

Inter-Organizational Relations as Structures of Corporate Practice¹

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This article starts from the assumption that global order emerges from relations among states, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and informal institutions, such as the Group of Twenty (G20) or the World Economic Forum. It addresses the question: How can the variety of these inter-organizational relations in world politics be studied theoretically? In search of an answer, we draw on the concept of structures of corporate practice, which, rooted in the philosophy of classical pragmatism, was established as a common framework for all constituents of world politics (be it states, international organizations, or else). We argue that it is not only the constituents of world politics that can be conceptualized as structures of corporate practice but also the relations between them. In this way, the concept of structures of corporate practice might help us to explore how these relations (referred to as inter-organizational relations) contribute to global order. To illustrate the heuristic potential of our approach we briefly look at relations between the United Nations and the G20 that are located at the very center of world politics.

Introduction

The last decades have witnessed a rising awareness both in politics and academia that the increasing number of global problems cannot be managed by states alone. Hence, environmental challenges, transnational terrorism, financial stability, and numerous other issues are held to require close cooperation between different organizations, such as states, international (governmental) organizations (IOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or any other form of institutionalized collective action. Today, these kinds of relationships are ubiquitous and play an increasingly significant role in shaping world politics. Also referred to as “inter-organizational relations,” they do not only conclude collaboration among IOs (as in the case of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank) but also cooperation between states and IOs (such as the role of the permanent members in the United Nations Security Council), relations between IOs and NGOs (e.g., cooperation between the

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World Bank and Transparency International), or relations between IOs and informal institutions (such as the United Nations [UN] and the Group of Twenty [G20]). As a consequence, we do not conceive inter-organizational relations in a narrow sense as relations among IOs (Koops 2013:72) but as the variety of external relations between an IO and other constituents of world politics in its environment—be it states, IOs, NGOs, or informal institutions. All of these kinds of inter-organizational relationships, so says our assumption, play a significant role in the creation of global order.

When it comes to analyzing inter-organizational relations, however, the discipline of international relations (IR) in general and IR theories in particular still tend to underestimate both the theoretical meaning and the empirical relevance of the full spectrum of this field. Since states have been predominantly conceived as sole actor, main actor, or principal, it is hardly surprising that IOs were either neglected or treated as epiphenomena. Even though theoretical debates touched upon the influence of IOs on interstate relations, those relationships that did not include states were bluntly ignored. On the other hand, the sheer omnipresence of non-state relations in world politics has, in recent years, inspired an increasing empirical interest in cooperation between organizations and how it shapes global politics. Although there is growing awareness in IR that inter-organizational relations matter, it still remains unclear how IOs and other sorts of organizations interact, cooperate, use one another for their own purposes, and how they sometimes compete with each other. In order to tackle these questions, some reflections on how to theoretically grasp the kinds of inter-organizational relations are needed.

Against this background, we will draw on the concept of *structures of corporate practice* (Franke and Roos 2010) as a starting-point for analyzing inter-organizational relations. We believe that this concept helps us to explore various kinds of relations in world politics and how these relations contribute to global order. Whereas IR approaches usually focus on states or on relations between states and organizations, the concept is suited to broaden our perspective on inter-organizational relations and to release us from the obligation to characterize in advance the kinds of organizations involved in a particular relation of concern. For this purpose, not only states, IOs, NGOs, and informal institutions, such as the G20, but also the relations among them are grasped as structures of corporate practice. This concept serves as a kind of common denominator for the analysis of both any world political feature to which agency is attributed and any kind of relation among them. Concretely, any kind of relation between structures of corporate practice—be it the UN and the G20, the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, or the government of North Korea and the Executive Chairman of Google—can be examined as a distinct structure of corporate practice of its own. Taken altogether, it is for these reasons that we consider structures of corporate practice a general approach suited to make sense of the variety of inter-organizational relations in world politics.

The article will proceed in three steps. In the first step, we will show how IOs have been conventionally studied in IR. From our perspective, most conceptualizations are biased by the discipline's state-centrist history and theoretically neglect IOs' external relations. IR theory appears insufficiently equipped for dealing with the full variety of inter-organizational relationships. In the second step, we will address accounts of global governance, resource

dependence approaches, and sociological neo-institutionalism, as well as network theory, which have already gained some relevance in IR on the level of analyzing the rather new field of inter-organizational relations. These approaches, however, usually concentrate on relations between similar kinds of participants in a particular policy field. Since we are looking for a more general model that grasps inter-organizational relations among all constituents of world politics, the actors within organizations, and their potentials to act in inter-organizational relations, we will, in the third step, turn to the concept of structures of corporate practice. To illustrate its heuristic potential, we will very briefly refer to relations between an IO (the UN) and an informal institution (the G20) as well as their contribution to global order.

International Organizations in International Relations Theory

Global order emerges from a variety of inter-organizational relations. These encompass different kinds of organizations such as states, IOs, NGOs, or informal institutions (such as the Groups of Seven [G7], Eight [G8] or Twenty [G20]). To foster our argument that the study of inter-organizational relations would gain from their conceptualization as structures of corporate practice this section shows how international organizations and their external relations have conventionally been studied in IR theory.

