Organizing for Inconsistencies: On Organizational Conflict, Depression and Hypocrisy as Substitutes for Action

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How do organizations handle and act out inconsistent norms in their environment? It is claimed that organizations use structures, processes and outputs to reflect external inconsistencies, in order to acquire support and legitimacy in the environment. To this end organizations establish conflicting subunits and construct conflicting ideologies, they carry out depressive processes by exploiting problems and employing rationalistic decision procedures, and they produce hypocritical outputs in the shape of talk (the spoken and written word), decisions and material products. But these inconsistencies, which thus serve a useful purpose, also represent an obstacle to organizational action. Organizations solve this dilemma by decoupling the reflection of inconsistencies from organizational action. They achieve this in several ways: over time, issues, environments and subunits. But inconsistent environments, structures, processes and outputs interact and reinforce one another, thereby politicizing organizations, making them less apt to act but more apt to survive.

Organizations are dependent upon external support in some form, upon their environments willingness to exchange money, goods, services or people with them. Some organizations may use force to establish these exchanges, but most organizations must demonstrate congruence with the values and norms of their environment in order to receive support (Parsons, 1956). Even if the congruence may sometimes, and to some extent, be established by the organizations' own efforts to spread their own values to their environment, or to choose their environment, organizations often have to reflect values and norms within an environment which they cannot influence to any great extent.

The organizational aspects that reflect external values and norms can differ. Organizations may reflect external values in their output of products and services and thereby be able to sell them on markets. Selling is facilitated when the products conform, not only to the values of some buyers, but also to the norms of a larger part of the public i.e. if they are legal and legitimate (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). Legality and legitimacy are also important for organizational processes. Organizations may risk exter-

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nal support if they use methods of control, decision-making or production which do not conform to external values and norms; and they can gain external support if they do conform. Organizational structures, in particular formal structures presented by organizations to their environment, are often better understood as ways of signalling conformity to external values and norms, rather than ways of coordinating and controlling production (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Modern societies exhibit a great many rules on how organizations should be structured and how they should behave (Meyer, 1983), for example, via state intervention in markets and companies' interests of relations to states. This means that important parts of organizations' environments do not look at the organizations as black boxes where merely the output of goods and services is important and valued. Organizations become transparent, their structures and processes being open to observation from the outside. Structures and processes also become a sort of output from the organization which is important for external support.

The external values and norms that the organization has to reflect are sometimes consistent with each other. Important parts of the environment may have the same or at least compatible norms and demands on the organization; norms conflicting with these may be held by groups with no importance to the organization. Since consistent norms are easier to adhere to than inconsistent ones, organizations have reason to specialize, to place themselves in environments with consistent demands. They may be able to influence the norms of the environment, making them more consistent, or they may be able to choose environment, interacting with a "niche" of the external world within which the norms are consistent. Industrial companies' propaganda that profit-making should be their only goal, is an example of the first strategy; their search for market divisionalization along product or market lines is an example of the second strategy.

However, organizations sometimes have to, or choose to, face strong inconsistent norms even in areas which they consider to be vital to them. For example, companies are required, by powerful counterparts, not only to make high profits, but also to provide many jobs, good employment conditions and little pollution. Local and national governments cannot seek small and consistent niches in their environment, but have to handle demands from a wide array

of groups in their constituencies with mutually inconsistent demands.

The task of reflecting inconsistent norms provides a demand for organizational inconsistency. But this demand is contrary to another request that organizations often have to fulfill — the quest for collective action. Collective organizational action is for many organizations, such as industrial companies, another important instrument for gaining external support. By providing products that require such actions, they can compete with non-organizational action and by achieving efficient organizational actions, they can compete with other organizations.

This article describes how the quest for organizational inconsistency calls for organizational structure, process and output which are contrary to those functional for organizational action. It also describes how organizations handle those opposing demands. The discussion will be based on a series of empirical studies of Swedish municipalities (Brunsson & Jönsson, 1979; Brunsson, 1981; Brunsson & Rombach, 1982) — organizations that meet demands for reflecting inconsistencies as well as demands for producing organizational actions.

