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**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL
BUREAUCRACIES**

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1. Introduction

International organizations are important participants in world politics. Since the creation of the League of Nations in 1919 which many scholars see as the starting point of modern international organization (Alvarez 2006; Rochester 1986; Yalem 1966; Koch 2008: 33-36), their number, their geographic distribution, and the scope of their activities has steadily increased (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Shanks et al. 1996). Moreover, their roles and functions, their means of action, and their relationship to the nation states that empower them have changed significantly over time, with international organizations gradually acquiring new roles and tasks beyond their original mandate and increasing their autonomy from their member states governments (Martin and Simmons 1998; Hawkins et al. 2006; Reinalda et al. 1998). In parallel to these developments, the internal structure of international organizations has also undergone continuous and far-reaching changes as international organizations increasingly focus on internal management reforms to improve their legitimacy and performance (Bauer et al. 2007; Coffey and Riley 2006; Weaver 2008; Koch 2008; Chwieroth 2008; Ness and Brechin 1988).

An area in which these organizational changes are becoming highly visible is the field of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping and statebuilding operations. Since the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping operations have increased in number, geographical focus, as well as in their overall complexity (Paris 2004; Berdal et al. 2007; Howard 2008; Seibel 2008). Numerous case studies on recent UN peacebuilding missions show how their scope as well as their level of ambition is moving well beyond the principles of earlier peacekeeping missions. In the most complex cases, the presence of international organizations has begun to assume the character of *de facto* protectorates (Seibel 2008; Berdal and Leifer 2007; Economides 2007; Chesterman 2007; see also Ignatieff 2003) with international organizations such as the United Nations, the EU, or the NATO imposing globalized models of public administration upon “failed” or war-torn states. In the

literature, this establishment of transitional administrations is described as “humanitarian occupation” (Fox 2008), “benevolent foreign autocracy” (Chesterman 2005: 339, Chesterman 2004), “international protectorates” (Keohane 2003: 9) or simply as “international administrations” (Caplan 2005), a terminology that points to the paradoxical fact that international organizations have gone as far as to temporarily assume the powers of national governments, thereby turning traditional perceptions of sovereignty and of the relationship between (some) nation states and intergovernmental organizations upside down (Fox 2008).

In order to understand the role international organizations play in the area of peacebuilding, one therefore has to develop a deeper understanding of how the roles, functions, internal structures, and self-perceptions of international organizations change. While more traditional approaches to international relations would explain these developments mainly as a result of changing state-preferences in the aftermath of the Cold War (see for example Paris 2004: 13-16), an organizational perspective adds internal changes within international organizations as a further and independent category of explanatory factors to the analysis (see for example Thakur 2006: chap. 13). Although the “organizational turn” (Ellis 2008) in the study of international organizations is still in its infancy, scholars in the area of peacekeeping have begun to incorporate internal organizational dynamics in their analyses. For example, in an empirical study on UN peacekeeping in civil wars, Howard observes that part of the changes in UN operations during the 1990s can be explained by an increased political and managerial autonomy of multilateral organizations vis-à-vis their memberstates:

"There is indeed mounting evidence that the Secretariat often now functions as something significantly more than a talk shop or the handmaiden of the Security Council, and that it is even beginning to take on state-like qualities. For example, in many peacekeeping operations, members of the Secretariat are in positions to make foreign policy and even life and death decisions for people in states emerging from civil war." (Howard 2008: 340)

From a learning perspective, Benner et al. (2007) have begun to analyse the emergence of an internal infrastructure for organizational learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy. They find that only recently systematic management reforms have been initiated which are aimed at improving the UN's institutional memory and promoting processes of institutional learning within that organization. However, as Seibel (2008) points out, success or failure of organizational change and learning in the area of statebuilding and the establishment of transitional administrations can only be explained adequately if one takes into account the specific governance structure of international peacebuilding operations. This governance structure is characterized by a complex and often problematic interplay of the intergovernmental arena where states act according to their perceived national interests and the organizational arena where international bureaucrats and policy experts try to learn from past experience and design effective transitional administrations for war-torn and contested territories. In a similar vein, Veit and Schlichte (Veit, Schlichte 2009) argue that in order to fully

understand organizational behaviour in the field of peacekeeping, the complex interplay of three interconnected arenas needs to be analyzed: (1) multilateral negotiation and decision-making among nation-states, (2) the interpretation and concretisation of these decisions within an international organization's central bureaucracy, and (3) their execution by the field personnel.