Referring to international law, IR scholars usually define international governmental organizations (IOs) as “an association of States, established by agreement among its members and possessing a permanent system or set of organs, whose task it is to pursue objectives of common interest by means of co-operation among its members” (Virally 1981:15). Although definitions might vary according to the minimum number of member states, they put an emphasis on the relationship between IOs and states. With this preliminary observation in mind, we now discuss how formal IOs and their relations to other organizations are studied in IR—from neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism to global governance approaches and constructivism.

Approaches such as the (neo)realist one, to begin with, assume IOs serve as instruments for states to further the latter’s particular interests; they “largely mirror the distribution of power in the system,” while “the most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it” (Mearsheimer 1994–95:13). Regime-based approaches and neoliberal institutionalism on the other hand argue that IOs offer an arena for states to reach agreements. As arenas, IOs form an administrative frame for negotiations that facilitates agreements among states by providing and enabling, *inter alia*, institutional venues, organizational procedures, and agenda-setting. Hence, IOs are regarded as “permanent institutions of conference diplomacy in which states may exchange information, condemn or justify certain actions and coordinate their national political strategies” (Rittberger et al. 2006:6). This perception is shared by neo-institutional approaches. Although neo-institutional approaches assume that IOs can operate as actors in the international system—by monitoring and sanctioning states’ behavior, for instance (Keohane and Nye 1972; Krasner 1995)—they do not accredit IOs with a similar quality of autonomy as they claim for states. Neo-institutionalism argues that IO decisions are, in fact, still made by states—and solely by states—under the roof of an IO; thus, IOs are just playing fields for states (Rittberger et al. 1997).

Compared to these models, global governance approaches perceive IOs as actors on the international stage. Whereas their acting part is disputable, they are seen as either *supporting actors or protagonists* (Rittberger et al. 2006:6–7). The role of IOs as supporting actors is mostly emphasized in principal-agent models (particularly prominent in EU governance studies; see Pollack 1997; Copelovitch 2010; Da Conceição-Heldt 2010; Hawkins et al. 2006). According to these models states (as principals) use IOs (as agents) to deal with interstate problems. States delegate those tasks to IOs that they are not able or willing to fulfill themselves. Yet, principal-agent models conceive IOs as actors in their own rights—as a problem that needs to be solved by better control. Therefore, they scrutinize the tools that principals can employ “to rein in errant behavior by IO agents” (Nielson and Tierney 2003:242). Other global governance approaches conceptualize IOs as protagonists of global order. These approaches are based on the assumption that—because of a growing number of interstate linkages—it becomes necessary to develop, maintain and implement accepted norms and standards on a global scale. In this respect, IOs are perceived either as persecutors of a global order or at least as an indicator of a structure of global order in the making (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006b).

Albeit from a different perspective, the idea that IOs are relevant to an emerging global order has also been advocated by IR constructivists—some argue that IOs are prototypes of an emerging world state (Wendt 2003). Most constructivist studies deal with IOs as institutions in a broad sense understood as reified sets of inter-subjective constitutive and regulative rules. As social structures, institutions—on the one hand—influence the behavior of states and—on the other hand—enable social interaction in international politics: Institutional rules and norms stabilize mutual expectations and offer actors a framework for perceiving and organizing the world (Risse 2003:108). Starting out from these assumptions, a constructivist analysis of international institutions must give center stage to norms and shared practices in order to comprehend and appreciate the ways in which these create and mirror intersubjective normative understandings (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Simmons and Martin 2002:198). Picking up on this claim, a number of sophisticated constructivist studies have dealt with both the effects and the role of institutional norms (see among many others Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Klotz 1995; for the field of security see Katzenstein 1996; Kier 1997).

In sum, IOs play a significant role in IR both in theoretical and empirical studies. It can be taken for granted that they have an effect on world politics—be it as an agenda-setter, an institution of conference diplomacy, a different playing field for states, a norm entrepreneur, or a monitoring, legitimizing, or even sanctioning institution. Even though the academic literature on IOs is vast and sheds light on various facets of IOs, its main concern is the relationship between IOs and states and how the one influences the other. This emphasis, unfortunately, tends to neglect other relations such as those among IOs or those between IOs and NGOs, epistemic communities or informal institutions. We need theoretical approaches that make it possible to conceptualize various kinds of inter-organizational relations—regardless of whether states are involved or not.

Theorizing Inter-Organizational Relations

The previous section showed that even though the study of international organizations and their contributions to global order has increasingly been considered relevant in IR, most conventional

theories are not capable of grasping the full variety of relationships among the constituents of world politics. Thus, we will now turn to three strands of IR research that more elaborately deal with inter-organizational relations and look at what they have to offer.² These strands are accounts of global governance again, resource dependence and neo-institutionalist approaches, as well as network theories.