Reflecting Inconsistent Norms — by Structure, Process and Output

Organizations may reflect inconsistent norms in their environment by adapting their structure, their processes and their outputs. These different strategies will be described in the following.

Conflict Structure

The task of effective, organizational action is facilitated by organizational structures based on unity. In organizations which stress action, people are recruited into the organization since they are expected to share, or at least work towards common goals (March & Simon, 1958:118; Brown, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981). Such organizations also tend to produce strong common ideologies — organization members tend to share many perceptions and values concerning the organization and its environment (Argyris & Schön 1974; Starbuck, 1976; Jönsson & Lundin, 1977). Several management techniques are used for achieving a common ideology — definition of goals, policy statements, formulation of strategies and planning (Ansoff et al, 1976; Lorange & Vancil, 1977; Starbuck et al, 1978). Conflicting views as to what the situation is, and what should be done about it, are avoided by the use of hierarchy or other means of conflict resolution.

But if it is important to reflect inconsistencies, then conflict rather than unity becomes the structural principle. One way of reflecting inconsistencies is to create and maintain a conflictual structure. Organizations using this strategy recruit people who declare that they do not share the norms, values or perceptions that other members of the organization have. For example, organizations such as municipalities and states, recruit at least some of their top members by elections in which groups with different demands appoint "their" members. So called industrial democracy often implies that union members are recruited on to company boards just because they are expected to have different interests than the traditional board members. In order to secure external support, conflicts should be maintained after recruitment, and they should be exposed to the environment. An inconsistent ideological structure is needed: different and distinct organizational ideologies are constructed containing different descriptions and prescriptions for the organization and its environment. Subgroups, sometimes called parties, are often formed, each one proposing one ideology. The formation of subgroups is facilitated in several ways. Organization members may consider themselves representatives of different parts of the environment rather than of the focal organization. They may interact closely with members from their own subgroup, while contacts with members of other subgroups take place mainly in arenas which favour conflict and disfavour understanding, for instance public debates. By forming an "opposition" (to a ruling "majority") a group is created whose task is to criticize and propose alternatives, a task that is facilitated by the fact that the alternatives are not expected to be implemented.

Not only structures but also organizational processes look different when applied to the purpose of action compared to the purpose of reflecting inconsistencies. Action requires solutions rather than problems. But the task of reflecting inconsistencies provides organizations with an incentive to deal with problems rather than solutions. It is hard to find solutions which satisfy inconsistent norms. But talking about problems in a way that allows for different norms is an easier matter. Many issues become problems just because inconsistent norms are involved. Unsolvable problems are particularly attractive. When problems for logical or practical reasons lack solutions no one can claim that they should be solved. Instead they provide material for endless discussions and a great number of suggestions for inconsistent actions, which can be

Depressive Processes — Problem-Orientation and Rationalization

claimed to meet the various norms involved.

In Western Europe churches, political bodies, universities and some public sector organizations exhibit a strong interest in unsolvable, seemingly eternal problems. Examples are problems of drug abuse, criminality, death and truth. Some of the organizations are even constructed for the purpose of dealing with such problems. Traditionally, public sector organizations have handled a great number of problems while market-oriented companies in the private sector have concentrated on solutions.

Problems and solutions can also be the starting-point for different kinds of decision processes and these processes may in turn be adapted to the tasks of action or inconsistency reflection. Organizational actions benefit from decision processes which are irrational and solution-oriented. Dealing with one or a few alternatives, describing a biased set of positive consequences for the action to be carried out, or adapting goals to this alternative rather than the other way round, are all methods of reducing potential uncertainty and thereby instruments for mobilizing organizational action (Brunsson 1982). So organizations seeking to achieve organizational action can be expected to avoid decision processes which follow the norms of rational decision-making.

On the other hand, rational decision processes provide good opportunities for reflecting inconsistencies. Almost all prescriptions for rational decision-making are useful. Formulating problems, explicit statements of objectives, considerations of several alternatives, descriptions of both positive and negative consequences and evaluation of alternatives are all activities in which conflicts and different ideologies can be made clear. Rational decision processes may even be a method of discussing and defining the inconsistenies which should be handled. For organizations which deal with inconsistencies, rational decision processes are attractive processes. They are also easy to combine with an interest in difficult problems.