What these few examples demonstrate is that the analysis of international organizations in world politics can clearly benefit from an explicitly organizational research perspective. This is true for the analysis of peacekeeping operations, but also for most other areas of international politics. In the following section we will briefly outline the contours of an emerging research program that analyses international bureaucracies as formal organizations. Building on the results of a set of case studies on organizational change in the European Commission, the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and other international organizations, section 3 then advances a set of hypotheses about the substance, timing, and the outcomes of management reforms in international organizations under varying conditions and in different organizational environments. The chapter ends with four generalized recommendations as to how researchers and practitioners should proceed in order to improve the understanding of organizational change and learning in general and discusses the implication for the inter-organizational basis of UN peace operations.

2. International Bureaucracies as Formal Organizations:

Contours of an Emerging Research Program

Although international organizations have stood in the focus of scholarly interest for many years we still have little systematic understanding of the factors and conditions that determine changes of their internal management structure (Liese and Weinlich 2006). For many years, International Relations has treated international organizations primarily as a sort of a device or platform for intergovernmental decision-making rather than international actors in their own right. International organizations were conceived of as the deliberate creation of dominant nation states and were assumed to emerge, change, and eventually disappear in function of these states strategic interests and preferences. Neorealist scholars saw international institutions merely as a "reflection of the distribution of power in the world" (Mearsheimer 1994: 7) and consequently showed little interest in a deeper analysis of international organizations. From a realist perspective, as Susan Strange pointedly remarked, international organizations were little more than "a big yawn" (Strange 1998: 215). Neoliberal institutionalists showed greater interest in the role and function of international organizations as they believed that these institutions could improve the chances of intergovernmental cooperation (Keohane 1984). However, as they understood international organizations as instruments developed by nation states in order to reduce the obstacles to intergovernmental cooperation, they were mainly

interested in the optimal design of international institutions (Koremenos et al. 2004; Mitchell 1994). In both neorealist and neoliberal approaches, therefore, the bureaucratic interior of international organizations deliberately remained outside the analytical focus.

By contrast, the sub-disciplines of public administration and policy analysis which place great emphasis on the analysis of bureaucracies and their internal structures and dynamics have shown surprisingly little interest in the internal workings of intergovernmental organizations. Even comparative studies of administrative reform tend to ignore international organizations and focus solely on the similarities and differences between national administrative systems (Peters 2001). The only international organization that so far has received significant attention from public administration scholars is the European Union. What could be termed the “public administration turn” of studying the European Union (Héritier 1997; Héritier and Knill 2001; Knill 2001) has provided us with a number of important insights into the internal dynamics of the European Commission and its effects on supranational institution building and domestic policy outcomes (for an overview, see Bauer 2005; see also Egeberg 2006). The interest in the European Commission as a supranational administration originated in the 1970s (Michelmann 1978; Coombes 1970). Yet, it is only since the dramatic resignation of the Commission under the presidency of Jacques Santer in 1999 that the administrative reform issue enjoys greater academic interest (cf. Bauer 2007).¹ In other words, it is exactly this exception that illustrates the lack of general knowledge and the dearth of empirical case studies about administrative reforms in international organizations.

The need for a more systematic research program that explicitly treats international organizations as independent actors and, in order to better understand their behaviour, is genuinely interested in their specific quality as organizations or bureaucracies, has been expressed before (Ness and Brechin 1988). However, only recently do we see the gradual emergence of a more comprehensive set of studies that explicitly treats international bureaucracies as formal organizations (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004; Reinalda et al. 1998; Koch 2008; Bauer et al. 2007; Dingwerth and Campe 2006; Dingwerth et al. 2009; Hawkins et al. 2006; see also Benner et al. in this volume). The main characteristics of this “organizational turn in international organization theory” (Ellis 2008) are:

- International organizations are seen as (partially) independent actors in international politics.
- As such, their actions and therefore their contribution to processes of international governance are determined not only by external factors, but also by their internal structures and dynamics. In other words, “organizations

¹ This development is best illustrated by fact that Pollitt and Bouckaert included a chapter on the European Commission only in the second edition of their seminal study on public management reform (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000 and 2004).

themselves are important units of analysis, precisely because they take on a life and character of their own” (Ness and Brechin 1988: 270).