Accounts of Global Governance

In contrast to most IR theories, accounts of global governance have brought about a significant amount of studies dealing with the full spectrum of inter-organizational relations. The rising number of international problems that could not be solved by states is seen as a major challenge on the one hand and as a proof for the need of international concerted action on the other (Commission for Global Governance 1995:370). Including “systems of rule at all levels of human activity—from the family to the international organization—in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions” (Rosenau 1995:13) global governance is introduced as a concept that guides the analysis of political processes beyond the state level (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006a:198). This helps to overcome an exclusive focus on states because no specific organization is prioritized.³ Instead, governance is grasped as an activity that takes place through states, IOs, NGOs, and informal institutions (Reimann 2006; Reinalda 2011; Weiss and Kamran 2009; Whitman 2009). Primarily empirical, global governance studies analyze specific relations among selected constituents of world politics—mostly IOs and their relations to other IOs or NGOs in particular policy fields (Jönsson and Tallberg 2010; Peet 2009; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Liese 2010).⁴ Although this strand of research is still dominated by single-case studies, a growing amount of global governance approaches applies concepts and models borrowed from organization studies. In doing so they follow a path that, twenty-five years ago, had been opened by Ness and Brechin who observed that the “gap between the study of international organizations and the study of organizations is deep and persistent” (Ness and Brechin 1988:245). As organization studies have more extensively been used to study IOs in the meantime, this gap is seen to have narrowed (Brechin and Ness in this issue).

Barnett and Finnemore, for instance, have shown how Weber’s model of bureaucracy can be used to study the authority and autonomy of IOs (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; 2004). Others apply insights from sociological neo-institutionalism—the so-called Stanford School—to study organizational fields (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009; Dobusch and Quack 2009; Steffek 2010; Vetterlein and Moschella 2013), refer to IOs’ legitimacy (Weaver 2008; Moschella 2010; Barnett and Coleman 2005) or conceptualize IOs’ external relations and their (varying degrees of) openness toward transnational organizations such as NGOs or profit-oriented enterprises by means of resource dependence models (Liese 2010; Tallberg and Jönsson 2010; Gest and Grigorescu 2010).

2. Inter-organizational relations are also examined in economics and administration studies. In contrast to IR, however, scholars of both disciplines are less concerned about forms of global order and engage with economic and administrative problems of cooperation and competition instead (Cropper et al. 2008; Galaskiewicz 1985).

3. Interdependence among states becomes most obvious at the interface between economy and politics where the density of institutional arrangements to generate global order—IOs like the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO—is most comprehensive and advanced (Peet 2009; Weaver 2008; Gutner 2010; Vetterlein and Moschella 2013).

4. For environmental and trade policy see Rosendal 2001; Gehring and Oberthür 2009; Raustiala and Victor 2004; Brosig 2011:150; Peet 2009; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009; Gehring and Oberthür 2008; for security see Biermann 2008; Varwick and Koops 2009; Koops 2012; for development see Staples 2006; Wodsak and Koch 2010; for public health see Jönsson and Söderholm 1996; for human rights see DeMeritt 2012; Natsios 1996.

In general, global governance studies do not try to offer a theoretical model for the study of inter-organizational relations. If particular studies use a theoretical model to grasp inter-organizational relations, they usually refer either to resource dependence approaches and sociological neo-institutionalism or to network theories.

Resource Dependence Approaches and Sociological Neo-Institutionalism

An alternative model to make sense of inter-organizational relations refers to “resource dependency as a trigger for interaction” (Brosig 2011:155) among organizations. According to this model, organizations strive for resources by which they try to accomplish something. As organizations are neither self-contained nor in complete control over resources in their environment, they depend on their environment that consists of other organizations with access to certain resources or influence over activities (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). “To acquire resources, organizations must inevitably interact with their social environment,” Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:19) state.

At the same time, organizations do not want to become dependent on other organizations and their resources. As a consequence, they are willing to exchange resources as long as they are not getting dependent on others (Emerson 1962; Ven 1976; Ven and Gordon 1984). In particular, organizations with access to many resources—be it money, expertise, prestige, or else—are likely to be targeted for cooperation. As organizational interplay usually takes place on the basis of reciprocal exchange, cooperation among organizations is likely if they exchange different types of resources or if “they can pool *the same* type of resource” (Gest and Grigorescu 2010:56). In sum, organizational interplay is held to depend on different degrees of access to certain resources. Organizations are, in principle, willing to cooperate as long as they receive resources in exchange and do not lose their independence.