The attractiveness of decision rationality may be one explanation of the great interest and efforts that are given to budget processes in many organizations, although the budget process has been found to have little influence on resource allocation (Olsen, 1970; Brunsson & Rombach, 1982; Jacobsson, 1984). Budget processes create advocates for different interests who, in turn, produce descriptions and arguments for a great number of actions. Since the process deals with the future, not the past, there are less restrictions on the number of actions that can be discussed.

Problem-orientation and decision rationality constitute depressive processes. The organization perceives problems without solutions and rationality produces much uncertainty — both descriptive, about what the facts and future look like, and normative, what is good or bad. Decision rationality aims at realism; it easily produces realistic doubts about chances of controlling events or realistic convictions that the chances are small. Such pessimism is a typical trait of depressed people (Seligman, 1975). Problem-orientation and rationality nurtures criticism, thus increasing the awareness that things are wrong and should be changed. The same is true for conflictual structures. So if the processes of problem handling and rationalization are combined with conflictual organizational structures, the risk of depression increases. However all these characteristics make it difficult to actually mobilize people for specific actions which would change organizational behaviour or results. This situation is a good breeder of frustration and low self-confidence. Myths of inefficiency and incompetence spread easily, which may further reduce the capacity for action. Depression in itself provides an obstacle to action.

Action is facilitated by the opposite kind of processes, solution-orientation and irrationality. These processes breed enthusiasm (Brunsson, 1985). Combined with unity they reduce criticism and lead to strong self-confidence. They facilitate the achievement of change actions. They also reduce the ability to observe that changes are needed. So even if no changes are made, people do not necessarily become frustrated. In such a situation myths of efficiency and competence are easily propagated. In short, organizing processes for organizational action promotes organizational enthusiasm, while organizing processes for reflecting inconsistencies promotes organizational depression.

Organizational actions are often prepared, initiated and propelled by talk — the spoken word — within the organization (Pfeffer, 1981) and by decisions. Talk and decisions are used for mobilizing and coordinating internal actions. In order to serve as action initiators they should be consistent — the talk and decisions should describe the action that they propose.

But the instruments of talk and decisions can also be used for external purposes — for reflecting norms of the organizational environment. They are then used as ideological outputs of the organization, beside its output of products. By talking about themselves and others to external audiences, organizations are able to describe who

Hypocritical Output — Talk, Decisions and Products

they are and what their environment looks like, what and whom they like and dislike, what they try to do, what they actually do, why they succeed or fail. Sometimes this talk is presented in formal documents like goal and policy statements, committee reports or annual reports. Sometimes it is presented via public debates, in mass media interviews, in advertisements for individual products or in discussions with individual clients. Similarly, decisions intended for external audiences may serve as indications of the organizations' preferences, decisiveness, ability or actions. Such decisions are often presented to the public through the mass media or official minutes.

So organizations can produce three outputs in order to reflect external norms — talk, decisions and products. Organizations may reflect inconsistent norms by creating inconsistencies within these outputs. Reflecting inconsistent norms by inventing and producing inconsistent products is sometimes possible (Cyert & March, 1963, pp. 117-118) but may be difficult, awkward and expensive when the products result from complicated organizational actions in which each one requires one consistent organizational ideology. Organizations dealing with inconsistent norms have strong incentives to look for outputs which are easier to make inconsistent than products. Talk and decisions are such outputs.

Different talk may be produced by different organization members in, for instance, public debates. It may sometimes be possible to produce different talk for different parts of the environment. Different and internally inconsistent decisions can be made by different parts of the organization or at different points in time. The easiness of producing inconsistencies in talk and decisions requires, of course, that they are not followed by corresponding actions. This hints at an additional method of generating inconsistencies.

The use of three kinds of output — talk, decisions and products — provides an important possibility. Organizations may reflect inconsistent norms by systematically creating inconsistencies between talk, decisions and products. They can talk in consistence with one group of norms, decide according to another and produce according to a third. Organizations dealing with inconsistencies have reason to be hypocritical. When other methods of reflecting inconsistencies are difficult to use, they should even be expected to be hypocritical.