- In order to reach a better understanding of these internal processes, international organizations have to be analyzed as formal organizations, thereby making use of the analytical perspectives and tools of public administration and organization research. In particular, organizational analysis of international administrations has to explain how, why, and to what effect organizational change and reform take place.

In sum, what is at stake in this emerging research program is a partial shift of focus from the *organization* to the *organizations* of the international system (Ness and Brechin 1988: 246). In the following we will try to open the “black box” of intergovernmental organizations and develop a preliminary set of hypotheses about the causes and mechanisms of internal change and reform in international bureaucracies.

3. Organizational Change in International Bureaucracies: Empirical Findings

As we have argued in the previous section, scholarly understanding of management reforms in international organizations, both in theoretical and empirical terms, is still rather limited and few theoretical attempts have been made in order to link the findings of existing studies to broader and more general theories of organizational change and administrative reform. In this section, we analyze a set of recently conducted case studies on organizational change in the United Nations, the OECD, the European Commission, and other international organizations and try to forward preliminary hypotheses and generalizations on the causes and effects of management reforms in international organizations.² The analysis of our case studies will be complemented by references to corresponding findings of other studies in the gradually emerging research agenda that treats international organizations as formal organizations rather than mechanisms, structures, or sets of rules within which others, usually nation-states, act (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 4).

Basically, change in international organizations can be caused by internal or external factors (for this distinction, see for example Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 42; Cox et al. 1973; Barnett and Coleman 2005, more generally on the relationship between internal and external determinants of organizational change see March 1981). In the following we will apply this distinction for a first systematization of the origins and driving forces of change in international bureaucracies.

² The eleven case studies analyzed here are published in Bauer et al. 2007.

3.1 The Influence of External Factors

The group of external factors comprises those influences on change in international organizations that emerge from the organization's broader environment. Most of the case studies we analyzed find external factors to be an important source of organizational change and reform. This finding is in line with previous research, most notably with a series of case studies on change in the internal decision-making procedures of intergovernmental organizations conducted by Cox, Jacobson and colleagues, which found external forces, especially nation states, to be the single most important causal factors (Cox et al. 1973).

In the following, we distinguish two types of external factors, namely effects of the organizational domain and effects of a changing constituency of international organizations.

3.1.1 Organizational Domain

The findings presented in our case studies indicate that the organizational environment in which international organizations operate can have an important impact on the occurrence or non-occurrence of management reforms. This causal relationship, however, goes beyond a mere mechanistic linkage of domain changes leading to respective organizational responses. Such an assumption would not only mean overlooking the fact that organizations might have considerable autonomy from their environment and are capable of shaping and affecting this environment (March and Olsen 1995; Reinalda et al. 1998; Verhoest et al. 2004). It also neglects - and this is the central argument we are able to deduct from the cases studies we analyzed - the fact that specific characteristics of the organizational domain affect its influence on organizational change.

Of particular importance in this respect is the *homogeneity of the organizational domain*. It makes a difference whether an international organization fulfils very narrowly defined tasks within a rather homogeneous organizational environment or whether the organization is active in a variety of different sectors, implying that it operates within a much more heterogeneous domain. Modeling the relationship between an organization and its relevant environment in terms of a signal game, we expect an organization to receive clearer and less ambiguous signals (for example to reform in order to combat organizational deficits) if it operates in a homogenous domain than is the case for organizations operating in a more heterogeneous domain. In the latter case, it is well conceivable that organizations receive contradictory signals and hence remain more hesitant when deciding upon respective changes.

To illustrate this point a bit further, we might take the examples of the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission as well as the OECD. The ECB has a single major task and operates in a professional environment of great homogeneity (as regards the efficiency-driven norms and concepts of the economic sector) in which management standards are generally undisputed and well accepted. As a result, it is hardly surprising that the ECB has undertaken

considerable reform of its internal management practices and hence responded to the rather clear signals from its domain (Glöckler 2007; Bauer and Foerster 2006). The European Commission and the OECD, by contrast, are responsible for a huge variety of outputs and hence are confronted with highly differentiated environments. Against this backdrop, it seems highly plausible that both organizations for many years have been (and in the OECD case still are) reform laggards (Schön-Quinlivan 2007; Bauer 2007; Balint and Knill 2007). Based on these considerations, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1:* The extent to which changes in the organizational domain trigger management reforms in international organizations depends on the degree of domain homogeneity. The more homogeneous the organizational environment, the more we expect far-reaching and swift organizational changes in order to close potential gaps to developments in the organizational domain.
- *Hypothesis 2:* As domain heterogeneity can be expected to increase with the number of tasks for which an organization is responsible, management reforms should be more pronounced (greater speed, broader objectives) in single-purpose than in multi-purpose organizations at the international level.

