and yet PF7 offers high discounts on all content to users, in a similar fashion to PF2 which has the same pay per course business model. This would indicate that platforms offering content to non-business customers, are competing on price rather than quality. Platform competition based on the price of individual courses, will have a direct impact on producer rewards.

Because producers have a **contract for service**, there is no guarantee that a platform will continue to use historic content or request future video content from producers. Platform growth in terms of users and profitability, does not necessarily equate to increasing individual rewards for producers. As a platform grows the number of

individual suppliers needed will increase, but the platform may be less reliant on the original producers to create content, and instead use alternative producers (internal or external).

Producers that do not work directly for a platform can be replaced at any time, for whatever reason a platform chooses.

*“the pay was good, and I had no reason to diversify and do something else, but then [PF5] started getting bigger and bigger they’re like ‘we’re going to take this away from you and give it to a different author that’s more skilled’.” CP1 - PF5.*

Rather than source expertise from outside the organisation, platforms can employ internal producers rather than external producers, platforms will have a more predictable cost base by paying salaries rather than royalties linked to platform sales.

*“I’ve never been an employee of theirs. They (PF5) now have staff authors, that work for them, and they are on the payroll and its cheaper for them to do that than to pay royalties based on how well the courses do.” CP1 - PF5.*

Co-producer reward streams may be constrained by **legal restrictions** to supply multiple platforms. But producers do not always adhere to platform terms and conditions and they do supply competing platforms with content.

*“But the reality is that my contract with [PF5b] precludes me from having content on competing platforms, even though I see many [PF5b] instructors on [PF2] and places like that.” CP2 - PF5.*

Co-producers have no control over changing **terms and conditions** on platforms. PF6 announced in an update (February 2022) to the platform terms of use, that they would be changing the minimum threshold to receive monthly payments from **30 to 75 minutes**. Therefore, a producer that has course content watched for less than 75 minutes (in total) by users in a month, will not receive a share of revenue. If in that same month producers have not had any referral income, no reward would have been received, despite producer content being accessible to users. As a result of the new 75-minute threshold, an increased number of producers will not receive any royalty payments from PF6.

PF6 terms of use (2021) state that it distributes at least **30%** of its monthly recurring revenue from users to producers on a monthly basis. The algorithm used to determine monthly share is based primarily on producer share of the total number of minutes watched on the platform. The specifics of the distribution calculation are subject to change from time to time.

Co-producer **CP3** - PF6 was employed by PF6 up until 2017, at that time the share of royalties for producers was 30-50% of the total membership revenue. Site pages of PF6 state that the total revenue pool for the platform has grown incrementally each year, but the proportion of the revenue shared amongst producers has fallen from 30% - 50% in 2017 to 30% in 2021.

*“I think it’s still 50-50 where they take/ create whatever you would call it, because they just wanted to draw a line in the sand and just say we’re equal partners on this platform. They say **50%** goes to all of our instructors in a royalty pool and 50% goes to keeping the business operating basically. And then within that royalty pool it used to be very simple based on enrolments, and then as it grew to millions of students, people started gaming the site and our team built a much more sophisticated algorithm.” **CP3** - PF6.*

If in any given year, producers were paid close to **50%** of the royalty pool, this would equate to a **40% fall** in the share of revenues compared to 2021 when the share was **30%**.

Based on the individual accounts of internal producers, external producers and co-producers, the following section summarises features of reward unique to each case.

## 5.5 Reward summary

The unique features of reward by producer group are summarised in Table 5-3:

**Table 5-3** Producer reward by group

<b>Producer rewards</b>	Internal producer	Co-producer	External producer
<b>Employment status</b>	Employed	Self-employed	Self-employed

<b>Content ownership</b>	None	No copyright when a platform produces a video	Producer copyright
<b>Multiple platform income</b>	Restricted to one platform	Focus on 'partner' platform	Multiple platform income
<b>Earnings portfolio</b>	Salary only	Multiple sources of publishing income	Multiple sources of publishing income
<b>Production</b>	Benchmarked salary	Royalty advance	No production reward
<b>Performance</b>	Job description	Relative metrics or Direct metrics	Direct metrics
<b>Transparent metrics</b>	Producers value user outcomes over video views	Producers value user ratings and course numbers	Producers value user ratings and course numbers
<b>Referral income</b>	None	Fixed fee or Percentage of course fees	Percentage of course fees
<b>Payment</b>	Salary and benefits	Royalties or Revenue share	Revenue share
<b>Service charges</b>	None	Platform and third party charges	Platform and third party charges

These unique features of reward between groups shine a light on current practice but also on potential intervention points for co-operation.

## 5.6 Reward leverage points.

The following section summarises unique features of reward for internal, external and co-producers in making and supplying video content to platforms. This is then followed by a summary of reward themes that are common to all groups. There is a focus on the hegemony of commercial platform systems over producers of content and summarises potential areas for change in the reward and data mechanisms experienced by each producer group. At this point specific recommendations have not been made on how these system issues should be addressed (adjustment of levers), this will be addressed in chapter eight.

### **5.5.1 Reward levers for internal producers.**

Internal producers with a contract of service and a fixed annual salary, are rewarded with earnings paid in the domestic currency of the host platform, potentially missing out on higher earnings based on international rates. Subject to the goals of a system, stable producer reward provides a basis for individual producers to have a broader focus than just data and user activity, to wider societal issues.

Resource constraints may require third party platforms and information systems to be used, multiple systems can be difficult to manage and may not provide the data needed to manage performance-based reward. This is compounded if an external system is owned and managed by a third party, and this system operates within a different paradigm, with goals that are incongruent with an internal system.

### **5.5.2 Reward levers for external producers.**

Platforms that host content (rather than produce and host content), are more likely to use external producers rather than internal producers. Because of this, reward models are based on user demand. The costs and risks associated with production are entirely with the individual producer. Advertising models of reward are difficult to manage from a platform and producer perspective, the platform must manage expectations and commercial demands of both advertising companies and producers, and this tension can lead to a lack of data transparency, and unpredictable earnings for producers.

Changing terms and conditions can have a significant impact on producer rewards. A single change in the terms and conditions of one platform, reduced the share of reward for external producers by 26%. External producers have limited control over price discounting of their content supplied to platforms. Even where individual producers are allowed to set initial prices, platforms have the power to reduce prices further to attract users.

### **5.5.3 Reward levers for co-producers.**

Platforms that produce and host content will eventually have capacity issues using only internal producers. Because of this, production and reward models will incorporate contracts for service (internal producers) and contracts of service (external producers).

Mixed models of reward are received by co-producers, providing reward based on video production and video performance. Even if a video is not successful, producers would be paid by a platform for making a video, this means that the platform and producer are partially sharing the risk of video production and performance.

Changing terms and conditions can have a significant impact on producer rewards. A single change in the terms and conditions of one platform, potentially reduced the share of reward for co-producers by 40%. Co-producers have no control over price discounting of content to users. Some platforms do not discount at all, but those platforms that do, will set initial prices and the final discounted price paid by users.

The following Table 5-4 summarises reward based system leverage points by producer group.

**Table 5-4** Reward leverage points

System leverage points (Meadows)	Internal producer reward	External producer reward	Co-producer reward
12. Labour reward	<p>A fixed salary provides financial stability but puts a cap on earnings for producers</p> <p>Pay set relative to statutory minimum wages provides a degree of international pay parity</p> <p>Comparatively high national wages puts less emphasis on international pay comparisons</p> <p>Regular pay provides financial stability</p>	<p>Performance only reward puts the costs and risks associated with production with the producer</p> <p>Reward directly linked to course or user numbers will provide reward transparency</p> <p>Advertising reward models provide reward data but only provide partial transparency</p> <p>For a fee, platforms offer quicker</p>	<p>Performance and Production reward partially shares risk between a platform and producer</p> <p>A share of a pool of earnings will require algorithms that affect reward transparency</p> <p>Royalty reward models are perceived as a 'black box' to producers</p> <p>Platforms offer quarterly or</p>

		payment terms for producers	monthly royalty payment terms
6. Information flows	<p>Mixed systems (internal and external) restrict producer access to data</p> <p>Salaries linked to a job family structure defined by technical competency are perceived as equitable</p> <p>Salaries provide freedom to focus on broader themes beyond platform data and personal performance</p>	<p>Closed systems (internal only) isolate producers from users</p> <p>Reward transparency provides clear connection between data and reward</p> <p>Lack of reward transparency leads to unpredictable earnings and lack of trust in platform reward</p>	<p>Open systems (linked to external systems) engage with producer networks</p> <p>Reward transparency provides clear connection between data and reward</p> <p>Lack of reward transparency leads to unpredictable earnings and lack of trust in platform reward</p>
5. System rules	<p>Employment (contract of service) provides financial security and stability</p> <p>Employee benefits provide financial security: holiday pay, sick pay, parental leave, health insurance and pension</p> <p>No power to set system rules. Rules set by philanthropist and local director</p>	<p>Self-employment (contract for service) provides financial independence and autonomy</p> <p>Self-employment provides opportunities for multiple revenue streams but exposure to volatile earnings</p> <p>Hegemony prevalent. Limited participation in setting system rules creates a power struggle between producers and platforms</p>	<p>Internal producers (contract of service) and external producers (contract for service)</p> <p>Self-employment provides opportunities for multiple revenue streams but exposure to volatile earnings</p> <p>Hegemony prevalent. Limited participation in setting system rules keeps producers at arm's length</p>



		Changing terms and conditions can have a significant impact on producer financial reward	Changing terms and conditions can have a significant impact on producer financial reward
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#### **5.5.4 Reward levers for all producers.**

Based on NVivo analysis and Meadows (1999) levers of control, the following section summarises levers that apply across producer groups, internal, external and co-producers respectively.

##### **Reward ownership theme**

There is inconsistency between platforms and within platforms how administration and handling fees are managed, often involving third parties, the variability of processes and charges has a direct and material effect on rewards received by independent producers.

A contract *for* service between producers and platforms, allows producers to pursue their own personal goals, and to benefit from a portfolio of earnings. Independence from platforms and multiple revenue streams was particularly valued by producers working in sectors where offline (non-platform) earnings can be unpredictable.

A contract *of* service between internal producers and platforms, provides producers with earnings stability. Having a paid full-time job was particularly valued by producers during the pandemic. Being rewarded with a fixed salary, rather than performance related pay, provided internal producers with scope to focus on broader themes beyond platform data and personal performance.

Within the study, platforms that offer a pay per course model to users are competing on price to attract users. High percentage discounts are used to attract users, with most content priced within a similar range, this systems rule can lead to homogenisation of content and affect perceptions of video quality. Producers have no control over pricing, and because they receive a percentage of the final price paid by users, this will have a direct impact on producer earnings.

Without any control or input into platform terms and conditions, producers are vulnerable to platform decisions about reward models. Every platform within the study has seen growth in users, especially during the pandemic, but this has not been matched by improving reward for producers based on platform terms and conditions. As the cake has grown, the share of the cake has been diminishing.

### **Transparency theme**

Producers emphasised the importance on platform reporting tools providing data transparency, valuing dashboards that provide a clear connection between user metrics and reward payments. Where platforms operate a reward model directly linked to course fees and users, producers appeared to be more satisfied with the level of transparency. Rewards based on royalty pools and minutes watched were more difficult for producers to assess whether the reward was equitable. Algorithms are like a black box to producers, where you can see the inputs (video content) and output (amount received) but given limited or restricted views of the processes and workings between.

This chapter has identified how individual producers are rewarded for education platform content, the unique features of reward for all three producer groups, and common themes based on reward ownership and data transparency. The next chapter considers the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of individual producers.

## 6 Motivation for producers

### 6.1 Introduction

This is the second of three chapters to focus on the findings from the analysis stage. It considers motivation for all three producer groups. It considers the research question why individual producers share education platform content (Q2). More specifically the focus is on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of individual producers.

Utilising NVivo at the analysis stage, three core themes emerged across all producer groups that address the research question why individual producers share content with platforms. These themes were **social impact, professional independence, and co-production**. Each of these themes are explored in detail using the ‘leverage points’ identified by Meadows (see Table 6-1).

**Table 6-1** Meadows’ motivation leverage points

Places to Intervene in a System	Leverage Points (Meadows, 1999)
11. The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks	<i>“Often you can stabilize a system by increasing the capacity of a buffer, but if a buffer is too big, the system becomes inflexible. It reacts too slowly and costs a lot to maintain” (p7).</i>
10. The structure of material stocks and flows	<i>“The stocks and flows and their physical arrangement can have an enormous effect on how the system operates. The only way to fix a system that is laid out wrong is to rebuild it, if you can” (p7).</i>
9. The lengths of delays and system change	<i>“If you are trying to adjust a system state to your goal, but you only receive delayed information about what state the system is, you will overshoot and overshoot. Same if your information is timely, but your response isn’t” (p8).</i>

8. The strength of negative feedback loops	"A negative feedback loop is self-correcting; their presence is critical to the long-term welfare of the system. How does the system self-correct under different conditions and impacts?" (pp9-10).
7. The gain around driving positive feedback loops	"A positive feedback loop is self-reinforcing, the more it works, the more it gains power to work some more. Positive feedback loops are sources of growth, explosion, erosion, and collapse in systems" (p11).

## 6.2 Internal producer motivation

### 6.2.1 The size of buffer and other stabilizing stocks

This system lever focuses on the motivation of **internal producers** to make video content for a single non-profit platform. Examining the type of content supplied by the platform, producer perceptions of the content they create, and their motivation to share their knowledge in making inhouse branded video content.

Video content is accessible and free to users via the foundation YouTube video channel, a platform accessible to their global target market. The foundation also has a dedicated platform that provides content and embedded YouTube videos.

*"So if we don't provide them the resources, then it's going to be something that is not scalable. So that's why we try to use the most wide platforms, the most easy for the people to understand the website, the YouTube channel that is widespread all over the world. So yeah, that's like our strategy in order to reach that people." IP3 - PF1.*

PF1 video content is aimed at engaging with audiences with limited literacy, numeracy and technology skills. PF1 videos have been seen by a large number of users in multiple countries.

*"Because in their minds you use words that are so difficult, brand new, difficult for pronunciation. Because of this you need a course or video that is very simple, one minute on this and not anymore." IP2 - PF1.*

*“So and once I started, I started asking for figures on the course and just last week, I found out that the English course has been seen by over 7 million people in 2020.” IP1 - PF1.*

PF1 producers respond to user feedback and the resource limitations of users in their target market, aware that mobile technology is an important channel for users to access content.

*“there's people that they don't have enough resources to pay internet, but they have a phone. And the phone comes with a plan that has WhatsApp and Facebook. So what they told us was that they communicated with the kids through the WhatsApp of the cell phones parents, because they didn't have anything else because they don't have computers” IP5 - PF1.*

*“we have some projects for offline access to the site that can help us achieve that people that is not connected to the internet, that is our one of our main cores, people that doesn't even know how to turn on a computer.” IP3 - PF1.*

PF1 video content is free and accessible to users that have limited financial resources. Despite being free to users, producers are conscious of creating high quality content that meets the need of users.

*“people that don't have money use my content. So I wanna do high quality content because maybe it's free, but I wanna make sure this course is very good. You can see a course you pay for, and my course is free, maybe my course is the same or better than the course you pay. I need to explain how to create an account in Instagram or Facebook, but how do you explain to people that don't have money, don't have time, don't have a computer?” IP2 - PF1.*

Internal producers are expected to follow PF1 guidelines in making video content, these will include directives from the foundation about suitable content, as well as guidelines on language to engage users.

*“we have guidelines about how to communicate with people, how to be as specific and clear as we can, because all the people need to understand, doesn't matter if it's elderly people or young. It has to be something really friendly, and clear for everyone. So we have this kind of guidelines about how to communicate the language we have to use. Never using words people don't understand. We don't have one hundred percent freedom to do whatever we want, but it's not like super strict. I think we can do personal tone, or something like that.” IP2 - PF1.*

Collaboration with outside parties (external producers) will be partially restricted by the requirement to meet internal guidelines from the foundation. This could restrict the scope and quantity of video content (stocks).

*“I think the difficulty there is quality standards, political views, a political view, neutrality, let's say, at least that's what is an issue at [PF1], in order to be able to accept more collaboration is that we have a very clear view of what we don't talk about and what we do. The tone of our communication, and that's restrictive. Yeah. And it's very hard to ensure without a very strict overseeing process, that collaborators outside of the organisation are going to, are going to follow guidelines” IP1 - PF1.*

PF1 by having boundaries for producers and guidelines for content creation, there is a risk that the platform will build up a stock of homogenous content, affecting producer creativity and ultimately user demand.

### **6.2.2 The structure of material stocks and flows**

This system lever focuses on the motivation and methods of **internal producers** to make video content for a non-profit platform. The motivation of producers to work in a particular way, including whether that is a preference to work autonomously or to collaborate with other producers. How production takes place and why certain production methods are preferred and working with platform rules and processes.

PF1 had a defined number of internal producers (employees) working to create content, this placed internal constraints on the capacity of the platform to generate content and respond to changes in demand.

*“We are the small part of the foundation in Latin America. But in the USA more people work in this area. Two months ago, I see the other people that work in the team using Zoom with all the people. All the team, it was great because it's not only 12 person work here, but 20 people. So I was proud to see the all the other people working for the company.” IP2 - PF1.*

PF1 had one Brazilian producer creating Portuguese content for the platform. This producer had a similar working practice to external producers interviewed, working in isolation from other producers connected with the platform, because there were challenges with collaborating with Colombian colleagues producing Spanish content.

*“I would prefer to talk with other people. I'm jealous about the Spanish team, because they are so many people like they can ask of the other people's opinions. It's difficult to me to do this at [PF1] because people kind of*

*understand Portuguese because it's kind of similar than Spanish, but it's not the same. It's not the same as talking to another Brazilian. I really needed some native opinion, like talking with someone who really understands what I'm saying, the tone of the content. I would prefer to have another partner. But it's not possible right now at [PF1]. So I'm trying to do by myself.” IP4 - PF1.*

Unlike a platform with supplies of stock (video content) from a relatively large number of external producers, PF1 will have capacity issues if staff absences occur.

*“ I have paid sick leave. Like, if this wasn't happening, these 30 days that I'm going to be on a sick leave, would have been beat up because you need to get back to it. Because every day, you're not producing well, you're not producing.” IP1 - PF1.*

The director is actively involved in content creation as a producer, as well as the manager of a small team of internal producers of education content.

*“Because the time for them to get to that point where I don't have to look at anything anymore, it's been very difficult. But now we are going into agile methodologies. And so I started to loosen up a little bit and say, okay, you guys look at the work that you've done. Let's say like the person who is organising everybody, so you make a meeting where everybody looks at the final product, and you evaluate if you think it's okay or not, but like, you have to start creating that. It's your responsibility, your criteria.” IP5 - PF1.*

The Colombian platform (PF1) had a lower cost per employee than the US platform, which should make it more sustainable with the finite resources of the foundation, and also offer the potential to support plans for expansion to meet changing international market needs.

*“here is a third world country, is less expensive, people is very creative, so here a good human resource. We have the same schedule (time zone) as United States because for them is easier to work with us than India, because India is in the other part of the world, and they have to wait until they wake up. But here is very comfortable to work with Colombians and very cheap to pay them.” IP3 - PF1.*

Employees provide a more direct and controllable source of education content, rather than relying on the drive of independent producers to supply a platform as and when they choose. Provided the market is stable, and the strategy of the foundation does not change frequently, it will be relatively easier to plan, control and make decisions based on human resources and reward systems. Should rapid change occur, PF1 as with any other platform reliant on full time employees, will be faced with the

difficulties of responding to higher (or lower) stock demands, and accessing new internal producers.

### 6.2.3 The lengths of delays and system change

This system lever focuses on the impact on **internal producer** motivation as a result of system delays and changes. How long does it take for the system to change, and what is the impact of system changes?

PF1 is a small team of internal producers, which can respond to environmental changes quickly provided the changes are within the aims and objectives of the foundation. The director of the team can make autonomous decisions about management and operational issues. PF1 changed the stock of content quickly during the pandemic, at first creating live streaming content to connect with the outside world in real time, and then adapting again by creating podcasts that were pre-recorded, this was deemed to be a better way to maintain quality standards.

*“I sent everybody home, they are going to be alone, they are going to feel part from the group. And to the people that is outside there, a lot of people is going to be lonely. Thank God, I have a partner and everything that happened just before the quarantine. And I was saying, we have to talk to them, we have to make live streaming. Once we started to receive the feedback from the people it was more rewarding than anything else. That kept us connected and connected to other people. And other people later told us that, that made them feel less apart and less lonely. So that's great. Because the quality decreased a little, we wanted to keep the quality the same, so now we're doing a podcast.” IP5 - PF1.*

*“we are working from home since the pandemic started. We decided to move all the processes in each home. And we're working today with internet access. So some of my mates go to the office in Bogota because they have to record videos, they are presenting so they have to go” IP3 - PF1.*

*“And now for the pandemic for Coronavirus, as the creator I do everything, one person, I do a version of course for the class, I then go to the studio.” IP2 - PF1.*

Rather than reduce the interaction with users, the pandemic enhanced the relationship between internal producers and users. There was more emphasis on user-producer interaction, rather than asynchronous feedback from users, and establishing the immediate needs of users that had restricted or no contact with people.

*“When the quarantine started the people started to talk to us. And we never had that interaction between people and the creators. They're helping them*



*and they are they are answering to us. You're paying attention and they're listening. And they're looking at us. And that was awesome.” IP5 - PF1.*

*“when we started in this quarantine thing, I thought about all the people that was going to be left alone at home. The things that they needed to know, in order to live, we have to start thinking about them. We have to start doing content very fast, even though the quality is not that good. We have to start teaching from the inside out. So let's think about all the tools that we have to communicate, how are they going to manage banking, how am I going to sell through internet? How am I going to teach? How am I going to learn through internet? Because everything is online. So we looked towards the needs of the people.” IP5 - PF1.*

#### **6.2.4 The strength of negative feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how negative feedback mechanisms affect the motivation of **internal producers** to make video content for a non-profit platform. How does the system self-correct under different conditions and impacts? How does the platform manage employed producers, and the stock of education videos supplied by producers at the right level?

PF1 receive feedback from users via several different communication channels, both online and offline, this user communication supports the director and internal producers planning future video stocks and adjusting existing stocks.

*“Yes, the comments in YouTube. And the emails that we get, or comments in social media, that helps us a little bit. We also, I also talked to people outside of the office, if I get the chance, because I am the one that travels the most, I am the one that is going into communities and talking to people, and people talk to me. I always say to people you can write me or call me, let me know what you think. Because I think it's important.” IP5 - PF1.*

User comments are useful, but how does the platform manage internal producers (employees), and the stock of education videos supplied by producers at the right level when there is limited system data? How does the platform know they have the correct number of employees employed to do the right jobs at the right pay? The difficulty for PF1 is there are limited signals available to indicate whether stock levels (videos) are at or near systems goals. Firstly because the system does not have specified goals, such as being the market leader, secondly because the data available is limited by having

two disconnected systems that might otherwise provide indicators of whether the system is in balance.

*“data comes from analytics in Google for our website, but there are some numbers that we still can't get from the two platforms (PF1 and YouTube)” IP5 - PF1.*

For commercial systems, prices vary to moderate supply and demand and to keep them in balance (Meadows, 1999). PF1 does not charge for user content, so there are fewer environmental signals and opportunity for negative feedback loops. Internally there are opportunities to compare the data between the platforms in different languages, to compare the internal systems signals and negative feedback loops.

Rather than rely on a system that does not provide sufficient data to make forward thinking and progressive plans, the director of PF1 has personally researched ways of developing the platform, including the potential of artificial intelligence (AI).

*“I've been thinking about what will be the programme in the future, because that is what he (founder) wants, start looking into the future. And what I see is AI, like artificial intelligence, somehow, because I know that like in artificial intelligence per se, it's not like it doesn't exist right now. But we have machine learning, deep learning, and all of those things that we can start looking into it. And if we transform our platform in a way that we can learn from the students, how they learn better, and how we can provide better learning, that is where I want to go.” IP5 - PF1.*

PF1 does not have immediate commercial needs to fulfil, or direct competition that forces the system to change in the short term. The platform has two unique and unconnected sources of data, YouTube where the videos are hosted, and the data form the platform itself. It is very likely that the data needed will not be accessible, or if it is, there will be a delay in being received. Producer (employee) rewards are not directly related to platform data, but the support from philanthropic sources may be affected by the success of the platform, which will at some point impact the rewards and employment of internal producers in the medium to long term.

*“And if we don't start, we'll never get there. So to start, we have to start watching the user, looking at the user how they use things and giving the user different options to see what is better, or how they learn, and to start to learn from people, according to a lot of things like ages or stats, so we need a different platform to start doing that, because our platform doesn't do that. Our platform does provide staff. And that's it. But we don't have anything that is*

*collecting information. And we have to take that first step, which is to create a platform that collects information from the user.” IP5 - PF1.*

### **6.2.5 The gain around driving positive feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how positive feedback mechanisms affect the motivation of **internal producers** to make video content for a non-profit platform.

The director of PF1 personally carries out all interviews for internal producers. There is a strong emphasis on establishing if the interviewee characteristics align with organisational values and objectives of the foundation.

*“The way I interview is kind of weird. Because I always ask things like, what is your dream, and how are we going to help you fulfil that dream? Do you have a background in something that has to do with the community or helping people? Do you like doing that or just because have the skill? Yes, you can you have it, but it's the attitude, and your character, and the way you are that drives you along your life. But the tool is one thing, and the personality and the principles. Yeah, the principles are, you know, like, the things that drives you, the values that drives you, those are very important for us. So, we are kind of a punk organisation.” IP5 - PF1.*

Continuing professional development is promoted by the director at PF1, with internal producers receiving training on areas that improve their job skills and personal development.

*[IP5 - PF1] paid for us three creators of content to have elocution lesson. So we benefit from this because I think in other companies or other work, maybe they don't worry about my experience, my studies, but here with [PF1] you can benefit more. You can know more, the knowledge. You need to know about this because you are the teacher, it was an amazing course. I learned about my voice, respiration.” IP2 - PF1*

*“here in the foundation, all the days, I've learned something new. The team is extraordinary, extraordinary people in which you can learn with them. [IP5 - PF1] is always such a great person with us, empowering people to be better each time, she's very great. And all the other team is like a family. So that was special. And also was seeing that you can help others” IP3 - PF1.*

## **6.3 External producer motivation**

### **6.3.1 The size of buffer and other stabilizing stocks**

This system lever focuses on the motivation of **external producers** to supply video content to platforms, examining the motivation to supply one platform over another. Producer motivation to share their knowledge and to make video content.

Platforms with external producers supplying content, have less restrictions about what can and cannot be uploaded to a platform compared to platforms with internal producers or platforms with both internal and external producers. PF2, PF3 and PF4 allow a broad range of content produced in different styles. With limited or no restrictions on content, producers are faced with several production decisions, not least if the video design is to be formal or informal from an educational perspective.

*“And I realised that one of my most watched videos- which is ‘[title] in 5 minutes’ is unlike my other videos. It was just scribble, because I wanted to get something out really quickly, but I did not believe that this would take off and I am thinking to myself...if that would have taken off that way maybe I would have put more attention to it. But it is what it is. So I am still dabbling with should I make it less formal, just scribble, or should I make it a little more formal?” EP6 - PF3.*

PF2 state in the 2021 published accounts that the platform has contracted with over 60,000 producers, but a significant portion of the most popular content on the platform, and as a result a significant portion of revenue, is attributable to a limited number of producers.

*“I think that the most successful people who have produced one or two videos, one or two courses that did really well, but most of them produce lots of courses and use one course to promote the other one. The top of the tree, the people that are really successful, they earn several hundred thousand dollars a year, but they're the exception, they're good at promoting it. And all the other platforms want to have them as well.” EP1 - PF2.*

Demand for producer content from businesses will largely depend on market forces, but also government intervention with employee participation in training and education.

*“I think in America there's some new thing out where in American companies have to give their employees some sort of enrichment. And so educational enrichment can include things like learning a language. And they send my courses to companies for their employees to watch and they're really specific on what they accept, because a lot of people, who I've made courses for, their courses haven't been accepted because the content isn't what they want for*

*businesses. Foreign languages is a big thing in businesses, apparently, so they want foreign language courses.” EP3 - PF2.*

Producers will sometimes communicate (via social media or e-mail) with a producer community before deciding about whether to share content with new platforms.

*“And I like to check them out with other people to make sure that they’ve got their courses on there. I know a lot of instructors; would you recommend them? If they say no, I just close it off. I’m limited on how much time, I don’t tend to be rude, you didn’t pass the vetting test, I just say look I haven’t got time, I can’t do it. It’s a very informal lattice of people. I mean there’s no formal channels of communication or anything like that, but you email or message a few people on Facebook and just say, have you seen this one and have you got any thoughts? EP4 - PF2.*

Producers typically start with PF3 before going to any other platform because videos can be easily uploaded, and the platform has access to a large and wide global audience providing a readymade marketplace for producer video content.

*“[PF3] was probably the only one that was that I was aware of. And it was really easy because you could put your videos, you could just upload them.” EP2 - PF2.*

*“I just find [PF3] to be the largest, it’s really a numbers thing. It’s the largest user base. It fits with what I am trying to do, that’s really the reason why.” EP5 - PF3.*

*“I figured [PF3] was the default watching platform for everybody. From a branding perspective there’s no other platform for me for video branding that gives me a broader scope across the world.” EP6 - PF3.*

*“I started with different marketplaces before I got into [PF4]. I had built up a [PF3] channel already, so people knew me a bit. But still, I wanted to benefit from marketplaces, because they have their marketing department and their ways on sharing everything. So you don’t have to take care about marketing yourself.” EP7 - PF4.*

Once producers have established several user contacts, they will typically look at other platforms where there is more control over users and resources.