It is easy to find examples of organizational hypocrisy among organizations for which reflection of inconsistencies is important. An obvious one is the investment plan-

ning of a city government described by Brunsson (1981).
In this city there was a strong demand for large in-
vestments from the voters, but a lack of money for realiz-
ing more than one of them. One year, before the public
elections, the leading politicians made a priority list of 44
investments which was topped by the building of a
schoool. In the election campaign the politicians widely
discussed the school claiming that it would be built as soon
as possible. A few weeks after the election the same politi-
cians made a new priority list. There the school was rank-
ed as next to last. The last project was one that had been
formally decided before the elections. One month later
the budget for the following year was decided, but none of
these projects were included; instead two of the top and
two of the bottom projects on the last priority list were in-
cluded in the budget. But during the following year just
one of these projects was actually carried out — a new
Town Hall was built. So during a period of less than one
year and in spite of scarce resources, the organization suc-
ceeded in supporting a great number of investment proj-
ects each reflecting different interests, some of them by
talk (priority lists, the election campaign), some of them
by decisions (isolated or in the budget) and one of them by
production (the Town Hall).

Swedish municipalities have recently met demands of
producing more service without using extra tax money.
Rombach (1984) found that the municipalities he studied
had discussed various efforts in which to make their pro-
duction more efficient in the future or, sometimes even in
the past, but he found that no such efforts were actually
carried out. Instead taxes and services were increased. It
seems that these municipalities handled the demand for
cutbacks and efficiency by talk and making some budget
decisions and meeting the demand for more service by ac-
tual production.

It often seems easier for socialist governments to carry
out policies that are considered to be conservative (such as
fighting inflation by reducing wage increases) than for
conservative governments and vice versa. The most exten-
sive socialization of Swedish industry was made by a
liberal government which came to power in the late seven-
ties after 44 years of socialist government. Maybe such
paradoxes can be explained by the need for hypocrisy —
consistencies between talk, decisions and products on
highly controversial issues may endanger external sup-
port while inconsistencies may secure it. Production in
one direction is facilitated by a compensating ideology in
another direction.

The generation of inconsistencies within and between talk, decisions and products does not require that individual organization members be inconsistent. Inconsistencies easily arise from organizations where different groups or departments are, to some extent, independent. Different groups or departments may participate in the different output activities. In political assemblies each group of representatives speaks for the interests they represent. Inconsistencies between talk and decisions may also arise from compromises.

The budget process again provides a good example of how inconsistencies can be created. It stimulates an intense debate between advocates and guardians about what should or should not be done. The budget decision is a compromise and many budget decisions are not implemented. Sometimes the advocates succeed in doing more with the money budgeted and sometimes they do not succeed in spending all the money they have obtained in the budget process.

To sum up, inconsistent norms can be reflected by conflictual organizational structures, by depressive processes and by hypocritical outputs. All these characteristics are opposed to those that are appropriate for enabling the organization to achieve organizational action. Actions benefit from consistencies rather than inconsistencies, from unity structures, from processes creating enthusiasm for the organization and its actions and from consistencies between talk, decisions and products. How, then, can organizations combine action and reflection of inconsistencies? This will be discussed in the following section.

Inconsistencies and Organizational Action

The Dilemma of Politics versus Action

The two strategies for gaining external support — reflecting inconsistencies and acting — that were described in the previous section evidently lead to conflicting demands upon organizations. This poses no problem for organizations that are extreme enough to use one strategy only. If organizations do not meet inconsistent norms in their environment, they do not need inconsistencies in structure, processes and outputs. Organizations, such as parliaments, which do not undertake complicated and difficult organizational actions, do not need consistency.

But most organizations are not in the extreme situation of only reflecting inconsistencies or of only producing organizational action. Instead they have to do both in

order to gain external support. For example, local govern-
ments are supposed to reflect conflicts in the community
and to run the town. So called industrial democracy
means that companies shall not only manufacture prod-
ucts that require strong coordination, but also reflect in-
consistent demands from owners, employees and the
state.