3.1.2 Organizational Constituency

In addition to the characteristics of an organization's domain one might expect similar influences emerging from the nature of its constituency. Do the reform orientations and reform developments in the member states of an international organization make a difference in terms of management reforms? And does it make a difference, whether the member states reflect a rather homogenous group in terms socio-economic and political conditions?

Interestingly, the evidence of the case we analyzed does not support these expectations. There seems to be no clear and straightforward linkage between constituency characteristics and organizational reform developments. For instance, reform developments in the ECB and the European Commission differ sharply, notwithstanding the fact that they have (almost) the same constituency (Glöckler 2007; Bauer 2007). In addition, we find that the reform developments in the European Commission are still more pronounced than those within the OECD, although in the OECD there is a higher share of member states that can be classified as pioneer states of public management reforms (see also Knill and Balint 2008). We thus should have expected much more reform activity in the OECD than in the European Commission. These findings are rather surprising from the perspective of intergovernmentalist approaches (cf. Moravcsik 1993, 1998), which expect that international organizations are highly responsive to the interests of their members. However, they confirm the findings of a study by Barnett and Coleman (2005) who argue that the way in which an international organization responds to its external constituency depends to an important degree on the "congruity between the organizational culture and the content of the environmental pressures" (Barnett and Coleman 2005: 595). In their study on

organizational change in the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) they find that marked differences between Interpol's organizational identity and the external demands of nation states to focus more strongly on political crimes led the organization to adopt strategies of avoidance or defiance, thus refuting external demands for organizational and programmatic change. Interpol only gave up its opposition to the demands of its constituency when states started to create other international organizations to fulfil the desired functions which as direct competitors began to threaten Interpol's organizational standing in the area of crime control and prevention.

While the *nature of the constituency* therefore appears to have an ambiguous impact which is strongly dependent on further intervening factors such as "organizational security" (Barnett and Coleman 2005), the opposite is the case when it comes to *changes in the constituency*. Several case studies report strong increases in reform activities as a result of such changes. This holds true not only for respective developments in the Nordic Council (where membership decreased) (Etzold 2007), but also for the European Commission and the European Parliament, where prospects of enlargement constituted an important driving force for managerial reforms (Schön-Quinlivan 2007; Bauer 2007; Kungla 2007). Similar evidence is presented by Bourantonis in his account of UN Security Council reform. In his historical study, he finds that growing UN membership was the single most important factor pressing for change in the composition of the Security Council. Regarding the causes of the 1963 Security Council reform, he writes that "(t)he dramatic increase in UN membership, which continued unabated until 1963, upset the ratio of the total number of members of the UN to the number of seats in the Security Council and brought about pressures for a reconsideration of the original composition of the Security Council and, more particularly, its non-permanent category." (Bourantonis 2005: 75).

The great influence of an increase in the number of member states on change and reform in international organizations is also supported by the pathbreaking empirical study on decision-making in international organizations by Cox, Jacobson, and their colleagues (Cox et al. 1973). In an early overview of this and other studies on change and reform in international organizations, Finkelstein comes to the conclusion that "(t)he greatest motor of change (...) has been the generation of new states which have both altered the composition and voting balances of the international organizations they joined in a massive influx and also posed a new agenda of problems to be dealt with" (Finkelstein 1974, S. 497, see also Cox et al. 1973).

In this context, however, it should be emphasized that constituency changes per se might only be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for triggering reforms. As indicated by our case studies, increases or decreases in membership were typically linked to the perception among the member states of existing performance deficits that were expected to further increase with membership changes (see also the contributions in Best et al. 2008). Consequently, for the European Central Bank, due to its absolute independence from its constituency

and its high degree of agenda-setting power, “(e)nlargement (...) has not proved to be a catalyst for transformative institutional change” (Dyson 2008: 9). Similarly, Bourantonis’ study of UN Security Council reform shows that increases in the number of UN member countries do not automatically result in organizational change and reform. Due to the strong resistance of the permanent Security Council members on the one hand and disagreement among the reform-oriented member states on the other, increasing numbers of member-states in the 1990s and a widely shared desire for reform did not result in further changes of the size or composition of the Security Council (Bourantonis 2005:77-82).