*“I had never heard of [PF2] and it sounds absolutely ideal. I can create my own content; I could upload it. So I don’t have to do promotion because that’s not really my thing.” EP2 - PF2.*

*“Places like [PF4] and Thinkific because they’re kind of like almost like a self-hosting type platform. You get all the commission whereas on some of these*

*other sites they take a large percentage. For example [PF2] you'll take like 50 percent if you're not generating the traffic to your courses on there. But Thinkific and [PF4], you drive your own traffic, which means you keep all the money. But also there's a massive marketing side of things that you have to understand with them.” EP2 - PF2.*

The supply of platform stock will be affected by a common practice of producers posting the same video content on multiple platforms at the same time.

*“I'm on [PF6], Stackskills, Skillwise, Simpliv I have my own site on [PF4]. I am on Eduonics, Skill Box, uLeague. I have my own platform on Thinkific, CyberU is a new one. I get approached about one a week, I look at them and see. It's the classic 80/20 rule that I make most of my money from 20% of the sites. A lot of them I only published on last year, and a lot of them are fairly early stage so they don't make me very much money. So it's really just a question of watching as the market evolves, making sure you don't only have your course on one platform.” EP4 - PF2.*

If producers submit content to multiple platforms, there is a risk that they will not be able to fully engage with users and other platform stakeholders.

*“So I want to make my life easier. So because imagine you have to update something, you have to answer questions on five, six different platforms. It's just driving you crazy. Yeah. So I decided, okay, one platform, I want to have full control on it. And since I have my big following already, I will do the marketing. So that was the point where I switched over, I moved all my courses to one platform, like cancelled it on all the other platforms.” EP7 - PF4.*

The terms and conditions of platforms can have implications for the supply of content, if the property rights are too restrictive, producers are encouraged to prioritise platforms that do not have restrictions, and only then place content on platforms that have restrictions. This may have implications for the supply of video content.

*“[PF2] have changed recently, they've got a new service for business and now they say if you're on this new service you can't publish new content anywhere else, unless it's already been published. Luckily, I'd already got 9 or 10 different platforms that I'd published on. If I make a new course, I publish it on [PF2] last, and that way it gets round the contract. I've already published it elsewhere and then put it on [PF2], then if they choose it then its already been published elsewhere, so they can't sort of control you that way.” EP3 - PF2.*

Inflows are faster than outflows in platform stocks of education video content because of the life span of videos. Some platform content will remain on a platform much longer than other content, this could simply be down to user demand, but it was

recognised by participants that a key reason for sustained or growing demand is a concept of 'evergreen' videos. Evergreen content is search-optimized content that is continually relevant and stays fresh for readers over a long period of time. It continues to be relevant long past its publication date, with search traffic growing over time (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021).

*"So there's all sorts of avenues and opportunities and as long as you do it in a fashion that is evergreen. So some of my online course creation stuff has been, some of it has been [PF2] specific and as [PF2] has changed it has gone out of date. But a lot of it hasn't changed at all and of course all my corporate finance stuff I make sure it's all evergreen, so that it doesn't go out of date. And then it's just a question of repackaging it, so I can take a five-hour course and deliver five courses of one hour on Skillshare and deliver it in different ways. Same content." EP4 - PF2.*

*"Because if I create good quality video that are time insensitive, meaning AI (Artificial Intelligence) concept or an architecture concept today is the same thing as it is going to be in ten years." EP6 - PF3.*

*"if I built up a library of content that was out there, then it's almost like a snowball riding downhill on a pension fund. Its evergreen. So just to give you an example, the last six months, the last year we've spent moving house I didn't really do a proper days work from the end of June, my income went up." EP4 - PF2.*

In contrast, where content is not evergreen, producers may have to update existing content or create new videos to fulfil user demand.

*"my biggest problem I think was because mine have been technology based, they're not really an evergreen course, technology changes. You then have to go back and re-record it. So it's kind of like a constantly moving beast, a lot of these courses are more generic. You know, if you're talking about film making for example. And how you use cameras and lighting and things like that. They are a lot more evergreen than one that's based on Excel. Because Excel does an update every year or so, it looks different, it behaves differently." EP2 - PF2.*

### **6.3.2 The structure of material stocks and flows**

This system lever focuses on the motivation and methods of **external producers** to make video content. The motivation of producers to work in a particular way, including whether there is a preference to work autonomously or to collaborate. How

production takes place and why certain production methods are preferred, and the impact of these platform processes and procedures on motivation.

Freelance producers of platform content have the flexibility to work remotely anywhere in the world, they do not have to travel to and from work and can utilise online meetings. As a result, producers have more time to create video content, and achieve a better work life balance.

*“two years ago, I was also doing freelancing and like training, I was like travelling to different companies and teaching their employees [software]. But I realised like freelancing is not really scalable, because you use your time, you need to travel and all this stuff. If I spent more my time here, I can like scale it up quite a bit. And this is also the part which I like most doing. So it was like perfectly aligning. And now it's not only paying me, it's basically paying also a lot of like a couple of other people, which is nice to see that, like the team is growing step by step.” EP7 - PF4.*

*It's a lot less stressful. I know I don't have to rush off every day down to The City. At one stage I did 218 meetings in 9 months on three continents. I was a VIP Gold BA. You know I was doing deals in Asia, Europe and The States and 280 meetings in 9 months, you work that out. I was on the road three, four, five days a week and it was just insane. So yeh I'd have probably had a heart attack by now if I'd continued at that pace so this is a longer-term strategy and I can keep on making these, I'm 58 now, I can keep on making these videos for another twenty years and longer if I live that long.” EP4 - PF2.*

Some external producers prefer to work independently rather than produce content with other producers, motivated by production autonomy and creative freedom.

*“I'm better working by myself. Even when I was at university and working on projects, I would always end up taking over. I'm better to just do it by myself.” EP3 - PF2.*

*“I wanted independence that I didn't have to depend on anyone for turnaround or anything of that nature. So while it is not super classy and super professional because I have my limits on how I can visualise stuff. It gives me the freedom to do anything end to end myself.” EP6 - PF3*

*“Cos we are talking about motivation too and this can give you a little bit of insight into why I am motivated to make those videos was...every filmmaker I think wants ultimate control. my dream passion if I won the lottery next week would be to do whatever I want. I wouldn't have to be beholden to a client, or I wouldn't have to be beholden to a studio or anything. I would just make the projects that I want to produce right.” EP5 - PF3*



While other producers may prefer to work with others, in practice they create content in isolation, with no face-to-face contact with users, producers or platform employees. This can impact on personal motivation.

*“I’m a people person, I like to talk to people and meet new people and rapport is massive for me as a trainer and the person I get my best ideas from other people I like to bounce them off them. And that’s where the online courses were lacking. They don’t feed you, it’s very much you have to generate your own motivation.” EP2 - PF2.*

Producers that collaborate will face practical challenges in working together beyond the expert knowledge and goodwill needed to co-produce content, especially with multiple producers and issues around shared resources.

*“I did get approached a few years ago to collaborate on a course in Excel, because at the time I had a really popular Excel course on there. I think maybe four or five other instructors, to put a course together at the same time, but it didn’t really work. I think the idea was that we’d all use our own mailing list to promote it, but it just didn’t get any traction.” EP2 - PF2.*

If two instructors perceive they are of equal standing in terms of success and audience size, there appears to be more potential in collaborating. This also indicates features of collaboration that will need to be evident if reciprocity is to be recognised by producers.

*“I have collaborated on courses with other people and actually it’s a very good strategy and something I’ll do more of this year cause it’s a very good way to grow your audience on [PF2] and to sell well. I’ve done three courses, and when you combine two instructors with large audiences you cross sell and actually get a lot of sales because people find the new instructor for the first time on both sides, and it works really well.” EP4 - PF2.*

Some producers are reluctant to collaborate with other subject matter experts in the same field, as they believe it will negatively impact on their unique style of creating content, and ultimately be a threat to their success.

*“I am trying to create my personal brand, so in my personal brand I want authenticity. What if there was somebody with a better voice, with a better view, with a better way of explaining these things, you always think about that right? So that’s why I wouldn’t create with a [EP6] II and a [EP6] III to help me in this process...cos then it’s not so authentic anymore.” EP6 - PF3.*

Rather than co-produce with other subject matter experts, producers are more readily willing to work with third parties to support them in creating their own content, including experts in project management and postproduction editing.

*“I don’t want to do the management of the people doing the work right. Because my love is on the creative side. I don’t want to spend time checking on the status of whether you’ve got that done, this done, that done. If somebody else were to take that on that would be great. Of course if I got to do the production that would be great. I am not good at trying to project manage the whole thing.” EP6 - PF3.*

*“So, I have thought about that how do I amp up. How do I add editors? How do we get to that level? And then bringing in other people to shoot, bringing in other people to do work. There’s an old Swahili saying you may have heard, it’s, “If you want to go somewhere fast, go alone, if you want to go somewhere far take a group with you.” And that’s the kind of way I think. Because I know I need to ad people to my team and go to a bigger place” EP5 - PF3.*

Face to face conferences are run by platforms to nurture a community amongst producers, but the cost of attending international events can be prohibitive for individual producers.

*“they have a conference once a year but this, for the first year, it was in Europe. It was in Berlin, but we were moving house so didn’t go. Other than that, it’s been in California, and I am just not prepared to shell out the thousands of dollars required to go over there for a three-day conference.” EP4 - PF2.*

Platforms have the potential to increase stock volumes quickly with no barriers to external producer supply. But without platform filters in place, content quality will vary greatly.

*“platforms where users have to pay, have to be quite good quality to sort of rank high in the searches and for people to leave their reviews. And also a lot of the platforms check the content and so they won’t publish it if it’s not very good. Whereas on [PF3] you can publish anything and ‘cos its free it can get loads and loads of views- even if it’s terrible.” EP3 - PF2.*

Even with platform filters in place, content quality will still be difficult to manage because of the internal resources and expertise needed to review every video uploaded to a platform.

*“I’ve looked at a lot of people who are producing it and a lot of the stuff is around- people take a very deep niche approach, become a guru in say Facebook ads, and Facebook ads they say is the answer to everything. But the*

*trouble is, unless you know the other bits that go around it you can publish Facebooks ads til you're blue in the face, but you're never going to have the whole jigsaw to join it up, so there's an awful lot of stuff out there which is frankly fairly second rate." EP4 - PF2.*

*"what comes to my mind now is also quality on many platforms. But I want to make sure there's one platform where you can find the [EP7] courses, and when you join these courses, you get quality from there. Like [PF2] you don't know if a course is good, or really bad, like you have all kinds of levels of quality there." EP7 - PF4.*

Some platforms have processes in place to filter content to ensure minimum standards are met for production quality, but this may discourage new and early-stage producers from engaging with platforms.

*"when you first touch base, they may encourage you to do a test video and they may come back and say audio is not up to scratch or something. So you're going to need a decent microphone. If you do the rest at the standard, they'll (PF2) accept it. They then give you an on online loading platform, you can sort the lessons in order, and then you go and publish it. I talk to a lot to other instructors on Facebook groups, you find that sometimes they start off being disappointed, but they realise that they need to change things. Because it is a learning process." EP1 - PF2.*

External producers with PF3 have the opportunity to use production studios owned by the platform in different locations around the world, if they hit a minimum number of user subscribers. This independent film producer appreciated the access to high value production equipment and themed sets provided at a PF3 studio.

*"the other connection I have with [PF3] is that they have a studio out in LA. If you are over 10,000 subscribers, you can actually got to the studio and use their facility and use their equipment. So, I have been out there about 3-4 times using equipment that I don't have. Another thing, occasionally they'll do a set, for me to put together a big set like that would be difficult, but you know that's what I use it for. But the trade-off is whenever you use their equipment and their set you work under their very, very strict guidelines." EP5 - PF3.*

All the external producers with PF2 created content at home at some point, but some producers had to adapt to the challenges of daily family life, including moving to an office.

*"Especially when you have to have a quiet environment. You know, because I've recorded everything at home, so I haven't been into a studio. So I have to make sure that if I'm my lighting is right, my sound is right. The amount of times the*

*kids might shout in the middle of one of the videos, and I've had to edit it out or I'll be up like six o'clock in the morning when they're not up, or I've done it when they've gone to bed. And it does have quite an impact on your personal life, because you I'd just want to get the school finished, and I need to stay up late and try and get it done.” EP2 - PF2.*

*“Well, this is actually my office, which is like a very small office inside web agency building. It's pretty close to my apartment. So it's like two minutes by foot, which is really good. Nice. I've worked from home half a year back in 2016. But then my second child was born, and it was like too loud and especially with recording videos and stuff like this. So having an external office is so good to have, really helps separate personal life and work especially when you're self-employed, it's really hard to separate this.” EP7 - PF4.*

Real time communication between producers and users takes place on live streams on PF3, this offers producers with an alternative source of reward to pre-recorded content. But the motivation is more about connecting with users directly than it is about the financial reward.

*“I do live streams. I have done a weekly live stream. Just to keep my sanity and just touch base with the fanbase just a little bit. Yeh but if I were to look at the numbers and see how many hours I put into that video I made, what \$500. It's nice to say that I am getting paid by [PF3]. I mean I appreciate that, but that is not the motivation to do it.” EP5 - PF3.*

Copyright issues will have an impact on the source and supply of video content to platforms, as some platforms have strict rules that are enforced by blocking or withdrawing producer content. Producers recognise the implications of copyright and are pragmatic about dealing with issues.

*“I am actually a strong supporter of copyright, but I am also a strong supporter of fair use. Because I have been dealing with both sides of the copyright issue. As in I have had stuff that was stolen from me, and I have had stuff that was claimed that wasn't fair.” EP5 - PF3.*

*“I had one issue with [PF6] recently where they've changed their rules on what they call self-promotion, and I had my website address on some slides. So in one course I had to go through, about 25 slides and reproduce them, taking the MP4 and then basically putting a little blank grey thing across the name on the slides and then republished it. Going forward I'll just adhere to their rules.” EP4 - PF2.*

Some producers utilise creative commons to provide free access content, which can also be used to promote monetised content. Rather than being reactive to copyright

infringements, a producer suggested platforms offer standard procedures and processes to certain categories of producers.

*“I used to get too many requests for can I have your permission to play it at this event and so on, so I gave email permissions, and it was getting a little bit too much and so I did the creative commons license for a couple of them, so that they don’t have to ask permission for those. And it seems to have worked and I think there are others where they just take it anyway and I don’t really care.”*

**EP6 - PF3.**

*“I would like you to have some way to make it so that if you have a certain kind of user that you are a safe user. So, if I happen to have a video that happens to have a clip of Frankenstein in it, that I won’t automatically get dinged (penalised) for it because I am a safe user. That I understand, yes, I know what copyright is and yes this is fair use. I would like that kind of automatic protection. I don’t know how that can be implemented.”* **EP5 - PF3.**

### **6.3.3 The lengths of delays and system change**

This system lever focuses on the impact on **external producer** motivation as a result of delays and system changes. How long does it take for the system to change, and what is the impact of system changes?

Managing system change is important for all stakeholders associated with a platform. From a producer perspective, changing systems too slowly can be as unwelcome as changing too quickly, as is updating minor system elements when there are other priorities for producers.

*“when you have good running courses [PF4] get in touch with you, they invite you to check out beta features or get your feedback on this. So I had like a lot of discussions with new features coming up could test them out earlier. So it's, it's nice. However, they still take a long, long time until a new feature is implemented, like from the point they introduced something to you like alpha testing, then it takes months or half a year or even longer until a feature is implemented. And it's so slow, and sometimes I feel okay, they're adding updates to areas which are not so important, like fix the basic stuff first.”* **EP7 - PF4.**

Switching costs can be seen as high barrier to producers moving their courses and content to other platforms. This would need to be taken into consideration for start-up platforms hoping to enter the market using a similar business model to PF4.

*“been thinking about this other platform, which looks good, but it still has its own issues in there. And doing the switch would take a long time. And it has to be like a well-made decision. Because like there's so much attached to it, like, there's not just [PF4], you have, like so many other apps connected to this, and everything is like kind of running hand in hand. And switching the system was so many customers, it's like a frightening task to do, and probably would also take a lot of time.” EP7 - PF4.*

Producers typically load their content on platforms like PF2 and PF3 with a readymade marketplace with many users, and once they have established themselves with a user base, look to supply content to platforms like PF4 where producers must promote their own content. Historically PF4 has operated as a learning management system hosting content for producers, but recently the platform has created a marketplace to attract producers and change the pattern of supply.

*“this year [PF4] just launched a marketplace. They've started to do a similar one to [PF2], but before that they had no marketplace, so you have to market it yourself. I wasn't really interested in [PF4] because I wasn't very good at marketing, so I left that for a while and I had the odd person buy it from [PF4] but more recently this year I thought, if I put it onto [PF4] and start marketing it myself, then it's just an extra way of doing it, because now they've got their new marketplace as well it's starting to get a lot bigger. But [PF4] at the minute isn't a big earner for me. I don't get many people on it but hopefully with their new marketplace that they've been opening it might start to take off.” EP3 - PF2.*

### **6.3.4 The strength of negative feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how negative feedback mechanisms within platform systems affect the motivation and of **external producers** to make and supply video content. How does the system self-correct under different conditions and impacts? How do platforms manage self-employed producers, and the stock of education videos supplied by external producers at the right level?

Producers on PF2 provide feedback to the platform directly and via social media platforms. There have been instances where feedback from producers has led to changes being made to platform processes.

*“at one point they changed the pricing structure, but nothing could be more than \$50. I think they've changed that again because they were up in arms about it. You can prevent them discounting your course by removing yourself*

*from the affiliate program. So if you want to keep it as full price you can say actually, no, I don't want you to discount them. You should have that option."*

**EP2** - PF2.

Platforms provide varying degrees of focus on user and producer interaction, where there is limited focus on user interaction, producers from a teaching background are aware of the limitations of users relying on pre-recorded content to learn a particular subject.

*"it's a bit of a one-way street. So we put the content up there. People sign up, they go and do your course. And you don't know them. You don't have the rapport that you would if you were in a classroom. You can't read if they have a problem, unless they ask a question. Coming from a teaching point of view, being able to read people when you're teaching is one of the most valuable things that you can do. You can see if people understand what you're saying, you can see if the pace is correct or if you leave people behind. We need to go a bit faster, or I need to go into a bit more depth in that area, and you don't when you have pre-recorded content."* **EP2** - PF2.

*"I'm not the faceless instructor who just put the course up there to earn money and isn't actually interested in how people are getting on. Because to me that's one of the biggest rewards is knowing that people are getting on very well, and you don't get that feedback."* **EP2** - PF2.

Producer reward models can be a key competitive tool for platforms. Platforms that reward producers less than competitors, will find it hard to attract producers to share their content.

*"There is video on demand at Amazon I think it's called, you had to jump through so many hoops, and it wasn't really worth it, you had to change the format of the videos, you had to add subtitles in a certain format, and it was so complicated that I thought it's going to take me forever, so I left that one. They don't pay very good loyalty rates. Its per watch like [PF6], they pay you 6 or 7p per minute of your course that's been watched and so that's quite a good rate. In comparison Amazon was awful, it was like 0.5p per minute watch."* **EP3** - PF2.

*"I think the danger is, though, that if people find you on [PF2] organically, then they look at the price of your course and there's one for ten ninety-nine and it's eight hours long and there's one that's one hundred and fifty pounds, but it's four hours ago. They're probably going to go look at the price and look at the lengths and go, well OK, I'm going to have that one, you're almost competing with people at other people's price points"* **EP2** - PF2.

### **6.3.5 The gain around driving positive feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how positive feedback mechanisms within platform systems affect the motivation of **external producers** to make and supply video content. Platforms use multiple methods to persuade producers to supply content to their platform, maintain an ongoing relationship and prioritise their platform over other platforms.

*“if you get 100,000 (users) you have a contact. Someone will call you from [PF3], well email you and ask for a call. There is a liaison kind of, so I do have someone that I can contact, I guess kind of like an account manager.” EP5 - PF3.*

*“They have some creator support. They give me for example the audio backgrounds that I play on my video. Music backgrounds. I get a library of those that they constantly replenish so I get huge access to a big library that I can use.” EP6 - PF3.*

Producers are not just focused on financial rewards from supplying content to platforms, there are non-financial reasons. Many producers expressed their love for their subject and teaching platform users. A retired accountant turned video producer discussed the importance of having something to focus on and learning new skills.

*“I don’t think you can make as good a living if you don’t enjoy what you’re teaching, because you have to spend, I spend hours, doing it. Like last night I was up ‘til four in the morning finishing off a book- just because I love it and so if you don’t love what you are doing- you shouldn’t do it. It’s good money, it’s really good money, but you shouldn’t do it just for the money because you do have to spend a lot of hours creating content.” EP3 - PF2.*

*“based on the amount of time I spent, it wouldn't have been worth it. But on the other hand, I'm still learning the process. And so. Yes, it gives me it gives me something. Other than my social activities, it does give me something else to do” EP1 - PF2.*

As the size of the online learning education market increases, **external producers** with access to multiple platforms have the opportunity to grow their user base across many countries and increase revenue streams year on year.

*“So my objective is to be making you know 20,30, \$40,000 a month, which I can see it’s totally achievable, just as this market grows. I am operating in a truly global market. I have students in 184 countries. I have, just on [PF2] today, where are we.... just look at the data. OK, I have 74,522 unique students. I’m in 187 countries now.” EP4 - PF2.*



External producer video content is rated by users, and because producer ratings are published by the platform, the feedback reinforces the meritocracy model of the platform.

*“I get a rating from people on [PF2], and I think I'm on four point four out of five on average. The ratings are fairly good. You get the occasional bad one.” EP1 - PF2.*

Producer motivation to get reviews, encourages them to take part in platform promotions including free access to producer video content. This will influence reward in the short term, but producers have the control to revert back to charging users for access.

*“Initially, you want to get your name out there and get some reviews. So I put some free ones out there. Initially. And within three days, I think I got a thousand students, and after that I put the limits on a thousand. And then after that I put it as paid.” EP1 - PF2.*

Perceptions of a platform will influence producer loyalty to remain with the platform, and motivation to continue to supply content.

*“I've stuck with [PF2] for a long time and haven't really deviated because it works for me. It's always nice to think that it's a community minded platform and it's benefiting other people. And I do like the idea that it is accessible as well, so that you're not pricing yourself out. Maybe graphically you're not pricing yourself out so people can afford the access for courses if they need them.” EP2 - PF2.*

## 6.4 Co-producer producer motivation

### 6.4.1 The size of buffer and other stabilizing stocks

This system lever focuses on the motivation of **co-producers** to supply video content to platforms. The motivation of individual producers to create online education videos and to share their knowledge.

The following producer motivation was based on social and economic themes around business development, environmental sustainability, and financial literacy, with ambitions to affect individuals daily and working lives through the development of user skills, knowledge and understanding.

*“My goal was to make an amazing course that gives back to the creative community. That was my number one goal. And my number one goal was to set the standard of how courses should look and feel for 2020. And that was what I was hoping to achieve. And I feel like the monetary reward, you know, is a confirmation of that. But my goal whenever I'm teaching, I enjoy giving back. I don't know if you read any of the feedback, or the testimonials on what the students are saying, but it's changed their business, it changed their life.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“I'm teaching in fashion, I think it's really important that they hear something else other than you need to sell stuff to be a successful person, and it needs to be about trend. I'm literally the absolute antithesis of that. I love clothes, but I'm not interested in selling things. And I'm not interested in marketing in that way. I'm interested in spreading an ideology. And for me that's around sustainability and thinking more creatively about the stuff you've already got in your life and what can you do with that.” CP6 - PF7.*

*“the field of personal finance is such a weird one because no one really teaches it. If you grew up in a financially healthy household, you'll be much better off than not. That is actually the luck of the draw. But there is still I believe a moral obligation of the industry 10 times the size of the biggest industry globally, they have a moral obligation to be able to move the word forward or we just go back to frugal times, which is kind of the path we're on right about now. Especially here (USA).” CP2 - PF5.*

The following freelance producer became a subject group expert in software, providing them with financial reward but also the satisfaction of being a respected and in demand producer for multiple platforms, creating a career path with interesting opportunities.

*“When they (PF5a) first brought me on I did a couple of titles and they were' oh my gosh, we love what you're doing. Here's all these amazing titles. All these incredible things that you can do, we just trust you with this. The entire total Adobe library is yours'. And it was very lucrative. It was fun. It launched my career, gave me a bunch of cool opportunities and stuff. When you get certified in Adobe, like an Adobe certified expert, you have to take this really big test. And so I was able to write some of those tests. I went from taking them, and like barely passing them, to being the author of them. And that was so fun and very rewarding and stuff.” CP1 - PF5.*

The following artists recognised that the process of creating video content and engaging with course users had developed their teaching and at the same time enhanced their own creative practice.

*“And it's kind of funny, because I've discovered myself through teaching these things, I didn't realise quite what my USP was, and I now realise that obviously, the pattern side of things, being previously a textile designer is quite a big thing. And the layering of things. And so, I've really kind of honed in on that. And my plans for the illustrations for this book are very much based around what I've just been teaching. It really made me want to teach face to face as well, I've kind of always stayed away from it a bit. And but now it's given me the confidence to do that.” CP4 - PF6.*

*“I get a lot out of that when I see a student that's really pushed it, and actually, they can give me really good ideas. And I get a lot out of some of the comments that are made where students haven't painted for absolutely ages. And then they take this course and you can just see how much it's meant to them. That's very good thing about teaching, it makes you strip right back to the beginning. It's given me the confidence to excel.” CP5 - PF7.*

#### **6.4.2 The structure of material stocks and flows**

This system lever focuses on the motivation and methods of **co-producers** (internal and external) to make and supply video content. The motivation of co-producers to work in a particular way, including whether there is a preference to work autonomously or to collaborate with other producers. How production takes place and why certain production methods are preferred, the impact of these platform processes and procedures on motivation.

Platforms use both internal (employed) and external (self-employed) producers to create content alongside internal teams that provide film, sound and editing expertise. Producers are referred to as authors.

*“I've never been an employee of theirs. I was one of their authors, I was ‘of their team’ so to speak. It's like a microcosm of what it's like freelancing versus just being an employee. Everything is on you, and there's a lot of weight there. There's also a lot of flexibility.” CP1 - PF5.*

*“They now have staff authors, that work for them, and they are on the payroll and it's cheaper for them to do that than to pay royalties based on how well the courses do.” CP1 - PF5.*

Internal producers provide a more direct and controllable source of education content, rather than relying on the motivation of freelance producers to supply a platform as and when they choose. External producers provide a third party source of education

content, providing a flexible and potentially a much greater source of stock for the system than internal employees.

Co-producers create content independently at a location of their choice, or on site at one of the studios provided by a platform. Producers that create much of the content independently will still have input from internal platform employees in editing and publishing video content.

*“But I think [PF6] is very curated. And you know, even though they don't control every content of video, they try to give lots of advice. So with the teacher handbook that's available to everyone to go through where they tell you all the equipment that they recommend, or the videoing tutorials that they recommend, you know, loads and loads of information. So if you delve into that you learn a lot.” CP4 - PF6.*

Producers that create much of the content independently, will have to work with technology that is constantly changing, without access to IT support individuals have to resolve issues by themselves. This is time consuming and will slow down production time and can affect motivation to produce more content.

*“It takes me a couple of months to do it. Others I know do it a lot quicker, but I'm just very slow with technology. And this last class, I switched editing from thing called Filmora to using Adobe Premiere Pro, and Adobe Premiere Pro is just massive. There's so much to learn about, it's taken me a long time. I mean, just when you've got your head around it, something changes, something doesn't work. And then you have to spend hours looking for tutorials on how to do it. So it didn't help.” CP4 - PF7.*

The following account highlights the contrasting strengths and weaknesses of self-production (using screen capture) and co-production.

*“The last few years I've been experimenting with different types of videos. For a long time I just did screen captures, stuff where I am recording my screen. And for the last few courses I've done for [PF5b] the filmmaking ones. I did more video production stuff. So I had cameras on me, and I had cutaway like B roll, and movie clips and stuff like that. And I find that that content is much more engaging, but also a lot more difficult to produce. So when I do that I have like a teleprompter, notes that I can follow like an outline and then I'm realising that's a slow way to do things and then I'm going back to the screen capture. With screen capture I don't have things spelled out, I'm just like riffing off the cuff and I'm realising that that's also a skill.” CP1 - PF5.*

Freelancers that take the initiative and contact a platform to be a producer, will go through a vetting process before being selected.

*“I contacted [PF5] back in, I think, maybe April. And I think they'd had a new guy come in, CEO or something, somebody to do with [publisher] books, had come in as a bit of a mentor. And he picked up on my name and a couple of others and said yeh get in touch with her. And so they got in touch. And then he said, okay, well, as soon as I can fly out to Madrid, we'll do some filming and get some videos done. And to be honest, it's been an absolute godsend.” CP5 - PF7.*

Some external producers are identified as a result of research initiated by employees of a platform and invited to produce video content based on their track record and level of expertise.

*“And I think they're (PF7) so careful about choosing who they pick to come and do a course that I think they're fairly confident. I mean, they wouldn't make the investment would they if they didn't think they were confident” CP6 - PF7.*

PF5, PF6, and PF7 have physical studios where videos are recorded with both internal and external producers, the external producer is the subject matter expert and presenter, internal producers make up the production team. PF5 producers were very positive about the experience.

