

Staging responsible selves

How dramaturgical identity work shapes
situated practical rationalities



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Identity work

- Explaining organizational and social life in terms of ‘the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves’ (Brown, 2015, p. 21)
- Constructing and maintaining consistent self-narratives reflexively (e.g., Giddens, 1991)
- Drawing on discursive resources (e.g., Watson, 2008)

Identity work – a situated perspective?

How is identity work implicated in *everyday* processes of organizing involving...

...situated action and decision-making

(that call for situation-specific creative navigation rather than generic action-scripts)

...cross-pressures of conflicting discursive elements

(involving different epistemic and normative framings of situations)

...how does identity work shape situated practical rationalities?

Case

Private mid-sized company producing public healthcare services

- **Home care, personal assistance, family services**
- **Participants (n=20): frontline and middle managers**
 - Mostly practical nursing background (some registered nurses)
 - Work: complex coordination involving various stakeholders and interests
 - Business interests
 - Public service/municipal administration
 - Medicine
 - Precarious labor
 - Clients' lay interpretations
 - (Covid)

Context and Method

Ethnography

- 16 months, 300 hours
- Covid

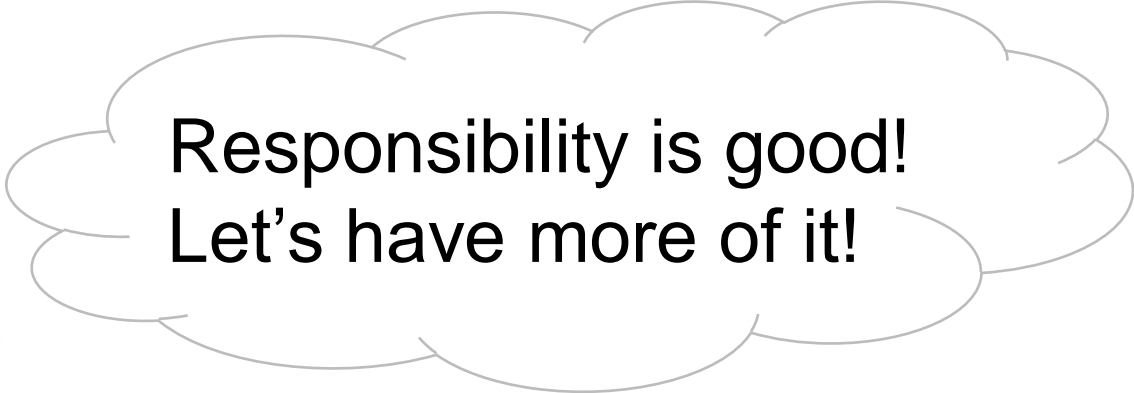
Initially interested in coping with contradictory normative influences. Responsibility and identity work ‘emerged’ through abductive analysis

- **Process perspective**

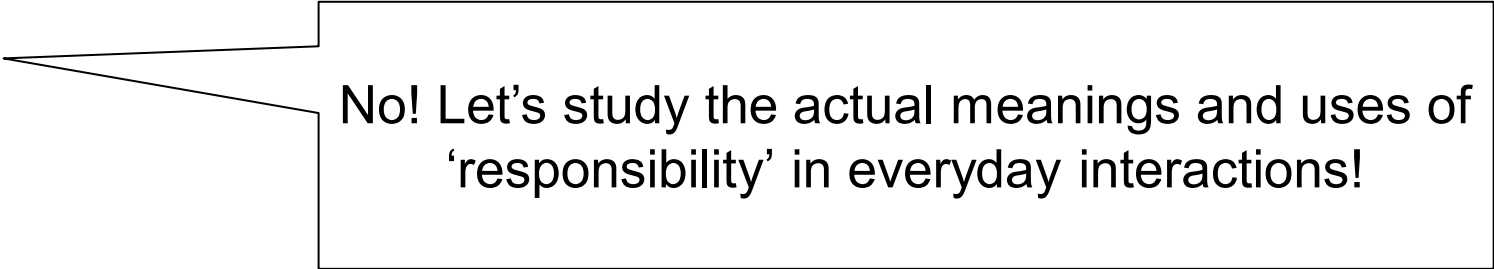
Two contributions

- Enacting a 'responsible selves' as a generic concern of identity work that defines identities in terms of particular events and situated agency
- 'Staging' as a form of identity work

Responsibility?