Besides resource dependence approaches, sociological neo-institutionalists argue that organizations are not sheer rational actors but also influenced by societal aspects like accepted norms and values. Organizational action and decisions are shaped by their social environment and socially accepted ideas, norms, values, and assumptions. These are subsumed under the notion of institution. Sociological neo-institutionalism shows that and how organizations are embedded in their social environment from which they adopt institutionalized, societally legitimated elements. “Organizations that incorporate societally legitimated elements in their formal structure maximize their legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capacities” (Meyer and Rowan 1977:352). In this respect, legitimacy has less legal but cultural implications; the social environment of an organization consists of various organizations with which it interacts and to which it responds. Specifying these environments as organizational fields, DiMaggio and Powell explain structural similarities (isomorphisms) among organizations in a certain policy field as follows: “Isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:66). Sociological neo-institutionalism has been applied by scholars who describe how IOs and other constituents of world politics in a particular policy field increase their legitimacy by adapting to organizational fields—and how they get similar (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009; Vetterlein and Moschella 2013; Steffek 2010).

Taken altogether, the resource-dependence model and sociological neo-institutionalism have their merits for inter-organizational relation as they explain why and under which circumstances cooperation among organizations is likely. Empirical case studies illustrate the value of these approaches by testing certain hypotheses on the likelihood and intensity of cooperation among IOs (Gest and Grigorescu 2010; Vetterlein and Moschella 2013; Liese 2010). However, these models are only applicable to the study of inter-organizational relations if we assume organizations are dependent on each other and either cooperate in order to exchange goods or to increase their legitimacy through structural adaptation and imitation vis-à-vis environmental expectations. As a consequence, it is hardly possible to make sense of relations among organizations that have nothing to offer—neither resources nor legitimacy.

Network Theories

Although network theories have already been applied to the study of inter-organizational relations more than twenty-five years ago (Jönsson 1986), their prominence in this field was growing only recently (Brosig 2011; Jakobi 2012). Conceptualizing relations among organizations as loose networks, network theories address the question of “how the structure of interactions connecting political actors affects perceptions, attitudes, and actions, and in turn, how political behaviors transform network structures” (Knocke and Xingxiang 2008). According to Jönsson (1986) a network presupposes there are at least two participants who interact on various occasions. Instead of describing a dyadic interplay, the approach aims at analyzing complex relationships among a number of interwoven organizations. Although networks are characterized by the absence of a center and strict hierarchy, ordering principles of networks “that govern networks and steer inter-organizational interaction” (Brosig 2011:159) are held to be identifiable.⁵

In a similar vein, Biermann (2008) uses a network approach and includes insights from a resource-dependence perspective to examine the relations among Euro-Atlantic security institutions (UN, NATO, EU, etc.). He identifies some preliminary findings explaining the emergence and durability of inter-organizational relations as well as their repercussions on the organizations involved. Biermann’s study reveals some interesting characteristics of inter-organizational relations;⁶ however, these characteristics do not yet provide an approach suited to make sense of the full range of inter-organizational relations as the study concentrates on IOs only.

In most cases the examples chosen by those who apply network theories to make sense of world politics deal with networks composed of organizations of a similar kind (security IOs, for instance; see Biermann 2008; Brosig 2011). Even though this reduces their capacity to examine the full spectrum of inter-organizational relations, the mentioned approaches provide a valuable basis for the conceptualization of analytical tools for at least two reasons. Network approaches allow moving beyond state-centric, hierarchic, and dyadic perspectives on inter-

5. Brosig introduces three ordering principles of networks and explores their impact on IOs: “First, it is argued that IOs are sensitive towards the position they occupy in a network and favour those positions which promise the most advantages to them. Second, based on ecological organization theory, we can assume that actor density in situations of scarce resources naturally leads to competition, which in turn triggers a process of specialization thus increasing variation between IOs. Third, network membership is assumed to exert an isomorphic effect on IOs; as resource exchange is based on common interests and the performance of similar tasks, IOs in a network become more similar over time” (Brosig 2011:159).

6. To name but a few: networks derive from dyadic relations and have causal effects on organizations’ behavior and profile, while pressures and resources are used to overcome reluctance against cooperation (Biermann 2008:173).

organizational relations still present in IR theory. Besides, network approaches are tying in with major insights from global governance studies (see above).

Preliminary Conclusion

The three approaches sketched in this section highlight the empirical richness of inter-organizational relations studies and offer some conceptual insights in why and how IOs cooperate with other organizations. They without doubt make an important contribution to a growing field of research, particularly regarding the question of how distinct IOs cooperate with selected IOs and NGOs in their environment (Henry et al. 2001; Joachim 2001; 2004). However, it still remains conceptually unclear how various kinds of organizations and other constituents of world politics can be involved in examinations of inter-organizational relations. While the presented approaches take for granted that organizations act as rational actors and cooperate with other organizations in order to exchange resources and information or to accredit each other, these relationships say little about who is involved and how. In this context, Jönsson does well to remind us that it is not organizations in their entirety that participate in networks but individuals who occupy certain roles in there (Jönsson 1986:41; Gordenker and Weiss 1996). Unlike the three approaches' focus on similar organizations (co)operating in the same policy field, we are in search of a more general model—one that accounts for inter-organizational relations among various kinds of organizations embedded in social environments, for the various actors within organizations, and for their various potentials to act in inter-organizational relations.