*“I mean I had such a good experience with the [PF5a] team. Like they couldn't have designed the entire immersive experience better. Like they fly you into [town], which is this beautiful seaside town north of LA. You stay by the beach. Their studios are beautiful. Everyone caters to your every need. And their producers and directors are really professional.” CP2 - PF5.*

*“you would go to their [PF5a] studios and record in these big booths, they had a producer that had headphones on listening to every word you say and while you're recording, it was this dynamic thing that was constantly happening. They fly you down there, you're down there for a week, you train, and it was great. I do miss that camaraderie that comes from working with a producer and saying, 'look let's talk about this' and 'how do we' and that kind of collaboration but it is really cool to be able to record when I want to, and that flexibility is awesome.” CP1 - PF5.*

The internal producers of platforms are not only skilled in video production, but they are also conscious of the need for good education practices when creating content for users.

*“Yeh there's a mix of traditional production skills, and there's this piece that a lot of people don't understand around instructional design, actually how to develop the content of an online course to make sure it is suitable for online learning, engages people making sure it's not just a series of interviews slapped together. It's got to have pedagogical value.” CP3 - PF6.*

External producers valued the curatorial expertise of internal producers and the quality of the production process at PF7 during the recording of videos on location at the studios in Madrid, Spain.

*“I guess that comes from being too much of a perfectionist that if I was going to create pre-recorded content, it would have to be edited perfectly, the art direction has to be amazing. When it's pre-recorded, there's like an expectation of that you could have edited that better, you could have made the sound better, you could have had better lighting. That's why I decided to partner with them (PF7) because they're the extreme experts and I cannot do it on my own. I mean I can, but it would have been like crappy quality, right? So it was just like not up to my standards because I really value design and aesthetics. And they do as well. That's why I chose to work with them.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“They're set up is phenomenal. They've got like eight studios with different teams of like they've got a full editor director, lighting person thermographer camera man, and they have eight creatives (producers) being filmed at a time and it's real systematic. But the prep for that was monumental like everything had be so carefully created and crafted. But I also wanted to learn how to do it well, which was why I said yes, because I knew I would find out about that whole process, which I didn't know about. And I got a free trip to Madrid, which I took my whole family.” CP6 - PF7.*

### **6.4.3 The lengths of delays and system change**

This system lever focuses on the impact on **co-producer** motivation as a result of delays and system changes. How long does it take for the system to change, and what is the impact of system changes?

Live streaming had been trialled by platform PF7, based on producers presenting a live demonstration of their expertise. Live streaming involves less preparation than it takes to create pre-recorded course content, producers take part in prearranged live broadcasts, presenting in person, and communicating via a chat function live to platform users.

*“When you're doing live video, it's raw and real. So nothing has to be perfect, you can just completely mess up. And it's okay because it's live, name of the game is like getting the content out, but not necessarily having to put so much effort on creating live content. So it's a lot less of a barrier to entry.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“there's no safety net, so that's an eerie experience, it's just an odd thing to do to speak to an imagined audience and try and be ingratiating, there's less preparation involved, and I set the objectives much lower to make sure that was*

*achievable. Whereas there's a lot more curation that goes into one of these other videos (pre-recorded), and it gives this real illusion of perfectionism, which isn't true of the kind of the actual messy process of creating something and decision making in real time. And I guess it's more representative of that during the live thing. There was an element of excitement in it, in that I didn't really know what I was going to create by the end of the process. You know, try and tie in with some sort of jeopardy, what an adventure!" CP8 - PF7.*

Producers may reject approaches to take part in live streaming where there is uncertainty if the reward is sufficient for the time and effort preparing and delivering a live stream.

*"there was a smaller company in Spain that wanted to run a kind of live three-day course. And I did question it for a little bit. But it was just, you know, I'd be paid on a day rate to produce that course. But the setup of, you know, curating a three-day thing that has to culminate in something definitive word where like, majorly outweigh the compensation with those three days? Yeah. Plus, just scale as well, I just kind of wasn't convinced that enough people would see it or sort of buy into it." CP8 - PF7.*

Responding to rule and process changes. Changes in reward mechanisms and processes are usually communicated using new terms and conditions, and these changes can be introduced almost immediately. Producers often miss this change in the system, and only notice once there is a noticeable drop in earnings from the platform.

*"I guess there are a lot of courses migrated from [PF5a] to [PF5b] that don't generate that much money, but it was a good amount of money for me every month and my royalties just tanked out of nowhere" CP1 - PF5.*

From the perspective of producers, platforms are slow to make changes because of their scale and complexity.

*"they're so big that they're not super nimble. Like they're not able to change that quickly. Like when they have a big website change it takes a long time to implement because they are so big" CP1 - PF5.*

The pandemic created new challenges for platforms and producers, but platforms were still able to produce videos with external producers.

*"So my first course on [PF7] was actually released in March of 2020. It was like literally the day that Israel went into lockdown. And that was the day we actually launched the course. So the world was actually completely shutting down when we launched the [PF7] course that you saw. So it's only the course*

*has only been one year old. And we have over 80,000 students enrolled in that course.” CP7 - PF7.*

The following account from a single producer demonstrates the potential versatility of platforms and producers in dealing with enforced system changes. The pandemic created short term challenges in meeting the pressing needs of users and managing a limited availability of resources.

*“Covid hit, so we just repurposed the content, built up the scripts properly within a week. So in the filming, that was in the course of three weeks, we went from let’s do it to having it filmed and it’s going to be this week or next, which is much faster than usual. Normally it’s like a three month cycle. I had to do everything myself, like the lighting and the makeup, a panel of people had dialled in telling me what to do, but it was challenging. I wouldn’t have thought I could have done it myself, but these strange new times brings strange new practices.” CP2 - PF5.*

*“I’ve actually been 100% fine without sourcing the production side of things, even though I come from that world, and I do have a strong point of view because it’s been such a good experience. I think now that I’ve done it, I would be a lot more confident in doing it myself, but its built up the muscle memory of working to autocue, getting text real time if I need things, but from the beginning I could not have done it from scratch. I’m going to say that production side of things... happy to outsource. The content I am actually pretty precious about.” CP2 - PF5.*

#### **6.4.4 The strength of negative feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how negative feedback mechanisms within platform systems affect the motivation of **co-producers** to make and supply video content. How does the system self-correct under different conditions and impacts? How do platforms manage self-employed producers, and the stock of education videos supplied by co-producers at the right level, and right quality?

*“[PF5a] had this really cool review process where they hire contract, quality assurance people I think they’re called, that go through and watch your course and give you notes and stuff like that. And if there’s something that’s not clear they’ll have you fix it. Collaboration gives you the chance to be critiqued and as an artist that’s kind of your lifeblood you know.” CP1 - PF5.*

Platforms undertake an element of risk in co-producing content with external producers that they have not previously worked with. Producers do not always work well under the pressure of daily recording in a professional production environment.



*“it’s a lot of collaboration with them (external producers) and figuring out how to get the best out of their brain, which there’s no two challenges that are the same. Every time it’s different. I’d say you can only plan for 80%, and then the 20% is like whatever happens on set. How you adapt to breakdowns, how you guide them and prompt them to make sure its engaging on camera and that the energy’s good, that its very personable. So that it doesn’t just feel like a random Q&A, that its actually teaching.” CP3 - PF6.*

*“it’s not for everybody, to be honest. It’s not for every artist. You’re having to be quite natural in front of the camera. Which can be quite tricky if you’re not really into that kind of thing. I was working with a couple of filmmakers, and one was really stressing she was having a really tough time editing. You don’t know how anybody is going to perform once that camera goes on.” CP5 - PF7.*

In a highly competitive market, producers that share content or co-produce videos with multiple platforms are likely to experience platforms that go out of business at some point.

*“So then I started branching out but every time I started branching out to another company that company went under. Nobody was doing it right. So I would work with these companies and be in talks with these companies, or a few companies we talked about titles, and I could tell, you know, you’re just not doing this right. And I would back out of it and then they would go under about a year later.” CP1 - PF5.*

Producers that do not make much money from videos supplied to platforms, will be more likely to seek alternative platforms. In this case a producer went from PF6 to PF7, because they made very little money out of producing videos for PF6.

*“I made these three videos and I sent them over to my regular students and then I also uploaded them on to [PF6]. I made £100.” CP5 - PF7.*

Platforms that only offer rewards based on course sales, may find that producers are not prepared to create video content independently without any resource contribution from a platform.

*“the other reason I worked with them [PF7] was lots of people have been in touch and said, I’ve got a platform for you to make a video on that, okay. But I have to make the video and they take a percentage of that; I’m not really interested in that.” CP6 - PF7.*

Conversely, platforms that co-produce content with external producers, investing time, resource and money, carry the risk that unsuccessful content generates limited returns.

*“I mean, there are some that you only have to look at [PF7] courses and you’ll see that some haven’t flown. You know, some don’t do so well. Yeah, there’s*

*some that if you have a look that have been up there maybe a year and might only have a couple of 1000 students or something. So no, it's not a given.” CP5 - PF7.*

#### **6.4.5 The gain around driving positive feedback loops**

This system lever focuses on how positive feedback mechanisms within platform systems affect the motivation of **co-producers** to make and supply video content.

Producers benefit from sharing their expertise with a wide online audience, improving exposure and potentially leading to additional work.

*“But the good thing with all these different platforms being available, it's just this more streams of income. Now. It's a less scary prospect kind of being freelance and out on your own than it was when I started, I think, you know, when I started, I didn't have any sort of real handle on how to get my work out of my immediate surroundings.” CP8 - PF7.*

*“So that link between the two is huge, I've had illustration commissions on the back of postings (content uploaded). I just posted an exercise that I'd done on [PF6] of some patterns, and high street stores picked up on it and commissioned me to do some illustrations.” CP4 - PF6.*

*“I've agreed to do a third course for them [PF7], going back over in May to do a third one. And if it's as popular as the watercolour, it's just it'll just go bonkers again. Because the other thing is it opens up other opportunities, because there's a lot of British people that have joined the course. But now I want to do the retreats over here. So it's gonna really start pushing the retreats that are here, which again, are a profitable side of the business.” CP5 - PF7.*

Producers often have to prepare a lot of material in order to create a video, this written content is often used for other purposes including books and blogs.

*“I was running my own company that was a personal finance company and realised that A: The investment of time that I could do in terms of generating the content for [PF5a], [PF5b] or the parent company now, own the video content, but I still own the written contents. So I could repurpose that, it's sort of like two birds one stone I could repurpose it and use it for my own customers. So there was like a paid lift you might say. That I was already being paid for it, but I was able to put it to work within my own company it was my single best source of new customers. By far. Right. So A. I was being paid and B. I was getting customers in from it. So that it was, and still is to this day a really great win-win.” CP2 - PF5.*

Once producers see that their courses have been successful, both the platform and producer are motivated to produce more content.

*“I do have another course coming out in a few days, they're going to be launching the new trailer for my second [PF7] course. And I chose to partner with him again, because first of all, we sold over 80,000 courses, we're gonna do it again, the quality of the video. And the editing they do is amazing. My business it's just me, I don't have like a whole team behind me creating hundreds of content. So I need to partner with people that can bring my vision into reality.” CP7 - PF7.*

*“Yeah, and unlike, you know, doing a painting, your painting might take you a week or so to do and then it's sold, and it's gone. And that's it, there's no more money, [PF6] is just get keeps on giving kind of thing, you know, it just, it just takes over. And yes, your watch, time probably goes down as your class gets older, which is why it's good to just keep on producing another class and then it boosts everything up again. And so you can see, you know, your statistics are kind of going up and down a bit.” CP4 - PF6.*

Producers are rewarded if they promote and market their videos outside of the platform, if they drive traffic to the platform and referrals lead to course purchases.

*“I try and plug things on Instagram and Facebook. And so if somebody clicks on the link that goes through my class to then sign up to [PF6]. And I tried to put a little kind of adverts on my website to lead people back to [PF6]. Definitely. It's all sort of interconnecting really, I suppose.” CP4 - PF6.*

Producers that engage real time with course users provides a connection that can help build up a relationship and supports the learning from pre-recorded content.

*“Live content is me keeping up with my students that are in in the course taking the course with me, and then they can also engage with me on a social really personal level, I can answer their questions in real time, I can see exactly what they're having trouble with, and engage in conversation, live conversation with them in real time. It's a different modality, a different mode of video.” CP7 - PF7.*

Based on the individual accounts of internal producers, external producers and co-producers, the following section summarises features of motivation unique to each case.

## 6.5 Motivation summary

The unique features of motivation by producer group are summarised in Table 6-2:

**Table 6-2** Producer motivation by group

<b>Producer motivation</b>	Internal producer	Co-producer	External producer
<b>Recruitment focus</b>	Producer values	Producer reputation	Producer content
<b>Community of practice</b>	Internal producers	Internal producers and co-producers	External producers
<b>Production focus</b>	Co-production Production expert	Co-production Content expert	Self-production Content expert
<b>Collective focus</b>	Teamwork	Collaboration	Autonomy preferred
<b>Social impact</b>	User and Society	User	User
<b>Viewer profile</b>	Person	Student	User
<b>Developmental</b>	Personal and professional development	Subject and film production skills	Subject and video skills
<b>Self-promotion</b>	Not required	Professional practice	Professional practice
<b>Meritocracy</b>	Teamwork a priority	Producers value being head hunted	Producers value meritocracy
<b>User feedback</b>	User feedback controlled by third party systems	User numbers make feedback challenging	User interaction tightly controlled
<b>Working practice</b>	Platform offices	Platform offices and home working	Rented office space or home working
<b>Interaction with platforms</b>	Producers actively participate	Producers value participation	Producers participate as needed

These unique features of motivation between groups shines a light on current practice but also on potential intervention points for co-operation.

## 6.6 Motivation leverage points

The following section summarises the unique features of motivation for internal, external and co-producers in making and supplying video content to platforms. This is then followed by a summary of motivational themes that are common to all groups.

### 6.5.1 Motivation levers for internal producers.

**Internal producers** expressed an interest in the individuals, the people not “users” that benefit from watching content producers have created for the platform and the Foundation. There was a strong sense of producer focus on users as being real people, and the content provided having a direct impact of the quality of life for the people that watch their content, supporting the development of literacy, numeracy and technology skills. Producers were highly motivated to create their content in the knowledge that they were potentially helping a large number of individuals through free education content. Equally if user data indicated that video content was not being watched by a large number of people there was still the motivation that they have at least helped a few people, rather than focusing on low level of user views and issues around producer performance management.

Producers expressed an interest and demonstrated an awareness of broader society issues, including health, education, poverty in local communities. In interviews that took place during a global pandemic, producers embraced the challenge of providing alternative communication methods to provide access for people that might be isolated from friends, family and colleagues. Producers were motivated to investigate and introduce innovative systems, processes and practices, but were restricted by the limitations of the existing platform system and internal resources available.

The platform has internal guidelines on content creation and communicating with users through video content production. These boundaries driven by the American and Colombian foundation have the potential to constrain personal

creativity of individual producers and lead to the production of homogeneous video content, and ultimately affecting user demand.

Producers valued working in a team of likeminded people, working with individuals that shared religious beliefs, and colleagues that had a shared understanding of the purpose of the foundation and the platform. This sense of altruism was evident in each producer, whether they had been working for the platform for a number of years, had left and returned, or had recently joined the organisation. This could partly be attributed to the selection process of internal producers.

### **6.5.2 Motivation levers for external producers.**

**External producers** supplied content to a wide range of platforms, from platforms that focus on specific markets, to platforms that have no subject boundaries. Platforms are prioritised that have a readymade marketplace with high volumes of users and producers, and platforms that promote individual producer courses to users on a platform.

Of the three producer groups, external producers were most likely to use platforms that are designed and built as a Learning Management Systems (LMS), because this system provides a platform for producers to build their own courses and learning communities. However, producers did not start the sequence of supplying multiple platforms with LMS platforms, aware that they would have to market their courses to new users. Instead, producers targeted marketplace platforms, and only when a user community was created, migrating across to LMS based platforms.

For commercial reasons producer interactions with users is restricted by some platforms that are protective of user information. Platforms are aware that users migrate with producers to other platforms, and for commercial reasons take measures to prevent this happening, leading to a relatively closed system. These restrictions may isolate producers from users, and result in a disconnect between producer and user. Some producers expressed a frustration with the lack of interaction with users, while other producers are happy to load content on to a platform and have no direct contact with users.

Producers considered themselves a subject matter expert in their respective fields and wished to share their knowledge with others in an informal learning environment, they expressed a satisfaction and enjoyment in the process of communicating ideas and explaining topics. Some producers created video content primarily as a way of promoting their offline work or business interests. Because the main aim is promotion, platforms are targeted that have readymade marketplaces with high numbers of existing users.

Producers posted the same video content on multiple platforms with the objective of generating multiple revenue streams and connecting with large numbers of students. Platforms have terms and conditions to prevent this from happening, but producers circumvent these restrictions by prioritising platforms that have the most flexible terms first, and only then placing them on platforms with more prohibitive terms and conditions.

Supplying video content to platforms provided a way for external producers to supplement other sources of income received from employment or self-employment, during periods of unemployment, or as a source of funds during retirement. Financial security was often cited by producers as an ambition and motivation for making education videos. Work independence was also highlighted as a key motivator, not having to work within the confines of a contract of employment and control over when and how producers work.

Self-employed producers enjoyed the independence and autonomy that comes with sole production rather than co-production of video content. They wished to be the main content creator, preferring to reserve any collaboration for third parties that can help with production activities to create videos, rather than advising on the content itself. However, production independence can lead to quality issues with video production. Producers were often confronted with production challenges that come from creating video content in isolation, with limited or no input from third parties, or access to film production quality equipment. Collaboration with producer peers was more likely to happen where external producers perceived themselves as equal partners based on existing individual profiles on a platform and can see the potential reciprocity of a collaboration.

### **6.5.3 Motivation levers for co-producers.**

**Co-producers** primarily worked with platforms that had a focus on specific areas like technology, business or the arts, rather than focusing on supplying content to platforms that have no subject boundaries. Producers are given generic titles by each platform such as 'Author' or 'Artist'. This title was important for some producers as it gave them a professional identity and a direct connection with other members of the platform producer community.

Platforms select and invite producers to create video content, which means they can curate the style and control the quality of content produced for the platform. By working with niche platforms that connect with their personal specialism, this was shown to have a positive impact on producer and platform relationships. Producers appreciated being part of a community of practice sharing their passion for their subject area and interacting regularly with users and internal platform workers.

Not all content creation is on site at the platform production studios, some content is created remotely by producers themselves, with support provided by internal producers and platform video tutorials. Producers will often work through their own production problems which includes working with software such as Adobe, software that is not owned or supported by platforms commissioning the video. These challenges and the time invested, can negatively impact producer motivation to make multiple videos.

Self-employed producers saw themselves as collaborators with platforms, recognising that internal platform producers are the experts in video production, whereas they were the content expert. Because of this clear division of labour, and a high level of trust in the expertise of both parties, there was no perception of a conflict of interest. However, this relationship is not static and may be affected by platform growth and changes in ownership. Some producers experienced rapid and mostly negative changes when platforms were acquired by a third party, including levels of reward, changes in working practices and the working relationship with the platform under new owners.

Platforms that work with co-producers tended to have more open systems than platforms that work with external producers, more readily allowing external links that



promote the work of producers, facilitating and promoting interaction between producers and users during courses and beyond the confines of a platform. This openness was highly valued by producers, as it was key to promoting their own practice.

Co-producers recognised that the process of making education videos and receiving feedback from platform production teams and video users, improves their own professional practice. The success of their online video content had given them more confidence in their own abilities, opportunities to reflect on their practice, and in some cases helping them to identify their unique selling point in their own practice. For some producers, the recognition and success of their online education videos created a new career that did not otherwise exist.

The following Table 6-3 summarises motivation based system leverage points by producer group.

**Table 6-3** Motivation leverage points

System leverage points (Meadows)	Internal producer motivation	External producer motivation	Co-producer motivation
11. Supplying content	User basic skills and knowledge	User technical skills and knowledge	User sector specific skills and knowledge
	User and Society focus	User focus	User focus
	Developing producer skills and knowledge	Developing producer skills and knowledge	Developing producer skills and knowledge
		Developing producer professional practice	Developing producer professional practice
		Promotion of producer professional practice	Promotion of producer professional practice
	Foundation content guidelines may lead to	Few restrictions on content scope and quality	Focused content and high quality standards

	<p>homogenous content</p> <p>Platform recruits employees</p> <p>Focus on producer CPD greater than performance management</p> <p>Producer employment contract restricts supply to third party platforms</p>	<p>Producers prioritise platforms to build reputation</p> <p>Limited number of producers create a high proportion of popular content</p> <p>Multiple platforms supplied where terms and conditions allow</p>	<p>Platforms choose producers</p> <p>Curated content and selected producers create less deviation in producer success</p> <p>Platform terms and conditions restrict supply to multiple platforms</p>
10. Creating content	<p>Employees value remote and onsite working</p> <p>Employed producers value secure employment</p> <p>Co-production with other internal producers creates a strong teamwork environment</p> <p>Producers find the practical and technical challenges in sole production demotivating</p> <p>Collaboration valued with subject matter experts and production experts</p>	<p>Self-employed producers value remote working</p> <p>Self-employed producers value autonomy and independence</p> <p>Production autonomy and creative freedom valued</p> <p>Producers find the practical and technical challenges in sole production demotivating</p> <p>Collaboration preferred with production experts not other subject matter experts</p>	<p>Self-employed producers value remote working and onsite co-production</p> <p>Self-employed producers value autonomy and independence</p> <p>Co-production with internal producers creates high quality content and enhances reputation</p> <p>Producers find the practical and technical challenges in sole production demotivating</p> <p>Collaboration preferred with production experts not other subject matter experts</p>

	<p>Create content per contract of service</p> <p>Creative commons is applied to partner organisations non-profit / public sector</p>	<p>Create content for as many reputable platforms as possible to maximise reward</p> <p>Creative commons is used by producers to promote paid for content</p>	<p>Create content primarily with platforms that create content in-house</p>
9. System delays	<p>Producers participate in decisions about platform content</p> <p>Third party platform (YouTube) make frequent changes to terms and conditions</p> <p>Internal systems can be changed quickly but limited in scope due to resource constraints</p>	<p>Platforms can change content priorities without notifying producers</p> <p>Platforms make frequent changes to platform terms and conditions</p> <p>Systems change is slow because of commitment to business model and commercial pressure</p> <p>Switching costs and delays can be a high barrier to moving content between platforms</p>	<p>Platforms can change content priorities without notifying producers</p> <p>Platforms make frequent changes to platform terms and conditions</p> <p>Systems change is slow because of commitment to business model and commercial pressure</p> <p>Switching costs and delays can be a barrier to moving content between platforms</p>
8. Negative feedback	<p>Producers are passive third party users of YouTube that hosts their content</p> <p>Producers value face to face and online feedback with peers</p>	<p>Producers value being involved in changes to platform functionality</p> <p>Producers value the option to feedback directly and indirectly (social media) to platforms</p>	<p>Producers value being involved in changes to platform functionality</p> <p>Producers value the option to feedback directly and indirectly (social media) to platforms</p>

	<p>Close relationship between producers and users provides valuable feedback</p> <p>Teamworking is effective at overcoming production barriers</p> <p>Limited system and market data to base decision making</p>	<p>User and producer communication valued, but tightly controlled</p> <p>Sole production and technical challenges are a barrier for some producers</p>	<p>User and producer communication is valued and promoted</p> <p>Co-production with internal production processes is a barrier for some producers</p>
7. Positive feedback	<p>Producer recruitment process is focused on maintaining organisational values</p> <p>Staff training aligned with the individual CPD needs of producers</p>	<p>Producers welcome meritocracy. Video content is rated by users and published by platforms</p> <p>Producers personal practice benefits from platform exposure and creative process in making content</p> <p>Successful producers are given more exposure on platform promotional pages</p> <p>Producers are rewarded if users are referred to a platform by producers</p> <p>Producers with access to multiple platforms have the opportunity to grow their user base and revenue streams</p>	<p>Producers welcome meritocracy. Course user numbers are published by platforms</p> <p>Producers personal practice benefits from platform exposure and creative process in making content</p> <p>Successful producers are given more exposure on platform promotional pages</p> <p>Producers are rewarded if users are referred to a platform by producers</p>

#### **6.5.4 Motivation levers for all producers.**

Based on NVivo analysis and Meadows (1999) levers of control, the following section summarises motivation levers that apply across producer groups, internal, external and co-producers respectively.

##### **Social impact**

Producers showed a very strong desire to make a difference to users and society in their area of expertise/interest, whether this was from the video content produced or their everyday practice. For some producers, the success of their video was identified by the number of views or users enrolled on a course, but there was also tangible feedback from users that the content had changed their lives, in powerful testimonials.

Platforms and producers have different mechanisms to communicate with users, but which ever approach is taken, there will be issues with producer-user communication when there are many thousands of users connected with a single course or a single video. All producers groups expressed a frustration that there was a disconnect of some sort with users, from internal producers with a lack of user data, external producers where user interaction was tightly controlled by platforms, or co-producers with the available time to commit to users.

##### **Co-production**

**External** and **co-producers** prefer to collaborate with experts in project management and video production rather than with content specialists (subject matter experts) that could be considered potential competitors in their sphere of knowledge. **Internal producers** were motivated to co-produce with other internal content specialists and production experts, this could be a direct result of the lack of individual performance management taking place and seeing the making videos as a team exercise, rather than an individual endeavour.

Although platforms work with thousands of unique individuals, when the platform uses the same production teams for every video, almost in the style of a manufacturing plant, there is a danger that the content is standardised. This homogenised content may negatively impact producer creativity and motivation to supply content to a platform, and ultimately user demand.

### **Professional independence**

Autonomy is highly valued by external and co-producers. They wish to have control over their working practice, including when, how and with whom they choose to work with. This is partly because they have outside interests and jobs that they wish to run in parallel to their video production, but also for some producers because they do not want to be constrained by the contractual terms of one or more platform. It was also expressed that professional independence offers producers a better work-life balance, so that they can choose the degree to which work impacts on family and social life.

Despite individual producer motivation for work autonomy and platforms operating in a highly competitive market, platform loyalty was evident in all producers groups, if by no other measure than the length of time that producers continue to work with the same primary platform.

It is important for producers to be able to develop themselves both professionally and personally beyond the confines of online platforms. There were perceived to be a number of alternatives to developing their professional practice, which included offline activities such as writing, teaching, and consultancy that were perceived to compliment rather than conflict with online activities.

External and co-producers valued having additional revenue streams and a portfolio of earnings, which included writing about their area of expertise on social media and online publications, and in some case obtaining book deals with publishers.

A sense of identity was also important to all producers, expressed during interviews by the number of times they would refer to themselves using the same term, and this appeared to be an important factor in identifying and connecting with their community of practice. This identity appeared to be driven by a title or label used by platforms. External producers were given generic titles such as '*Instructor*' or '*Creator*', while co-producers were given titles such as '*Artist*', or '*Author*'. Platform descriptions for producers are incorporated into all platform communications including terms and conditions. This recognition of being a producer for a platform contributes towards producer communities developing in groups hosted on social media platforms such as Facebook (Meta), but there did not appear to be the same level of producer community building on the platforms themselves. This could be because external and

co-producers were self-employed independent producers, rather than employees of a platform. Platforms appear to design systems whereby producers can feedback and feedforward on confined areas of operations related to content and users, ensuring that producers are kept a healthy distance away from platform management, control and decision making, at arm's length rather than detached.

This chapter has identified why individual producers are motivated to produce and share video content with education platforms, the unique features of motivation for all three producer groups, and common themes based on social impact, professional independence, and co-production. The next chapter considers the role and impact of power within platform systems, and how this power affects the individual motivation and reward for producers within platform systems.

## 7 Power for producers

### 7.1 Introduction

This is the last of three chapters to focus on the findings from the analysis stage. It considers power for all three producer groups. It further considers the research question why individual producers share education platform content (Q2). More specifically the focus is on the motivation and power of individual producers to question and challenge the hegemony of existing commercial systems funded by venture capitalists, and from this the scope for individual producers to participate in the design and ownership of platform systems.

Utilising NVivo at the analysis stage, two core themes emerged across all producer groups that address the research question why individual producers share content with platforms. These themes were **system participation** and **property rights**. Each of these themes is explored in detail using the ‘leverage points’ identified by Meadows (1999).

In this section, system interventions 2-4 will be utilised to critically evaluate how individual producers have the power to question and challenge existing systems in each producer group, and the scope for change (see Table 7-1).

**Table 7-1** Meadows’ power leverage points

Places to Intervene in a System	Leverage Points (Meadows, 1999)
4. The power to change systems	<i>“The most stunning things living and social systems can do is change themselves utterly by creating whole new structures and behaviours. In human society it’s called technical advance or social revolution. In systems lingo, it’s called self-organization.” (p14).</i>
3. The goals of the system	<i>“Whole system goals are not what we think of as goals in the human-motivational sense. They are not so much deducible from what anyone says as from what the system does. To increase stockholder wealth, to grow, to increase market share.” (p16).</i>



2. Paradigm out of which the system arises	<i>“Paradigms are the source of systems. From them, from shared social agreements about the nature of reality, come system goals and information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems” (p18).</i>
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## 7.2 Internal producer power

### 7.2.1 The power to change systems.

Meadows (1999) points to the importance of the distribution of power to change a system, and the importance of recognising who has the power in a system to change aspects of a system, such as adding feedback loops and making new rules.

The founder of PF1, and president of the US foundation, is the primary source of materials used in press releases about the work of the foundation. The founder is the figure head interviewed in the media and is quoted when the press release content about the workings of the foundation and PF1. On the home page of PF1 (and sub-platforms), there was a message from the US founder that sets out their personal vision for the future of online learning, and the role of the foundation and associated platforms.