Responsibility is good!
Let's have more of it!



No! Let's study the actual meanings and uses of
'responsibility' in everyday interactions!

Responsibility and identity?

- **Causal Authorship component**
 - ‘X caused a car accident (event), because X was drunk-driving (subjective attribution)’
- **Normative component**
 - One *ought not* cause car accidents
 - Medical doctors *ought to* cure illnesses

‘the subject’s identity derives from the objects and events deemed to have been authored by her’ (Dan-Cohen, 1992, p. 963).

Also Giddens (1999)



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Findings

Responsible self was a key concern of participants

‘someone must take responsibility in [this company] and put one’s head on the guillotine’ -Elise

‘then we are doing it that way and I’ll take the responsibility! I’ll probably lose my head!’ -Victoria

How to establish and maintain a responsible self?

- **Act responsibly? Yes, but..**
 - often limited causal authorship compared to expectations
- **Work on identity narratives? Yes, but..**
 - outcomes attributed as one's responsibilities are evaluated based on particular events rather than narrative processes as such

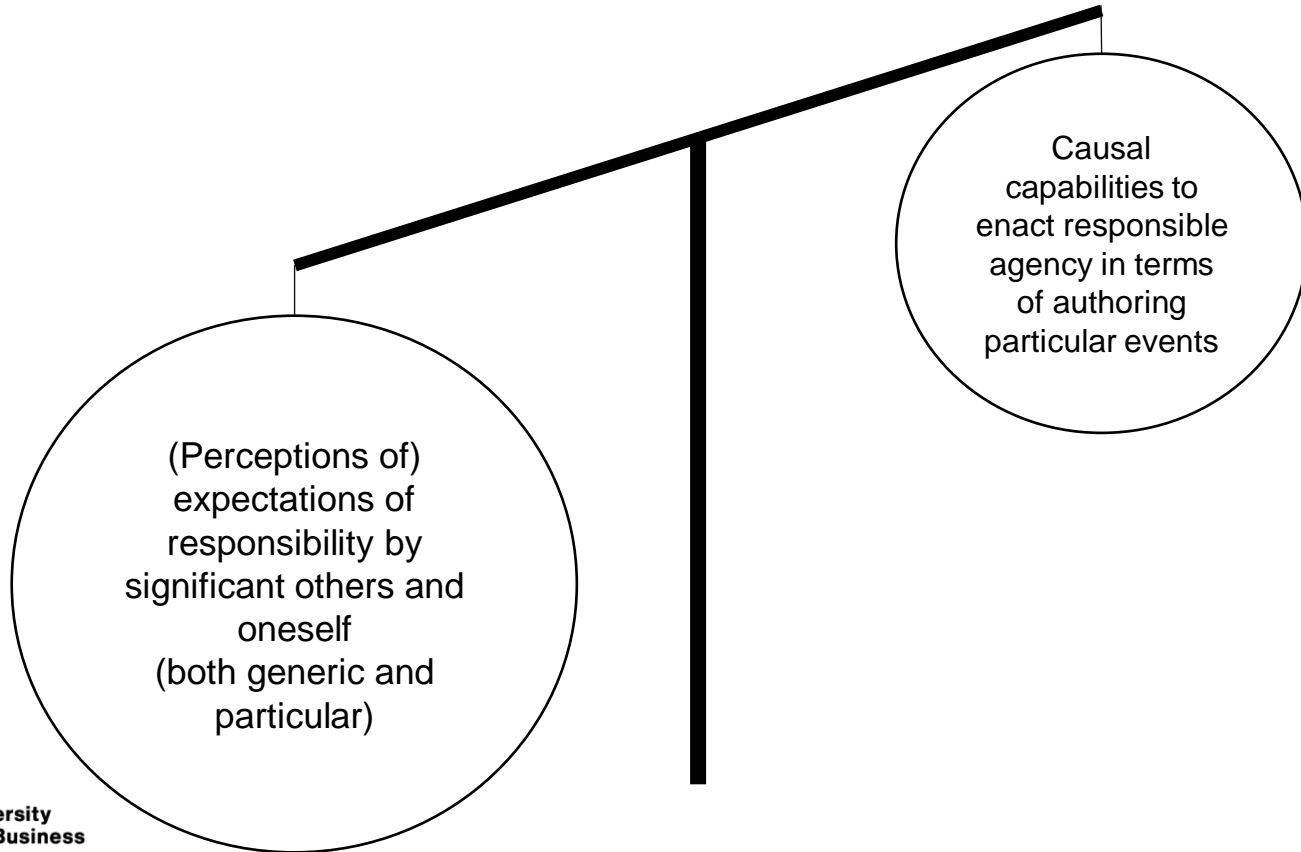
How to establish and maintain a responsible self