These considerations suggest the following hypotheses on constituency effects:

- *Hypothesis 3*: Characteristics of an international organization's constituency (in particular with regard to homogeneity of public management orientations and socio-economic and political conditions) have no significant effect on the speed and scope of management reforms in this organization.
- *Hypothesis 4*: The speed and scope of management reforms in international organizations increase with the extent to which pre-existing concerns on performance gaps coincide with changes in the organization's constituency.

3.2 The Influence of Internal Factors

Whether or not international organizations change their internal management structures is also affected by factors that are endogenous to the organization in question, including the nature of an organization, its size, its leadership and internal politics, its organizational culture and identity, as well as the internal origin of reform attempts.

3.2.1 The Nature of the Organization

It seems plausible that the nature of an organization, and here in particular its status as a supranational or intergovernmental body, has an impact on respective management reforms. This argument is based on the assumption that supranational organizations dispose of a higher degree of autonomy from their members than it is the case for their intergovernmental counterparts. As a consequence, we should expect a much higher responsiveness of intergovernmental organizations to changes in their member states' preferences, hence implying that the speed and degree of management reforms should be more pronounced than in supranational organizations.

This expectation, however, is not supported by the case studies we analyzed. On the contrary, we find rather far-reaching reform developments in the ECB (Glöckler 2007), the European Parliament (Kungla 2007) and – with some delay – also in the European Commission (Wille 2007; Bauer 2007), see also (Kassim 2008), while reforms at the level of the intergovernmental organizations we investigated remained rather piecemeal and certainly not more pronounced than those in the supranational bodies under study (Alesani et al. 2007; Balint and Knill 2007; Kerler 2007; Etzold 2007).

How can this puzzling finding be explained? We argue that our findings imply no contradiction to existing theories in which the degree of organizational autonomy is seen as an important factor affecting the policy-making capacity and policy impact of international organizations. It is hardly disputed that a supranational organization, such as the European Commission, in contrast to intergovernmental national organizations enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy and hence independent influence on policy-making within the European Union (for a recent account of the European Commission's considerable degree of policy autonomy, see Trondal 2008). However, while autonomy might make an important difference for an organization's role in policy-making, this need not necessarily be the case when it comes to questions of internal operational autonomy and internal affairs.³ Here it is well conceivable that member states leave international organizations (regardless of their status as either supranational or intergovernmental bodies) rather broad leeway, as these issues do not directly interfere with domestic positional and policy interests.

Indeed our case studies underline that while the level of autonomy as regards policy delivery of international organizations may vary, virtually all organizations under study appear to be rather independent when it comes to the regulation of their internal administrative affairs. Hence, the supranational or intergovernmental nature of international organizations seems to be of limited relevance in order to account for the degree of reforms of their internal management.

- *Hypothesis 5*: The nature of an international organization (in particular its status as supranational or intergovernmental body) has no significant effect on the speed and scope of management reforms in this organization.

3.2.2 *Organizational Size*

The case studies we analyzed also provide evidence for the fact that the size of an international organization has an impact on the degree and process of management reforms. In this context, size is not only a matter of the number of staff per se (which can reach from some dozens to several thousand civil servants), but also closely related to the extent to which international organizations have been designed for single or multiple tasks.

More specifically, the smaller an organization is, the less we expect the organization to be able to independently influence its organizational environment. Consequently, small organizations might be much more responsive to developments and challenges emerging in their domain. Reforms in smaller international organizations, therefore, are more likely to reflect a pattern of continuous incremental adaptations. Etzold's case study on reorganization processes in the Nordic Council illustrates the assumption that smaller organizations with a rather limited spectrum of responsibilities are more

³ For a systematic account of the distinction between political and operational (or managerial) autonomy, see Verhoest et al. (2004).

responsive to their environment and more apt to respond to changing requirements through incremental but continuous internal reforms (Etzold 2007).