Such organizations face a dilemma — organizational
characteristics that are useful for one task are harmful for
another. They are exposed to claims of breeding both con-
flict and consensus, of running depressive and en-
thusiastic processes and being both hypocritical and con-
sistent in combining talk, decisions and products. The
quest for action produces a need for integration, for con-
sensus and consistency. In an inconsistent environment
reflection is achieved by reproducing the inconsistencies
within the organization, or in other words, by engaging in
politics; this gives rise to dissolution rather than integra-
tion. If the dissolving force is strong the organization
becomes more like an arena where other organizations
and individuals interact. So the problem for these
organizations is how to produce both consistency and in-
consistency, how to be both integrated and dissolved. This
is a true dilemma — there are no solutions, only ways of
dealing with the problem.

Decoupling Politics and Action

The dilemma of politics versus action can be dealt with
by decoupling. By separating dissolution from integra-
tion, both can be achieved by the organization. Studies of
local governments reveal four methods of structural
decoupling. Integration and dissolution can be decoupled
over time, over issues, over environments and over dif-
ferent organizational subunits. In the following, these
methods will be described by examples from Runtown, a
Swedish local government, whose major actions and inac-
tions, ideologies and organizational structures were
studied over an eight-year period (Brunsson, 1981).

Decoupling over time: When dissolution and integration
are separated over time, the organization responds to the
quest for politics in some periods; it then turns into an
arena where the conflicts between individuals, parties or
suborganizations can be exposed. Organizational ideol-
ogies are inconsistent. There is no common and consis-
tent ideology such as an agreed-upon policy which can be
used as a basis for decisions and actions. Instead the in-
consistencies of members' perceptions and values are
strong and made evident by intense debates and voting.
Such conditions make the organization highly represen-
tative; it can exhibit a wide array of opinions within the en-

vironment. But the situation does not provide much capacity for undertaking organizational action. Talk and decisions are substituted for actions.

During other periods the organization responds to the quest for action. Disagreements are suppressed whenever they threaten to interfere with organizational actions. A consistent common ideology is sustained and used for reaching agreements. The willingness to compromise is considerable; instead of voting, "sounding out" (Olsen, 1972) is the most common method of conflict resolution. The organization becomes strong in action but weak in representation.

Runtown used this method. During the seventies it went through a couple of cycles from high integration to high dissolution. The dissolved periods were periods of inaction; a lot of organizational actions were requested but almost none were carried out. Decisions about organizational actions were not implemented. Inconsistent decisions were made, for example both to construct a building, and then not to — an elegant way of representing different opinions but not a good starting point for action. The paralysis of action made the members of the organization highly frustrated. In the integrated periods organizational actions were started or continued but new successive frustration emerged — the opportunities to demonstrate conflicts were considered to be too few by the politicians. Thus, both situations contained strong incentives for their own termination.

Decoupling over issues: Another method for separating politics and action is to differentiate between issues. Some issues are used by the organization for exposing conflicts. Other issues are handled in an integrated way. Issues that do not involve organizational actions can be treated in the political way. A local government can produce conflict and debates around issues such as how much money to pay in welfare subsidies or how high taxes and charges should be. In these kinds of issues there is seldom any problem in achieving what is finally decided — in local government a majority vote is normally sufficient.

If these issues are used for satisfying the quest for politics, other issues involving complicated and difficult organizational actions can be handled in a more integrated way, which is often necessary for making the actions possible to carry out. City planning is an example of such an issue where agreement is strived for by the use of long investigation procedures which provide arenas for internal discussion and conviction (Brunsson & Jönsson, 1979). In Runtown, the expansion of the town had to wait

for seven years; at every point in time there was a majority for expansion in one direction, but the majority shifted several times. Only when no further shifts were expected (as almost everyone agreed), the action started.

Decoupling over environment: The organization can also choose between dissolution and integration in relation to what kind of environment with which it interacts. When negotiating with relatively highly integrated organizations, such as industrial companies, local governments in Sweden form special committees whereby meetings are not public and the usual political conflicts and debates are supposed not to be displayed (Kroksmark, 1983). At the other extreme, when confronting the unorganized electorate, for example just before elections, the organization tends to produce more inconsistency. If the electorate becomes more organized, for example by forming strong pressure groups, the organizations may react by also becoming more integrated. Occupations and protests from organized groups in Swedish municipalities have been met by unity amongst politicians and strong reliance on the expert arguments of civil servants.

