

Nations as Organizations: Organizational Theory and International Relations

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I learned the names of SPSSI and Kurt Lewin at the same time—that is, about 40 years ago, when I returned to the University of Michigan to begin graduate work in the interdisciplinary program in social psychology that Ted Newcomb, Dan Katz, and a dedicated group of others had launched not long before. More than any other organization, SPSSI was the professional and ideological home for those of us in that program, and more than any other person, Kurt Lewin represented the kind of social psychology to which we aspired. I tell you this so that you can understand the deep meaning that this award holds for me.

I must also tell you that it brings a reassuring message at a time of transition in my career. I do not refer to the moment of my official retirement, which drifted by a couple of months ago, but rather my attempt to bring organizational research and theory to bear upon issues of international relations, especially the prevention of nuclear war. It is reassuring to be reminded that in doing so I am working within a SPSSI tradition as old as the organization itself and as new as the recent *Journal of Social Issues* (Wagner, de Rivera, & Watkins, 1988) and Ralph White's (1986) excellent book on *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War*.

In his preface to White's book, Herbert Kelman states that "psychological and other factors conducive to nuclear war and its prevention can only be under-

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stood within a larger interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the global system and international relations" (White, 1986, p. xii). Part of that framework, I believe, must come from theory and research at the organizational level. This is the implication of the title I have chosen for this paper: "Nations as Organizations." It asserts a link between problems of international relations on the one hand and the potential contributions of organizational research and theory on the other.

The possibility of such a connection first struck me a dozen years ago, when I was working at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. One of the attractions of that marvelous place was the opportunity to interact with scholars from many different disciplines and different countries—East and West, industrial and third world. Among the topics that arose in our informal conversations was the origin of nations, with each of us contributing a bit of our own national history. I was particularly intrigued by the contrast between two processes of creating nationhood—one characterized primarily by coercive power and the other by voluntary coalition. The first, which is by far the more common, is exemplified by the Prussian unification of Germany or the White Russian conquests that gradually created the tsarist domain of "all the Russias." The second kind of process by which nations have come into being is exemplified by the unification of Dutch city-states in the face of invasion from Spain, or by the emergence of the United States through the voluntary federation of 13 weak but autonomous colonies, initially united only by geographical location and by opposition to the harsher aspects of British rule.

The relevance of these historical fragments to the international dilemma of our own time and place is obvious. The possession of nuclear arms both makes some form of effective world-scale organization imperative and prevents the attainment of unilateral coercive power. We are thus left with the central question of how to create voluntary coalitions, especially between hostile entities, and with the derivative questions of what forces promote and oppose such combinations, what combinatorial forms tend to endure, and what initial ceding of sovereignty or awarding of powers is sufficient to make a new combination viable.

Last year, at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, a group of us were able to consider such questions in a year-long seminar. We began with the observation that similar questions have arisen at the organizational level. This is an era of unprecedented organizational combinations. Mergers and joint ventures, hostile takeovers, poison-pill resistance by which a targeted organization attempts to make itself financially unattractive to would-be conquerors, white-knight rescues by which an organization is saved from a hostile takeover by submitting to a less hostile acquisition—all these are the common stuff of newspaper financial pages and magazine reportage. Such cases are organizationally interesting, and all of them, voluntary and involuntary, seem to have their international counterparts.

Two Uses of Organizational Theory

Studying these numerous and accessible interorganizational phenomena to increase our understanding of analogous events at the international level illustrates the first of two major uses of organizational theory and research for understanding relationships between nations—namely, the use of organizations as models for nation-states. In the life sciences, investigators put great emphasis on such models, that is, on the discovery and appropriate use of readily accessible and relatively simple organisms that exhibit behaviors and pathologies relevant for understanding the same phenomena in human populations.

Social psychologists interested in conflict processes, even those whose interests extend to the international level, also have relied heavily on a relatively simple model, the two-person game, especially the Prisoner's Dilemma, which Axelrod (1984, p. 28) refers to as "the *E. coli* of social psychology." In urging research at the organizational level, I do not suggest an end to such work; the trade-off between experimental control and external validity is unavoidable, and it implies complementary work in the laboratory and in the field. I do propose that human organizations can serve as models for certain behaviors of nation-states, and in so doing can complement experiments in which the units of study are individuals or small groups but the hoped-for extrapolation involves the behavior of nations.