*“the CEO of [US foundation] tries to travel to Colombia. Right now, he can't because of COVID, but he tries to do some meetings. He encouraged us with messages, but also trying to share the vision of the foundation that is very important for him. Sometimes we forget about that, yeah, but he tries always to say what we are and why. He sometimes says you are making the possibilities for others. So if you don't do your work, you're closing the door for them, when you are working is because of them” IP3 - PF1.*

The distribution of power for the Colombian platform system is in the hands of two people, the founder of the US foundation and the director of the Colombian foundation. The founder sets the overall vision for the organisation, but there is freedom for the Colombian director to produce Spanish and Portuguese content that fits with the overall aims of the foundation and the development of basic skills for individuals. The Spanish version of PF1 was set up by a previous translator of US platform content:

*“I was hired as a translator [2010] to translate basically the courses that they did in the US. So the only thing I had to do? Well, not the only thing, what I had to do was to look at the videos, look how they were done, and do the same thing. But with the software and with everything in Spanish. So that was how I started doing videos, instructional videos, at the beginning was just the screencast on my voice, nothing else.” IP5 - PF1.*

On a flight between the US and Colombia, the US founder and future director of PF1 had a conversation about the challenges of directly translating from English (US) to Spanish, which ultimately led to a decision by the US founder to set up a second platform and foundation based in Colombia:

*“I mean, we cannot translate literally, we have to interpret, we have to move it to our way of thinking is not just translating, and that's it. So he said [founder], Okay, why don't you hire three people and start your own team? And I said, Okay. And the other thing was that I wanted to do a lot of things I wanted to transform the platform to I don't know, how to do a lot of a lot of things. And I think it was a vote of faith. How do you say that in English? Yeah, somebody has a confidence or a vote of confidence, a vote of faith that my boss had in me” IP5 - PF1.*

The power to change the PF1 platform system was in the hands of two individuals that were very closely connected from their close working relationship and historical ties. Individual internal producers had limited power to change the system, other than working practices related to their job roles and interactions within the local team of producers. Because of the close historical and working relationships between the US founder and the Colombian director, it could be argued that there is limited distribution of power, and a threat that “insistence on a single culture shuts down learning” (Meadows, 1999, p16).

### **7.2.2 Goals of the system (platform goals).**

In examining how **internal producers** are rewarded by individual platforms, the goals of each platform system are discussed, rather than whole-system goals of education in the broadest sense. Meadows (1999) points out that actors within systems are unlikely to recognise the whole-system goal they are serving. The broader sense of whole-system goals will be explored in chapter 8 and the value of co-operation.

Part of the mission of the US non-profit foundation is to improve the quality of individuals lives by creating and funding education projects (Guidestar n.d.). PF1 states

on the 'who we are' page that the platform helps people around the world learn the essential skills they need to live and work.

*"we want to create these (videos) for everyone who need needs it, but we are especially focused in that gap, I mean in helping the people to access knowledge that normally is expensive. People that is in different cultures, in different places, different ages, but have that in common that they have no resources, didn't have the opportunity to study, or to create an email account or to access to social media." IP3 - PF1.*

*"that was one of the things that really motivated, you know, like to see that need and I really feel passionate when I talk about it because it's unbelievable that in 2021 people had those problems. They don't have internet, they don't have electricity, maybe they don't have computers or either a cell phone, there are a lot of problems that the children are suffering right now. So the teachers just deal with it the best way they can. And I think that there is a knowledge that has to be shown out there somehow and gathered in one place." IP5 - PF1.*

PF1 does not have a commercial drive to be profitable, instead it is focused on helping users improve their lives with targeted education content. The director and internal producers were not primarily driven but user numbers and other data, instead the focus was on the impact on individual users and wider society. PF1 appear to have characteristics associated with communitarianism argued by Etzioni (1996), a web of internal and external relationships beyond the digital education platform, relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another, and a commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity (culture).

*"I think that education is the only way to change the world in terms of helping other people and ourselves. Because if we have a lot of knowledge, and if a lot of people put out there a lot of knowledge and if it's free, I think it's better. If we get as much education as possible, and not only that, if we find our purpose, your mission in life. Yes, you have obstacles, but once you have a goal that is bigger than you, and maybe if it is to help others that will be great." IP5 - PF1.*

*"helping others is something that is really encouraging, I mean, is something that you feel bearable, because you're doing good to society. And that is crucial, that is something that even though maybe you have a bad day, that encourage you to work on. So that is something for me, it's very rewarding." IP3 - PF1.*

*"A video with 100 views you say is not so high, because other videos with low quality is half a million (views). Something that we talk about in staff meetings, we don't say it is bad to have 100 views, because we can help 100 users." IP2 - PF1.*

*“It's almost more important about the people that you're not accessing. I really like that point. Because if you're assuming your impact is based on what you are doing. But actually, what aren't you doing is equally as important.” IP1 - PF1.*

PF1 internal producer job roles may change over time to meet platform objectives and the mission of the foundation.

*“I have to admit that it was very hard for me to get rid of what I love doing, technical aspects, because I love doing bee effects, and I love putting people flying and all this stuff. So I was only a bit frustrated because of that. Even though this is a great job, I was feeling like that part was missing. Because here we don't put people flying or do that kind of special effects and motion graphics is now not my department.” IP3 - PF1.*

By undertaking roles that are needed by the foundation and platform, there is a risk that producers will not be fulfilling their individual ambitions, impacting on producer motivation and perception of platform reward, and employee retention.

### **7.2.3 Paradigm out of which the system arises**

Philanthropic foundations have a freedom to set up and support online platforms, they can focus on markets of interest and niche areas. Foundations can be intermediaries, connecting governments, NGOs and businesses, without commercial pressures to grow and meet shareholder wealth expectations (Mulgan, 2021). However, there are weakness and potential threats to philanthropic supported ventures. Winn (2012) provides a convincing critical review of open education resources (OER) in the public sector, providing several observations including questions surrounding sustainability that could equally apply to the private sector. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been the dominate player in the OER field, but much of this production is funded by attracting private philanthropic funds. Several direct and indirect benefits have returned to MIT, but the organisation is continually searching for new funders to support future expansion plans (Winn, 2012).

**Internal producers** interviewed were employees of a not-for-profit foundation based in Colombia, the Colombian foundation is part of a foundation originated in the United States of America (US). Internal producers all work for PF1, a free distance learning tool, providing informal learning video content. The original US platform was created in July 2000 by a US citizen and reverend, and foundation leader. The director

of PF1 expressed their own personal religious beliefs and the importance meeting the aims and objectives of the foundation.

*“I believe in God. And I think that he puts you in the places where you can serve the most. So for me, this is a calling. And as long as I have enough to cover my expenses and even if I don't make lots of money.” IP5 - PF1*

*“So it is in a loving and very friendly environment. Like we learn from our mistakes, and we are humans, and we have families, but we are also doing this thing that is a mission for us.” IP5 - PF1*

The foundation has three platforms serving different language markets: English (US), Spanish and Portuguese. The platform is funded through revenue generated from the value of donated items to a non-profit foundation. The foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt organisation based in the US. Internal producers of PF1 were all aware they were working for a platform owned and supported by a not-for-profit foundation, and the importance of the platform to help individuals learn new skills:

*“I feel very fortunate of being working here. Because here as a foundation, I don't know if all the foundations are the same. But in this foundation, they say that if you want to help, you need to be okay with yourself, and you need to be somebody that is okay, so you can help others.” IP3 - PF1.*

*“Personally, I really like this kind of non-profit job. If I don't want to stay at [PF1] anymore, I will probably look for something in the non-profit sector. I really like it because it's a different mindset. I was I working in the commercial sector, so the priorities are completely different. I prefer to work for non-profit organisations, I think we can feel more useful for the society.” IP4 - PF1.*

Internal producers of PF1 were aware that the foundation had set boundaries for video content, boundaries that censor content.

*“But the foundation have some political things that the foundation says that we should not speak about politics, religion, or that kind of things. So these kinds of things affect the content. And because some of the content creators doesn't know much about that, sometimes there are mistakes, and these media has to be removed.” IP3 - PF1*

*“Basically, we are funded by a republican founder, I know he's a pastor. So my prejudices tell me they are very clear boundaries.” IP1 - PF1*

Where content is seen to step over these boundaries, the content is retrospectively amended by producers to meet the internal guidelines of PF1.

## 7.3 External producer power

### 7.3.1 The power to change systems.

**External producers** have limited individual power to influence the design and workings of platform systems in their capacity as third party suppliers.

*“don’t think about that too much because I have no control. I have no way other than putting an idea in, of having any influence. I mean I have suggested to [PF2] actually that they go the other way, that they have a premium course section so they can charge more, but they haven’t adopted that.” EP4 - PF2.*

However collectively producers can influence platform systems, provided there is enough of a response from a sufficient number of producers, platforms will act upon producer feedback.

*“at one point they changed the pricing structure, but nothing could be more than \$50. I think they’ve changed that again because they [producers] were up in arms about it.” EP2 - PF2.*

Activism is possible because producers communicate outside of the boundaries of each platform on social media platforms such as Facebook (Meta) and LinkedIn, and it is this collective influence of networked producers that offers the potential to influence platform systems.

*“Well the reach that I have in terms of my reputation and authority is vastly wider you know than it would have been. I mean I’m up to about 8,000 people on LinkedIn”. EP4 - PF2.*

Producers have demonstrated their ability to self-organise and collectively influence platform rules. In July 2019, the YouTubers Union joined with IG Metall to start FairTube (n.d.), a campaign that advocates for greater transparency from the YouTube company and a greater voice for independent creators on the platform in decision-making. Creators are YouTube's ‘partners’ rather than employees; they make money from advertising revenue and merchandising.

Nevertheless, YouTube has taken many of the demands of IG Metall and the YouTubers Union into account in recent months. For example, the company has published almost all of its rules for taking videos down and for allowing videos for monetized ads. YouTube has also created more opportunities to contact its employees.

FairTube February 2021

Successful producers have the resource to get professional advice to make sure the system works in their favour, in a similar way tax specialists advise individuals to optimise tax systems.

*“last year when I went to The London Bookfair and I met with a copyright solicitor and she was talking to me and she gave me a lot of advice, but now she said to me I can email her any contract and she’ll just make sure they all look OK and so I’ve done that a few times and just made sure that I’m, everything’s safe.” EP3 - PF2.*

*“I always read through the contracts, because there have been a couple of websites and their contracts look a bit weird. Like they’ll say we own the rights, and we can do this or whatever, so if the website, after reading through the contract, if I own all the rights to and they can’t do anything without my permission then I’m happy to put it on.” EP3 - PF2.*

It is possible for external producers to challenge platform power, by circumventing platform terms and conditions. Producers with content on multiple sites can prioritise platforms that do not have restrictions, and only then place content on platforms that have restrictions.

*“[PF2] have changed recently, they’ve got a new service for business and now they say if you’re on this service you can’t publish new content anywhere else, - unless it’s already been published, and so a lot of mine has already been published and I was on the new service and I think it’s because they spend a lot of money advertising courses on service for business and so if your course is on there then they say you’re not allowed to post it anywhere else and so I’ve got a few courses on there and the courses that are on there I haven’t posted anywhere else because you do earn quite a lot from it.” EP3 - PF2.*

*“Luckily I’d already got sort of 9 or 10 different platforms that I’d published on but and then it said if you’ve already published them then you haven’t got to worry so- and what I do now to get round that sort of thing, so a lot of my courses are chosen, so for the new service for business they have to be chosen to, you can’t just put them on they have to choose your courses, and luckily a lot of my courses have been chosen. As for now, if I make a new course, I publish it on [PF2] last, and that way it gets round the contract. I’ve already published it elsewhere and then put it on [PF2], then if they choose it then its already been published elsewhere, so they can’t sort of control you that way.” EP3 - PF2.*

Producers had created websites that they had set up on their own to promote their own work or to create a bespoke online learning environment. While many were relatively simple profile pages, others were more complex and challenged the

capabilities of packages such as WordPress, especially when the platform was designed to offer a variety of education resources to users.

*“I was trying to do that on WordPress and that was sort of a three- or four-year process of trying to create my own online course and platform at the same time, and it was so complicated.” EP3 - PF2.*

*“We had a redesign that was going to be fundamentally changing the way the website worked...like ground up. We were going from a new site to more of a teaching school site. Which had like tests and.... We weren't charging for classes, but we were giving quizzes out. We were doing a lot of stuff. All that stuff requires a tremendous amount of work.” EP5 - PF4.*

Some producers demonstrated alternative methods to self-organise outside the boundaries and power of existing platforms.

*“I also thought about scaling and so on, but I take it very calmly, or I want to scale naturally. So I know these business minded people, they were like I need to scale the business, let's get some investors on board and get 50 people. But I'm more like if I see people, I just came across online and I felt okay, this could be a nice person to work with, he's a great artist, he's doing tutorials already. So let's get in touch and see if there is something we can like, work together. And then step by step it's growing. So in general, I do have the idea of having the business, which kind of pays for my living at a point where I don't need to put something in. So this point, I wouldn't like sell it to someone else. But yeah, I don't know what the future brings. It's just a current view on this.” EP7 - PF4.*

*“I didn't really start out with a grand plan. In other cases I usually do because that's what I advise myself on. I usually say when you are a company look at the future and look at what it takes to get you to the future. But in this case its organic and it was more as a hobby with no other intention of- I'd say it was almost like stamp collecting.” EP6 - PF3.*

External producers are aware of the potential of organic growth via informal networks of producers collaborating on projects, rather than relying on the financial support of outside investors such as venture capitalists to fund growth.

### **7.3.2 Goals of the system (platform goals).**

The goals of each system have been gathered from publicly available information on each platform and their respective terms and conditions.

PF2 provides education content to individual users and organisations by providing education videos aimed at developing the knowledge and skills of users. They describe



their platform as a marketplace platform, with access to thousands of courses in multiple languages, promoting the benefit of providing tools to users, producers, and organisations to achieve their respective goals. PF2 operates a two-sided marketplace where producers develop content to meet learner demand.

*“You have to differentiate between marketplaces and platforms. Marketplaces are [PF2], platforms are [PF4] and Thinkific. The difference is, who does the marketing? On the marketplace [PF2] does the marketing on [PF2] and Thinkific I have to bring my own customers to the platform.” EP4 - PF2.*

PF2 provides users with access to courses in multiple languages and countries.

Producer content is prioritised by factors such as learner feedback and ratings, topic relevance, content quality, and producer engagement. Courses can be accessed through direct-to-consumer or platform-to-business services. For commercial reasons PF2 manage the interaction between producers and users, which includes restricting communication through the platform, and ensuring that user e-mail addresses are not obtainable by producers from the platform.

*“We could do it (communicate) off-line, but [PF2] are very precious about their platform. And they don't like you taking people away from their platform for anything. You can't capture any of their information, so you don't have their email addresses. You don't know anything about them. You can message them from within the platform. So that's the other reason other instructors move away is because they haven't really got a mailing list. I can only do a couple of announcements a month through [PF2] to email your students, and then they probably get them from all the other instructors as well. So all the instructors are competing for their attention.” EP2 - PF2.*

*“The thing is, if somebody signs up for me videos through [PF2] they would retain all the email addresses. So you won't be able to market to the people in future because they've got them. Okay. Well, you can market, but only by [PF2]. And only your courses that are all already on [PF2]. So it's their business model. We're just players, whereas if you're doing your own thing, then obviously you own the database.” EP1 - PF2.*

PF3 is a video-sharing platform, allowing users to upload, view, and share videos, including movie and music clips and amateur content. It is not a specialist education platform, there are limited quality control mechanisms in place to restrict producer content. Video content is supplied to PF3 by individual producers and by 'for-profit' and 'not-for-profit' organisations.

*“[PF3] supports me a little bit, but basically it’s a big funnel that brings people to my website where I can actually offer products that I can put online, and I don’t have to be there to monitor it and so if it brings in a steady monthly income.” EP6 - PF3.*

*“I just find [PF3] to be the most, the largest, it’s really a numbers thing. It’s the largest user base.” EP5 - PF3.*

PF4 is a learning managed system (LMS), also known as software as a service business (SaaS), on which producers set up and promote their own bespoke course content. The platform specifically states that they are neither a content provider nor an educational institution. Producers and users are not employees of PF4. The platform terms and conditions state that the system is not responsible for interactions between producers and users, other than providing the technological means through which producers make their content available. The platform claims it is not liable for any legal disputes that may arise out of the producer/user relationship, including any user’s reliance upon any information or content provided by a producer.

*“I started with different marketplaces before I got into PF4. I wanted a system which is doing all this [back office] for me, and PF4 was the only platform which included it out of the box.” EP7 - PF4.*

Depending on the payment plan chosen, PF4 provides additional services to support producers day to day running of courses, encompassing administration, payment and tax support systems.

### **7.3.3 Paradigm out of which the system arises**

All participants categorised as **external producers** create content for multiple platforms, but the focus in this section is on the primary platform that provide their main source of income. These primary platforms are owned by companies based in the United States and have been funded by venture capital at some stage (see Table 7-2).

**Table 7-2** Platforms related to external producers

Primary platform	Legal Entity	Company type	Headquarters	Equity type	Growth stage investment
PF2	Incorporated	For profit	United States	Public	Venture capital
PF3	Limited Liability Company	For profit	United States	Private	Venture capital
PF4	Incorporated	For profit	United States	Private	Venture capital

(Source: Crunchbase, n.d.)

PF2 has stated in the most recent set of publicly available accounts that due to the year-on-year growth in market share and structure of operating costs, the business has historically not made any profits since it was established. They also point out that their rapid growth may not be sustainable, because of the challenges attracting new users, producers, and organisations and retain existing ones. The platform has raised over \$200 million in venture capital since it was formed in 2010 <sup>3</sup>.

*“I think the marketplace is continually evolving. [PF2’s] gone through one or two rollercoasters of changes of tack and strategy and personnel. And yeh continue trying to stay ahead of the game and find ways to monetise the existing content and make new content.” EP4 - PF2.*

*“I’m only interested because I’m nose and so I do a lot of research on all the platform, not all of them, but I’ve done a lot of research on [PF2] and [PF6], just out of nosiness. I just wanted to see who owned them and how they got their first, starting up an online course company must be hard because it’s a lot of work and if you’ve got no money to start off with so I always look at how they start off. [PF2] they have lots of investors, but you have to take an interest because they’re so big, they can make a change and it can affect quite a lot of and it can affect a lot of how you work and how you share things.” EP3 - PF2.*

PF3 was venture capital funded prior to being purchased in 2006 by a large technology company, also based in the United States. The business operates as a subsidiary of the parent company. The two co-founders of the parent company are the controlling shareholders, board members, and employees (Crunchbase, n.d.).

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<sup>3</sup> Source (published company accounts) withheld for purposes of anonymity, validated using materials provided by producers and public information on platform PF2.

PF4 has grown revenue each year, but the business has historically not made any profits since it was established. The platform has had multiple rounds of venture capital funding prior to being acquired in 2020 by a European company, which itself has been venture capital funded. The purchase price is many times greater than the disclosed valuation of the platform <sup>4</sup>.

Individual external producers and venture capitalist owners are likely to have different perspectives, priorities and planning time horizons for a platform. A system time horizon will have implications for system goals, structure and rules.

*“In general, it's just a platform, what I sometimes think about is just, like, for example, this new platform, how much customers do they have? Are they sustainable in the long run? Can I use this platform for the next 10 years?” EP7 - PF4.*

## 7.4 Co-producer power

### 7.4.1 The power to change systems.

Changes to system reward mechanisms are formally communicated to **co-producers** by changing the published terms and conditions of the platform. What is not clear from this research, is how much internal dialogue (including forums) takes place between producers and the platform prior to these rule changes decisions being made. Producers provided no evidence of platform systems and processes being changed as a result of producer feedback to platforms. Should producers wish to challenge the power of platforms, the profile and practice of the individuals interviewed provided evidence that they have a potential source of power to change the status quo if they desire, whether they act individually or collectively.

Individual producers with expertise in social media, commonly known as ‘Influencers’, could use their online network and power to influence the rules and structures of platform reward systems that host their content.

*“Yeah, right now things are, things are going very well, I'm working with some of the biggest companies in the world. And I get to have a lot of impact within these organisations. And the fact that these companies trust whatever I say, with no questions, pretty awesome. So I mean, obviously that right is has been*

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<sup>4</sup> Source (technology article) withheld for purposes of anonymity, validated using materials provided by producers and public information on platform PF4.

*earned, right? My dream is really to empower other creators and other creatives to take over the world and design a life that that can, that you can actually make a living out of what you love doing. CP7 - PF7.*

Individual producers potentially have access to many thousands of users by utilising different online channels of communication, webinars provide an example of this.

*“It was interesting this recent experience, it was 30,000 retail staff, it was not an insignificant number, that’s education at scale! So that for me, was such a lightbulb moment. It was just me, three sessions of 60 minutes. It’s like hardcore, and I had a whole panel of moderators, and they were texting each other, but because of PI (personal information) I couldn’t be in their chat because I’m not part of their companies. So it was something else.” CP2 - PF5.*

Producers are aware of different reward models on platforms as they provide content to multiple platforms in some cases. Producers are open to the idea of adopting new models even where there is no certainty of rewards from a user community.

*“I think one thing that I am looking into is Patreon. So I mean, obviously, it’s completely open model. There’s the reward structure around that. And I think a lot of people treat that as an educational thing. But that also seems to be a massive element of creation within that as well, because you have a kind of micro community that is really invested in what you do to the point where they actually give you quote, in internet terms, quite substantial amount of money, like \$5 or something per month up to anything. And then they kind of get a say in I think it’d be an interesting kind of project to build. I like the idea that it becomes something of a hybrid.” CP8 - PF7.*

#### **7.4.2 Goals of the system (platform goals).**

The goals of each system have been gathered from publicly available information on each platform and their respective terms and conditions.

PF5 is a marketplace education platform with a strong emphasis on providing video content for business professionals, with the aim of supporting career development for user and producers, through improved skills and knowledge and by networking online. There is a strong emphasis on employee learning in the workplace, and the platform offers specific services for business clients. Courses are not accredited; the platform offers a subscription model for users. Users can watch unlimited videos. The platform co-produces content with industry experts that have been invited to produce content.

PF5 has a competitive advantage over some education content platforms as it also operates as a social networking site for users and producers, it also has a very targeted business focus for the video content provided.

*“[PF5b] really is the only global platform and the only global social media network. No 1: It is where people shop the most professionally. No 2: I have found that I do get contacted by a lot of the other educational platforms, my initial interaction, it isn’t as professional with them.” CP2 - PF5.*

The change in ownership from PF5a to PF5b created a shift in the goals of the platform to providing a greater focus on business related courses.

*“It’s because they [PF5b] don’t care about design and art. They want money. They want to go after the most money. They want business. They want business clients and a lot of people that are super interested in business they don’t care about art, design, whatever and they’ll figure out how to use it and that’s all that they care about. So then they have that same approach to their training videos. They’re more interested in those type of courses, so their feeling is that like, ‘we’re going to go after the stuff that makes the most money’ and artists don’t make as much money, so we’re going to kind of put away that side of the business and then focus on money” CP1 - PF5.*

PF6 is a marketplace education platform providing content for individual users via classes, the classes are mainly supported by pre-recorded video content, on creative rather than business topics. The courses are not accredited. The platform also offers specific services for business clients. The platform co-produces content with employees and external practitioners. PF6 along with other commercially driven platforms will inevitably have a strong focus on sales and profit, but as argued by an ex-employee, a focus on growth may be to the detriment of education quality:

*“Prior to that I was at a company called [PF6] which is a pretty sizeable online learning platform, but when I joined them in 2015 it was probably in the hundreds of thousands of students. Now it’s something like 8 million students.” CP3 - PF6.*

*“But I think it needs to be education first and focus on the quality of the content, not about selling course. A lot of people are trying to do this as a business model, which it can be, but you can’t do a cash grab really quick and then get out. You have to care about your student and teaching them and I’d like to see more of that for sure. And I don’t know if that comes from the leading platforms. I don’t know if that comes from me as a producer. I don’t know if that comes from the brand on which its hosted or what.” CP3 - PF6.*

PF7 is a marketplace education platform focusing on providing content for creative professionals to learn new skills and develop their careers. The platform co-produces content with creative (arts based) professionals that have been invited to produce content, the content is highly curated. The courses are not accredited. Users pay for a license to view a class (videos) via the platform. Classes are licensed, and not sold. The platform also offers specific services for business clients.

*“It seems to us word has gone round really quickly and maybe they've targeted growing really fast. Because when I started with them, they had only got predominantly Spanish speaking tutors. Yeah. So they were on a real drive to get English speaking tutors. And just as I was talking to them, they were opening offices in Tokyo, London, Argentina, and some New York as well. So they're all you know, they're still growing and growing. So it's a bit like, to me [PF7], we're almost like the online version of demand for fine art over here.”*  
**CP5 - PF7.**

### 7.4.3 Paradigm out of which the system arises

Unlike external producers, participants categorised as **co-producers** were more likely to focus on creating content for one platform. Platforms that co-produced video content with producers tended to curate content to ensure that internal standards of quality are maintained, and it could be argued creating the perception of a partnership rather than a supplier relationship.

*“So [PF7] is actually the partner, my partner that created the video content. I was just providing the teaching content and presenting it”* **CP7 - PF7.**

Co-producers primary platforms have common features that are consistent with external producers, in that the platforms are owned by companies based in the United States and have all been funded at some stage by venture capital (Table 7-3).

**Table 7-3** Platforms related to co-producers

Primary platform	Legal Entity	Company type	Headquarters	Equity type	Growth stage Investment
PF5	Incorporated	For profit	United States	Public	Venture capital
PF6	Incorporated	For profit	United States	Private	Venture capital
PF7	Incorporated	For profit	United States	Private	Venture capital

**(Source: Crunchbase, n.d.)**

Changes in platform ownership will not only have an impact on employees of a platform, but also for third parties that co-produce content with employees. These participant comments illustrate the impact of changes in objectives and culture of PF5 having been acquired by two different companies.

*"[PF5a] founder, as a person, it doesn't seem like that was the type of thing she would have done unless she was absolutely desperate. Cos she wasn't as focussed on the bottom line. She was focussed on making a really great product. And making it great for consumers. And great for authors. They started out \$25 a month in 2000 or 1999, or whenever they started. And they never raised their prices, until [PF5b] new owners bought them." CP1 - PF5.*

*"Basically when [PF5b] bought [PF5a] there was a bit of a style clash there. They paid the founder of [PF5a] a bunch of money and she doesn't work there anymore. She's not part of the organisation and you could really feel that, as you can tell when you just looked at [PF5b]. They are not really interested in design. They don't really respect art and design and the benefits of design and good design." CP1 - PF5.*

*"I think the transition from [PF5a] to [PF5b], was actually pretty smooth. When the parent company (global technology company) bought [PF5b] things changed a lot, and that's probably where I went from regular cadence to dropping off a little, where their priority was much more around enterprise sales, which makes sense for the parent company. And a lot more around software use. Strategically it has been influenced by who the owners have been. And again tactically from a taxonomy perspective I honestly feel like it hasn't moved forward much from the [PF5a] days." CP2 - PF5.*

The following co-producer, an internal employee of PF6, expressed an opinion that employees should co-own a business, but pointed out that a private financed 'bootstrapped' company is much less attractive an investment for venture capitalists, and a venture backed business has a clear planned route to growth and a future sale or acquisition.

*"Everybody should be a co-owner of the company they work in, but if you are in a private bootstrapped company that's not venture backed, there's no trajectory of exiting in ten years or getting acquired in ten years or anything like that. Or going public in ten years which is typically the trajectory that a venture backed start-up goes on. It's just the investors want their return and its typically a ten-year cycle." CP3 - PF6.*

Whilst there is a strong argument being made, not least because of cash flow issues common to start-up businesses, there are examples to illustrate how an education



based business can achieve market growth and a high value exit sale without venture capital. Software development platform company, GitHub, launched as a bootstrapped start-up in 2008 and was bought by Microsoft for \$7.5 billion in 2018 (Harvey, 2021).

Some producers consider the companies that own platforms before making a decision about whether to supply content, or work with a platform in making content.

*“do you choose a platform based on like the company behind it like the Facebook or the LinkedIn Learning or TikTok. And it's for me it's, it does, it does play into my consideration. And that's why I haven't like jumped on to the TikTok bandwagon. But at the end of the day, it's really about where your community is hanging out. So where are, where is your ideal audience?” CP7 - PF7.*

PF7 was created in 2002 as a community of creative people in Barcelona, Spain. The community developed with a combination of online forums and offline events. The company was founded in 2010, and courses were added to the platform in 2013. The headquarters of the company is in San Francisco (USA) with further offices in other countries. PF7 has raised around \$200 million in venture capital to date.<sup>5</sup>

*“I was worried, you know, will [PF7] sell out to YouTube or something? But I was only worried about that in the so far as how would that affect my royalties? And my copyright and the rest of it? You know, would the contract still hold firm? If they did sell out to another business? Yeah. But as long as I'm making money, to be honest, I can't see there's any ethical problems. It's not like they're going to start suddenly supporting a business that's not ethical, I wouldn't have thought.” CP5 - PF7.*

*“It is a competitive, very competitive space out there because all these companies want market share. So in terms of the future, I think these platforms are maturing into these huge, massive brands. And how I like to think of it or how I see it is like, okay, you have the Facebook, you have the LinkedIn and the Twitter, and, you know, the TikTok's, and these are huge, massive companies, they all you know, have are on the stock exchange, and they're just giants.” CP7 - PF7.*

There was a recognition by producers that there is a need for change in platform systems, with more emphasis on producer communities, and scope for more a sustainable business model where profit is balanced alongside social objectives.

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<sup>5</sup> Source (technology article) withheld for purposes of anonymity, validated using materials provided by producers and public information on platform PF7.