For larger organizations, by contrast, reform patterns might reflect a less responsive pattern, assuming that these organizations either have a more autonomous position towards their environment as a result of their higher influence in their domain or that these huge bureaucratic entities are just less apt to adapt quickly to changing requirements. Their reform patterns will hence reveal a less continuous, but also less incremental pattern. As larger organizations can afford to leave a bigger gap between their own structures and their environment, reforms, when actually perceived as being necessary, are more likely to go beyond merely piecemeal adjustments. This can be expected at least in terms of reform rhetoric, leaving issues of deficient implementation aside. The late, but far-reaching “Kinnock reform” of the European Commission which only became possible when the Commission came under severe legitimation pressures may serve as one prominent example (Bauer 2007; Kassim 2004).

- *Hypothesis 6*: The smaller an international organization in terms of size, the more responsive it is to changes in its environment, implying that management reforms follow a pattern of continuous and incremental adjustments.

3.2.3 Leadership and Internal Politics

The adoption and implementation of organizational reforms requires a certain degree of consensus among the involved actors. This consensus, however, can hardly be expected to emerge ‘out of the blue’, as reforms, in many instances, are highly contested between potential reform beneficiaries and reform opponents seeking to preserve the status quo or favoring other reform options and directions.

Against this background, successful reformers not only require building coalitions for achieving necessary majorities in the decision-making process, but also have to ensure the compliance of important stakeholders during the implementation stage. Successful management reforms in international organizations are strongly dependent upon the strategic and tactical capabilities of their leadership in order to overcome internal resistance to change. In other words, internal reform processes matter for the magnitude of organizational reform. The design of these processes, on the other hand, is strongly affected by the existence of committed political entrepreneurs within the organization and their leadership skills (Chwieroth 2008). Four decades ago, Cox already pointed to the importance of leadership for organizational change in intergovernmental organizations when he noted that “(t)he quality of executive leadership may prove to be the most critical single determinant of the growth in scope and authority of international organization” (Cox 1969: 205). The relevance of this argument becomes apparent in almost all the case studies we analyzed, but is most pronounced and empirically demonstrated in the analysis by Baumann, Hagel and Kobler of the role of “reform brokers” in the modernization of international organizations (Baumann et al. 2007). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 7*: Management reforms in international organizations are more intensive the more there is committed and skillful leadership within the organization.

3.2.4 *The Impact of Organizational Crisis*

What is the impact of organizational crisis on the degree of respective management reforms? The evidence from our case studies indicates that there is no straightforward relationship between crisis perception and reform. This can be traced to three aspects.

First, while the existence of a crisis can be seen as important condition for reforms taking place, this does not automatically lead to actual adoption of respective reforms. There might still be powerful actors within the organization who successfully oppose reform proposals.

Second, it is well conceivable and often the case that organizations reform themselves in the absence of crisis. Change without crisis can either occur because organizations anticipate potential problems in the future or react to them already at an early stage. Moreover, change without crisis can occur as a result of isomorphic adjustments to developments in the organizational environment. In the case studies we have analyzed, we rarely see organizations reform in face of open crisis but rather in response to organizational changes within their peer group or as a pre-emptive measure in view of alternations in their environmental constellations. In other words, questions of organizational legitimacy seem to be more important than issues of functional performance in order to bring about organizational change (see also the contributions in Coicaud et al. 2001). This point is driven home by various case studies; in particular by Balint and Knill's analysis of the reform of human resource management in the OECD (Balint, Knill 2007), by Etzold's study on reorganization processes in the Nordic Council and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Etzold 2007), by Kerler's analysis of reform at the World Bank (Kerler 2007), and by Mehde's account on administrative reforms as a means to enhance the legitimacy of an international organization (Mehde 2007). From a realist or a principal-agent perspective, this finding may be surprising. But if one takes into account that legitimacy is on one of the major sources of IO authority (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) and a principal reason why states regularly seek the mandate of an international organization before engaging in critical actions, such as peace enforcement operations (Coleman 2007; Coicaud 2001), it becomes apparent that the quest for international legitimacy constitutes an important source of organizational change.

Third, the link between crisis and reform is further complicated by the fact that the very nature of organizational crisis matters. As argued by Knill and Balint (2008), it makes a difference whether crisis stems from a kind of dissatisfaction with the performance of an international organization or whether it is the result of a search for a new organizational identity and mission. In case of performance challenges, one would expect management reforms to be seen as useful devices to improve the situation. Olson therefore rightly characterizes performance crises as useful

“reality checks” (Olsen 2002: 590). Organizational identity crises, by contrast, might have a paralyzing effect. Without a clear idea of the (future) mission of an organization, reform momentum is easily lost: would-be reformers do not know with certainty what is most important to focus on and where to start improvement.