Against this background, we agree that insights from organization studies can be used to examine inter-organizational relations. However, we suggest perceiving IOs from the more general *open system* perspective (Scott 1992:25) instead of applying a specific organizational theory, such as a resource-dependence approach or sociological neo-institutionalism. An open system perspective holds that organizations are embedded in a wider environment, which contains “everything outside the organization” (Mintzberg 1979:267). Since the environment is too complex to survey, any organization makes contingent selections of irritations to which it responds. It is, therefore, an empirical question and cannot be determined a priori whether something in the organizational environment is chosen for cooperation and how this cooperation can be characterized. Moreover, organizations are not conceived as monolithic entities from an open system perspective but as “systems of interdependent activities linking shifting coalitions of participants” (Scott 1992:25). Organizations and their participants cannot be assumed to hold common goals or even to routinely seek the survival of the organization; rather, some of their activities “are tightly connected; others are loosely coupled” (Scott 1992:25). In this respect, it seems reasonable to focus on communications and other activities of people in international organizations in order to study inter-organizational relations.⁷

As will be shown below, the concept of *structures of cooperate practice* fits into the open system perspective on organizations and will help us to grasp the full spectrum of inter-organizational relations. It allows studying inter-organizational relations from within IOs and other constituents of world politics. In addition, the concept of structures of corporate practice

7. “We should not forget that organizations, as such, do not interact with the environment. Individuals do the interacting, and they do it within a greater or less detailed framework of role demands, role expectations, role conflicts, and resultant role stress” (Organ 1971:80).

does not draw on fixed assumptions about why and with whom IOs cooperate but reveals the reasons for cooperation as a result of research. Finally, the concept grasps inter-organizational relations (like those between the United Nations and the Group of Twenty) as newly emerging structures of corporate practice. In doing so, it pays attention to the various roles human beings can play in manifold situations and institutional settings.

A Pragmatist Model of World Politics

From the “blind spots” of the empirical studies and theoretical approaches sketched above, we conclude that a general theoretical model is required, which helps us to conceive inter-organizational relations among dissimilar kinds of participants and in various policy fields. Every participant in an inter-organizational setting has to be analyzed in its own right—by means of adequate theoretical approaches and tools. As we believe that the concept of *structures of corporate practice* (Franke and Roos 2010) fulfills the given requirements, it is now time to elucidate what we mean by it and why we deem it to be helpful for analyzing the multitude of forms of inter-organizational relations and their contributions to global order. For this purpose, we have to start with replicating an assumption that is broadly shared: Contemporary world politics does not only involve states/national governments but also IOs, NGOs, and informal institutions, such as the Groups of Seven (G7), Eight (G8), and Twenty (G20), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the World Social Forum (WSF), or the Paris Club, to name but a few.

If taken seriously, this assumption has severe consequences, though: In contrast to national governments (or rather: in contrast to states which are represented by governments on the international scene)—but also in contrast to NGOs and IOs—informal institutions cannot be considered international organizations. The reason for this is that informal institutions are not based on international conventions and (usually) do not dispose of a permanent secretariat.⁸ Given the emerging world political role that, in the recent financial crisis for instance, is attributed to the G7, the G8, the G20, or the “Troika” (consisting of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the IMF), it would be helpful to have an analytical framework that goes beyond relations among states/governments or between states and IOs. What is needed is a framework by means of which we can, at the same time, account for formal organizations (states/governments, IOs, and NGOs), informal institutions (the G20, the Troika, etc.), and all kinds of relations among these various *structures of corporate practice*.

Structures of corporate practice constitute one component of a tripartite pragmatist model of the social world, the other two being (human) actor and process (Franke and Roos 2010:1065–72). In a nutshell, the three components of this model are connected with each other as follows: Process is conceived as the interrelation between *structures* (of corporate practice) and (human) *actors*. The model is denoted as “pragmatist,” since it draws on ideas and concepts by philosophers in the tradition of classical pragmatism, namely, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), John Dewey (1859–1952), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931).⁹

8. In addition, informal institutions seem to be more concerned with the preparation of decisions than they are with decision making in a strict sense. Considering decision making the core criterion for the existence of an organization (as is done in Luhmann’s systems theory, at least) thus makes for another argument not to treat informal institutions as organizations.

9. For a pragmatist approach to IR that also accounts for William James (1842–1910) see Franke and Weber 2012.

In the remainder of this section, we will briefly recapitulate the tripartite actor-structure-process model. In the subsequent section, we will elaborate on the model and illustrate its helpfulness for examining all types of world political relations. Concretely, we will argue that it is not only the constituents of these relations that can be grasped as structures of corporate practice but also any kinds of these relations.

Structures of Corporate Practice

Regarding its first component—structures of corporate practice—the pragmatist model adopts Dewey’s observation “that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others” (Dewey 1954:12). These efforts to control consequences of action can be conceived as attempts to deal with social problems that an individual cannot solve alone. They are characterized as “social strategies of problem-solving” (Franke and Roos 2010:1066), conducted by and in favor of those who are (negatively) affected by the consequences of the acts of others. Of particular importance in this context is the assumption that in the course of these common endeavors to deal with problems of action *rules for action* are created, consciously and unconsciously. All rules for action created to cope with a specific problem of action are held to form a structure of corporate practice (such as a family, a state, a seminar, an orchestra, an enterprise, an IO, or a social movement, for instance).