*“There’s so much power to be had in the community, especially within learning. Also time to really contribute something fantastic on a bigger project and I think we’re all looking for that. Especially artists. We’re looking for, not only knowledge, but we’re also looking for experience and there’s ways to give that to artists easily now in the modern age and nobody’s really taken advantage of that.” CP1 - PF5.*

*“I think the incentive is very important and I would love for there to be a sustainable business model that actually is profitable. Like for profit, for good. That was the thinking behind [PF6]. Some of our thinking as well, like this ‘for profit for good’ mindset where you can make money as a business. You can make profit. And help a lot of people in the process and not just the students but also the teachers. I don’t know if anyone has cracked it yet because I don’t even know if [PF6] turns a profit to be honest.” CP3 - PF6.*

*You know for the way things are right now, the day and age we live in. It feels like its overdue for there to be a new training company” CP1 - PF5.*

Based on the individual accounts of internal producers, external producers and co-producers, the following section summarises features of power unique to each case.

## 7.5 Power summary

The unique features of power by producer group are summarised in Table 7-4:

**Table 7-4** Producer power by group

<b>Producer power</b>	Internal producer	Co-producer	External producer
<b>Paradigm</b>	Communitarianism	Capitalism	Capitalism
<b>Funding</b>	Funded by public donations	Funded by venture capital	Funded by venture capital
<b>System time horizon</b>	Relatively long	Relatively short	Relatively short
<b>Ownership and governance</b>	Foundation president and platform directors	Company shareholders and platform directors	Company shareholders and platform directors

<b>Growth</b>	Sustainable growth	High growth	High growth
<b>Market models</b>	B2C model	B2B and B2C models	B2B and B2C models
<b>Values</b>	Purpose Religious	Professional	Professional
<b>System access</b>	Internal	External	External
<b>Producer engagement</b>	Participation	Participation	Consultation
<b>Producer profile</b>	Linked to platform	Linked to platform Field of expertise	Linked to platform Field of expertise
<b>Producer networks</b>	Social media Local communities	Social media Professional practice	Social media Community of practice
<b>Platform ownership ambitions</b>	None disclosed	Professional focus	Learning focus

These unique features of power between groups shine a light on current practice but also on potential intervention points for co-operation.

## 7.6 Power leverage points

The following section summarises the unique features of power for internal, external and co-producers in making and supplying video content to platforms. This is then followed by a summary of power themes that are common to all groups.

### 7.5.1 Power levers for internal producers.

**Internal producers** have the potential to take part in system changes, they can see the workings of a system from within and are involved in day to day operations that will provide some leverage to make changes. As part of their job role, some producers are actively involved in technology issues connected with platform development. However as demonstrated by this study, a philanthropic venture is more likely to have resource

restrictions than a commercial organisation, and such constraints can limit the design and capability of systems and limit the potential change that individual producers can initiate.

Platforms that are funded from a single philanthropic source, are likely to be influenced to some degree by the individual or organisations that provide the capital used to sustain the platform. The influence of a few powerful individuals can have a far reaching impact on the aims of the system and the actors within these systems.

A focus on very specific non-profit aims can be a powerful force for good, that can galvanise internal producers to work collectively to make a difference to society. But there is a danger that the system is less adaptive to outside change while it operates as a relatively closed system, incubated from market forces, access to limited resources to develop the system, and directed and managed by a few powerful individuals.

### **7.5.3 Power levers for external producers.**

Individual **external producers** have little influence over platforms, but collectively there are many thousands of producers that communicate both within a platform system, but more importantly beyond the confines of a platform on social media. Producers are acutely aware of the power of social media to promote their courses and to connect with users, but historically these informal networks had not been used to undertake collective bargaining with platforms. FairTube has set an example of how producers can work together to retrospectively change existing platform systems, but it also begins to shine a light of what is possible for producers that wish to act collectively and impact platforms of the future.

Producers often have websites of their own or ambitions to set one up at some point in the future. These websites are often simply landing pages that describe the practice of the producer, produced using relatively cheap or free software such as WordPress. But some producers aim to set up their own platform offering video content and courses to users, that could be considered direct competitors to platforms that reward these individual producers for supplying video content. This shows clear intent and the ambition of some producers to take part in ownership and control of

education platforms, rather than just passive third party suppliers of content to platforms.

The goals of platform systems will be influenced by the goals of venture capitalist funders, which will be driven by the time horizon of the investment in a platform, the targeted market growth, the pursuit of profit and ultimately an exit strategy. High growth strategies require investment, investment requires profit, which leads to further investment. This is an example of a reinforcing feedback loop, which on the face of it would help achieve the goals of the system and those of the venture capitalist owners. However, if profitability levels are not being achieved as planned, and in some cases, platforms have not achieved profitability at any point in their trading history, then venture capitalists will try alternative methods to achieve their goals, including market consolidation.

Some producers had achieved organic growth of their own online branded business by working with other trusted producers, subcontracting work out to these producers on a self-employed basis. By organically growing their own business without outside investment, producers had consciously avoided any dilution in the ownership and control of their own business.

### **7.5.3 Power levers for co-producers.**

**Co-producers** more than any other group expressed an interest in broader issues around platform ownership, systems and processes. They also questioned the reward model that their royalties were based on. Despite this they appeared to be the group least likely to challenge a platform, whether individually or as a producer collective.

Co-producers were identified and invited to work with a platform, the process of being recruited based on their expertise was important for producers. Producers worked closely with internal employees of a platform to create content, there was an unequivocal recognition of the quality of video production standards and the expertise of internal producers to support co-producers in making education video content. This working relationship appears to have created a loyalty and trust between co-producers and platforms as far as collaboration is concerned.

Beyond the positive perception of platform resources and people, producers questioned reward mechanisms based on royalties, recognising that the approach in

principle was fair, but in practice the ‘black box’ approach to reward was not transparent. Should producers choose to challenge platform practices, their individual profile and working practices demonstrated a very wide reach with a broad range of stakeholders. Producer communities of practice were well established, and individual producers highlighted examples of their online status, whether as social media ‘influencers’, or as practitioners with the capacity to communicate with large audiences beyond the confines of education platforms.

Platforms that are financed by venture capitalists will more than likely experience a change of ownership at some point, in the case of PF5, two changes of ownership had taken place. Changes in ownership are beyond the control of producers, they have no say in whether an acquisition or merger takes place, who the new owners are, and the terms and conditions of a sale. Any subsequent changes to strategy, management or operations may not be in the interest of existing producers, regardless of how successful or long serving they may have been.

The following Table 7-5 summarises power based system leverage points by producer group.

**Table 7-5** Power leverage points

System leverage points (Meadows)	Internal producer power	External producer power	Co-producer power
4. The power to change systems	<p>Foundation president and platform directors</p> <p>Producers participate in internal systems change</p> <p>Producer power to change the system from within the system</p> <p>Producer knowledge of local markets and users</p>	<p>Company shareholders and platform directors</p> <p>Producers wish to consult on, or participate in systems change</p> <p>Producer power to change the system from outside the system</p> <p>Producer profiles in their field of expertise</p>	<p>Company shareholders and platform directors</p> <p>Producers wish to consult on, or participate in systems change</p> <p>Producer power to change the system from within and outside the system</p> <p>Producer profiles in their field of expertise</p>

	Limited power to change third party systems	Producers social media networks and community of practice  Collective bargaining desired and possible with self-employed producers (FairTube)	Producers social media networks and community of practice
3. The goals of the system (platform)	Sustainable growth  Relatively long system time horizon  Mixed system. PF1 platform linked to Marketplace (YouTube) B2C model  Informal learning  User basic skills	High growth strategy  Relatively short system time horizon  Marketplace platforms (PF2, PF3) LMS platform (PF4) B2B and B2C models  Informal learning  User technical skills	High growth strategy  Relatively short system time horizon  Marketplace platforms (PF5, PF6, PF7)  B2B and B2C models  Informal learning  User sector skills
2. Paradigm out of which the system arises	Communitarianism  Third sector Foundation  Non-profit  Funded by public donations  Headquarters in the United States	Capitalism  Public listed or privately owned companies  For-profit  Financed by venture capital  Headquarters in the United States  Acquisitions used to gain market share and dominance	Capitalism  Public listed or privately owned companies  For-profit  Financed by venture capital  Headquarters in the United States  Acquisitions used to gain market share and dominance

	Shared values and beliefs can be a powerful motivator for producers		
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#### **7.5.4 Power levers for all producers.**

Based on NVivo analysis and Meadows (1999) levers of control, the following section summarises power levers that apply across producer groups, internal, external and co-producers respectively.

##### **Systems participation**

External producers have limited interest and engagement with platforms and the organisations that own platforms, how they are managed, controlled and how decisions are made. This is in contrast to internal producers that have a high level of interest and engagement with the platform they work with and the organisation that own the platform. Co-producers are somewhere between these two extremes, but because of the close working relationship with platform employees and the intense process of collaboration, there is a build-up of goodwill but also a dependency on platform resources and reward mechanisms. This relationship cultivates and supports a barrier to challenging the hegemony of platform systems, designed to maximise profits and growth in time frames favourable to venture capital owners.

All producer groups are interested in the workings of a platform, of system issues that have a direct impact on them individually. These system issues include video production processes, communications with a platform, and the legal terms that determine producer relationships and rewards with a platform. For external and co-producers these system rules are linked to platform terms and conditions, for internal employees this is part of their contract of employment. Producers from all three groups have limited or no control over the system rules that determine their relationship and rewards with platforms. Platforms appear to be transparent in their publication of terms and conditions on published web pages, but the determination of these rules is very much beyond the control of producers. The strategy of platform management appears to rely on producer reticence to get involved in systems they have no access to and limited understanding of, and producer satisfaction from



receiving reward for their labour, regardless of whether this reward is fair and equitable.

### **Property rights**

As third party suppliers and with no individual equity stake, external and co-producers are not interested in the ownership and management of platforms, instead their focus is on the ownership and reward of their video content shared with platforms.

External producers want to be able to price their videos, or at least to have a say in how they are priced to users. Where users do not pay for content, producers want to have more control over the share of advertising revenues they receive from platforms. This was not the case with co-producers who seem happy to relinquish responsibility for platform pricing, not least because some platforms models are subscription based, and where users are charged per course there was little variation in pricing.

Independent self-employed producers want ownership of their content. They want to be able to share their content with multiple platforms and have ownership of the written content contained in videos produced, so that it can be multipurposed in other mediums both in print and online. Producers will utilise professional advisors if necessary to ensure they make the most of their content and copyright to supply their work to third parties other than education platforms. Producers are aware of the restrictions placed upon them by platform terms and conditions and understand the options open to them, which may include a carefully planned sequence of supply that ends with platforms that have the most restrictive terms and conditions.

Despite this conscious decision to draw a line in the sand between themselves and well established large education platform systems, some producers do have ambitions to own and control of their own platforms. This may be in the form of a simple website with minimal content, but some producers have future ambitions or have already set up platforms with video, courses and users registered, which appear to be early stage competitors to the third parties they currently work with. This indicates that producers are interested in ownership and management, but only where a new venture is initiated by the producers themselves and where they have a high degree of control.

Power struggles between producers and platforms have important consequences for the motivation of individual producers and their perception of rewards. They also raise a number of interesting questions about alternative approaches to producer-platform relations and platform systems design.

This chapter has critically evaluated the role and impact of power within platform systems and how this power uniquely impacts the motivation and reward for all three producer groups, as well as common themes based on system participation and property rights. It has highlighted the potential for individual and collective producer power to influence reward within platform systems. The next chapter considers the findings from chapters 5-7, the potential value of co-operation amongst producers, and the contribution to knowledge this thesis provides.

## 8 Co-operative platforms

### 8.1 Introduction

In this discussion chapter the potential of co-operative digital education platforms is evaluated based on the experiences and perceptions of individual producers, identified themes and system leverage points in existing platform systems. In order to investigate the motivation and rewards for individual education video producers, within platform systems, findings from chapters 5-7 utilised Meadows' taxonomy of systemic intervention points 2-12 (see Figure 8-1). Critical theory provided the philosophical basis to place the producer accounts in a wider political and economic context, relating digital education platform systems to broader discursive and material formations including capitalism. In gathering empirical data on motivation and reward to inform this research project, different producers' realities have been represented based on a consensus theory of truth expressed through a criteria and analysis that Lincoln and Guba (1994, p.114) describe as 'authenticity'. This has highlighted the hegemony of existing platform systems, and the scope for using system levers to benefit producers and platform systems.

Meadows emphasises that there are no quick and easy adjustments to complex systems, that 'magical leverage points are not easily accessible' even if we know where they are and which direction to push on them. By remaining in the same capitalistic driven paradigm, the impact of adjustments to system levers could be further limited. This chapter considers the implications for platform reward systems of shifting to a new paradigm.

**Table 8-1** Meadows' power leverage point

Places to Intervene in a System	Leverage Points (Meadows, 1999)
1. The power to transcend paradigms	<i>"There is yet one leverage point that is even higher than changing a paradigm. That is to keep oneself unattached in the arena of paradigms, to stay flexible, to realise that no paradigm is "true," that every one, including the one that sweetly shapes your own worldview, is a tremendously limited understanding of an immense and amazing universe that is</i>

	<i>far beyond human comprehension. If no paradigm is right, you can choose whatever one will help to achieve your purpose” (p19).</i>
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This chapter now focuses on the third research question which is:

**Q3) What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?**

In order to address this research question the findings from the previous three chapters on producer reward, motivation and power have been utilised to identify the potential role of reward in the design of platform systems within a co-operativist paradigm.

## 8.2 Co-operation

No platforms in this research were owned by the members of a co-operative organisation, or by a co-operative. Platforms PF2 - PF7 were owned by commercial organisations and operated for-profit, PF1 was owned by a non-profit foundation. The headquarters for all platforms were based in the United States. No individual producer explicitly referred to co-operative businesses or practice during data collection. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, most individual producers were motivated by reward systems and practice that would be congruent with co-operative principles and organisation.

Based on an understanding of the motivation and rewards of producers across three distinct cases, this chapter will consider the viability of co-operative organisation as an alternative to philanthropic and venture capitalist financed platforms for individual producers of education content. This will be achieved by firstly distinguishing between different types of co-operative organisation and membership that could be utilised by producers. This is followed by placing a veil of co-operativism over the findings of what producers value in a platform relationship, to establish if there is a place for platform co-operatives in informal online learning.

Co-operative forms of organisation are based on the internationally recognised statement of co-operative identity, and co-operative values and principles. The ICA

statement of co-operative identity includes the definition of co-operative firms (ICA, 1995):

‘A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.’

Co-operatives follow a set of internationally agreed principles, which are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice (see Table 8-2).

**Table 8-2** Co-operative Principles

1 <sup>st</sup> Principle	Voluntary and open membership	Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Principle	Democratic member control	Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Principle	Member economic participation	Members contribute to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative.
4 <sup>th</sup> Principle	Autonomy and independence	Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members.
5 <sup>th</sup> Principle	Education, training and information	Co-operatives provide education and training for their members.
6 <sup>th</sup> Principle	Cooperation among cooperatives	Co-operatives serve their members most effectively by working with other cooperatives.
7 <sup>th</sup> Principle	Concern for community	Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities.

(Source: ICA, 2020)

Worker co-operatives (WCs) are trading enterprises, owned and run by the people who work in them, who have an equal say in what the business does, and an equitable share in the wealth created from the products and services they provide (Co-operatives UK, 2012). The integration of different types of members into one single association is the defining difference between multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) and the more conventional and common single-membership cooperatives (Münkner, 2004).

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services or participate in a business enterprise. People cannot be made to be co-operators, it is a voluntary act to join and to be involved with others to achieve shared economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations (ICA, 2015).

‘Members of a co-operative are individuals (natural persons) or corporate organisations (legal persons) who are users of a co-operative services or participate in its business as consumers, workers, producers or independent business owners. The type of membership will depend on the nature of each co-operative. Members are also the co-operative’s stakeholders, co-owners and co-decision makers with authority over major business decisions.’ (ICA, 2015, p.8).

The idea of membership has become an established way in which almost all co-operatives and mutuals refer to their owners. Apart from the investors of capital, there are two main stakeholders in a business: its consumers and the producers who supply inputs to or take the outputs from the business (Birchall, 2012). In a member-owned business, usually one of these stakeholders is put at the centre of the business. In the case of platforms that rely heavily on individual producers for the supply of content this would appear to favour a producer-owned business.

Based on the supply side need of an education platform and the motivation findings for different producer groups, potential members of a WC platform could be sourced from both internal and co-producers only (Worker members). External producers provided no evidence of wishing to be involved in working directly for or with a platform, primarily because they value their independence and autonomy in producing video content. As a general rule, in a WC, work shall be carried out by the members. This implies that the majority of the workers in a given worker co-operative enterprise are members and vice versa (ICA, 2005). Should a WC platform be

established using only internal producers, or alternatively made up of internal (employed) and co-producers (self-employed), the third basic condition of a worker co-operative would be met.

Based on the supply side needs of an education platform and the motivation findings for different producer groups, potential members of a MSC platform could be sourced from both internal and co-producers (Labour members) and external producers (Service user members) both of which could be utilised to create what could be termed a labor-managed firm (Vanek, 1970).

The following sections bring together the findings from chapters 5, 6 and 7 for all producer groups but instead of looking at an ever increasing order of systems intervention points in existing systems, the opposite approach is taken to examine the potential of a co-operative platform by starting with the most important system levers linked to reward, motivation and power.

### 8.3 Valuing co-operation: reward

Using the findings from chapter 5 and **reward** intervention points in platform systems based on three producer groups (internal, external, co-producers), the following Table 8-3 highlights the potential of co-operative organisation.

**Table 8-3** Systemic reward issues and co-operative intervention

System levers (Meadows)	Reward findings	Co-operative intervention
5. System rules	<p>Platform producers are selected by platform directors/managers based on:</p> <p>Employee recruitment (<b>IP</b>)            Content supplied (<b>EP</b>)            Producer profile (<b>CP</b>)</p> <p>Platform terms and conditions and producer contracts are controlled by directors/managers, with limited or no input from producers (<b>IP, EP, CP</b>)</p>	<p>Producers become members and select new:            WC Worker members, or            MSC Labour and Service user members</p> <p>System goals and rules are established by members (or elected representatives)</p>

<p>6. Information flows</p>	<p>Outsourced systems restrict producer access to data <b>(IP)</b>  Closed systems isolate producers from users <b>(EP)</b>  Open systems engage with producers networks <b>(CP)</b></p> <p>Lack of access and understanding of reward based data (including advertising and royalty models), affects producer confidence in platform systems <b>(EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>The goals and design of reward systems can be guided by member interests and time horizon rather than that of external funders</p> <p>Members (or elected representatives) determine reward methods. Members could be given a right to access data and provided with training</p>
<p>12. Labour reward</p>	<p>Salaries that exceed external benchmarks are more likely to be acceptable to internal producers <b>(IP)</b></p> <p>Performance based rewards based on advertising and royalties models lack transparency and lead to unpredictable earnings <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Performance only reward puts the cost and risk associated with production with the producer <b>(EP)</b></p> <p>Platform terms and conditions restrict producers from supplying multiple platforms <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Changing terms and conditions can have a significant impact on producer rewards <b>(EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>Internal (pay ratios) and external benchmarks (industry benchmarks) could be utilised</p> <p>Members (or elected representatives) design and control reward systems. Members decide royalty and share surplus mechanisms</p> <p>Members choose a membership type that fits their personal risk profile</p> <p>With copyright ownership Service user members in a MSC could be free to supply multiple platforms.</p> <p>Members determine system rules and mitigate dramatic impacts on producers.</p>

Features of reward within a platform system are now summarised from the perspective of a platform established by a co-operative organisation (Table 8-4) and also from the perspective of each group of members (Table 8-5).



**Table 8-4** Co-operative platform reward

Member focus	System focus (Meadows levers)	Co-operative focus	ICA 7 co-operative principles
WC with Worker members, or a MSC with Labour and Service user members.	5. System rules	Members select new members.  System rules and goals are established by members.  Members have voting rights.	1. Voluntary and open membership
Contract <i>of</i> service or contract <i>for</i> service  Pay or performance reward  Capital or content ownership	5. System rules  6. Information flows  12. Labour reward	Members design and control reward systems  Members determine reward data and transparency levels  Worker / Labour members own capital. Service user members own copyright. Members determine surpluses	3. Member economic participation

**Table 8-5** Co-operative membership reward

ICA 7 co-operative principles	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
1. Voluntary and open membership	Employed WC—Worker MSC—Labour	Self-employed WC—Worker MSC—Labour	Self-employed WC—Nonmember MSC—Service User
3. Member economic participation	Benchmarked salary Pay transparency	Performance reward Data transparency	Performance reward Data transparency

	Surplus share	Surplus share Production reward	Content ownership
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Utilising both of the above summary tables of co-operative reward from a platform and producer perspective, producer reward in a co-operative organisation is now examined using ICA principle 1 voluntary and open membership, and principle 3 member economic participation, as these principles have the potential to address key leverage points in systems and producer rewards.

### **8.2.1 Voluntary and open membership.**

Voluntary and open membership sourced from all three producers groups would provide a flexible and diverse labour force, platforms could have the option to utilise producers as Worker members in a WC, or Labour members as part of a MSC. Should a MSC platform be established then membership could be based on historical examples consisting of the Stakeholder model, Cooperative CIC Model, NewCo Model and Surplus Sharing Model, all models had fully evolved multi-stakeholder systems of ownership and governance involving at least three stakeholders (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2019). Based on autonomy that external producers prefer, and collaboration with employees that co-producers value, a MSC model that recognises multiple types of capital contribution (financial and non-financial) would be an attractive proposition for producers groups in this study. Producers looking for an established and sustainable MSC governance model based on co-operative principles could utilise the membership classes provided by the FairShares Model (FSM) or the Somerset Rules. The FSM model consists of Founder Shares, Labour Shares (producers/employees), User Shares (consumers/service users) and Investor Shares (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2019).

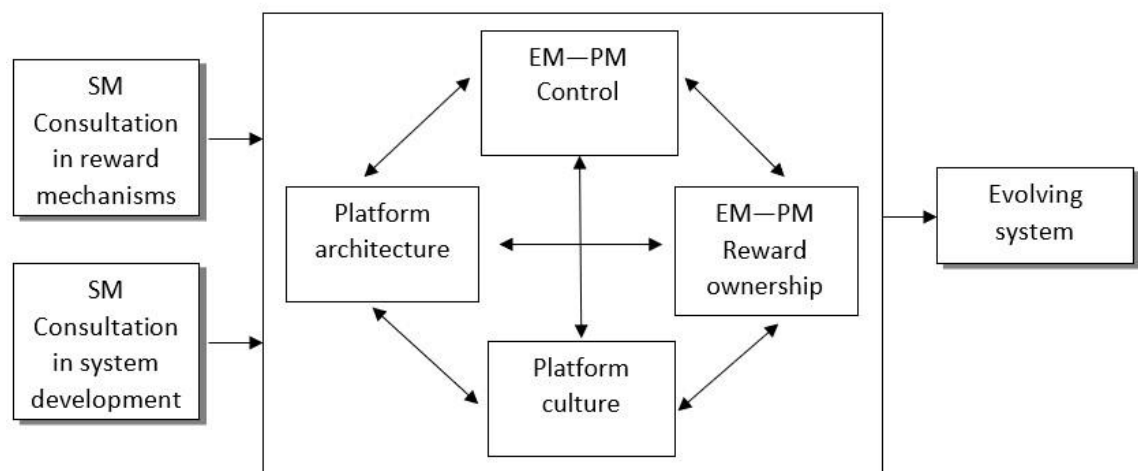
The following Table 8-6 summarises producer groups that could be suitable for a worker co-operative, or a multistakeholder co-operative (based on the FairShares Model operating under co-operative law).

**Table 8-6** Producer options for Co-operative organisation

Producer group	Worker Co-operative	Multistakeholder Co-operative (FairShares)
Internal producers	Worker (Employee)	Labour (Employee) – <b>EM</b>
Co-producers	Worker (Producer)	Labour (Producer) – <b>PM</b>
External producers	Nonmember	Service (Service user) – <b>SM</b>

As with PF5, PF6 and PF7 the core of platform labour could be sourced from Employee members (EMs) that provide the production expertise valued by Producer members (PMs), including set design, filming, sound and editing. EMs could also provide technical support for Service user members (SMs) who create their own content. Selection of new platform members will be very important to ensure a fit with the existing membership, to maintain standards in member skills and outputs, system development and platform culture.

Having a pipeline of content from a variety of sources would address resource constraints experienced by platforms such as PF1 that rely on content created by employees. Voluntary and open membership would allow producers the option to contribute to platform development and levels of engagement that fit with their personal ambitions. Voluntary and open membership in either a WC or MSC is represented in Figure 8-1 with each labour source provided with opportunity to play a role in developing platform culture, architecture and content.



**Figure 8-1** Framework for a labour controlled platform

Birchall (2012, p.79) highlights the importance of an open membership orientation by arguing that the quality of democratic participation improves if we: “extend the logic [and] see non-members as potential members...[that] people or businesses with similar needs have a moral claim on the [member owned business] to open up membership further.”

### **8.2.2 Member economic participation.**

In a co-operative capital is the servant, not the master of the enterprise. The whole structure of co-operative enterprise is designed around the concept of financial capital being in service of people and labour, not labour and people being in servitude to financial capital (ICA, 2015, p.30). Voluntary and open membership in a worker or multistakeholder co-operative for a producer focused platform, would have at its core workers or labour members that contribute and own share capital, while a share of surpluses and welfare benefits accrue to individual members. In the following section suggestions for ‘membership economic participation’ are designed around the findings for all three producer groups.

**Employee members (EMs)** sourced by internal producers, could be paid a fixed salary and a surplus share. Based on the success of PF1 with a relatively small team of internal producers, there is evidence that full-time employees provide a firm basis for a platform to create a controllable supply of content and manage the development of a platform system. In a study by Wren (2016) of different types of employee owned business, the co-operatives in the study “had the same financial reward structure paying a regular salary enhanced with some form of surplus share, distributed periodically during the year.” Two out of three worker co-operatives paid the same hourly rate or same net pay, but because of different jobs within an organisation it led to some roles being paid above a market rate, while others are below. However, like any business with financial limitations the pay may simply be set at a level that a co-operative can afford.

Dickinson (2005) provided evidence that UK employee perceptions of equitable pay is based on responsibility, qualifications and performance. If producers prefer reward that is more focused on performance, then there would be an option to choose the membership type that fits with this profile. PF1 staff valued the transparency and

clarity of being paid a salary based on a job family structure with roles defined by technical competency, which is more aligned with responsibility and qualifications. This would provide EMs with clearly defined roles based on knowledge, skills and competencies. Salaries set relative to an agreed measure such as industry benchmarks, national minimum wage or living wage would provide a transparent basis to set pay. Having a surplus share would overcome the limitations of a fixed salary when EMs compare themselves to other member types.

Internal producers at PF1 were restricted in their earnings by having a contract of employment, and a job description that constrained the ambitions of individual producers to create content beyond the confines of a job role. By having the flexibility to transfer between two alternative membership types offers producers the opportunity to have a relationship with a platform that is congruent with their personal reward ambitions, rather than being constrained by full-time employment and a fixed role as in the case with PF1 and internal producers.

**Producer members (PMs)** sourced from co-producers, could receive production and performance based reward, and a surplus share. Performance based reward is valued by knowledge based workers (Tampoe, 1993). Self-employed PMs could be selected by platforms based on their practice and profile, and their fit with platform quality standards and the content in demand by platform users. As evidenced by co-producers working with PF5, PF6 and PF7 a close working relationship between EMs and PMs would help to create a loyalty and trust between producers and platforms. A WC or MSC platform could actively encourage and engage with PMs interest in broader issues around platform ownership, systems and processes. PMs would provide an important worker / labour resource on a WC or a MSC. Potentially worker members could be given the option to be an employee member (EM) while also being a producer member (PM) providing opportunity for both stable income and royalties from creative work.

The appeal of platform membership for PMs would be reward ownership, being able to take part in the design and execution of reward systems, ensuring that reward transparency is maintained, and reward is fair and equitable. PMs would be able to participate in reward by contributing and owning financial capital and taking part in the decision-making process on how surpluses are shared. PMs would also be

able to engage with platforms that have a strong social and sustainability focus. In a co-operative PMs would be able to avoid the negative impact of changes in ownership of platforms, changes that historically they have had no control over.

PMs reward could be based on performance, providing members with transparent measures of success that are directly related to user engagement. Members of a WC or MSC platform would have control over the level of transparency for any reward mechanism, including reward based on advertising or royalty payments, so that PMs could in theory assess for themselves how reward was calculated. If a co-operative platform were to mirror existing platform reward mechanisms, PMs could receive a one off payment or an advance against a royalty for producing the video content, these types of payments would share the risk of the video's success with the platform and the producer. Based on the evidence from co-producers for PF5, PF6 and PF7, having a say in the decision-making process of sharing surpluses with EMs would be an attractive proposition for PMs. They would benefit from the overall success of the platform, rather than be limited to the reward from their own labour.

**Service user members (SMs)** sourced from external producers, could receive performance-based reward (Tampoe, 1993), and benefit from content ownership. SMs would benefit directly from the revenues generated by their content on a MSC platform, but also be able to supply the same content to other platforms because of their copyright ownership. SMs could be provided with limited voting rights to engage in the decision-making process of how a share of surplus is returned to them. The role of the co-operative would be to secure the best price possible for SMs content, as this would also benefit labour members. Service user membership could be attractive for external producers that supply content to platforms where producer have limited control over pricing, such as PF2. SMs would retain their valued independence and autonomy whilst engaging with a MSC platform on operational and reward issues that have a direct impact on them, including consultation on systems development.

Voluntary and open membership roles such as Employee members (EM), Producer members (PM) and Service User members (SM) in a labour-controlled platform system could be important for co-operative organisation of a platform but may not be suitable labels for producer groups in order to build up a sense of bond

and community of practice. Producers valued titles such as *Artist, Author, Instructor* or *Creator* in order to build up a community of producers associated with a platform. There is an argument for using the same approach of having a generic title for all producers within a WC or MSC, regardless of whether individual producers are employees or self-employed members.