Decoupling over subunits: Finally, organizations can separate politics and actions within their organizational structure. Certain parts of the organization can reflect external norms by talk and decisions while others produce action. The political suborganizations are supposed to expose conflicts by discussions and decisions. The action-oriented or administrative suborganizations are organized in a way that facilitates action; unity is important and conflicts and ideological inconsistencies are avoided. The political-administrative organization is a common, and sometimes effective, way of reflecting both inconsistencies and producing action.

The border between political and administrative units may exist between boards and top management on one hand and the "technical core" (Thompson, 1967) on the other, or between politicians and the staff of officers. However, the distinction between political and administrative units may also be a matter of degree rather than being absolute. For instance, local governments in Sweden embrace several suborganizations with different degrees of dissolution. The City Council is usually the most political suborganization — here the different opinions are made clear. Meetings are therefore open to the public. The government, or the special committees under it, can then be more action-oriented. Their meetings are therefore normally closed.

Political and administrative suborganizations can be

highly independent of each other. Even if the suborganizations contain the same people, their different functions may make people behave differently within them. For example, in Runtown some actors voted differently on the same issues in the government and in the council elections. In the government election, where the actors felt that integration and action were important, they agreed on certain decisions. They voted against the same decisions at the council election since they felt that the function of the council debate and voting was to expose conflicts.

Independence between political and administrative suborganizations may also mean that political decisions are not followed by corresponding administrative actions. This makes the representative task of politicians easier as the investment planning in Runtown showed. Furthermore, if administrative actions are independent of political debates and decisions, they can be chosen according to the actors' own preferences which facilitates their achievement — like the new Town Hall in Runtown.

Organizations sometimes face problems when trying to decouple decisions in the political subunits from actions in the administrative ones. In addition to demands for inconsistency a claim for consistency is sometimes added. Important parts of the environment may demand some consistency between decision and action. The political subunits are supposed to accept responsibility for administrative actions and to explain their appropriateness to the public so that people will accept them. The politicians themselves may want their decisions to be realized though action. The administrators may want their actions to be described in decisions. This combination of a political-administrative structure and a quest for consistency between the subsystems, seems to be quite common in practice and a vast amount of research has been spent on describing and prescribing it (Niskanen, 1973; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Bardach, 1977; Baier et al, 1982).

When this consistency requirement is imposed on the political-administrative structure, the structure in itself no longer provides an obvious solution to the dissolution-integration problem. The same action should be the object for exposing conflicts and should be carried out. However, the problem can be handled by adjusting the interaction within the political-administrative structure. The next subsection will discuss how politics and actions can be facilitated by different designs of interaction processes between political and administrative subunits.

Implementation or legitimation: In principle, the interaction between a political suborganization and an administrative one can be of two kinds. When the initiative is with the political subunit — which then makes decisions prescribing the actions of the administration — the interaction can be called a process of implementation. When the administration has the initiative and tries to convince the politicians to make decisions describing the actions that the administration has completed, or wants to complete, the process can be called legitimation. For both implementation and legitimation, the political decision is the bridge between the two suborganizations; in implementation the decision is supposed to be the starting-point and in legitimation it is supposed to be the result.

When the political and administrative suborganizations behave according to their roles, (the political one displaying conflict and the administrative one unity), the effects of the two processes become different. They fulfill the reflection and the action tasks to different extents. Implementation is a process which gives the political subunit room for much discussion and for rationalistic decision processes whereby different ideologies, alternatives, arguments and disagreements can be displayed. Nevertheless, the chances of actually initiating action in this way are relatively small. If the administration does not want to carry out the action, it often has strong means with which to resist the decision; there is ample evidence in the implementation literature that political decisions are often not a strong enough basis for administrative actions (Derthick, 1972; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Mayntz, 1976; Baier et al, 1982; Brunsson, 1985).

Legitimation leaves less room for reflecting inconsistencies in the political subunit since it is clear from the beginning which action should be described in the decision. Legitimation tends, instead, to produce agreement. And there is no problem in convincing those who actually carry out, or have carried out the action.