The second way in which research at the organizational level can address problems of international relations involves certain determinants of individual behavior that are common to both organizations and nation-states. Acts of war, the making of peace, and the conduct of diplomacy, which von Clausewitz (1943) regarded as an activity intermediate between the two, are not only formal acts of social organizations. They can also be understood as behaviors of individuals acting in organizational roles. People in these circumstances, as we know, are not only expressing their own personalities; they are motivated in large part by organizationally mediated rewards and penalties, the hope of organizational preferment, organizationally generated feelings of solidarity with others, identification with an organizationally defined mission, and with organizationally determined standards and values.

Dramatic reminders of the extent to which such demands of the role overwhelm individual attributes are provided when we compare the statements of national leaders in office and after leaving it. For example, Eisenhower's (1961) remarkable warning to the American people about the dangerous power of the military-industrial complex came in his farewell address, as did his wistful statement that "in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love" (p. 22).

Or consider Robert McNamara's (1983) proposal that, as part of a nuclear no-first-use policy, the United States should make a public declaration that it will not use nuclear weapons first, even at the "battlefield level" and even in re-

sponse to an attack by conventional arms. This statement was made not during his tenure as secretary of defense, but in a 1983 article on the military role of nuclear weapons.

As citizens, we can wish that these statements had come sooner, when the people who made them were still in positions of power. As social psychologists, our task is to understand why they did not, and perhaps to consider what counter-vailing factors might have enabled them to come earlier. The more general implication for social psychological research is both obvious and familiar: If we want to understand the behavior of people in real-life situations, we must take into account not only their enduring individual attributes but also the social forces that define the field in which they act.

That textbook Lewinian injunction is difficult to apply in ways that address the realities of international relations and the special circumstances of people whose responsibilities involve transactions across national boundaries. The difficulties with field research on the international scene have to do with inaccessibility, secrecy, and deliberate deception (or disinformation, to use the current euphemism). The difficulties with laboratory research have to do with our inability to create in significant strength the variables whose effects we want most to understand—the influence of constituencies, the life-affecting rewards and penalties mediated by hierarchical superiors, the power of interpersonal relationships with a long past and an expectedly long future—in short, the effects of a complex social process in which the stakes are extremely high.

These considerations do not imply the abandonment of research that deals directly with major international events nor of research that attempts to create in the laboratory some of the key variables that shape such events. We have some remarkably informative and successful instances of both kinds—Irving Janis's (1986) work on international crises, for example, and Morton Deutsch's (1973) sustained experiments on conflict escalation and resolution.

Such work should be continued and extended. It should be complemented, however, by research that makes the most of the nation–organization analogy—that takes advantage of the fact that organizations, like nations, have long histories, generate strong loyalties and hostilities, play for large stakes, struggle to protect their boundaries, and exist in a state of unavoidable interdependence with other organizations.

The Management of Interdependence

The fact of such interdependence among organizations and among nations is the first element in our theoretical framework. It is not new, of course. I suspect that the interdependence of individuals and of nations has long been greater than our comprehension of it, and that it has been mediated by organizations to a

greater extent than we have acknowledged. Industrial development a century ago greatly increased that interdependence, and recent technological achievements in transportation and communication have transformed it by magnitudes. Most important of all, the existence and proliferation of nuclear weapons have made the management of interdependence between nations a matter of species survival.

That task, the management of interdependence, is what organizations and organizational theory are about, at levels from the interpersonal to the international. The recognition of interdependence among individuals at the level of the work group was central to the early work of the human relations school (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939; Argyris, 1957; McGregor, 1960; Likert, 1961), which treated the management of interdependence at that level as the central task of supervision and regarded participative decision making as the most effective way of accomplishing that task. Emery and Trist (1973) proposed an analogous proposition at the organizational level. In their exposition of the sociotechnical concept of organizations, after acknowledging the importance of interdependence within work groups, they added, "Similarly, the primary task in managing the enterprise as a whole is to relate the system to its environment and is not in internal regulation per se" (p. 220).