According to the pragmatist model, three major types of rules for action are distinguished. The first type of rules defines the constitutive *problem* of action, the second type establishes various structural *positions* and defines the relationship among them, while the third type of rules for action constitutes the structural *potential*, that is, the entirety of acts or effects “that are possible and impossible for those who hold a certain structural position” (Franke and Roos 2010:1068). All examples of each of these three major types of rules for action make up a specific structure of corporate practice. Against this background, we can summarize that structures of corporate practice “are designed to govern the indirect consequences of action undertaken by the members of a collective in the desired direction” (Franke and Roos 2010:1066). And, again, they are designed to do so by means of various rules for action, which constitute the underlying problem, structural positions, and action potentials.

Human Actors

The second component of the tripartite actor-structure-process model is the figure of the actor. It is a peculiarity of the model that the competence to act is dedicated to human beings only. Human beings are exclusively held to be “provided with corporeality, reflexivity, and the aptitude for abduction”—properties seen as making for the capability to depart “from structurally fixed routines of action” (Franke and Roos 2010:1069). *Corporeality*, to begin with, “anchors the actor in time and space and endows him with the physical ability to make a difference” (Franke and Roos 2010:1069). Starting from the assumption that “the aims of social practices are shaped by pre-reflexive strivings of the body as well as fundamental beliefs understood as rules for actions” human beings’ corporeality is held to “strongly influence both the perception of a given situation and the decision between different alternatives of action” (Franke and Roos 2010:1069). Whereas, *reflexivity* refers to the “capability to think of oneself as of an object” and can be

grasped “as the competence to reflect upon oneself, one’s surrounding and the world as a whole” (Franke and Roos 2010:1069), *abduction* names human beings’ creativity and problem-solving capacity (as well as its control). In combination with reflexivity, the aptitude for abduction is held to enable actors “to modify or replace rules for action and aims in moments of crisis,” that is, “all situations that cannot be coped with, either because there are no proven routines of action yet or because previous rules for action were thwarted by practice and thus cannot be followed any longer” (Franke and Roos 2010:1069). Given that corporeality, reflexivity, and abduction are very important for the creation of new beliefs or the modification of existing ones, it is helpful to add in this context our understanding of the term *belief*. It refers to “those rules for action of all three types that guide an actor’s concrete action (and so were selected out of the quantity of all possible latent rules for action)” (Franke and Roos 2010:1068).¹⁰

Process: The Interrelation between Human Actors and Structures of Corporate Practice

The pragmatist model is completed by a concept of process grasped as the interrelation between structures and actors. This interrelation is held to change the characteristics of both actors and structures in time. Hence, process brings about changes in the beliefs of actors and on the level of all three major types of rules for action, that is:

- in the definitions of the problems that constitute structures of corporate practice and the relationships between these structures (rule type I),
- in the relationships between the various structural positions (rule type II), and
- in the structural potentials (rule type III), that is, changes in those rules for action, which are understood as possibilities included in and opened by structural positions (see Franke and Roos 2010:1070).

Conversely, social processes emerge from and are maintained by “both the set of qualities that constitutes a human actor’s competence to act and the different types of rules for action included in the structures of corporate practice” (Franke and Roos 2010:1070). Social processes can also be grasped as dialectics of crises and routines. In their course, some of the beliefs that guide an actor are challenged from time to time, “shaken by the intended and unintended consequences of action” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072). Put differently, beliefs occasionally get into crises and new rules for action, new ways of coping with life need to be created. In line with pragmatist philosophy, it is “the specific set of corporeality, reflexivity and the aptitude for controlling abductive processes,” which is held to bring about the possibility to deal “with these crises and to establish new routines” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072). It is in moments of crises when “those rules for action that turned out to be unsustainable” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072) are transformed or new beliefs are created. Evidently, these new or transformed beliefs for their part “will (have to) prove their worth in practice” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072) and, as routines, will prevail until the next crisis comes about.¹¹

In sum, the tripartite pragmatist model’s focus on social processes understood as interrelations between human actors and structures of corporate practice helps us to examine

10. The concepts of reflexivity and abduction particularly point to the actor-structure-process models’ roots in the philosophy of classical pragmatism—for reflexivity see Mead 1974:214; Mead 1982:177; for abduction see Peirce 1998:216; and for the link between abduction, creativity, and the emergence of new beliefs see Joas 1992; Oevermann 1991.