- Dramaturgical approach? (Goffman, 1956)
 - **Managing impressions? Yes, but..**
 - reality bites back

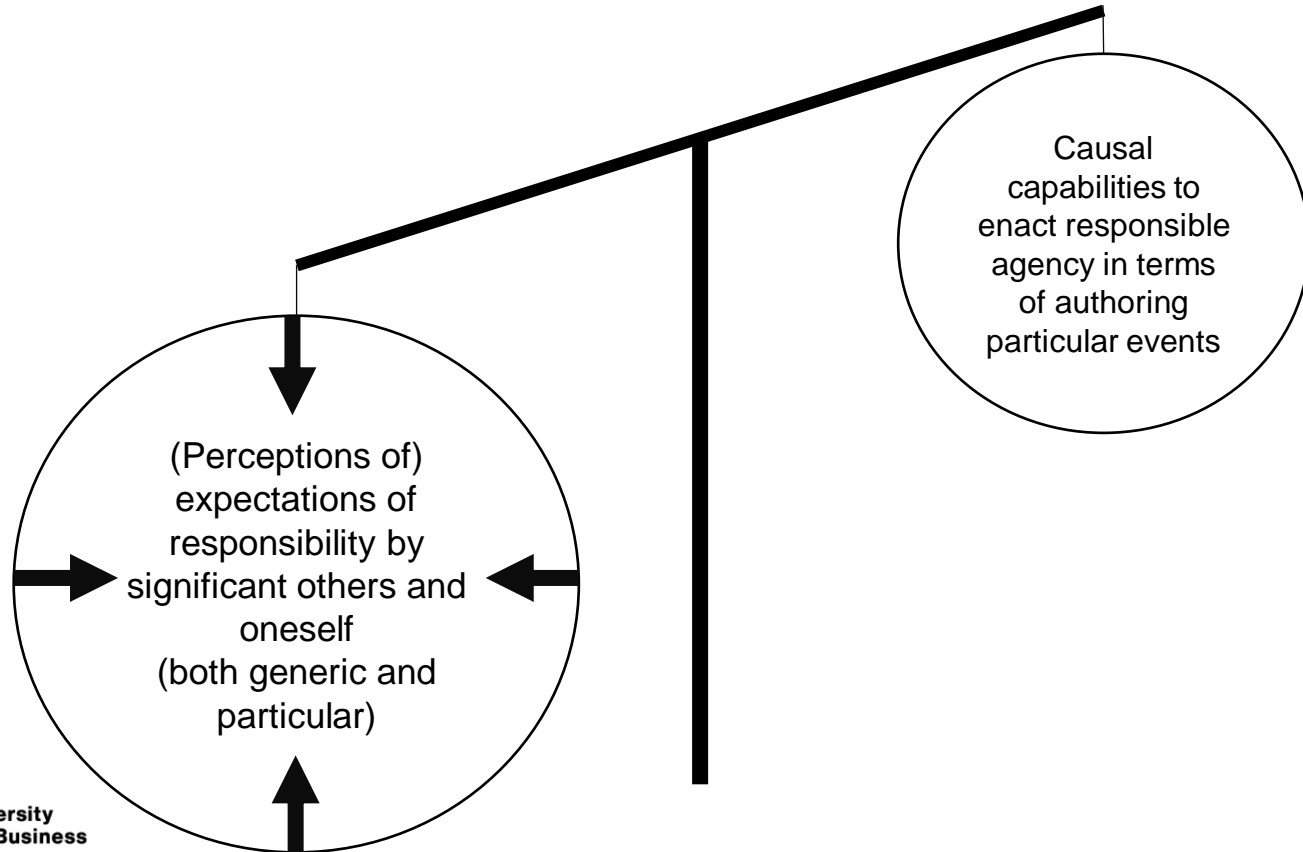
Staging responsible selves

situated manipulation of the