Having established the role of reward, the next section considers the role motivation can play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content.

## 8.4 Valuing co-operation: motivation

Using the findings from chapter 6 and **motivation** intervention points in platform systems based on three producer groups (internal, external, co-producers), the following Table 8-7 highlights the potential of co-operative organisation.

**Table 8-7** Systemic motivation issues and co-operative intervention

System levers (Meadows)	Motivation findings	Co-operative intervention
7. Positive feedback	Producers welcome meritocracy and rewarding success ( <b>EP, CP</b> )	Self-employed members should receive transparent performance based rewards
	Producer recruitment processes important to maintain platform culture ( <b>IP</b> )	Worker / Labour member recruitment focused on maintaining co-operative values
	Staff training aligned with the individual CPD needs of producers ( <b>IP</b> )	Worker / Labour members could benefit from individual CPD support
	Producers promote platforms and platforms promote producers ( <b>EP, CP</b> )	Culture of reciprocity would be valued by members
	Successful producers are given more exposure on platform promotional pages ( <b>EP, CP</b> )	Successful members should not be promoted to the detriment of other members

<p>8. Negative feedback</p>	<p>User and producer communication is important for effective feedback and corrective action <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Producers value being able to provide feedback to platforms directly and via social media platforms. <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Teamworking is effective at overcoming production barriers <b>(IP, CP)</b></p> <p>Sole production and technical challenges are a barrier for producers <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>User and member communication should be enabled</p> <p>Multi-channel member communication should be enabled</p> <p>Team expertise consist of employee (production) and self-employed (content) members</p> <p>Members supporting members could provide a competitive advantage for a co-operative platform</p>
<p>9. System delays</p>	<p>Platforms can change content priorities without notifying producers <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Platforms make frequent changes to platform terms and conditions <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Mixed systems are hard to manage <b>(IP)</b></p> <p>Systems change is slow because of commitment to business model and commercial pressure <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Switching costs and delays can be a barrier to moving content between platforms <b>(EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>Members would participate in, and be consulted on changes to content priorities</p> <p>Members would participate in, and be consulted on changes to terms and conditions</p> <p>Member reward should be based on in-house systems</p> <p>Systems should be agile and capable of evolving</p> <p>Membership should be open and voluntary but there should be some switching costs that deter member migration</p>
<p>10. Creating content</p>	<p>Producers value the flexibility of remote working <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Employees and self-employed producers value onsite production facilities <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>Worker / Labour members are likely to work remotely and onsite. Service user members would not work onsite.</p>



	<p>Co-production is valued by producers (employed and self-employed), and enhances teamwork <b>(IP, CP)</b></p> <p>Collaboration preferred with production experts not other subject matter experts <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Practical and technical challenges in sole production of content <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>Self-employed members would provide a diverse source of expert labour to co-produce content</p> <p>Production teams should include producers with complimentary skills and knowledge, unless reciprocity can be expected</p> <p>Labour members collaborate. Service user members could receive remote technical support</p>
11. Supplying content	<p>User and Society focus <b>(IP)</b> User focus <b>(EP, CP)</b></p> <p>Developing producer production skills <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b> Continuing professional development <b>(IP)</b></p> <p>Platforms choose producers <b>(IP, CP)</b> or content supplied by producers <b>(EP)</b></p> <p>Platform terms and conditions restrict supply to multiple platforms <b>(EP, CP)</b></p>	<p>Members promote the spread of interest in broader societal issues beyond platform users</p> <p>Members benefit (financially and non-financially) from the development of themselves and other members</p> <p>Members recruit potential members. Members (or video users) choose content from Service user members</p> <p>Copyright owned by co-operative, except for content supplied by Service user members</p>

Features of motivation within a platform system are now summarised from the perspective of a platform established by a co-operative organisation (Table 8-8) and also from the perspective of each group of members (Table 8-9).

**Table 8-8** Co-operative platform motivation

Member focus	System focus (Meadows levers)	Co-operative focus	ICA 7 co-operative principles
Motivation	7. Positive feedback 8. Negative feedback 9. System delays	Members engagement and control. Members determine reward mechanisms.	2. Democratic member control
Motivation	10. Creating content 11. Supplying content	Members supply capital. Member diversity to avoid dominant producers.	4. Autonomy and independence

**Table 8-9** Co-operative membership motivation

ICA 7 co-operative principles	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
2. Democratic member control	Participation Voting rights	Participation Voting rights	Consultation Limited voting rights
4. Autonomy and independence	Financial and human capital contribution Supply stability	Financial, human and social capital contribution Supply quality	Intellectual and social capital contribution Supply diversity

Utilising both of the above summary tables of co-operative motivation from a platform and producer perspective, motivation in a co-operative organisation is now examined using ICA principle 2 democratic member control, and principle 4 autonomy and independence as these, as these principles have the potential to address key leverage points in systems and producer motivation.

### **8.3.1 Democratic member control.**

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Representatives are accountable to their membership. Members have equal voting rights—one member, one vote (ICA, 2020). Employee participation is defined by Hyman & Mason (1995) as a collective representation either through state sponsored interventions or the result of workers initiatives. In a democratic firm, work in the firm qualifies one for membership in the firm. The employment relation is replaced by the membership relation, and it is members who make decisions (Ellerman, 1990).

Individual producers in this research have provided evidence that their individual motivation to supply content to platforms could be seen as congruent with co-operative values and principles. What is not clear is how far individuals would wish to engage in democratic control and participate in the management of a co-operative platform. This has been partly addressed by offering producers different membership types depending on their personal motivation, and by the assumption that most individuals will be attracted to the mission and social purpose of the platform and similar in profile to what Cornforth et al. (1988) labelled ‘alternative – pathfinder’ forms of worker co-operatives. This rather idealist image of a start-up co-operative even if it were possible, would not be a static and stable member environment. Meister (1984) argues, even those founded with the collectivist ideals of direct democracy have to come to terms with the need for management and will go through a life cycle of change. After a collectivist start, and a second stage bringing in professional management ideas, comes a third stage in which collectivism and managerialism conflict, and a fourth in which managers triumph and the co-operatives degenerates as a democratic organisation. Cornforth et al. (1988) provided case study evidence that such a cycle was not inevitable because of ‘resistant’ forces to this degeneration that included ‘maintenance’ of participatory democratic working under certain conditions and opposing positive forces towards ‘regeneration’ (Bernstein, 1976; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). These resistant forces are supported by a learning organisation willing to adapt and evolve, maintained by the energy of activists keeping alive the ideals of co-operation and from individuals gaining positive experiences from participation (Pateman, 1970). These resistant forces appear to be as relevant today

and embodied in platform co-operative organisations such as Enspiral that strive to be agile organisations continually learning and collaborating with members (Enspiral, 2021).

Traditional co-ops have struggled to maintain democratic decision making processes when growing to scale. Technology such as allows contributions and interactions to be logged digitally, and actions can be voted on and carried out in an automated way. This reduces some of the difficulties of conducting democratic decision making at scale (Borkin, 2019). Perhaps the best example to demonstrate this process is the development of Loomio, one of the essential tools of Enspiral for collaborative decision-making. Loomio was initiated as an idea by a team of activists from the local Occupy movement in Wellington, New Zealand. They joined forces with Enspiral to help self-organised communities make decisions without centralised coordination (Schneider, 2016)

Platforms PF2 – PF7 in this study operate in a highly competitive profit driven environment, driven by the time horizon and financial goals of venture capitalists, and supplied by producers whose experiences are firmly rooted in a capitalist paradigm. Should a platform be established by a multistakeholder co-operative, Turnbull (1997) points to a number of reasons why stakeholder co-operation is challenging and often neglected:

‘(a) The cultural hegemony of competitive values which inhibits those with co-operative values from promoting participation outside a business in case they are seen to have questionable business acumen; (b) industry and legal concerns in establishing formal relationships with customers and suppliers and (c) lack of experience and knowledge of how to structure value adding relationship with external stakeholders.’

Turnbull highlights the existence of competing values and interests between different stakeholder groups as they inevitably compete for control over the firm’s outcomes, undermining co-operative values. Davis (2018) argues that competition between stakeholder groups in a co-operative should be addressed rather than eliminated by establishing a “management and leadership culture and institutional framework for just conflict resolution that co-operative values, vision and ownership enable” (Awotwe et al., 2020). A knowledge of producer (member) expectations and values, and relationships and tensions between different producer groups will help platform

managers achieve and communicate effective democratic control and support member cohesion (Davis, 2004). This understanding of stakeholder needs could be further enhanced by recognising that “participatory democracy can be advanced by devising systems that enable members to regulate how their 'resources' contribute to decision-making, and how much 'power' they have to take them to other producers” (Ridley-Duff & Ponton, 2014).

Ostrom (2000) argued that facilitating the ability of individuals to create their own rules and allowing the development of new social norms offers the greatest likelihood of individuals co-operating to address problems requiring collective action. Increasing the authority of individuals to devise their own rules may well result in processes that allow social norms to evolve and thereby increase the probability of individuals better solving collective action problems. This was evidenced in PF1, where the platform director handed over much of daily production and control to internal producers, empowering individuals and teams to establish their own task rules and make independent decisions.

Ostrom argues individuals will be more effective assuming the existence of two types of “norm-using” players, “conditional co-operators” and “willing punishers”, together conditional co-operators and willing punishers (who tackle free riders) create a more robust opening for collective action and a mechanism for helping it grow. Conditional co-operators are individuals who are willing to initiate co-operative action when they estimate others will reciprocate and to repeat these actions as long as a sufficient proportion of the others involved reciprocate (Ostrom, 2000). As demonstrated at PF1 it is much harder to be a free rider and to survive in a small team of producers where producers are quickly and easily exposed if they are not contributing as expected and required. But as the number of producers grow on a platform, the more likely it is there will need to be some kind of intervention with free-rider producers (members). Although the context of Ostrom’s principles were based on the management of shared natural resources, it could be argued the main incentive for a co-operative company is the satisfaction of a common socio-economic necessity (Bruque et al., 2003, Lund 2011).

Starting a new platform business within a co-operativist paradigm will create challenges in balancing democratic participation and participatory management, but

also an opportunity for members to iteratively develop a shared understanding of how they see and wish participation to take place. Having a formal governance support structure with defined systems and process will make the transition through each stage of platform and member development more planned and controlled, ideally supported by established worker or multistakeholder co-operative models such as that provided by FairShares Enterprise which has three structured stages of self-governance: Informal democracy, Embryonic Democratic Model, and Co-operative Governance (FairShares, n.d.).

Shah (1996, as cited in Birchall, 2012) provided evidence through a study of agricultural co-operatives in India that effective member control is linked to business success when three conditions are met: the purpose of the organisation is central to members; the governance structure ensures patronage cohesiveness; and the operating system finds competitive advantage with the relationship with members. An organisation with a set of cohesive values supplied by a diverse source of producer members and with clear governance structures could offer less risk and sustainable opportunities for platform growth.

### **8.3.2 Autonomy and independence.**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy. The 4<sup>th</sup> principle of autonomy and independence focuses on the relationship of co-operatives with national and international governmental organisations, but the emphasis for this research is on the relationship between platform co-operatives and other commercial entities, such as commercial lenders and suppliers and others in a dominant position in the value chain (ICA, 2015, p.45).

Cornforth et al. (1988) identified “Pathfinder” co-operatives as high economic performing businesses, that constantly debate idealism and pragmatism, they are usually in market sub-sectors that are not too heavily constrained and have a high degree of both human and financial investment from the start. In human/social terms they continually reinvent incentive and opportunity structures to ensure compatibility with their aims. A key question to address for members would be how much this

individual financial investment should be, which for a start-up business would usually be addressed by a well structured business plan containing financial projections and the funds needed to sustain the business in the short to medium term.

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership (ICA, 2015). Mondragon a well documented and researched co-operative is financed by members' capital investments, while a share of surpluses and welfare benefits accrue to individual members, in contrast co-operatives in the UK favour community over individual ownership. Mondragon builds in explicit benefits and substantial profit-sharing arrangements that provide for the long-term welfare needs of members, their families, and the wider community (Ridley-Duff, 2009).

Co-operatives UK has established the UK's first dedicated platform co-op support programme branded 'UnFound' in 2018 (UnFound Accelerator, 2023), this provides a route map for platforms to launch a business and to establish themselves. The route map has multiple rounds of funding at different stages of the platform's development, this includes 'crowd rewards' and 'crowd equity' as alternative sources of finance. What is not clear is how crowd sourcing/funding would be structured and still meet co-operative principles including democratic members control, economic participation, autonomy and control. A growing membership will put pressure on democratic process and member participation, which is why Stocksy a successful and growing worker/producer co-operative has put limits on photographer members (Stocksy, 2017).

YouTube was the first video hosting platform to gain mainstream traction, from the outset there were no restrictions on who could upload content. It did this by focusing entirely on content creators. The platform encouraged producers to bring in consumers, some of whom eventually converted to producers as well. YouTube benefited from being first to market, offering hosting and bandwidth infrastructure and an embeddable player for producers (Parker et al., 2016). Producers in this study have demonstrated that they have access to large numbers of users that watch their content on one or more platforms. Should a co-operative provide enough incentive for

new producers to supply content as a platform member, a platform could benefit from the migration of video users connected with newly appointed members.

Birchall (2012) provides a framework to review the comparative advantages of member owned business (MOB) over investor owned businesses (IOB). This is based around the three elements of ownership, control, and benefit. Birchall identifies five advantages that members gain from keeping control over their MOB:

- (1) It guarantees that the benefits from ownership will be realised.
- (2) It aligns the interests of members with those of boards and managers and linked to business success.
- (3) It lowers risk-taking and so makes the business more durable.
- (4) It increases opportunities to pursue ethical aims as well as shareholder value
- (5) It has intrinsic value to members; they may enjoy taking part and having a sense of control.

These relative benefits of member owned benefits are reinforced by Wren (2016) who provides evidence of a high commitment culture of employee owned businesses based on the foundations of trust, openness and fun. "Mutuality was demonstrated through shared rewards, values, openness, trust, enjoyment, respect, care and personal effort." The unique features of co-operative culture that were not shared with other employee owned businesses were:

1. A whole life perspective
2. Shared values
3. Self-owner
4. Self-control
5. Secure employment

With the exception of 'self-owner', all of these features identified by Wren (2016) were evident in platform PF1 employees that provided the stability and cohesiveness needed to support and sustain the development of a platform with a clear social purpose. Platforms designed around the motivation and reward needs of producers and based on co-operative principles has the potential to attract a highly skilled and



diverse labour force that could form their own unique differentiated competitive and ethical strategy to attract users and make a lasting impact on wider society.

Having established the role of motivation, the next section considers the role power can play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content.

## 8.5 Valuing co-operation: power

Having established the role of reward and motivation, this section considers the role power can play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content. Using the findings from chapter 7 and **power** intervention points in platform systems based on three producer groups (internal, external, co-producers), Table 8-10 highlights the potential of co-operative organisation.

**Table 8-10** Systemic power issues and co-operative intervention

System levers (Meadows)	Power findings	Co-operative intervention
2. Paradigm	<p>Communitarianism models focused on education and system sustainability can run in parallel with capitalist models (<b>IP</b>)</p> <p>Rapid market growth has not been met with profitability in some established capitalist platforms (<b>EP, CP</b>)</p> <p>Where organic growth does not meet growth and profit targets, acquisitions may be an alternative strategy (<b>EP, CP</b>)</p> <p>Headquarters in United States (<b>IP, EP, CP</b>)</p> <p>Shared values and beliefs can be a powerful motivator for producers (<b>IP</b>)</p>	<p>Co-operatives are focused on the education of members, communities and wider society</p> <p>Sustainable platform goals could encompass the triple bottom line of co-operative enterprise—economic, social and environmental (p5, ICA 2020)</p> <p>Shares in a co-operative are not transferrable, they are the common property of a co-operative</p> <p>Democratic member control. Headquarters do not have to follow the source of financial capital</p> <p>Co-operative values self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity</p>

	Philanthropic investment limitations can constrain a system <b>(IP)</b> , venture capital can overstrain a system <b>(EP, CP)</b>	Member economic participation. Members contribute capital  Building co-operative capital among co-operatives (p9, ICA 2020)
3. Goals of the system	Sustainable growth is an achievable goal in a non-profit platform system <b>(IP)</b> Having a common social purpose for a platform can enhance user lives and simultaneously motivate producers <b>(IP)</b>  Growth and profit are primary goals in for-profit platform systems <b>(EP, CP)</b>  Focus on in-demand content and competitive pricing can be to the detriment of producer rewards <b>(EP, CP)</b>	Sustainable platform goals could encompass the triple bottom line of co-operative enterprise—economic, social and environmental (p5, ICA 2020)  Democratic member control. Members design system goals  Co-operatives will consider members in making commercial decisions
4. The power to self-organise	Power to change systems is limited to: Foundation president and platform directors <b>(IP)</b> Company shareholders and platform directors <b>(EP, CP)</b>  Producers wish to consult on, or participate in reward systems <b>(IP, EP, CP)</b>  Producers network with other producers more readily beyond the confines of platforms <b>(EP, CP)</b>  Producers professional networks are far reaching <b>(EP, CP)</b>  Poor platform practices have motivated producers to seek alternative methods to achieve collective bargaining <b>(EP)</b>	Democratic member control. Members benefit from direct power to establish systems and to change them  Members (or elected representatives) determine reward mechanisms  Membership may encourage internal platform communication between producers  Member networks could enhance platform promotion  Members collectively have control and make decisions

Features of power within a platform system are now summarised from the perspective of a platform established by a co-operative organisation (Table 8-11) and also from the perspective of each group of members (Table 8-12).

**Table 8-11** Co-operative platform power

Member focus	System focus (Meadows levers)	Co-operative focus	ICA 7 co-operative principles
Power	2. Paradigm out of which the system arises	Partnerships and resources accessible via the co-operative ecosystem.	6. Co-operation among co-operatives
Power	3. System goals	Sustainability, user and society focused.	7. Concern for community
Power	4. The power to change systems	Evolving platform and labour development.	5. Education, training, and information

**Table 8-12** Co-operative membership power

ICA 7 co-operative principles	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
6. Co-operation among cooperatives	Open system Co-op ecosystem	Open system Producer networks	Closed system Managed access
7. Concern for community	User and society focus	User and society focus	User focus
5. Education, training, and information	Leaders / Managers Business / Platform Wider Society	Members Platform Wider society	Members Platform Network

Utilising both of the above summary tables of co-operative power from a platform and producer perspective, power in a co-operative organisation is now examined using ICA principle 6 cooperation among co-operatives, principle 7 concern for community and principle 5 education, training, and information. These principles have the potential to address key leverage points in systems and producer power.

#### **8.4.1 Co-operation among co-operatives.**

Individual producers (external and co-producers) had experienced first hand the effects of mergers and acquisitions between organisations and platforms that had hosted producer content, strategic changes driven by the aims of venture capital backed firms to increase market share and returns on investment from platforms. Producers experienced almost immediate and predominantly negative changes to platform culture, systems and processes that directly impact the livelihoods of individual producers and the existing producer community. An alternative digital education paradigm could be one where solidarity amongst co-operators and co-operatives provides a practical vehicle for the expansion of the co-operative movement based on common values and principles. “Co-operatives have two key dimensions, firstly they are economic entities trading goods and services, secondly they are social entities of members who relate to other co-operatives and the wider movement through co-operative groups, secondary co-operatives and federations to realise the co-operative advantage and create common wealth for mutual benefit” (ICA, 2015, p.71). As highlighted in the most recent International Co-operative Alliance strategic plan (ICA, 2020), at a time when the finite resources of the planet are under ever increasing pressure from unsustainable human activity, this is the moment (decade) in time to focus on co-operative organisational forms guided by sustainable missions encompassing the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental goals.

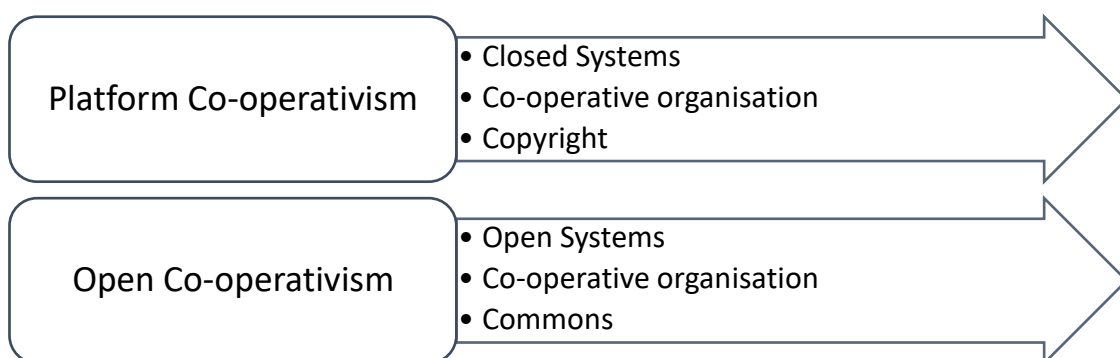
Co-operatives can take on different legal forms and organisational structures. In New Zealand the Enspiral network of professionals and companies (including Loomio a limited liability company with investors and a registered worker-owned cooperative) aims to empower and support social entrepreneurship, in this case the platform eco-system is encompassed within a foundation that acts as a custodian of collectively owned assets and legally representing the network (Davies-Coates, 2015;

Krause, 2014). The foundations legal form is a limited liability company with a charitable constitution, which mandates its non-profit purpose and the reinvestment of all income in its social mission. The Enspiral Foundation is a charitable company co-owned by the Enspiral Members. Its mission is to support the network as a whole, facilitate collaboration between the people and ventures, and further the overall social mission of Enspiral (Enspiral, 2021). Hypothetically the Enspiral organisation structure could be adopted by the non-profit US foundation that owns platform PF1, the foundation could be established as an umbrella organisation for a consortium of co-operatives (or social enterprise companies) that operate learning platforms. On the face of it this hybrid organisation offers an attractive proposition of an organisation led by both redistribution (charity) and reciprocity (co-operative) economic aims operating in a market economy (Polanyi, 2001). However, as this research has highlighted there are complexities for platforms systems operating within a single paradigm, a hybrid structure of this nature would effectively be creating systems operating simultaneously in different paradigms. This would create systems within systems that could potentially create complexity in governance and reward structures and a barrier to producer engagement and participation.

In this research producers have drawn attention to both positive and negative issues around content copyright and platform terms and conditions, but at the same time they have frequently referred to the importance of copyright in its current form in providing producers with the rights to supply video content to multiple platforms and to repurpose content in other media (blogs, books etc). A co-operative platform could embrace existing copyright laws and neo-liberal market driven models of exchange or adopt a commons-based peer production (CBPP) model which it is argued offer an alternative model for democratic participation (Scholz, 2016; Bauwens & Paitis, 2019). The peer-to-peer capacity to relate each other over the Internet entails the emergence of what Benkler and Nissenbaum (2006) first called 'commons-based peer production'. CBPP is a new pathway of value creation and distribution, where peer-to-peer infrastructures allow individuals to communicate, self-organize, and, ultimately, co-create non-rivalrous use value in the form of digital commons of knowledge, software, and design (Bauwens 2016, Bauwens et al., 2019). The P2P Foundation and Commons Transition Movement provide alternatives to existing models of economic exchange

rewarding intellectual property within a market based economy, using “non exclusive copyrights (such as Creative commons, Copyfair and Copy Left)” (Ridley-Duff, 2021, p.8). Based on the levels of awareness shown by producers in data collection, there would need to be a period of education and marketing to inform and persuade producers to transition to alternative approaches including a commons based model where content was free (Copyleft) or paid for (CopyFair). Papadimitropoulos (2021) argues that CBPP issue is broad, and it is more than just an understanding on the options available, it would require state and political intervention running alongside a broader social movement and provided with sustainable cases that commons-based peer production benefit both individuals and collectives.

Building a co-operative ecosystem will take time and involve the development and evolution of multiple systems. Platform co-operativism and open co-operativism do not have to be mutually exclusive; they can run in parallel with each other, movements and organisations sharing ideas and resources, informing participatory communities of the benefits and challenges of each model (Figure 8-2). Eventually one model will be more dominant, but in the meantime, there could be further opportunities for co-operative principles and practice to be promoted and incorporated into future platforms and helping to develop the next generation of co-operators.



**Figure 8-2** Co-operative models in parallel

Co-operative eco-systems will be important in providing the environment and infrastructure for new platform formations and for supporting organisations that wish to convert from capitalist to co-operativist platforms. Scholz & Schneider (2017) identified practice based cases studies that outline systems, processes and information that could potentially provide support to platform co-operatives, including support

with financial systems that include: The Madeline System (community based funding), Purpose Fund (platform investments), rCredits (banking facilities), Swarm Alliance (blockchain system) and The FairShares Model (multistakeholder ownership) providing mechanisms that are addressing the perennial financial capital issue for co-operatives and examples of a developing eco-system being created by a growing number of community of digital co-operators.

#### **8.4.2 Concern for community.**

Digital Education Platforms are dominated by the private sector (Van Dijck et al., 2018), and yet the focus of the literature to date has been on pedagogic, data and technological aspects of platforms rather than adopting a critical gaze that scrutinises wider socio-economic and issues (Robertson, 2019).

Platform PF1 provided evidence of the collective power of a group of producers that share common values and a clear social goal such as providing free education to platform users. Individual producers on PF1 had a focus not only on users but on the wider community beyond the confines of platform users, this socially driven strategy would be congruent with the 7<sup>th</sup> co-operative principle which is focused on the sustainable development of communities. The community does not have to be confined to local geographical locations for platforms that have members and users spread across the world, but equally producers in this research gave examples of their motivation to transfer their online success to offline local projects that would fulfil their individual needs to connect with ‘people’ rather than ‘users’. It is this connection with members and community, and in the case of platforms without physical boundaries the potential to connect with a global community that has the potential to create a powerful competitive force for good and a potential competitive advantage.

Co-operative platforms focused on economic, social and environment sustainability could provide opportunities to move beyond local markets and to reach a global audience that has a growing concern with issues beyond local communities, issues that face humanity. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was defined at the UN ‘Earth Summit’ in 1992 by core principles that included:

“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature [principle 1]...the right development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet

developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations  
[principle 3]”

From a co-operative perspective, sustainable development of communities will be “through the economic, environmental and social benefits it creates, improve the living standards of current and future generations, contribute to peaceful co-existence, social cohesion, social justice and social progress, and do so in a way that does not degrade the natural environment” (ICA, 2015, p.87). By providing free basic educational content to users, platform PF1 demonstrated the power of a social purpose in educating users in key everyday skills to improve their lives, but also motivating producers to continuously work for an organisation when other employment opportunities were available. A co-operative platform consisting of more than one group of producer members in a worker or multistakeholder co-operative could benefit from this producer cohesiveness and sense of purpose, especially when challenges naturally occur in terms designing and participating in reward mechanisms and governance. This cohesiveness was also seen to support a teamwork environment on PF1 where the balance of discussions during interviews was much more on non-financial reward than financial, it was about helping the ‘people’ and not just ‘users’.

Ouchi (1980) proposes three mechanisms by which the employees of an organisation can be controlled, a ‘market’ mechanism which accurately measures each person contribution, a ‘bureaucratic’ mechanism with tight performance evaluation, and a ‘clan’ mechanism which achieves organisational goals by selecting and socialising individuals so that their individual objectives are largely congruent with those of the organisation. The collective cohesion of the internal producers at PF1 provided evidence and features consistent with those of a clan provided by Wilkins and Ouchi (1983): low turnover of internal producers (employees), the telling of shared stories throughout the group consistent with the foundation philosophy, considerable effort to screen applicants by the director, a strong and shared claim of uniqueness, with producers expressing that their platform content had more impact than many other education platforms, and an atmosphere where producers were encouraged to offer opinions on decisions, rather than having decision-making dominated by the director. “In a clan cooperative effort can be attained by effecting changes in states of mind,



and if the socialisation of individuals into an organisation is complete, the basis of reciprocity can be changed” (Ouchi, 1980, p.132).

This potential openness to alternative forms of reciprocity, could be applied to worker members of a platform whether producers are employed or self-employed. Goal congruence does not mean that clan members and the organisation must have specific goals in common; it means instead that clan members tend to believe that in the long run they will be treated equitably, joint effort is the best way to achieve individual self-interest, in the long run both honest and dishonest people will be discovered and dealt with appropriately. This belief permits short-term inequities without destroying the clan relationship and permits cooperative action even though specific equity cannot be determined (Wilkins and Ouchi (1983).

Where cohesiveness is weaker because producers have chosen to be less engaged with a worker or multistakeholder co-operative, there may be a need for more technocratic forms of control and reward than with members that have a connection with a platform mission. Alvesson and Kärreman (2004) conducted a study of the control methods used in a profitable Nordic subsidiary of a global management consultancy. Using a case study method, they examined specifically how different forms of technocratic control interacted and merged with socio-ideological controls. Technocratic controls were described as attempts to directly control worker behaviour using systems, processes and practices based on measurable outputs. There was evidence of an emphasis on the symbolism of the technocratic systems and procedures, as these drew attention to certain dimensions and also framed consciousness in a particular way. A similar process driven approach to some elements of content reward could be applied to reward mechanisms for worker or multistakeholder co-operative platforms. Socio-ideological controls, on the other hand, were considered to be those which affect behaviour indirectly, such as norms, emotions, beliefs and values. The consultancy applied selective recruitment and employed a highly homogeneous work force, while socialisation and other ritualised, ceremonial forms of control were also in evidence. The consulting firm’s workforce demonstrated high compliance with technocratic controls combined with strong evidence of clan control, both of which contributed to the financial success of the company. The firm was described as a “technocratically framed clan”. It was concluded

that technocratic and socio-ideological controls should not be seen as mutually exclusive (Alvesson and Kärreman 2004).