11. For the actor-structure-process model’s relation to Mead’s dialectics between “I” and “me” as well as Aristotle’s distinction between efficient, final, material, and formal causes see Franke and Roos 2010:1071–2.

social change. The model highlights the “effects that a human being’s beliefs and competence to act have on ideational structures”—and it is exactly these effects that are held to “bring about intended and unintended consequences that make change possible” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072). As we have already seen, this is thought to happen as follows: Undesired consequences of action are responded to by collective attempts to regulate them—collective attempts that take the form of structures of corporate practice. Structures of corporate practice are configured by structural positions, which include rules for action that enable and constrain human actors’ possible scopes of action (known as structural potentials). At the same time, human actors’ specific sets of corporeality, reflexivity, and an aptitude for abduction enable them “to depart from such rules” (Franke and Roos 2010:1072), that is, to bring about change.

Applying Structures of Corporate Practice to Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics

After having sketched a model we think is suited to provide new possibilities of examining the manifold relations in world politics, our duty is to give an idea of how this promise could be realized concretely. For this purpose, we will engage in an attempt to illustrate the heuristic potential of the pragmatist approach of structures of corporate practice to relations between a formal international organization (the UN) and an informal institution (the G20). In this way, we not only refer to an example of highest relevance for world politics, moreover, we come up with a decisive extension of the concept of structures of corporate practice. In arguing that it is not only the constituents of world politics that can be grasped as structures of corporate practice but also the relations among them, we unfold what is contained in the original concept as a potential (on the level of the first type of rules for action; see Franke and Roos 2010:1067–8) but what has not been explicated yet.

As a consequence, we will proceed in two steps. First, we will account for the UN and the G20 as separate structures of corporate practice. Second, we will briefly introduce their relations as a distinct structure of corporate practice.

The United Nations and the Group of Twenty as Structures of Corporate Practice

In light of the pragmatist assumptions sketched in the previous section, structures may be grasped as “socially constructed objects which, despite that they are ideational, display an effect according to their meaning” (Franke and Roos 2010:1066). We can reconstruct the meaning of a structure of corporate practice by studying the effects it brings about.¹² For this purpose, it is helpful to remember the centrality attributed to the concept of rules for action when it comes to making sense of structures of corporate practice and their effects. It is the (various types of) rules for action included in a structure of corporate practice that are held to bring about—to enable and constrain—effects. Rules for action have both enabling and constraining effects; correspondingly, structures of corporate practice enable and constrain action; they make some kinds of action possible and others impossible. Against this background, it is the task of the

12. If we accept that structures “consist of signs that mutually refer to each other” (Franke and Roos 2010:1066) we see the pragmatist maxim (Peirce 1905:171) operating here, which can be summarized as *signs mean their effect*, or in Biblical terms: “You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). In a relation of mutual constitution, it is the presence (or existence) of an inter-subjectively shared structure of signs that, on the one hand, makes social meaning possible, while this very presence (of an inter-subjectively shared structure of signs or meaning), on the other hand, is brought about by (and thus depends on) human beings (see Franke and Roos 2010:1066).

present and the subsequent subsection to illustrate how (a very small sample of) those types of rules for action could be named that guide the UN, the G20, and the interrelations taking place between them.

Let us begin with the first type of rules, which defines the constitutive problem of action. The UN can be grasped as a structure of corporate practice that addresses the problem of world order. Its basic rule for action can be formulated as follows: “Shape the relations among states in a way that they are peaceful, secure, friendly, and cooperative.” Referring even more explicitly to the Charter of the UN, one could also term the basic rules like this: “[S]ave succeeding generations from the scourge of war” (Preamble); “[M]aintain international peace and security” (Article 1); “[D]evelop friendly relations among nations” (Article 2); “[A]chieve international co-operation” (Article 3). The structure of corporate practice termed G20 (which is also located “above” the level of states) primarily regulates those problems that are related to pressing challenges to global economics and finance. Hence, the G20’s basic rule for action can be phrased as: “Swiftly address all troubles on the level of global economics and finance that have the potential to produce serious imbalances.” Or in terms of the group’s self-description (even if this is of course not as prominent and recognized (yet) as the Charter of the United Nations): “[Coordinate policy between members] in order to achieve global economic stability, [and] sustainable growth”; “[Promote] financial regulations that reduce risks and prevent future financial crises”; “[Modernize] international financial architecture” (G20 2013).

The second type of rules for action establishes various structural positions and defines the relationships among them. In case of the UN, this, first of all, includes the creation of substructures—that is, the principal and subsidiary organs (according to Article 7 of the UN Charter): “[Create] a General Assembly, a Security Council, an Economic and Social Council, a Trusteeship Council, an International Court of Justice and a Secretariat” (Article 7.1). A rule that defines the relationship between two of the UN’s principal organs is stated in Article 12.1: “While the Security Council is exercising in respect of any dispute or situation the functions assigned to it in the present Charter, the General Assembly shall not make any recommendation with regard to that dispute or situation unless the Security Council so requests.” It is on this level of principal and subsidiary organs—substructures of the structure of corporate practice termed UN—where structural positions are established. Article 97, for instance, demands: “The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary-General and such staff as the Organization may require. The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. He shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization.” Another prominent structural position is created by Article 23, which regulates the composition of the UN Security Council and distinguishes permanent and non-permanent members. As to the G20, it can be grasped as an effect of a rule for action of the second type that there are special assistants (sherpas and sous-sherpas) to the regular participants of the meetings (the finance ministers and central bank governors, as well as, since 2008, the heads of state and government). Concerning their relationship it is adequate to establish a rule for action that holds: “The sherpas and sous-sherpas prepare the meetings of the finance ministers, the central bank governors, and the heads of state and governments.”