immediate relational (involving social and material relations) environment to facilitate the possibilities of presenting a desired identity.

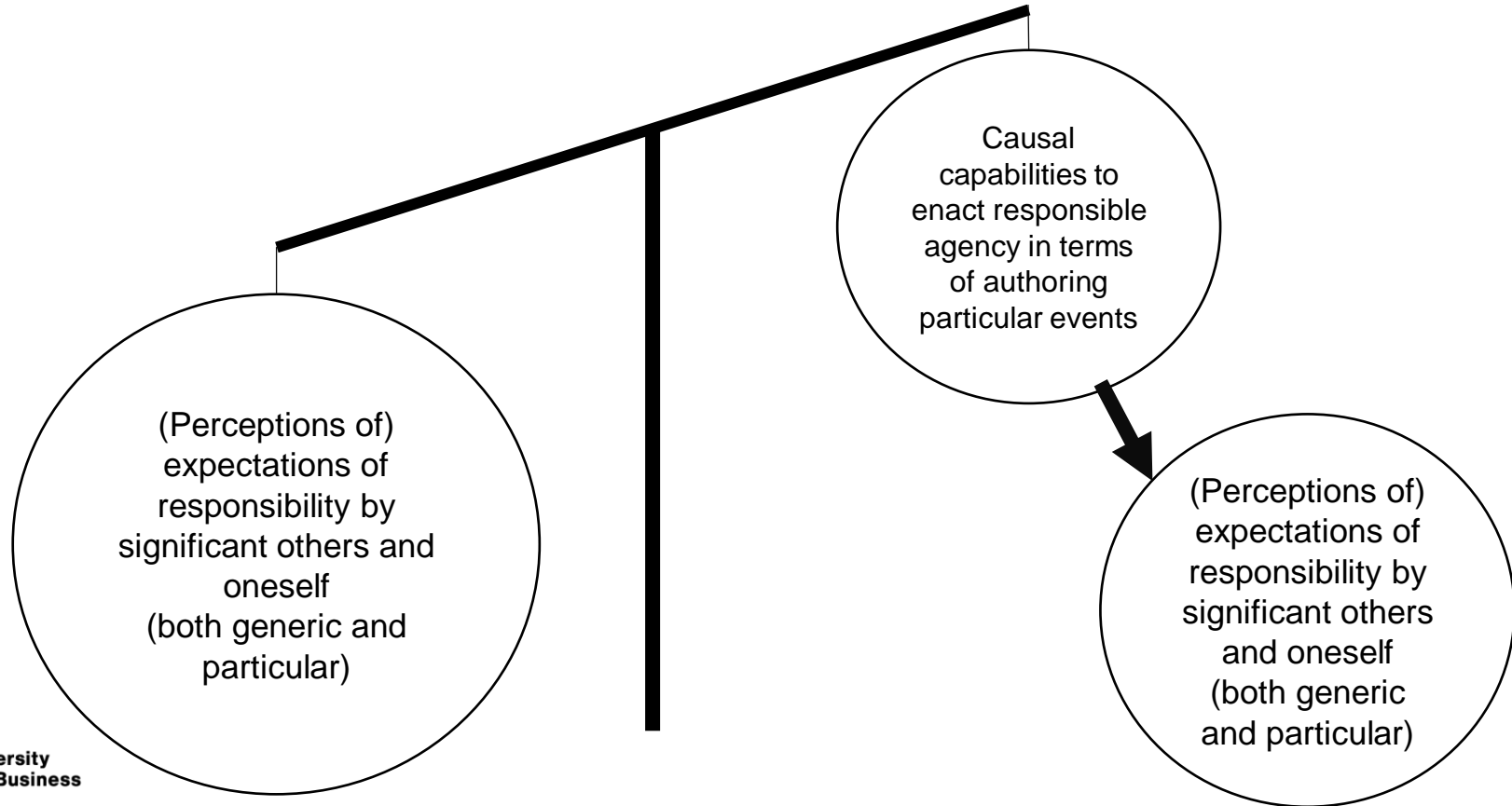
Expectations vs 'reality'