A knowledge intensive co-operative with a focus on a diverse membership of platform producers, community and wider society, could utilise both sociocratic and technocratic methods of motivating and rewarding producers.

### **8.4.3 Education, training, and information.**

The 5th co-operative principle is based on education, training and information. Co-operatives recognise the importance of education and training for members so that they are able to support growth of their own business and the co-operative model to a wider audience. Employees, managers and elected representatives should have the practical skills necessary to operate a co-operative based on the co-operative principles including democratically controlling the business. Watkins (1986, p127) argued that co-operators should be “educated in co-operation” but also “co-operate in education” uniting theory and practice wherever possible. “The co-operative movement is not a rules-based movement, but a values and principles-based movement. Co-operators need to understand the principles that are the creative foundation of all co-operatives and learn to apply them in today’s fast changing world” (ICA, 2015, p.58).

Based on evidence during this research, platform co-operatives would need to continuously adapt and innovate where possible if they are to compete with established platforms, as successful platform changes are quickly adopted by competitors. However such challenges have been faced from the very start by the co-operative movement. “The earliest co-operators were quick to embrace the technologies emerging at the time from magic lantern slide shows to pioneering the use of film as an educational and informational tool. Following the example of the Rochdale Pioneers, co-operatives established lending libraries and reading rooms, pioneered distance learning and forged partnerships with universities and others to extend the reach of their programmes” (ICA, 2015, pp.57-58). There is a potential for co-operative learning platforms to cross the formal and informal learning divide, to cross the public and private divide, but this would need to be carefully planned so that the system does not become an ineffective and uncompetitive hybrid system with competing objectives from multiple stakeholders from different paradigms.

Early co-operators recognised their responsibility to help educate their members and their families by allocating part of their co-operative's trading surplus to education (Fairbairn, 1994):

The 1854 statutes provided that 2.5 percent of Rochdale's [Rochdale Pioneers] annual surplus before distribution was to be deducted and put into "a separate and distinct fund ... for the intellectual improvement of the members" and their families. This fund was to pay for the co-operative's library and instructional programs. These provisions formalised a longstanding commitment to education whose roots went back to the Owenites before the Pioneers were ever founded.

Whether profits are set aside, or education and training costs are budgeted for as part of the operational cost of developing members of a co-operative platform, the emphasis is on financial resources being set aside to support the education of members. Platform PF1 provided staff training aligned with the individual continuing professional development needs of producers as well as the need of the team, this was highly valued by producers who recognised that support was not just for the needs of the platform but also their personal development.

A co-operative platform with an explicit focus on member development including internal external and co-producers, could have a competitive advantage over other platforms where the focus is on video production and less on producer development. Cornforth et al (1988) identified a key constraint to the development and growth of new and established worker co-operatives was a lack of skills in key functional areas such as financial management, impacting the growth of members, elected representatives and the organisation. Such operational and management issues could potentially be addressed by having a broad base on producer members that bring their own specialisms to support the development of platforms and the co-operative organisations that own them.

Producers in this research were conscious of the educational impact of their content, many were focused on online and offline communities, the general wellbeing, knowledge and skills of platform users and local communities, sometimes bringing their skills to bespoke face to face classes. At the same time, the International Co-operative Alliance (2020) and the global community is fully aware of sustainability and environmental issues that need to be addressed. Platforms focused on education and

community could attract a diverse and committed source of producers, who in turn would benefit from self and platform community development, providing a foundation for co-operative learning (Wilkins, 2011).

The following section provides a summary of the role reward, motivation and power can play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content.

## 8.6 Co-operative framework

By combining insights into what producers value in a platform relationship (chapters 5-7) with the 7 Co-operative Principles from the ICA, Table 8-13 below highlights the potential and focus of a platform from a member, system and co-operative organisation perspective.

**Table 8-13** Dimensions of a Co-operative platform

Member focus	System focus (Meadows levers)	Co-operative focus	ICA 7 co-operative principles
Reward	5. System rules	WC with Worker members. MSC with Labour and Service user members.	1. Voluntary and open membership
Reward	5. System rules 6. Information flows 12. Labour reward	Worker/Labour members own capital. Service user members own copyright. Members determine surpluses.	3. Member economic participation
Motivation	7. Positive feedback	Members engagement and control. Members	2. Democratic member control

	8. Negative feedback 9. System delays	determine reward mechanisms.	
Motivation	10. Creating content 11. Supplying content	Member diversity to avoid dominant producers.	4. Autonomy and independence
Power	2. Paradigm out of which the system arises	Partnerships and resources accessible via the co-operative ecosystem.	6. Co-operation among co-operatives
Power	3. System goals	Sustainability, user and society focused.	7. Concern for community
Power	4. The power to evolve and change systems	Evolving platform and labour development.	5. Education, training, and information

By combining the 7 Co-operative Principles from the ICA with insights into what producers value in a platform relationship, Table 8-14 below highlights the potential options and features of a co-operative platform utilising membership combinations in a Worker or Multistakeholder Co-operative.

**Table 8-14** Membership of a Co-operative platform

ICA 7 co-operative principles	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
1. Voluntary and open membership	WC—Worker MSC—Labour	WC—Worker MSC—Labour	WC—Nonmember MSC—Service User
2. Democratic member control	Participation Voting rights	Participation Voting rights	Consultation WC—No vote MSC—Vote limited

3. Member economic participation	Fixed salary Pay transparency Surplus share	Performance reward Data transparency Surplus share Production reward	Performance reward Data transparency Surplus share (MSC)  Content ownership
4. Autonomy and independence	Capital contribution Supply stability	Capital contribution Supply quality	No capital contribution Supply diversity
5. Education, training, and information	Sustainability System evolution Co-production	Sustainability System evolution Co-production	Sustainability System change Production
6. Co-operation among co-operatives	Open system Co-op ecosystem	Open system Producer networks	Closed system Managed access
7. Concern for community	User and society focus	User and society focus	User focus

## 8.7 Summary

This chapter has illustrated how platform systems can be designed to align with what producers value in a platform relationship and co-operative values and principles. It has highlighted the options for different producer groups to organise education platforms as a worker or multistakeholder co-operative organisation. It has also evaluated the challenges in establishing co-operative platforms, many of which are challenges that have long faced co-operators through many decades. However, with a growing ecosystem of co-operative resources that could be utilised by online platforms, there has never been a better opportunity to challenge the hegemony of capitalist models by developing worker-centric platforms.

The final chapter of this thesis brings together the contributions to knowledge that this research has made to the area of motivation and reward for producers of

platform content and the potential of co-operative organisation. It provides a review of the process and looks to the future with suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 9 Contributions to knowledge

### 9.1 Introduction

This research set out to investigate the motivation and reward for individual producers of education platform content, to explore the value of co-operation amongst producers, and the potential role of co-operative principles in the formation of future platforms. During the period of this research there were very few established education platforms based on co-operative principles, those that have been set up were either informal co-operative organisations such as the London Learning Coop (n.d.), and those that had been formally established as a co-operative organisation were relatively new and at a vulnerable start-up phase such as Mycoolclass Co-operative (n.d.) with relatively small numbers of producers (teachers) and limited investment. In the public sector Winn (2012, 2015) referred to open and co-operative education and argued the case for universities to be converted to co-operatives, but there are no signs of this intellectually sound argument being converted into reality. Bauwens and Kostakis's (2014) proposed that the alternative to existing capitalist driven models is based on open co-operativism and commons based peer production, but with limited case study evidence and political backing Papadimitropoulos (2021) argues that this peer production model has yet to prove itself as a viable model. Instead, established education platforms operating within a capitalist paradigm provided clearly defined systems to critique, and to establish how and why individual producers supplied content within the confines of these systems.

This research set out to provide knowledge for academia as well as practical understanding and guidance to individual producers considering setting up new education platforms. In order to achieve this a constructivist stance of critical theory was taken, with importance given to processes of self-reflection and emancipation of workers (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). To investigate platforms and the wider socio-economic environment, Meadows (1999) taxonomy of systemic intervention was utilised as a theoretical framework. In order to expose the underlying beliefs and assumptions of individuals and different groups of producers of education video content; motivation, reward and power were identified as appropriate conduits



through which the potential of co-operativism could be revealed. The specific research questions to be answered were:

**Q1) How are individual producers rewarded for education platform content?**

**Q2) Why do individual producers share education platform content?**

**Q3) What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?**

The research was carried out as an inductive study of different groups of producers of education platform content, to understand how producer motivation and reward management practice changes depending on the relationship between individual content producers and education platforms. Online semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty case studies from three groups: internal (employed), external (self-employed) and co-producers (employed or self-employed). Co-producers were individual producers that work with more than one party in producing content, the third party may be an internal or external producer. The data from interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic approach as presented in chapter four (Thomas 2006, Braun and Clark 2006). From this, themes were identified that related to each producer group as well as some that were common to all groups (see chapters five, six and seven). This was followed by placing a veil of co-operativism over the producer data and findings of what producers value in a platform relationship, to establish if there is a place for platform co-operatives in informal online learning.

The remainder of this chapter summarises the contributions to knowledge and practice that arose, fulfilling the initial objectives of the research which were:

1. Examine the systems in which producers provide education content to platforms, through relationships between producer reward, motivation and power.
2. Identify systemic intervention points within existing platform systems, based on the motivation of producers.
3. Explore the role of reward within co-operative organised platforms driven by co-operative principles.

The key contribution to knowledge that this thesis brings is a study of reward and motivation for individual producers of education content and the unique value they place on relationships with platforms. It is from an understanding of alternative platform relationships (internal, external and co-producer) that this research provides insights into what workers value in a platform relationship and the implications of this for reward systems.

The contributions to knowledge arising from this research are:

1. In the area of reward, how platforms reward producer groups and potential co-operative intervention (Section 9.2).
2. In the area of motivation, why producers supply content to platforms and potential co-operative intervention (Section 9.3).
3. In the area of power, how platforms utilise control systems to manage producer power and potential co-operative intervention (Section 9.4).
4. In the area of methodology, utilising Meadows' taxonomy of systemic intervention points and co-operative principles to identify potential system levers in platform reward systems. (Section 9.5).

This research may provide contributions to practice for individual education video producers that are looking for alternative platform options to the dominant venture capital backed model, so that can see for themselves the potential of co-operative platforms from insights provided into reward, motivation and power. Contribution to knowledge in the areas of reward, motivation and power are framed by co-operative principles. Each of the contributions is now explained in turn.

## 9.2 Reward for producers

A key contribution this study makes is identifying reward mechanisms experienced by producers and producer groups (cases), and from this an identification of reward based system leverage points by producer group. In chapter five the unique features of reward in each producer group are summarised in Table 5-3, followed by Table 5-4 which summarises reward based system leverage points by producer group. The key reward themes from analysis highlighted that producers experienced a frustration with a lack of understanding and control over reward mechanisms, this was named 'reward

ownership’ which was closely linked to ‘data transparency’. Producers had minimal or no input into platform terms and conditions and their frequent changes. Changes in terms and conditions commonly resulted in unpredictable earnings and in some cases a significant reduction in financial rewards to producers. Producers emphasised the importance on platform reporting tools providing data transparency, valuing dashboards that provide a clear connection between user metrics and reward payments.

This research highlights the hegemony of third sector and private sector platform systems over education content producers, and the scope for change in the reward and data mechanisms of digital education platforms. Co-operative intervention is presented based on co-operative principles of voluntary and open membership and economic participation.

### 9.2.1 Voluntary and open membership

In co-operatives membership rights serve as the boundary of a system, separating internal processes from the environment. These rights are granted to members upon their entry and define their ability to participate equally in decision making based on predefined rules rooted in co-operative values and principles (Tortia, 2022). Voluntary and open membership would allow producers the option to contribute to platform development and levels of engagement that fit with their personal ambitions as presented in chapter eight and Table 8-5.

**Table 8-5** Co-operative membership reward

<b>ICA 7 co-operative principles</b>	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
1. Voluntary and open membership	Employed WC—Worker MSC—Labour	Self-employed WC—Worker MSC—Labour	Self-employed WC—Nonmember MSC—Service User
3. Member economic participation	Benchmarked - salary Pay transparency Surplus share	Performance - reward Data transparency Surplus share	Performance - reward Data transparency

		Production reward	Content ownership
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The above sub-section of a theoretical reward framework in a worker (WC) or multistakeholder (MSC) co-operative platform could address producer reward preferences and identified leverage points in this study. Employee members sourced by internal producers, could be paid a fixed salary and a surplus share, Producer members sourced from co-producers, could receive production and performance based reward, and a surplus share, Service user members sourced from external producers, could receive performance-based reward, and benefit from content ownership.

Internal producer employees in this study were recruited from local applicants to help maintain the values and culture of a platform showing signs of consistency with co-operative practice (Divini & Schiniotakis, 2015; Bossler and Schild, 2016). This recruitment strategy helped internal producers to align with platform goals, to create content with other local producers within a team, and to share organisational values (Benevene et al., 2019; Tortia et al., 2022). Because of the importance of employee members setting the co-operative standards for other types of members (self-employed) and non-members, it would seem prudent to implement a probationary during which platform employees, aspiring to become members, must demonstrate their character and abilities through their alignment with co-operative values and principles (Wren, 2020). Digital education platforms should aim to attract members with a long term perspective, as this aligns with their anticipation of long term professional growth and increased productivity (Tortia, 2022).

### **9.2.2 Economic participation**

Based on the motivation and rewards of producers in this study, specific reward models for different producer groups could be utilised to attract different categories of producers. By having the flexibility to transfer between alternative membership types could offer producers the opportunity to have a relationship with a platform that is congruent with their personal reward ambitions, rather than being constrained by full-time employment and a fixed role. Maintaining cohesive relationships and economic

participation with a diverse range of producers could provide a competitive advantage for a co-operative platform.

**Internal Producers** employed by a third sector platform [PF1] in this study demonstrated individual, organisational and societal practice that would benefit co-operative platforms, but also evidence that internal producers within the platform could benefit from social enterprise practice, common to co-operatives. The platform rewarded internal producers with a contract of service, a fixed annual salary and benefits providing financial security and stability. The platform had low staff turnover and job stability, showing evidence and a route to embedding, accumulating, and preserving human capital (Tortia, 2022). The platform perceives employment security as beneficial not only for the current and future members but also for society as a whole (Wren, 2020), with a focus on providing video content for users to improve their chance of being employed.

Internal producers paid a salary in a local currency could potentially miss out on higher earnings based on international rates compared to other groups (external and co-producers). However, this opportunity cost was not an overt consideration for internal producers, because they were content with their salary and benefits. This international workforce was made up of employees in different countries, employees were paid the same multiple (4 times) above the national statutory minimum in each country, this reward management practice could provide a degree of international pay parity for global platforms. An 'international pay ratio' could also provide the necessary scope to reduce pay when platforms are struggling financially during difficult economic times and/or market competition. Provided a fall in pay remains above minimum wages in each country there is the possibility for members to maintain financial stability and for platforms to remain viable while at the same time protecting their most valuable asset (Tortia et al., 2022).

Dickinson (2005) provided evidence that UK employee perceptions of equitable pay is based on responsibility, qualifications and performance. Internal producers valued the transparency and clarity of being paid a salary based on a job family structure with roles defined by technical competency, which is more aligned with responsibility and qualifications. As a result, there was minimal emphasis on internal pay ratios. International pay parity combined with technically based salaries would be

compatible with a culture or remuneration based on egalitarianism, with minimal linkage between individual pay and performance (Basterretxea et al., 2019).

Internal employees were paid comparatively high compared to national wages, they seemed less concerned with international pay comparisons even though they knew the pay of international colleagues. Platform reward management should be to provide a wage that allows individuals to thrive in their local community (Wren, 2020). Subject to the goals of a system, stable producer reward provides a basis for individual platform producers to broaden their focus beyond performance based data and user activity, to wider societal issues.

**External producers** could provide a flexible source of labour so that digital education platforms are capable of meeting supply and demand needs within a capitalist system. Every avenue should be explored in order to obtain a competitive advantage, and potentially this could be achieved on a micro level in an education market by focusing on 'value' related to education and social principles. Platforms that host content (rather than produce and host content), are more likely to use external producers rather than internal producers. Because of this, reward models are based on user demand. External producers independently create video content, supplying videos to platforms under a contract for service. Platforms treat external producers as self-employed. Producers are not rewarded for producing content, instead reward is only be triggered once the content (commodity) is supplied to a platform. Marx (1993, 926) determined that labour in capitalist societies has a dual character: 'concrete labour' and 'abstract labour'. In this context, concrete labour relates to the labour of individual content producers (individual skills and effort) in creating video content (commodity), rather than the product of that labour. Instead, an individual producer is rewarded for abstract labour which is 'absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity' (Marx, 1993, 926). The costs and risks associated with production are entirely with the individual producer. This may not fit with the risk profile of individual producers, but unless there are viable alternative relationships with platforms, producers will continue to supply content to platforms that dominate the market and the reward mechanisms on offer to producers.

**Co-producers** are utilised by platforms that produce and host content. If supply was limited to internal producer platforms would be less able to deal with rapid

changes in demand. Because of this, platforms use reward models based on contracts for service (internal producers) and contracts of service (external producers). Mixed models of reward are received by co-producers, providing reward based on video production and video performance. Even if a video is not successful, producers are paid by a platform for making a video, this means that the platform and producer are partially sharing the risk of video production and performance. Producers are paid for their skills (production fee) and performance (royalties) rather than qualifications (Dickinson, 2005).

Advertising and royalty based models of reward are difficult to manage from a platform perspective. Platforms must manage expectations and commercial demands of both advertising companies and producers, and this tension can lead to a lack of data transparency, and unpredictable earnings for producers. Platforms wish to be seen as fair and equity in royalty based mechanisms, but once again there are commercial reasons why there is not full transparency, as producers could game a system in their favour. Royalty pools are seen by producers as a black box driven by algorithms and very demotivating. A basis to consider alternative reward mechanisms could be based on the fundamentals of value, to a user, a producer and platforms.

Advertising models are based on 'exchange-value', payments made to producers out of the advertising revenues, the 'use-value' to the platform is based on the advertising revenues from companies that advertise on a platform, the 'use-value for others' (Marx 1976, 131). The commodity itself, the video recorded has no direct value in its own right, instead it is the value it creates for a platform. In contrast if users were to pay what they felt a video was worth to them directly, a traceable exchange of production and consumption would allow producers to see a more direct link with their concrete labour. Which appears to explain why producers are more satisfied with reward models where there is a direct link between course paid for by users and the payments received by producers. If we extend this further where users are allowed to pay what they think video content is worth, then platforms could move away from 'value form' of commodities to 'natural form' and rewarding producers based on what the content is worth to the end user. Reward management based more on the natural form of commodity exchange might reduce the homogenisation of video content that occurs when everything is sold at the same (often discounted) price on platforms. The

use-value to the *end user* rather than the use-value to a *platform* could move the commodity exchange closer to a one to one relationship between producer and user based more on social than economic value.

Employee members sourced by internal producers, could be paid a fixed salary and a surplus share in keeping with co-operative practice for employees (Wren, 2020). Salaries set relative to an agreed measure such as industry benchmarks, national minimum wage or living wage would provide a transparent basis to set pay (Dickinson, 2005). Producer members (PMs) sourced from co-producers, could receive production and performance based reward (Tampoe, 1993), and a surplus share. Service user members (SMs) sourced from external producers, could receive performance-based reward, and benefit from content ownership.

By understanding and meeting the needs of different producer groups reward systems can be designed accordingly, and from this future education platforms could harness the power of a diverse range of skilled and motivated producers.

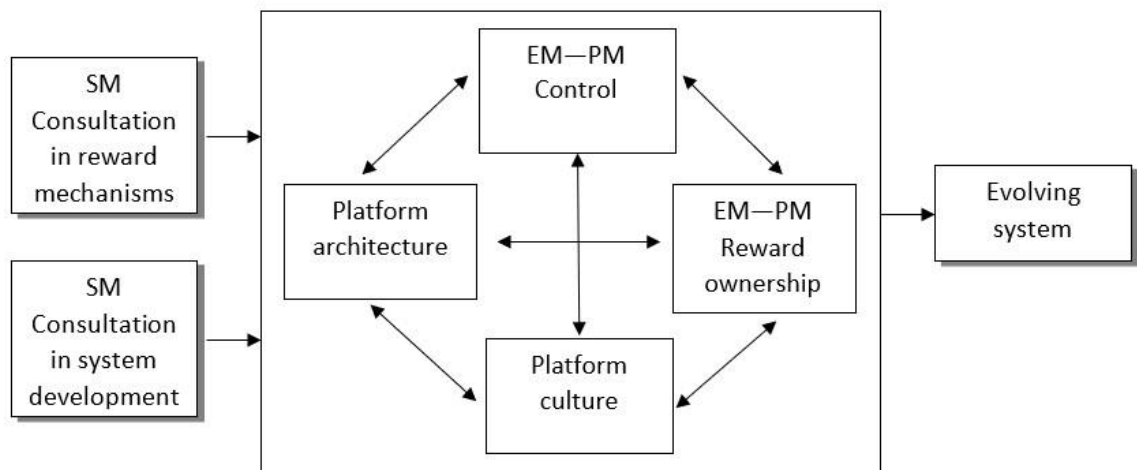
### 9.3 Motivation for producers

A key contribution this study has made is identifying the motivations of producers and producer groups (cases), and from this an identification of motivation based system leverage points by producer group. In chapter six the unique features of motivation in each producer group are summarised in Table 6-2, followed by Table 6-3 which summarises motivation based system leverage points by producer group. The key motivation themes from analysis highlighted 'social impact', 'co-production' and 'professional independence', each of these could be utilised by a co-operative education platform. Internal producers with reward stability and a shared sense of educational and societal purpose, were more likely to engage with stakeholders and local communities. Co-producers valued working with experts in video production in creating high quality content, they enjoyed the prestige of being selected to work with a platform and perceived the relationship with platforms as a partnership rather than just a supplier of content. Autonomy is highly valued by external and co-producers. They wish to have control over their working practice, including when, how and with whom they choose to work with.



### 9.3.1 Autonomy and Independence

Individual and group motivation in this study has demonstrated that a platform could provide producers with the flexibility to choose either employment or self-employment (or a mix), and at the same time platform demand for a diverse and flexible supply of labour can be co-ordinated to meet the co-operative principle of autonomy and independence. Based on the autonomy that external producers prefer, and collaboration with employees that co-producers value, a multi stakeholder co-operative model that recognises multiple types of capital contribution could attract producers from all three producer groups. Having a pipeline of content from a variety of sources would address resource constraints experienced by platforms that rely on content created by employees. In chapter eight and Figure 8-1 a framework for a labour controlled platform demonstrated how autonomy and independence could be achieved for both producers and platforms.



**Figure 8.1** Framework for a labour controlled platform

Whilst there will naturally be tensions between membership types with competing objectives (Turnbull 1997), Birchall (2012) highlights the importance of open membership to engage all relevant stakeholders, while Davis (2004, 2018) argues that an understanding of members expectations and values rather than trying to eliminate stakeholder competition can be managed via a co-operative management and leadership culture.

### 9.3.2 Democratic member control

Democratic member control would be more likely to be maintained by a cohesive core workforce with a shared sense of purpose ‘alternative–pathfinders’ (Cornforth et al, 1988), enhanced by producer designed rules (Ostrom, 2000), and if this commitment develops into features of a clan, then it is possible for the basis of reciprocity to be changed (Ouchi, 1980). Where cohesiveness is weaker because producers have chosen to be less engaged with a worker or multistakeholder co-operative, there may be a need for more technocratic forms of control and reward than with members (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004).

The third sector platform in this study was made up of two subsidiaries based in the US and Colombia, the cohesion of each group to work autonomously and to maintain the interests (community and education) of the group as a whole suggests that co-operative practice could be extended across a global practice, and not hinder growth. The Mondragon experience of international expansion creating a balancing act between capitalist and co-operative logics (Bretos et al., 2018, 2019), could be addressed in digital business through ‘platform clans’ made up of a core of producers members in a worker or multi-stakeholder co-operative, providing an opportunity to maintain and cultivate co-operative values and principles.

Internal producers such as those that work for PF1 and selected co-producers could be members of a co-operative platform. Job security serves as a significant incentive for employees to become co-operative members (Arando et al., 2015). But job security would not distinguish a co-operative from the working practices of the third sector platform in this study. The key difference would be ownership and control. Members could hold a dual role as both employees and owners, enabling co-operatives as hybrid organisations to overcome conflicts between labour and capital as well as management and labour (Santos-Larrazabal and Basterretxea, 2022). This could empower producers to make strategic decisions regarding platform systems and processes and employment policies collectively while setting common objectives and means to achieve them (Bretos et al., 2019; Tortia, 2022).

## 9.4 Power for producers

A key contribution this study has made is identifying the power of producers and producer groups (cases), and from this an identification of power based system

leverage points by producer group. In chapter seven the unique features of power in each producer group are summarised in Table 7-4, followed by Table 7-5 which summarises power based system leverage points by producer group. Analysis highlighted 'systems participation' and 'property rights' as key power themes, each of these could be utilised by a co-operative education platform. Producers from all three groups have limited or no control over the system rules that determine their relationship and rewards with platforms. Producers do have ambitions to own and control their own platforms but only where a new venture is initiated by the producers themselves and where they have a high degree of control. Independent self-employed producers want ownership of their content. Power struggles between producers and platforms have important consequences for the motivation of individual producers and their perception of rewards and provide intervention points in platform systems design that could enable co-operation between producers when guided by co-operative principles.

This research provides a contribution to knowledge by challenging the direction of travel in the literature that open co-operativism ("the commons") is most likely to progress the co-operative movement, enabling digital education platforms to work beyond a capitalist paradigm (Vieta, 2010; Winn 2012, 2015; Bauwens & Kostakis 2014). This research suggests that in order to bridge the gap between platform capitalism and platform co-operativism, producers could be provided with alternatives within the existing capitalist system as well as radical alternatives within a post-capitalist paradigm (see figure 8.2 Co-operative models in parallel).

Based on this study the levels of producer awareness of commons based peer production (CBPP) and desire to protect producer generated content using existing copyright laws, there would need to be a period of education and marketing to inform and persuade producers to transition to a CBPP model, as well as government and political intervention (Papadimitropoulos, 2021).

This study has demonstrated that all seven co-operative principles could be utilised to address systemic issues in existing platform systems in the third and private sector and in the design of co-operative platforms. However co-operative principles are not equally important in addressing systemic issues based on reward, motivation

and power in digital education platforms serving global and local needs. Moreover, each co-operative principle can be utilised to address specific systemic issues.

To address issues of power and platform hegemony, the principles of **education, community** and **co-operation amongst co-operatives** could be utilised to address high level systemic issues within digital education platforms. Platforms focused on education and community could attract a diverse and committed source of producers, who in turn would benefit from self and group development, providing a foundation for co-operative learning (Wilkins, 2011), and the development of the platform itself (Cornforth et al., 1988). This empirical study places education and community principles as fundamental (Oczkowski et al., 2013) rather than aspirational principals (Birchall, 2011).

#### **9.4.1 Education**

Digital Education Platforms are dominated by the private sector (Van Dijck et al., 2018), and yet the focus of the literature to date has been on pedagogic, data and technological aspects of platforms rather than adopting a critical gaze that scrutinises wider socio-economic and issues (Robertson, 2019). This study has utilised critical systems thinking and Meadows (1999) taxonomy of systemic intervention points as a theoretical framework, to identify systemic reward issues and potential intervention points in education platform systems. The third sector platform in this study used employee training as an integral part of a broader educational approach, which also included the director and local community, which in an alternative setting could be aligned with co-operative values and principles (Piasecki, 2021). In order to achieve broader societal aims, a platform producer's impact could be further enhanced if members undergo training in co-operative values and principles (Brestos et al., 2019; Souisa et al., 2019).

This study has demonstrated the importance to employed producers of both job skills based training but also employers showing a genuine interest in producer's personal development. By nurturing long-term employment relationships and job security, the third sector platform in this study created an environment conducive to continuous investment in training and human capital (Burdin, 2014). In order to achieve broader societal aims, a platform producer's impact could be further

enhanced if members undergo training in co-operative values, principles and entrepreneurship (Brestos et al., 2019; Souisa et al., 2019). Cornforth et al (1988) identified a key constraint to the development and growth of new and established worker co-operatives was a lack of skills in key functional areas such as financial management, impacting the growth of members, elected representatives and the organisation. Such operational and management issues could potentially be addressed by having a broad base on producer members that bring their own specialisms to support the development of platforms and the co-operative organisations that own them.

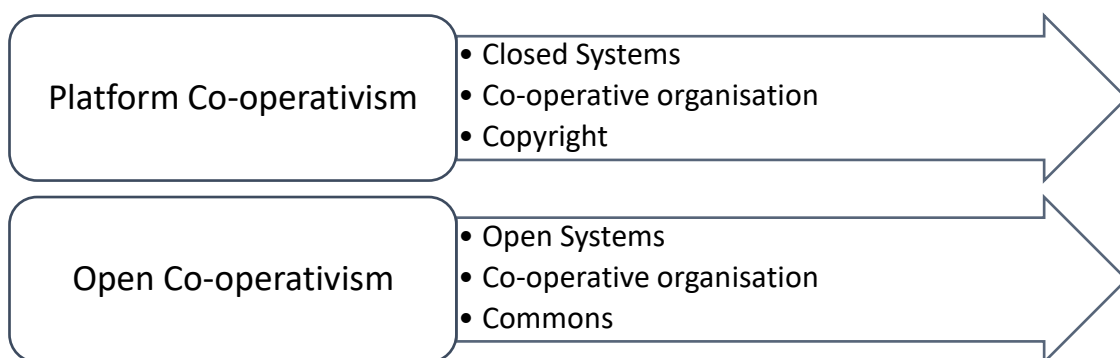
#### **9.4.2 Community**

Internal producers of the third sector platform in this study consistently referred positively to a set of internal values and principles, and at the same time were highly engaged with the welfare of external stakeholders in the community. Consistent with co-operatives this coherent group of producers showed a heightened awareness of their internal and external values, and prioritised relationships with key stakeholders (Cisi and Centrone, 2021). This non-profit digital education platform was not only focused on providing basics skills to a global online audience but providing education locally in schools and other face to face learning environments. In doing so, they demonstrated practice consistent with co-operatives in providing goods to the local community (Wren, 2020). These and similar education and community driven activities has the potential to differentiate co-operative from capitalist platforms, by cultivating trust and credibility between platforms and community (Benevene et al., 2019).