The argument is no less valid at the international level. Interdependence of some kind is an inevitable part of cooperation and it is a precondition for conflict, interorganizational and international. Without some degree of interdependence with respect to resource acquisition, territorial boundaries, and the like, there would be no incentive to assume the risks and costs of conflict or the effort of cooperation.

The persisting question for every organization and every nation is how best to manage unavoidable interdependencies. Let us begin with the organizational case and assume that the avoidance or elimination of a given interdependency between two specific organizations is impossible and that its nature is dominantly conflict generating rather than symbiotic (Scott, 1987) or promotive (Deutsch, 1973). We can imagine a hypothetical continuum in which the identifiable scale points represent specific structural arrangements for the management of interdependence between the two. Arranged in order of increasing proportions of managed as compared to "unmanaged" interdependence, we then have an ordinal scale anchored at one end by total combination (merger or absorption) and at the other by no-holds-barred conflict.

In organizational combinations, whether voluntary or involuntary, all of what had been an interorganizational relationship is made intraorganizational. Problems of conflict and coordination are not thereby eliminated, but they are moved inside the organizational boundary and thus made subject to the authority structure and problem-solving machinery of the organization. It is in that sense that they become managed. The other extreme, no-holds-barred conflict between

organizations, is not encountered in civil society. The social norms and the laws of the land limit the ways in which interorganizational conflict can be expressed, so that the more common situation is that of the market, in which competition is demanded but the expression of conflict is constrained by sociolegal factors. For example, criminal law prohibits physical assault on one's competitors or demolition of their production facilities.

The continuum of managed vs. unmanaged organizational interdependence, as I have described it, is represented in Fig. 1. Each of the structural arrangements for organizational interdependence has its counterpart at the international level. Organizational mergers and takeovers resemble international federation and conquest. Organizational joint ventures have many international counterparts, from bilateral single-purpose arrangements like the U.S.–USSR Antarctic expeditions to multination multipurpose structures like the European Economic Community or the United Nations itself. Organizational contracts resemble treaties, in that both are formal agreements regarding the future performance of the parties and both are governed by law, although international laws lack the enforcement powers that can be applied within nation-states.

The distinction between spot or one-off contracts and contracts as hierarchical documents is based on the scope of the agreement, both in terms of time span and range of activity. A spot contract is drawn, for example, when a manufacturer arranges to purchase a shipment of component parts from a supplier. Suppose, however, that the same manufacturer contracted to purchase components from that supplier on a continuing basis, and that the contract

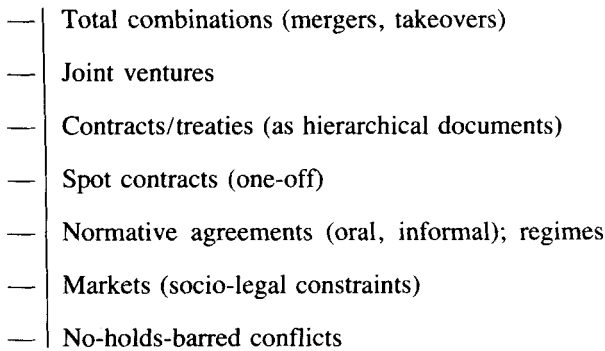


Fig. 1. Hypothetical continuum of managed interdependence between organizations.

included agreed-upon procedures for coordinating shipments with manufacturing schedules, adjusting prices to take account of cost changes, and settling incidental disagreements. The contractual relationship would then have acquired some of the functions typically carried out by management hierarchies within organizations, and in that sense the contract would have become what Stinchcombe (1985) calls a "hierarchical document."

Less formal, noncontractual agreements between organizations resemble the agreements between nations that political scientists refer to as "regimes." As Keohane (1984) puts it, "International regimes neither enforce hierarchical rules on governments nor substitute their own rules for autonomous calculation; instead, they provide rules of thumb in place of those that governments would otherwise adopt" (pp. 115–116).