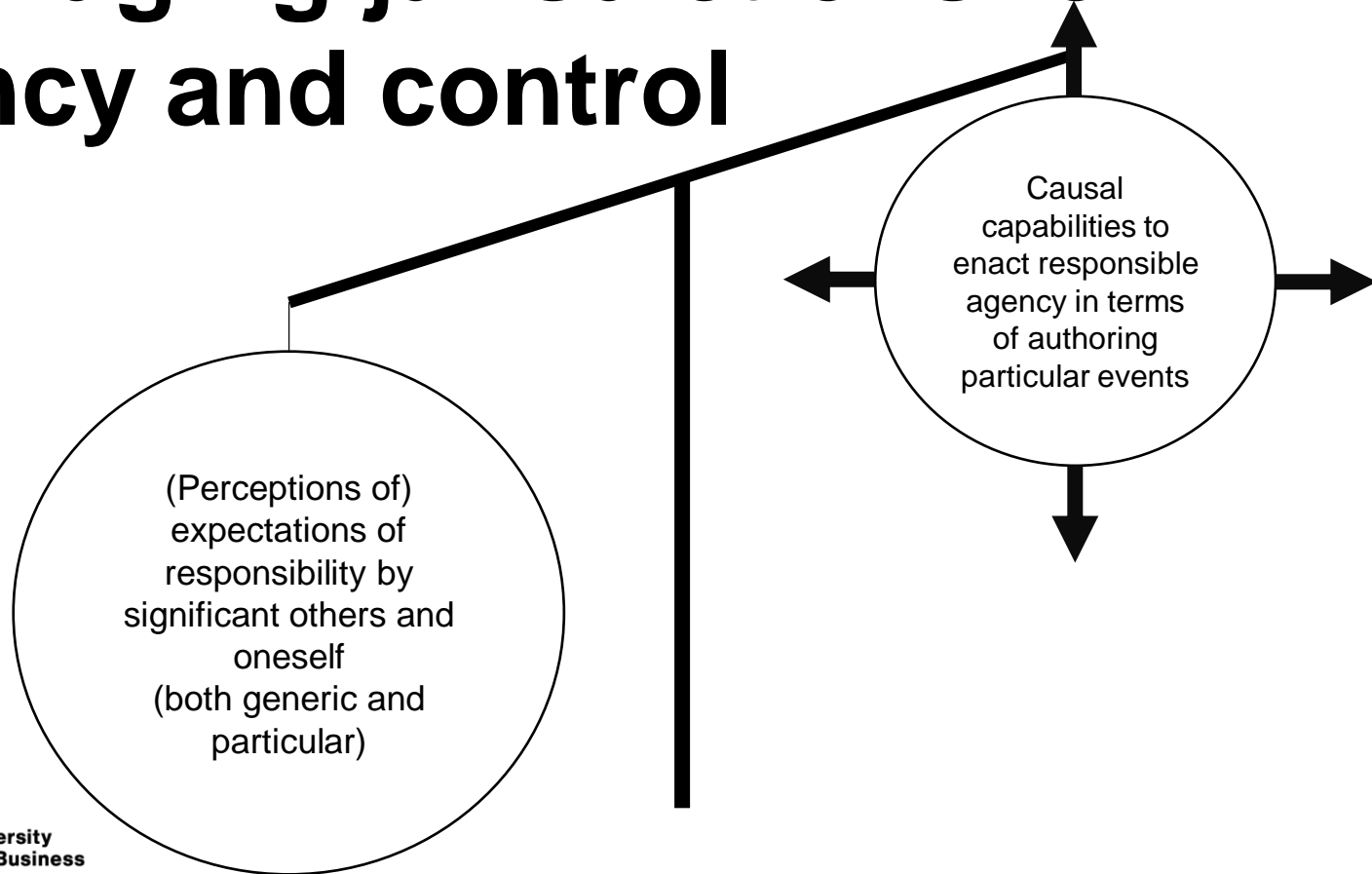
Defending reasonable attributions