So, from an action point of view, legitimation should be preferred to implementation. But legitimation is not a good method for reflecting inconsistencies. In other words, implementation constitutes more of a political behaviour than legitimation but is less apt to lead to action.

Implementation is a process response to the dissolving force and legitimation to the integrative one. Therefore, organizations can be expected to use the implementation method when the action considered is simple and easy to bring about and control, for example the payment of

money. They can also be expected to use the implementation method when action is not considered important or when action is not desired at all; when inconsistency between decision and action is actually sought. Organizations can be expected to use legitimation methods when they consider it important to achieve actions and when the actions are organizational actions which are difficult to initiate and control.

If the interaction methods have these different purposes, they can explain some observations in the implementation literature. The quest for reflecting inconsistencies by hypocrisy may provide at least one explanation as to why many decisions in political suborganizations are never implemented or why implementation is substantially different from what was decided. Indeed many external observers, such as researchers, probably find this more problematic than the politicians themselves. The quest for action can explain why there are not more "implementation problems" — why many actions are achieved via legitimation rather than via implementation.

Thus, organizations can handle the dilemma of being both political and mobilized for action by adjusting organizational structures and processes. However, organizations might also react by trying to evade the dilemma — by concentrating on either action or politics as their instrument for gaining external support. The more fundamental issue of how organizations orient themselves towards politics or action is the topic of the following section.

The Dynamics of Politicization

The extent to which organizations depend on actions, politics, or both, as instruments for gaining external support, may change over time as the result of external forces or the organizations' own efforts. When organizations face the dilemma of being both political and acting, they may be particularly interested in trying to affect their own position towards purer forms. Incentives exist for organizations to become both action-oriented and political. One incentive for highly political organizations to become action-oriented is the search for happiness — to avoid the depressive character of politics. But the incentives for action-oriented organizations to become more political seem to be stronger. Many organizations in Western Europe are in the process of politicization. Modern institutionalized societies produce an increasing

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number of inconsistent rationalized myths about legitimate organizational structures and processes, whilst criteria of efficiency become relatively less important (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In highly institutionalized environments, striving for efficiency in producing material outputs gives less legitimacy and support than reflecting diverse norms from various external groups.

Companies depend less and less upon traditional markets for resources and more and more upon state agencies and political bodies (Hernes, 1978). In times of economic trouble, companies may enhance their chances of survival by linking themselves to the state. However, the state is a highly political organization displaying inconsistent norms, and these should be reflected if the linkage is to succeed.

In addition, the striving for survival may help to explain politicization. Organizations that specialize in reflecting niches of the environment containing consistent norms, in order to be efficient actors, become vulnerable — the niches may disappear; giving rise to extreme claims for quick changes of production equipment, ideology and products. Organizations concentrating on reflecting inconsistencies are generalized rather than specialized, covering wider areas and more aspects of the environment. Even if some aspects become obsolete, other aspects will survive. Problems often live longer than solutions. The vulnerability of these organizations appears to be lower. Organizations that are good at reflecting inconsistencies, such as universities, churches and states, have survived for centuries. Organizations that are more specialized and more competent in achieving efficient action, such as traditional industrial companies, have very short average lives (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1981). If survival is considered important— and it often is for large modern companies — there seems to be strong reason for politicization, even if this leads to the dilemma of balancing politics and action.

One further reason why politicization occurs easily is that the structural nature of the highly political organizations and its processes and products interact stongly with each other and with the environment of the organization, reinforcing each other (see figure 1). As described above, inconsistent norms in the organizational environment produced specific responses in organizational structures, processes and outputs. Nevertheless this may not be the only direction of a politicization process. Any circle in figure 1 can be considered as the starting-point as described in the following sample of hypotheses.
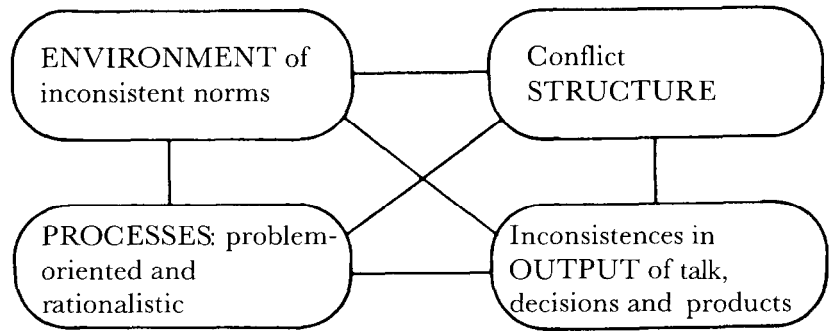
Figure 1. The inter-action of political characteristics of organizations.