Joint Ventures

The sequence of organizational arrangements from no-holds-barred conflict to merger reflects an underlying continuum of managed vs. unmanaged conflict, as I have said. There are therefore presumptive advantages as we ascend the scale—less risk of unmanaged, unconstrained, and perhaps survival-threatening conflict. On the other hand, there are costs associated with each higher point in the scale, and those costs involve sovereignty. Additional aspects of autonomy or sovereignty are surrendered at each higher point, and at the point of merger the identity of the organization itself is lost.

The leaders of organizations, like the leaders of nation-states, value sovereignty so highly that acquisition is resisted unless the personal or protective advantages are overwhelming. Add to this the power of nationalistic identity, and the limited appeal of total combination across national boundaries is readily understandable.

Joint ventures, however, offer some of the advantages of outright merger with virtually none of the risks. They entail only a limited pooling of resources (Scott, 1987, p. 189), and they can be designed for a variety of formally stated and explicitly limited purposes. They can be sufficiently insulated from their parent organizations to permit the development of a cooperative subculture even when the parent organizations continue to compete or conflict in other spheres. And most reassuring to those who insist on uncompromised sovereignty, joint ventures are not irrevocable. Unlike mergers, organizational and national, from which the component parts cannot secede without civil war or its corporate equivalent, joint ventures continue only so long as their parent organizations permit them to do so.

These characteristics give organizational joint ventures a certain plausibility

at the international level, and there are some successful examples. The failures are numerous, however, and few of the successes involve both the United States and USSR as participants. One success in which both nations are major participants is the multilateral arrangement for the exploration of Antarctica. It is additionally remarkable because of its scale (18 voting nations and 17 "acceding"), because of its duration (27 years), because the current mode of a cooperative joint venture superseded earlier stages of conflict and informal regime agreement, and because the current agreements, to which the United States and USSR are signatories, include the definition of Antarctica as a nuclear-free zone.

The success of this special case appears more celebrated than understood. It has evoked a scholarly literature predicting a range of outcomes from competing national claims and international conflict to complete internationalization of the Antarctic continent, the first move on a continental scale toward the long-envisioned "one world" (Shapley, 1988). As researchers, we stand to learn much more from comparative research on a population of successful and unsuccessful joint ventures, both corporate and governmental. We can also learn a great deal from longitudinal case studies of specific joint ventures as they go through periods of varying success. The Standing Consultative Commission is a case of the latter sort, and some such analyses have been recently published (Buchheim & Farley, 1988; Graybeal & Krepon, 1985).

The Standing Consultative Commission

The Standing Consultative Commission is an outgrowth of SALT I, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the United States and the Soviet Union begun in 1969. It is a unique example of a joint venture created by a treaty [the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972], dealing with a subject of great military importance and sensitivity, operative over a substantial time period, and characterized within that period by sharply different patterns of success and failure.

Both the American and Soviet negotiators recognized that implementation of the ABM Treaty agreements would involve further specification of procedures, inevitable questions of subsequent compliance, and adaptation to changing diplomatic and technological conditions. They decided that such problems could best be dealt with by a special-purpose organization with a continuous rather than an intermittent life, and thus they wrote Article XIII of the ABM Treaty of 1972, which stipulates the creation of the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC).

The basic structure of the organization is simple and totally symmetrical. Each side is represented by a commissioner, a deputy commissioner, an executive officer, and additional members of the delegation "as deemed necessary."

The SCC is required to meet as a body at least twice a year, in Geneva, and to maintain both written and oral communication between commissioners in the intervals between meetings. In effect, the SCC is thus in continuous session. Finally, at the initial request of the USSR, the treaty states that the SCC will make its proceedings public only with the express agreement of both commissioners.

A review of SCC's successes and failures over 15 years shows that the successes dominated during the years before 1980, and the failures in the years since 1980. Or to put it in terms that imply the reasons for these differences in performance, the pattern of success characterized the Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter administrations; the pattern of failure was more characteristic of Ronald Reagan's administration.