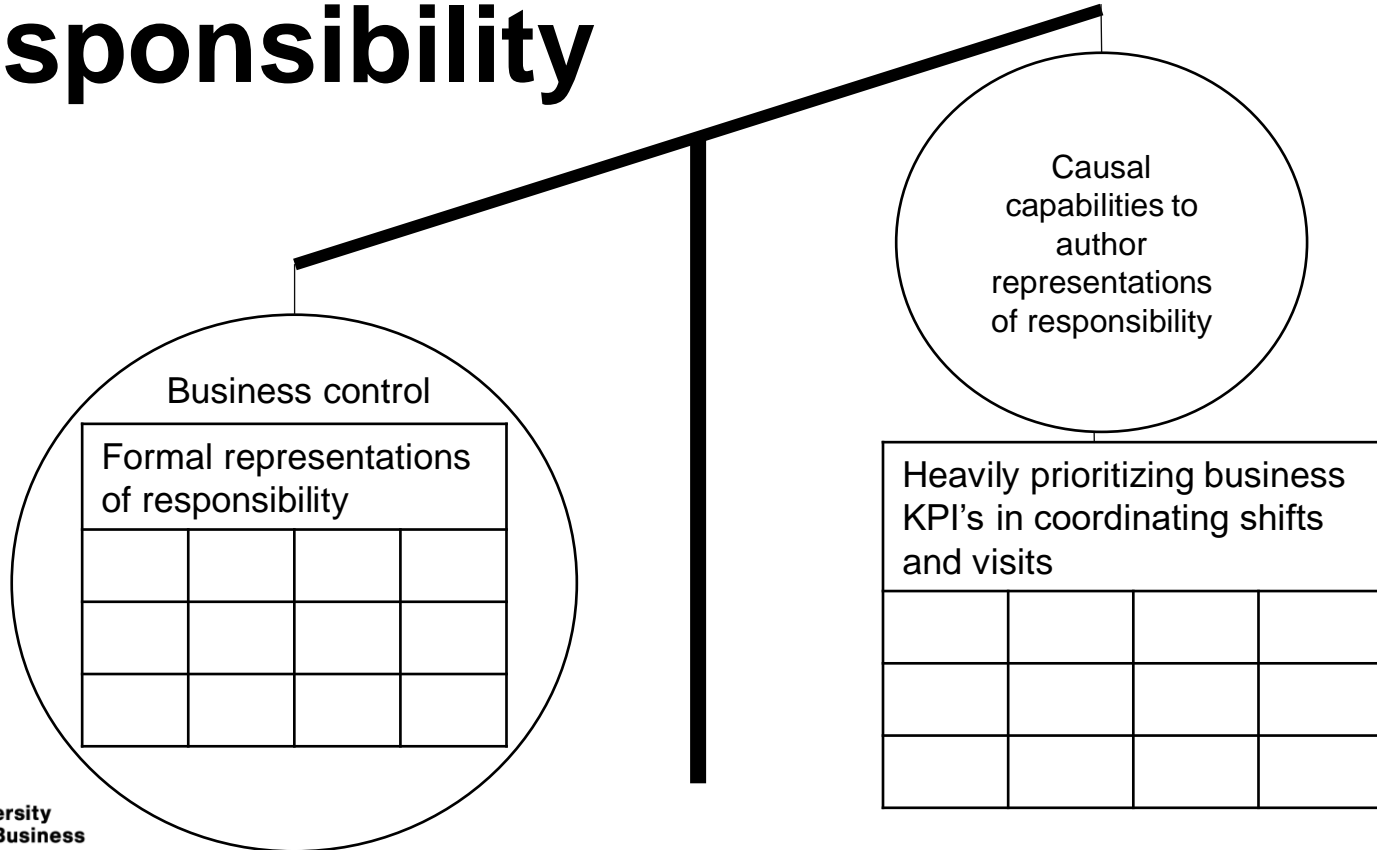
Pressing out attributions