#### **9.4.3 Co-operation amongst co-operatives**

To address systemic issues and to challenge the power of existing platforms, co-operation amongst co-operatives (Scholz & Schneider, 2017) offers the potential to support the scaling up, autonomy and sustainability of co-operative platforms, within the context of open and closed co-operatives systems developed in parallel, driven by a shared interest in the principles of education, community and co-operative amongst co-operatives. Platforms could utilise a combination of both social entrepreneurship and social extrapreneurship to achieve co-operation at scale and speed. Social

entrepreneurship occurs where efforts to create organisations produce ‘new forms of social relations’ (Ayob et al., 2016), potentially originating from a combination of internal, external and co-producers in a worker or multi-stakeholder co-operative. Social extrapreneurship occurs where there is concerted inter-organisational collaboration involving new and existing organisations to address social change (Tracey & Stott, 2017), between co-operative platforms and movements (platform co-operativism and open co-operativism) represented below in Figure 8.2 from chapter eight.



**Figure 8.2** Co-operative models in parallel

There may be challenges and tensions in deciding who the ‘community’ is for a co-operative platform, communities may not have clearly defined boundaries and are likely to be in a constant state of flux, but the sooner a broad multi-stakeholder co-operative community is engaged, the more likely it is that a platform will be able to compete with platforms with traditional market driven resources at their disposal. Returning to Marx (1864) and his assessment of co-operatives:

One element of success they possess — numbers; but numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge...

Global online communities of knowledge workers led by co-operative principles of education and community have a number of paths to achieve systemic change, but which ever route is taken platform workers should share experiences and understanding of different journeys so there is a possibility of reaching the same principled driven co-operative paradigm by different means.

## 9.5 Methodology

This research adds to a growing interest in systems thinking in order to broaden the horizons of members and potential members of co-operatives, to achieve change and transformation (Novkovic et al., 2022). This research has extended the co-operative interest beyond the public sector in the areas of open education and universities (Winn; 2012, 2015,) and higher education co-operatives (Malcolm and Ross, 2021), to the private and third sector. It has broadened the focus and understanding of the digital education market (Robertson, 2019), control over education resources (Williamson et al., 2020) and the hegemony of platform systems. If co-operative principles are key to defining and maintaining a co-operative difference (Novkovic, 2008), then this study has highlighted the relative importance of education and community (Oczkowski et al., 2013) principles for co-operative education platforms, and their potential role as the building blocks to positively contribute to sustainable development.

A methodological contribution comes from the utilisation of both co-operative principles and Meadows (1999) taxonomy of systemic intervention points to examine digital education platforms. This has provided a basis to identify systemic reward issues and potential intervention points in education platform systems, and the scope for co-operatives beyond the public sector. Producer findings of reward, motivation and power were mapped to system levers and from here the identification of potential co-operative intervention points. The extract below illustrates how this was achieved and presented in chapter eight Co-operative platforms:

Member focus	System focus (Meadows levers)	Co-operative focus	<b>ICA 7 co-operative principles</b>
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Once producer, system and co-operative focus were aligned the next stage was to break this down by producer group so that their unique motivation and reward expectations could potentially be met by either a worker co-operative or multistakeholder co-operative organisation:

<b>ICA 7 co-operative principles</b>	Employee member (Internal producer)	Producer member (Co-producer)	Service member (External producer)
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Based on the nature and scale of this study it is recognised that this methodological contribution has limitations. Further studies are needed to further develop and understand the potential of utilising both Meadows' systemic intervention points and co-operative principles. For example a systems based approach could be utilised in future research that considers the perspectives of other actors in platform systems, from users to managers and owners and one in which the intervention is based on co-operativism or an alternative paradigm.

## 9.6 Research impact

This research set out to promote critical awareness and provide guidance to individual producers of the paradigm and systems in which they provide video content to education platforms, so that producers are able to ask probing questions about platform systems, challenge platform hegemony, and make informed decisions about their own valuable human, social and intellectual capital.

More broadly this research has the potential to inform and influence critical debates about the scope for alternatives to the dominant capitalist driven model. Digital education platforms do not have to be dominated by multi-national corporations and funded by venture capital. Alternatives and systemic change can come from within a capitalist system as demonstrated by this co-operative based research. In addition, change can come from beyond the reach of capitalism, from the commons movement. This research argues that multiple initiatives will be needed for systemic change, humanistic and sustainability focused projects that can learn from each other without being consumed by incumbent platforms and organisations.

The research has the potential to benefit the growing number of independent producers worldwide that interact with online platforms, in identifying and modelling alternative reward models and mechanisms that recognise co-operative practice across digital networks.



## 9.7 Reflection on limitations

This section provides a reflection on key areas of the research and identifies elements that could have been improved.

The three main phases of this research took place before (design), during (data collection) and post (analysis and write-up) the Coronavirus Pandemic. Most interviews took place during the pandemic although early interviews took place when the virus was not been seen as a threat to participants because of their physical location, and the analysis and write-up phase mainly took place after most UK restrictions had been eased. All interviews were planned to be online, so the pandemic made no difference to the process and risks associated with the research, however on reflection it is inevitable that the participants and researcher would have been affected by the unique circumstances. No attempt has been made to extract elements that are unique to the pandemic, as many features of working remotely were already commonplace to research participants.

A survey was designed to provide the starting point for 'how' producers were rewarded by education platforms in exchange for their video content. A flaw in this strategy was locating the survey (via a link to a Qualtrics survey) on a social media platform that was itself closely linked to an education platform. Not surprisingly some producers were reluctant to come forward when a survey was asking probing questions about a sensitive subject for both producers and platforms. With hindsight an alternative social media platform should have been chosen that did not have an affiliation with any particular education platform.

Internal producers were employees contracted to a Colombian non-profit foundation; the Colombian foundation is a subsidiary of a US non-profit foundation. It could be argued that employees from the US platform would have provided a better cultural fit with external and co-producers participants in the research, but access was not offered. The platform systems and processes (including reward mechanisms) were similar for both the US and Colombian platforms, and the research aims were not focused on cultural nuances between producer groups.

## 9.8 Future research

A limitation of this research is that data collected was based on the perspectives of individual producers, future research could include other actors (users, managers and owners) to provide a rich picture of platform systems. Research incorporating additional actors would open up alternative research methods such as soft systems methodology, which would further enhance the design of future systems offering an alternative to existing education platforms (Checkland, 2000).

By focusing on one type of employee owned business namely a co-operative, this research has not addressed alternatives for worker-centric platforms that include direct ownership or trust ownership forms. Wren's (2016) employee ownership study could be further utilised, by focusing on direct and trust ownership types for future research into motivation and reward for platform producers.

This study has not resolved the capital problem for co-operatives, but it has provided a framework of reward to attract a wide and diverse supply of producers that could potentially bring a capital contribution at different stages of development of a co-operative platform (Borkin, 2019). Research could be carried out to establish the social return on investment (SROI) of education platforms with a clear and sustainable purpose that potential members and users could gravitate towards. SROI could be determined by assigning monetary values to social and environmental returns and provide an opportunity to demonstrate wider value creation (Rotheroe & Richards, 2007). By basing the funding of a platform on the SROI provided by members and other stakeholders, the calculation and headline figure to attract potential investors could be based on direct financial benefits, but also include a financial valuation of indirect benefits from the social and environmental impact created by a co-operative platform.

## 9.9 Personal reflection

After six years part-time producing this thesis, part of which was during the Coronavirus Pandemic, I have changed and developed as a person and academic. This progress has been important in pushing the research forward but allowing the breathing space for important issues to be seen and heard during different stages.

During the interview stage I was constantly reminded of the call by Alvesson and Ashcraft (2009) for 'reflexive fieldwork and interviewing'. During the data analysis phase when there was a lot of noise coming from the vast quantities of data, I was reminded of Meadows (1999) who concluded that there is a leverage point that is even higher than changing a paradigm, and that is to stay flexible, to be aware of your own biases towards a paradigm, that there is no 'true' paradigm, and to "let go into Not Knowing, into what Buddhists call enlightenment."

Identifying leverage points in existing systems and making adjustment, or designing completely new systems, is only part of the journey to challenge the status quo. Platforms and their owners appear to be the masters of deception, convincing us all that we are fairly benefiting from the growth of the internet and that platforms naturally fit into capitalist driven models that have served us well. Tom Slee (2017):

Many well-intentioned people suffer from a misplaced faith in the intrinsic abilities of the Internet to promote egalitarian community and trust, and so have unwittingly aided and abetted this accumulation of private fortune, and the construction of new and exploitative forms of employment.

Alternatively, labour can own capital, producers can be owners, and all that is needed is an understanding of this potential and a coordination of a collective power to build a more sustainable future. This alternative future is in the hands of a new generation of platform co-operators.

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## Appendix 1 Ethics Review

# Valuing co-operation: investigating motivation and reward for producers of education platform content

**Ethics Review ID:** ER9289164

**Workflow Status:** Application Approved

**Type of Ethics Review Template:** Very low risk human participants studies

## Primary Researcher / Principal Investigator

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Darren Connolly  
(Sheffield Business School)

**Converis Project Application:**

**Q1. Is this project:** ii) Doctoral research

## Director of Studies

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Rory Ridley-Duff (Sheffield Business School)

## Supervisory Team

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Christine O'Leary (Department Of Management)

**Q4. Proposed Start Date of Data Collection:** 07/01/2019

**Q5. Proposed End Date of Data Collection:** 07/06/2019

**Q6. Will the research involve any of the following:**

i) Participants under 5 years old: No

ii) Pregnant women: No

iii) 5000 or more participants: No

iv) Research being conducted in an overseas country: No

**Q7. If overseas, specify location:**

**Q8. Is the research externally funded?:** No

**Q9. Will the research be conducted with partners and subcontractors?:** No

**Is another UK HEI the lead partner?:** No

**Q10. Does the research involve one or more of the following?**

- i. Patients recruited because of their past or present use of the NHS or Social Care: No
  - ii. Relatives/carers of patients recruited because of their past or present use of the NHS or Social Care: No
  - iii. Access to data, organs, or other bodily material of past or present NHS patients: No
  - iv. Foetal material and IVF involving NHS patients: No
  - v. The recently dead in NHS premises: No
  - vi. Participants who are unable to provide informed consent due to their incapacity even if the project is not health related: No
  - vii. Prisoners or others within the criminal justice system recruited for health-related research: No
  - viii. Prisoners or others within the criminal justice system recruited for non-health-related research:  
No
  - ix. Police, court officials or others within the criminal justice system: No
- Is this a research project as opposed to service evaluation or audit?: Yes

Q11. Category of academic discipline: Social Sciences

Q12. Methodology: Mixed Method

## P2 - Project Outline

---

**Q1. General overview of study:** The purpose of this research is to investigate motivation and reward for individual producers of education platform content, to explore the value of co-operation amongst producers, and the potential role of co-operative values. This purpose will be addressed through a study that seeks to develop an understanding of how producer motivation and reward management practice changes depending on the relationship between individual content producers and education platforms. Three specific groups of producers will be researched: internal producers, co-producers and external producers. This research seeks to see if there are distinct motivators and reward management practices specific to producer groups, as well as underlying features that are common across all producer groups. Rewarding capabilities and connections outside a single firm or formal partnership has the potential to contribute towards the 'Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade' (Mills and Davies 2013, Mayo 2014). This research is looking to answer the following 'grand question': 'What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?' Aims This research aims to develop a theory of co- operative reward for producers of education platform content. This research will: • Investigate how producers are rewarded for education platform content • Investigate producer perspectives on reward in the context of producing education platform content • Inductively develop a theoretical framework of co-operative based reward for producers of education platform content Contribution This research will build on the work of Winn (2012, 2015), Neary and Winn (2017) open and co-operative education, Wren (2016) employee ownership and cultures of reward, and Cornforth (1986) motivation and alternative pathways to cooperation.

Upload:



RF2 Valuing Co-operation - Darren Connolly.docx



RF2A (2017-18) Darren Connolly.doc

**Q3. Is your topic of a sensitive/contentious nature or could your funder be considered controversial?:** No

**Q4. Are you likely to be generating potentially security-sensitive data that might need particularly secure storage?:** No

**Q5. Has the scientific/scholarly basis of this research been approved, for example by Research Degrees Sub-committee or an external funding body?:** No to be submitted

**Q6. Main research questions:** This research is looking to answer the following 'grand question': 'What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?' Sub-questions: RQ1 How are individual producers rewarded for education platform content? RQ2 Why do individual producers share education platform content? RQ3 What role can reward play in fostering co-operative practice between producers of education platform content?

**Q7. Summary of methods including proposed data analyses:** Critical systems theory and multiple case studies will be used to reveal how social orders, dominating practices, discourses, ideologies and institutions affect the way reward is framed and used to influence human behavior. The research strategy will be aligned with the research questions in order to be able to contribute relevant answers. Stage 1 Reward model Purposive sampling will be used to survey individual producers, questions will be based on reward management, and not on motivation at this stage. The survey will provide a screening process for subsequent interviews. Stage 2 Motivation Research findings from stage one will be used to plan and design interviews and to provide comparative cases studies. This inductive research will be undertaken by online interviews with individual producers of education platform content, making a contribution to reward management theory from the empirical reality. Stage 3 Co-operation This research stage aims to use the research findings from earlier stages, to generate a co-operative reward based theoretical framework for producers of education platform content.

### **P3 - Research with Human Participants**

---

**Q1. Does the research involve human participants?:** Yes

**Q2. Will any of the participants be vulnerable?:** No

**Q3. Is this a clinical trial?:** No

**If yes, will the placebo group receive a treatment plan after the study? If N/A tick no.:** No

**Q4. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?:** No

**Q5. Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants?:** No

**Q6. Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?:** No

**Q7. Will the study involve prolonged testing (activities likely to increase the risk of repetitive strain injury)?:** No

**Q8. Is there any reasonable and foreseeable risk of physical or emotional harm to any of the participants?:** No

**Q9. Will anyone be taking part without giving their informed consent?:** No

**Q10. Is it covert research?:** No

**Q11. Will the research output allow identification of any individual who has not given their express consent to be identified?:** No

**Q12. Where data is collected from human participants, outline the nature of the data, details of anonymisation, storage and disposal procedures if these are required (300**

- 750): A key aspect will be whether to name individual participants and the related education platforms included in the fieldwork. However naming individuals and the related platforms could restrict the number of willing participants, but more importantly undermine the reputation of Sheffield Hallam University. This is deemed an unacceptable risk and not in line with the University's ethical policy (Sheffield Hallam University 2017). Ethical issues may arise in taking video or audio recordings interviews in phase 2, consequently participants will be informed and consent requested at the start of each online interview. Similarly, confidential and commercially sensitive information will be handled appropriately by denying public access both physically and electronically. During the fieldwork electronic data will be collected and located on a secure password protected network and will be held in line with the University's data protection standard and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Sheffield Hallam University 2018). This research will be carried out online interviews using Zoom or Skype. Deakin & Wakefield (2014) identified the benefits and drawback of Skype interviews from their respective qualitative research projects that have been considered in this research design. One of the key ethical issues will be addressed by obtaining verbal consent from the interviewees before interviews begin, and by making it clear that recordings will be video and audio. As participants will be producers of education video content, it would be reasonable to assume interviewees would be comfortable with online interviews and have the technology to undertake the interviews. However, contingencies will be put in place that recognise and allow for a percentage of interview drop outs and failed interviews due to technical issues.

## **P4 - Research in Organisations**

---

**Q1. Will the research involve working with an external organisation or using data/material from an external organisation?:** No

**Q2. Do you have granted access to conduct the research?:** No

**Q3. If no, is this because:** You have not asked yet

## **P5 - Research with Products and Artefacts**

---

**Q1. Will the research involve working with copyrighted documents, films, broadcasts, photographs, artworks, designs, products, programmes, databases, networks, processes, existing datasets or secure data?:** No

**Q2. Are the materials you intend to use in the public domain?:** No

**Q3. If No, do you have explicit permission to use these materials as data?:** No

**Q4. If No, is this because:** You have not yet asked permission

## **P7 - Health and Safety Risk Assessment**

---

**Q1. Will the proposed data collection take place only on campus?**

: No

**Q2. Are there any potential risks to your health and wellbeing associated with either (a) the venue where the research will take place and/or (b) the research topic itself?:** None that I am aware of

**Q3. Will there be any potential health and safety risks for participants (e.g. lab studies)? If so a Health and Safety Risk Assessment should be uploaded to P8.:** No

**Q4. Where else will the data collection take place? (Tick as many venues as apply)**Researcher's Residence: false

**Participant's Residence:** false

**Education Establishment:** true

**Other e.g. business/voluntary organisation, public venue:** false

**Outside UK:** false

**Q5. How will you travel to and from the data collection venue?:** By car

**Q6. Please outline how you will ensure your personal safety when travelling to and from the data collection venue.:** Personal safety will be ensured by travelling by car on a well established route, between the researchers residence and place of full time employment at the University of Brighton.

**Q7. If you are carrying out research off-campus, you must ensure that each time you go out to collect data you ensure that someone you trust knows where you are going (without breaching the confidentiality of your participants), how you are getting there (preferably including your travel**

**route), when you expect to get back, and what to do should you not return at the specified time. (See Lone Working Guidelines). Please outline here the procedure you propose using to do this.:** There is an established work timetable that will be adhered to during the data collection period. Data will only be collected during normal working hours while on the campus for Brighton Business School.

**Q8. How will you ensure your own personal safety whilst at the research venue, including on campus?:** My personal safety will be ensured by following standard university health and safety procedures. I have my own office within Brighton Business School. Electrical and portable devices within this office have been through internal safety checks.

## **P8 - Attachments**

---

**Are you uploading any recruitment materials (e.g. posters, letters, etc.)?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading a participant information sheet?:** Yes

**Are you uploading a participant consent form?:** Yes

**Are you uploading details of measures to be used (e.g. questionnaires, etc.)?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading an outline interview schedule/focus group schedule?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading debriefing materials?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading a Risk Assessment Form?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading a Serious Adverse Events Assessment (required for Clinical Trials and Interventions)?:** Non Applicable

**Are you uploading a Data Management Plan?:** Non Applicable

**Upload:**



Participant Consent Form.docx



Participant Information Sheet.docx

## P9 - Adherence to SHU Policy and Procedures

---

### Primary Researcher / PI Sign-off:

**I can confirm that I have read the Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Policy and Procedures:** true

**I can confirm that I agree to abide by its principles:** true

**Date of PI Sign-off:** 20/09/2018

### Director of Studies Sign-off:

**I confirm that this research will conform to the principles outlined in the Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics policy:** true

**I can confirm that this application is accurate to the best of my knowledge:** true

**Director of Studies' Comments:** Darren is undertaking a low-risk project (from an ethics point of view) involving web-based interviewing of people about their contributions of education content, with a particular emphasis on understanding the rewards they seek and get. He has provided an appropriate consent and information form that describes the study, and both supervisors have reviewed with RF2 and are satisfied that is consistent with the information in this ethical approval application.

**Date of submission and supervisor sign-off:** 12/10/2018

## Appendix 2 Survey

# Rewarding producers of videos for education platforms

Welcome to the survey.

This research project is interested in understanding **motivation and reward** for individual producers of education videos, content accessible to the public via a platform (website).

In this survey you will be presented with information relevant to **how you are rewarded** for producing education videos and asked to answer some related questions.

Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The study should take you around 5 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail: [Darren.A.Connolly@student.shu.ac.uk](mailto:Darren.A.Connolly@student.shu.ac.uk)

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

- I consent to undertake the study
- I do not consent to undertake the study

*Skip To: End of Survey If Welcome to the survey. This research project is interested in understanding motivation and reward... = I do not consent to undertake the study*

---



Q1 Are you.?

- Male
  - Female
  - Other (please specify)
- 

Prefer not to say

---

Q2 Please indicate your age

- under 20
  - 20-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - 51-60
  - 60+
- 

Q3 What is your employment status?

- Employed
  - Self-employed
  - Employed and Self-employed
  - Not employed
-

Q4 Please provide the name of the country you currently live in?

---

Q5 Please provide the names of education platforms that provide access to your education video(s):

Platform 1

---

Platform 2

---

Platform 3

---

Platform 4

---

Platform 5

---

Q6 What is your working relationship with platforms named in the previous question?

I work directly for the following platforms (please name the platforms)

---

I work independently from the following platforms (please name the platforms)

---

Q7 Do you have a target audience in mind when you produce your videos?

No

Yes (please specify)

---

---

Q8 Please provide the URL for one or more education videos you have produced:

- Video 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - Video 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - Video 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - Video 4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - Video 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q9 Do you produce videos with other people?

- No
- Yes
- Sometimes

*Skip To: Q11 If Do you produce videos with other people? = No*

---

Q10 Who do you co-produce videos with?

- Internal people who work directly for the platform
  - External people who work independently from the platform
  - A combination of internal and external people
  - Varies depending on the platform
-

Q11 On what basis are you financially rewarded by the platform for video production?

- The submitted video
  - Video Usage (metrics such as per click or downloads)
  - Hours Worked
  - Salary or Wage
  - Royalties
  - Other (please specify)
- 

-----

Q12 How important would you say financial reward is in your decision to supply platforms with your video content?

- Very important
  - Important
  - Fairly important
  - Not important
- 

Q13 What are the non-financial rewards of producing education videos?

---

-----

Q14 Would you be interested in sharing your personal motivations for producing and sharing videos for education platforms? This would be in the form of an interview.

Yes

No

Maybe (please specify what further information you require)

---

---

Q15 If you would like to know more about the interview stage of this research, please provide an e-mail address so further details can be provided to you.

---

## Appendix 3 Interviews

### **Interview protocol**

- Level 1 Semi-structured interviews.
- Level 2 Line of enquiry. Questions based on motivation and reward, taking into account different groups: internal/external/co-producers for cross case analysis.

### **Interview questions**

#### **Consent:**

- Can I confirm that you have read and understood the participant information sheet and participant consent form?
- Can I confirm that you consent to the interview taking place and it being recorded?

#### **Motivation:**

- Thank you for joining me, what location are you in now?
- Is this your usual workplace of work?
- How did you end up making education videos?
- Do you collaborate with other people to produce your videos?
- Which platforms do you share your video content with?
- Why do you use these platforms as opposed to other platforms?
- How do you work with the platform, what do you have to do in practice?
- How much do you know about the platform beyond supplying video content?
- What changes would you like to see with the platforms you work with?

#### **Reward:**

- Do you have legal ownership of video content supplied to platforms?
- How are you were rewarded for your video content?
- Can you tell me more about how this reward works in practice?
- What reward data do you have access to?
- What do you think of this reward?
- What would be your ideal reward?
- Are there other benefits you can think of that has not been discussed?

- How do you plan to develop your working practices/working with others in the future?

### **Interview debrief and follow up**

- Debrief statement (thank you, your contribution will help with.....).
- Follow up contacts and resources.

## Appendix 4 NVivo

### NVivo Themes

<b>Final Themes</b>	<b>Themes Archive</b>
REWARD OWNERSHIP	EMPLOYMENT
	PLATFORM PORTFOLIO
	REWARD
TRANSPARENCY	DATA TRANSPARENCY
SOCIAL IMPACT	COMMUNITY
	GLOBAL MARKET
	INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
	LANGUAGE
	NOT FOR PROFIT
	SOCIAL MEDIA
	TEACHING
	THE FUTURE
	USER EXPERIENCE
CO-PRODUCTION	COLLABORATION
	PRODUCTION PROCESS
AUTONOMY	DEVELOPING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE
	FLEXIBLE WORKING
	PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY
	PUBLISHING
SYSTEMS PARTICIPATION	BUSINESS MODEL
	PLATFORM OPERATIONS
	SYSTEMS
	TECHNOLOGY
	COVID-19
PROPERTY RIGHTS	CONTENT OWNERSHIP
	PLATFORM OWNERSHIP



## NVivo node master set

£3000	Camera equipment	Covid-19
50 members	Capitalism	Creative Commons
Accents	Career development	Creative process
Advances v royalties	CG Boost	cross fertilization
Advertising revenue	Client communication	Crypto currencies
Affiliate	Closed system	Dashboard data
Algorithms	Commercial pressure	Data access
Altruistic reward	Communities of practice	Data mining
Amazon	Community of people	Data obsession
App communication	Community size	Data transparency
Artificial Intelligence	Company owner	Data unknown
Artist communities	Company takeover	Data use
Assets	Competing prices	Director
Autonomy	Constructivism	Discounted pricing
Barriers to entry	Consultation process	Economies of scale
Behind the platform	Consumer	Education philanthropy
Bespoke education	Content collaboration	Education poverty
Bite size videos	Contractors	Education v entertainment
Blender	Co-operation	e-learning
Blender Market	Co-production	Employee
Book publishing	Copyright	Employee benefits
Boss	Cornerstone	Employee numbers
Bounce rate	Corporate market	Employment status
Business model	Coupons	Equitable reward

## Node master set continued

Evergreen videos	Getting started	Interviews
Exchange value	Global audience	Intrinsic value
Expert collaboration	Global brands	Job description
Expertise	Global education	Job opportunities
Extrinsic reward	Global producers	Joint ventures
Facebook	Glug	Kajabi
Family life	Google Ads Grants	Khan Academy
Fashionable subjects	Google Analytics	Language skills
Female organisation	Gumroad	Latin American audience
Film production	Helping others	Lead generation
Financial aims	Hermit Craft	Learning anonymously
Financial security	Hobbies	Learning curve
Fluctuating income	Hologram	Learning styles
For profit	Home office	Legacy
For profit for good	Household income	Legal restrictions
Forum	Identity	Lifestyle
Foundation	Income from learning	Limiting behaviour
Founder contact	Informal v Formal	LinkedIn
Free content	Offline to online	Live education
Free downloads	Innovation	Live recording
Funder benefits	Internal v external producers	Live streaming
Future plans	International markets	Local communities
Gaming community	International pay	Love Crafts
Gamification	Instagram	Market dominance

## Node master set continued

Marketing	Organic growth	Platform communication
Masterclass	Other platforms	platform competition
Mentoring	Outdated content	Platform connectivity
Meritocracy	Own website	Platform Coops
Mobile phones	Ownership dilution	Platform culture
Moderators	Paid per video	Platform disasters
Multiple jobs	Partnership	Platform evolution
Mutual reward	Part-time work	Platform failure
Nature	Passive income	Platform growth
Network	Patreon	Platform invitation
New platforms	PechaKucha	Platform loyalty
Next generation learners	Peer respect	Platform management
Niche videos	People not views	Platform marketing
No office	Per minute	Platform owners
Non education videos	Performance data	Platform portfolio
Non teaching background	Performance reward	Platform processes
Not for profit	Personal development	Platform reputation
Ofcourse	Personal projects	Platform resources
Offline to online	Physical disability	Platform retained income
Older producers	Pictoplasma	Platform revenue
One Education	Pinterest	Platform segmentation
Online community	Platform changes	platform stability
Online presence	Platform charges	Platform support
Open system	Platform choice	Platform T&Cs

## Node master set continued

Platform training	Public Label Rights PLR	Self image
Platform trust	Publishing	Self promotion
Platform v Market place	Qualifications	SEO
Platform v publisher	Recruitment	Singing
Platforms inside platforms	Referral income	Sketchbook School
Platforms niche	Relative pay	Skills
Podcast	Religious faith	Slack software
Politics	Resource constraints	Social Enterprise
Pre made assets	Retired	Social media
Private groups	Return On Investment	Specialise
Producer as student	Revenue algorithm	Staff training
Producer community	Revenue forecast	Start-up
Producer competition	Revenue per view	Start-ups
Producer control	Revenue transparency	State education
Producer equity	Reward for referrals	Succession
Producer experience	Reward perception	Sustainability
Producer isolation	Reward streams	System boundary
Producer perception of users	Royalties	System changes
Producer presenting	Sabbatical	Teacher forums
Producer role	Salaries v royalties	Teaching basics
Production collaboration	Salary	Teaching offline
Production independence	SAS software as a service	Teacher forums
Production software	Schools	Teaching basics
Professional identity	Self employed	Teaching offline

## Node master set continued

Teaching v Practice	User helping user	Year started
Technology	User interaction	Younger producers
Technology access	User needs	Zoom
Theft	User rewards	
Thinkific	Values	
Third sector	Video games	
TicTok	Video length	
Time management	Video niche	
Time to produce	Video production	
Translation	Video promotion	
Twitch	Video quality	
Twitter	Vimeo	
University market	Virtual to physical	
Up front payment	Vocation	
Use Value	Volunteers	
User assessments	Webinar	
User benefits	WhatsApp	
User choice	White privileged	
User community	Wi-Fi access	
User culture	Work family	
User demand	Work office	
User details	working online and offline	
User disability	Working remotely	
User feedback	Working with colleagues	

Nodes in appendix (339) + anonymised (7) = Node master set 346 (see section 4.2.2)