For example, the pre-1980 achievements of the SCC included the development of procedures for dismantling weapons in excess of the ABM Treaty limits, enacting treaty provisions limiting strategic offensive arms, regulating the replacement of ABM systems and components, and providing immediate notification of suspected use of nuclear weapons by other countries or terrorist groups. In addition, the SCC dealt with eight questions of compliance raised by the United States, each of which tended to evoke a similar question from the USSR. The conclusion of the Carter administration was that each of the questioned Soviet activities had either been stopped or had been explained to the satisfaction of the United States, and the Soviet government made no complaints about U.S. compliance.

Beginning in 1982, however, a series of public and official statements from the United States charged the Soviet Union with generalized and intentional noncompliance (Duffy, 1988). Similar accusations were made against the United States by the USSR, and both governments turned away from using the SCC as a forum for conflict resolution. Disuse, moreover, gave increasing validity to charges of SCC ineffectiveness, the most florid of which was Caspar Weinberger's statement that the SCC had become an "Orwellian memory hole into which U.S. concerns had been dumped like yesterday's trash" (Duffy, 1988, p. 285).

Success and Failure in Joint Ventures

A comparison of SCC accomplishments before and after 1980 suggests that the potential utility of such treaty-nested joint ventures is very great, but that the realization of that potential depends in part on factors external to the joint venture itself. The most obvious functions of joint ventures of the SCC treaty-nested type are the interpretation and fleshing out of an agreement that is appropriately general rather than specific in many respects, and the application of the agree-

ment to new political and technological developments. Viewed in these terms, a treaty-nested joint venture would have a continuing function so long as the treaty signatories intended to continue the kind of cooperation prescribed in the treaty itself. It is precisely that intent that has come into question in recent years with respect to the SALT treaties and therefore the SCC.

On the part of the United States, the change in cooperative intent was indicated not only by presidential statements that SALT II was "fatally flawed" and "dead," and by Reagan's March 1983 speech on "star wars" (Farley, 1988). The administration also took actions that directly impeded the SCC's ability to function. These included the well-publicized debate on whether to use the SCC at all, the attendant delay in appointing the U.S. delegation in 1981, the consequent deferral of the scheduled Geneva meeting, the constraining and adversarial instructions with which the U.S. delegation was finally sent to Geneva in 1981, the withdrawal of SALT II from consideration by the Senate in 1982, the decision to leave unratified the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, and the public accusations of noncompliance, which constituted a breach of confidential SCC procedure as previously agreed upon.

The question posed by this sequence of events is whether the SCC and other such joint ventures can help preserve a mode of problem solving and conflict resolution even at times when the cooperative mood of the principals to the agreement has weakened. This is a familiar issue to organizational researchers and to managements that have attempted field experiments in which some new organizational subculture is created within an environment of older norms and values. The tendency in such cases is toward erosion and absorption of the new (Morse & Reimer, 1956; Walton, 1978), and the major antidote consists in guarantees of autonomy for the new enterprise, preferably accompanied by some insulation from the parent enterprise. Autonomy as a general condition is made up of such tangibles as the explicit delegation of decision-making authority, the commitment of resources for extended periods, and the appointment of members (representatives) for substantial terms.

The selection procedures, tenure commitments, and other autonomous characteristics of the federal civil service system are, among other things, a wise attempt to provide a reasonable continuity to government programs and to guarantee them some insulation from the political shocks of the quadrennial electoral process. One can imagine building such autonomous characteristics into organizational joint ventures at the international level, with commitments made at times of cooperative, long-sighted high tide, and the joint venture serving to continue such cooperation during periods of wavering commitment.

There may, of course, be disadvantages to such designs. Increasing the autonomy or "distancing" of a joint venture from its parent systems may increase its ability to function as a cooperative cultural island, but it may reduce the likelihood that it will fulfill a larger social function—that is, that the cooperative

example of the joint venture will lead, through a process of organizational learning or contagion, to more widespread cooperation between the principals themselves.

To what extent joint organizational ventures launched by competing systems can create and sustain a cooperative subculture, to what extent their success in doing so depends on their autonomy from their parent organizations, and to what extent the cooperative achievements of successful joint ventures generate cooperative tendencies in the parent organizations—these are questions yet to be answered empirically. They are, however, researchable through the study of organizational joint ventures at both the international and the corporate levels. No systematic comparisons have yet been made between joint ventures that were successful and those that were not, between those that endured and those whose life was short, or between those that had the effect of inducing cooperation between their principals and those that did not. Research of this kind can help us realize the potential contributions of organizational studies to international relations.