In organizations which have, for a long time, been highly political, the conflict structure can be expected to be a strong initiator of further politicization. States and municipalities must, according to their constitutions, be led by representatives and the representatives have traditionally been representatives of different groups, interests and norms. This structure can easily cause the organization to reflect inconsistent norms corresponding to the different peer groups. The inconsistent structures produce political processes and outputs.

But this does not mean that the structure was once created from the outside, with no relation to the other characteristics. Only historical research can provide answers as to whether more evident and intense conflicts among different groups, and hence more inconsistent norms, produced a clearer conflict structure at the time of the democratic reforms, or whether other forces were crucial.

Another hypothesis for explaining the politicization of state and municipalities is that problem orientation is fundamental — these organizations have little control over their agenda (Kingdon, 1984) and therefore end up with a series of unsolvable problems which can only be reflected by ideological outputs and by conflict structures.

Similarly, the introduction of various forms of industrial democracy in Western Europe during recent decades may have several explanations. The conflict structures that these reforms implied may have been initiated or accepted by companies which have faced highly inconsistent demands within their environment, perhaps because they had themselves come to define their environment in broader terms (including for instance workers' health and working conditions). The companies may also

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have met with unsolvable problems, for example simultaneous demands for profitability, maintenance of jobs and increasing wages while demand was on the decline. Whether the conflict structures were introduced for these reasons or not, once established they probably reinforced both the incentives and the capabilities for dealing with more inconsistent environments and difficult problems, and for producing ideological and hypocritical outputs.

Although the relations between the different aspects of political organizations can be assumed to be strong, no automaticy should be taken for granted. Organizations with discordant qualities exist and organizations may resist forces of politicization. A conflict structure can be avoided even in the presence of an environment of inconsistent norms. This is the strategy of the one-party state — but this strategy may also be the reason why such a state has to use force to survive. Organizations may also avoid environments with inconsistent demands, seeking niches of specialization, for instance by joining a segment of society in which politicians, public administration and enterprises support each other, arguing and acting together towards other segments. For a member of such an "iron triangle" (Hernes, 1978) it may be possible to maintain necessary links with the state without politicization.

In the long run, existence of both action and inconsistency reflection as simultaneous aspects of organizations can be assumed to be affected by the importance of the same aspects in society at large. Modern society is extremely dependent on actions which can only be realized by organizations. Reflection of inconsistencies may have the important function of producing symbols (Olsen, 1983; March & Olsen, 1984). Organizations that reflect inconsistencies dramatize people's inconsistent values and may, in this way, reduce tension within and between individuals and groups, just like legal proceedings or internal organizational stories (Arnold, 1935; Martin et al, 1983).

Organizations that specialize in reflecting inconsistencies, such as parliaments at different levels, and organizations specializing in organizational action, may be complementary by supporting and legitimizing each other. Political organizations handle problems that cannot be solved by action-oriented organizations; political organizations give meaning to what happens in their environment (Olsen, 1983) — events which are often produced by the interaction of action-oriented organizations — and they accept responsibility for such events and ac-

tions (Brunsson, 1986). To some extent the public and private sectors in Western Europe have complemented each other in this sense, each one specializing in one aspect. Many public organizations have concentrated on problems and have been stronger in talk and decisions than in action. States and municipalities have offered depressed settings to their members and have been accused of inefficiency, but due to their high chance of survival they have also offered high security. Many private companies have offered more enthusiastic settings but less security. When private sector companies have become better at reflecting inconsistencies, the role of the public sector has become less clear. This may help to explain the calls for privatization and for greater efficiency and action-orientation in the public sector.

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