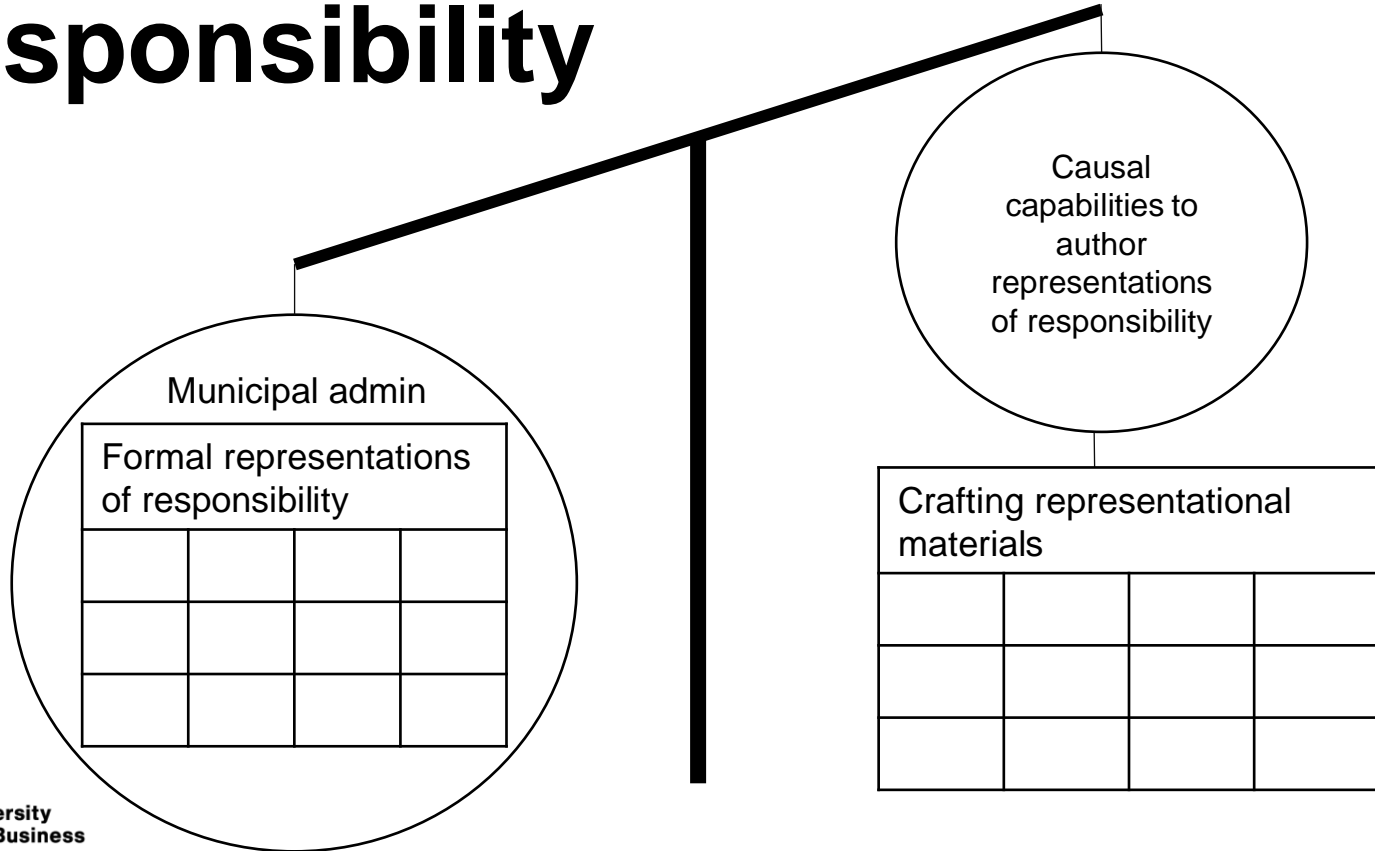
Leveraging jurisdictions for agency and control