Further rules of the second type regulate the relationship between the assistants across and within national delegations to the G20 meetings or constitute working groups (such as those on the International Financial Architecture [IFA], Development, Anti-Corruption, or Energy Sustainability). Regarding the G20 meetings on the level of the heads of state and government in particular, it is another effect of a rule for action of the second type that there are the structural positions of the chair of the group as well as of a member of the “G20 Troika” (consisting of the past, the present, and the future chair).

Finally, the third type of rules for action constitutes structural potentials; it defines what is possible or impossible for those who hold a structural position. Article 24.1 of the UN Charter, for instance, holds that “Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.” Another very prominent (and particularly influential) rule for action of this type is formulated by Article 27.3 of the Charter: “Decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.” On the level of the G20, the structural potential of a sherpa is distinct from that of a central bank governor, a finance minister, or a head of state and government. Whereas sherpas (as we have already seen above in the case of defining the relationship between structural positions in the G20 process) prepare the meetings of central bank governors, finance ministers, and heads of state and government, a rule for action formulated on behalf of the latter could be stated: “Prepare decisions that are formally to be made on the national level (according to the rules of the respective polities).”

From this perspective, a central advantage of the proposed pragmatist model becomes tangible: Both structures of corporate practice, the UN and the G20, can be examined at the same time and in the same terms; the model thus serves as a kind of common denominator. This means that it is not required to predetermine whether a structure of corporate practice deemed relevant is state or non-state, formal or informal, or whether it is better described as an organization, an institution, or else. What is decisive, instead, is to conceive any human actor—be it the UN Secretary-General or a sherpa—as embedded in a (couple of) distinct structure(s) of corporate practice with various structural positions and structural potentials.

Relations between the United Nations and the G20 as a Structure of Corporate Practice

According to our extension of the concept, it is not only the UN and the G20 that can each be grasped as a distinct structure of corporate practice; the same holds for their relations—even if those have not been highly visible so far.¹³ UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, however, started participating in the G20 summits in 2008 and is confident of both structures’ potential for mutual support (UN News Centre 2012). Besides, the UN has assigned Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) Jomo Kwame Sundaram from the UN Department for Social and Economic Affairs (DESA) with the task to serve as the organization’s G20 sherpa.

Empirically, these are the starting-points for an analysis of the relations between the UN and the G20 as a structure of corporate practice of its own. Those who will study the UN secretary general’s meetings with the G20’s heads of states and governments, or the meetings between the sherpas from the G20 members with the G20 sherpa of the UN ASG Jomo

13. This claim does not contradict the observation that the United Nations and the G20 are frequently related to each other by scholars and think tankers, mostly to propose the G20 as a (geographically more nuanced) model for reforming the UN Security Council (see, for instance, Quarterman 2010).

Kwame Sundaram, will be in a good position to reconstruct important rules for action—either by looking at the “self-descriptions” of participants (communiqués, interviews, etc.) or by examining how others (the media, non-participating politicians, and diplomats, etc.) think of these meetings. Regardless of which research strategy will be chosen, the rules revealed in this way will refer to underlying problems of action, structural positions as well as structural potentials; they will manifest the contribution to global order provided by that structure of corporate practice that is currently located at the very center of world politics—the relations between the UN and the G20.

Conclusion

Our article set in with the observation that inter-organizational relations—relations among states, IOs, NGOs, and informal institutions—are omnipresent and play an increasing role in global governance and the establishment of global order. As a consequence, we primarily aimed at proposing a conceptual tool for the study of inter-organizational relations in world politics. This tool was built around the concept of structures of corporate practice and is rooted in the philosophy of classical pragmatism. In contrast to existing approaches that engage with inter-organizational relations in IR—global governance, resource dependence and sociological neo-institutionalism, as well as network theories—we hope our model is universally applicable in that it avoids both concentrating only on a certain structure of corporate practice (IOs, for instance) and studying only a particular policy field (security, for instance).

The heuristic potential of the proposed model, which focuses on (various types of) rules for action understood as a way to cope with problems of action, was exemplified by means of the UN, the G20, and—very briefly—the relations between them. It goes without saying that this was done rudimentarily and programmatically. Put differently, our examination of the multitude of inter-organizational relations has only just begun. Further research is needed to theoretically elaborate on the model and fathom its blind spots but also (and primarily so) to establish its empirical value by carrying out case studies on a broader set of relations among the constituents of world politics. For now, Pandora’s Box seems to be open.

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