Decision Making Among Units of Unequal Power and Size

The SCC, despite its complexities, is in several important respects a simple case. It is limited in function by the terms of the treaty that created it, and it is ultimately responsible to only two nations, the United States and the USSR, that in the possession of nuclear power are equals. It is, in short, a bilateral joint venture between equal partners. Let us now turn to the complicating factors of numbers and inequality, both of which enter strongly into attempts at multilateral joint ventures among nations and are also manifest in organizational life.

International joint ventures like the European Community and the United Nations consist of many nations that differ greatly in size and power, a fact that makes it extremely difficult to reach initial agreement about the basis for making decisions. The principle of national sovereignty implies that the decisions of such multinational bodies be made on the basis of one-nation, one-vote. This principle is predictably unsatisfactory to nations of great size (population), which are more likely to argue for a formula of one-person, one-vote. And considerations of power, economic and military, raise further complications. In addition to these competing principles, there is the question of what voting proportions are required to enact a decision—simple majority, some larger fraction, or unanimity.

Neither of these problems is new, but neither has been fully resolved in research or in practice. The bicameral Congress of the United States is an attempt, successful on the whole, to deal with the problem of unequal size among states. The structure of the United Nations, with the differentiation of the Security Council from the larger Assembly, is another attempt to deal with the problem of unequal size and power.

The UN organizational design can be considered only a limited success, and there have been proposals to modify it. The most original of these, developed and given some testing in simulations, is the "Binding Triad" (Hudson, 1986). This would require that the votes in the United Nations Assembly be counted in three ways: first, on the basis of one-nation, one vote; then weighted according to the population of the voting nations; and finally weighted according to their power (i.e., rated according to gross national product, which is already the agreed-upon basis for determining national assessments for support of the UN). If the vote carried on all three bases, it would become binding on all member nations—hence the proposed designation, Binding Triad.

The dilemma of attaining joint decisions by units of unequal size and power that maximize the long-term collective good is another problem for which the potential contributions of organizational research appear promising. Most large organizations encounter this problem in some form. Many universities, for example, have councils of deans that act as decision-making bodies on the basis of formal votes. The colleges represented by the various deans differ greatly, however, in size of the student body, size of the faculty, and in allocated space and resources. The situation is replicated at the next lower hierarchical level, when deans convene the heads of departments that also differ greatly in size, resources, and institutional importance. And in most large corporations, the various vice-presidential domains differ substantially in these respects. Nevertheless, the vice-presidents as a group are charged with acting in the interests of the organization as a whole when they participate in decision making at the organizational level.

It is certain that organizations have evolved many different ways of dealing with this core problem of collective decision making, and it is almost equally certain that their various solutions, formal and informal, hierarchical and participative, are not equally successful. This, however, is conjecture rather than the result of empirical research or theoretical derivation. Research to document the ways in which organizations deal with the problem of joint decisions by collectivities made up of unequal components remains to be done, and the contributions of such research to solving the same problem at the international level remain to be realized.

Conclusion

I will conclude by recapitulating the argument: It began with the proposition that organizational theory and research can contribute to understanding international relations, that those potential contributions are largely unrealized, and that they involve the use of organizations as models for nation-states. I proposed the management of interdependence as an integrating theoretical principle, and attempted to order a number of different interorganizational structures in terms of

the proportion of managed vs. unmanaged interdependence. I chose the organizational joint venture as a structure particularly deserving of study, and used the SCC as a case example of a bilateral joint venture that has had successive periods of success and failure. Finally, I considered the complexifying factors of unequal size and power among the participant subsystems in a joint venture.

I began, you may remember, with two hopeful statements—that you might be persuaded of the potential uses of organizational research, and that some of you might be tempted to venture into this domain. If you feel the stirrings of such temptations, my colleagues and I will welcome you to the enterprise.

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