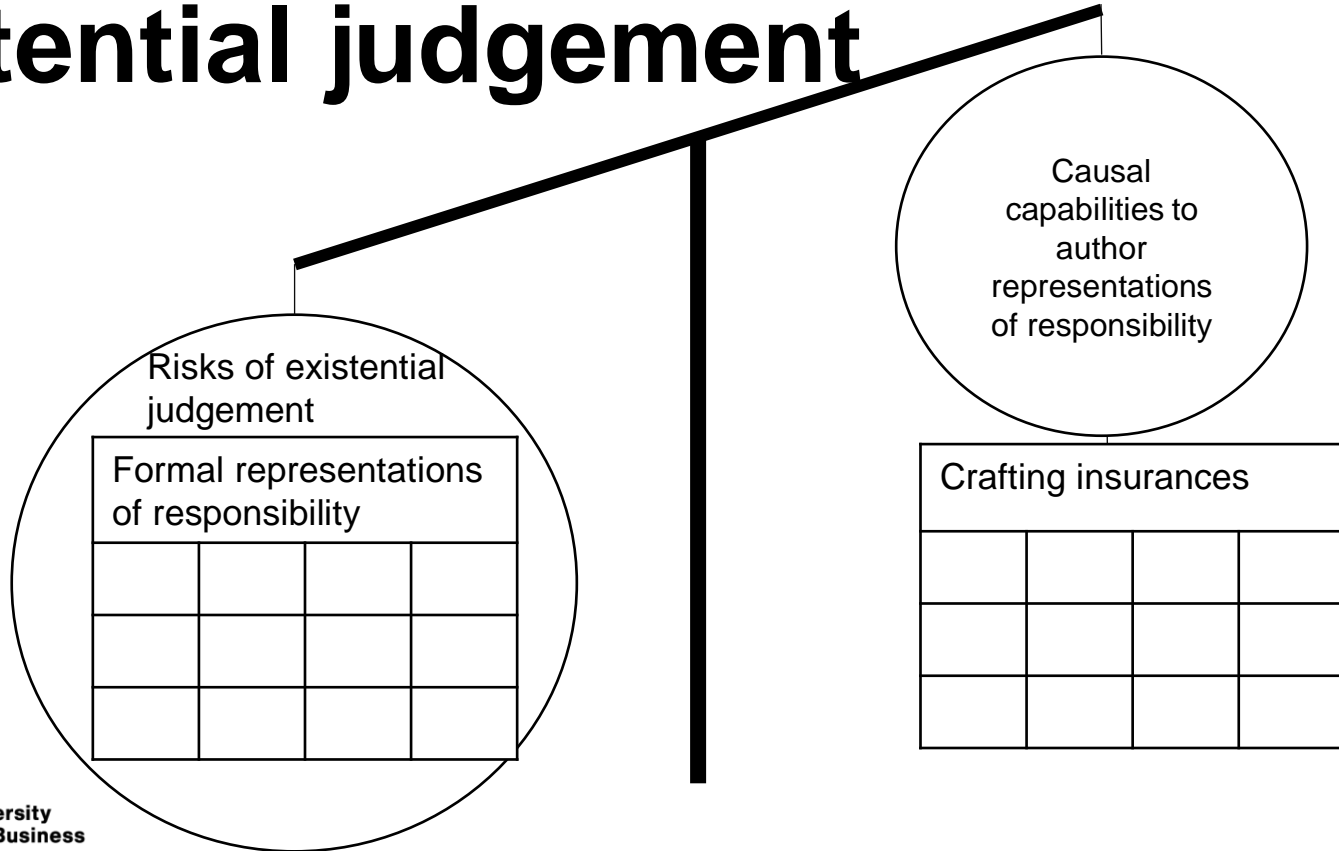
Managing representational stages of responsibility



Managing representational stages of responsibility



Crafting insurances for risks of existential judgement



Conclusions

- **Situated meanings of responsibility connect events and agency to professional and managerial identities**
- **Tactics of staging responsible selves have performative effects on situated practical rationalities of actors, as particular discursive resources might be useful for facilitating ‘responsible selves’ in various everyday situations and thus becoming vested interests to actors**

Thank you!