- *Hypothesis 8*: The extent to which the existence or perception of crises affects management reforms in international organizations depends on the nature of crisis. The more crises are linked to the organization’s very identity (implying that its core functions are disputed) rather than mere operational performance gaps, the lesser the organization’s capability of responding swiftly and comprehensively to the challenges. The more a crisis affects an organization’s core, the lesser the likelihood that crisis actually triggers systematic reform endeavors.

3.2.5 Political Versus Administrative Origin of Organizational Reforms

A fundamental dichotomy that might affect results, goals and processes of organizational reforms refers to the question whether organizational reforms are initiated predominantly by administrative actors or by political leaders within the organization in question. As political and administrative actors might pursue rather different reform objectives and be guided by different interests, it seems plausible that this distinction has an impact on the scope, scale and the very character of organizational reforms.

Administrative reformers seem to be concerned primarily with issues of functional performance. That implies that reforms dominated by the administration of an international organization are more directed towards incremental adjustments in order to improve and optimize the organization’s operative capacities. If, by contrast, reforms are politically driven, issues of legitimacy towards the organizational environment rather than aspects of functional performance might play a dominant role. Moreover, as politicians generally have an incentive to demonstrate a profound impact of their activities, they should strive for more fundamental rather than piecemeal developments. At the same time, however, the potential ignorance towards functional issues might imply that one-sided political reforms might suffer from far-reaching implementation problems if they are not supported by the administration. As a consequence, there is a higher potential that politically driven reforms instead remain at a symbolic level, with fundamental reform announcements being trimmed down to minor changes during the implementation stage. These considerations suggest the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 9*: The more management reforms of international organizations are dominated by administrative actors, the more we will observe incremental changes in order to improve functional performance. By contrast, the more reforms are driven by political actors, the higher the probability of more fundamental reform attempts in order to increase an organization’s external legitimacy.

- *Hypothesis 10*: The more political actors dominate management reforms of international organizations, the higher the likelihood of implementation deficits, given a gap between political legitimacy concerns and issues of functional performance advocated by the organization's administration.

Conclusions

This account of the causes and conditions of administrative reforms in international organizations is primarily an explorative exercise. Based on a set of recent case studies of management reforms in international organizations, the generalizations and preliminary hypotheses presented here are first attempts to gather facts, systematize observable patterns and propose possible explanations for the wide array of organizational reforms which we regularly observe at the international level. In other words, the results presented here are the starting point for a discussion rather than a synthesis to settle competing claims and theories.

In view of this explorative character of our analysis, we will conclude with four recommendations as to where – in our opinion – researchers interested in the topic may want to go and what they should keep in mind in order to further improve our understanding of administrative reforms of international organizations.

(1) *Invest in good description*. First and above all, we need more reliable empirical data on the phenomenon of organizational change in international bureaucracies. There is an unjustified disdain in contemporary social science for the description of political events. While the primary aim of social sciences is to uncover causal inferences, we should not forget that causal explanations have to be based on sufficient and adequate description. However, with respect to explaining administrative reform in international organizations we still do not know enough about our factual and potential cases for developing already well-specified concepts and general explanations. In particular, we need better tools for evaluating the intensity of organizational change. Furthermore, we need to know more about the various elements of administrative reforms (financial-budgetary, personnel and institutional) and their respective importance for organizational change on the whole. We thus need to work on ways to optimize our categories of change and on exact operationalizations as to relate observations more precisely to our theoretical concepts. Good description is an indispensable requirement for the development of sound theories. The gradual emergence of an “organizational turn” in the study of international organizations (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Ellis 2008; Benner et al. 2008; Bauer 2008b) may provide the necessary incentive for political science scholarship to broaden the empirical foundation for a better understanding of processes of organizational change in international bureaucracies.

(2) *Focus on the actors*. A further challenge is to connect macro-level reform change with micro-level behavior of real world human actors. Our understanding of individual actors' preferences, their utility functions but also the implications of culturally or nationally bound behavioral patterns is still very limited. For example,

it may be that culture and nationality are no significant factors since such differences are business as usual for transnational administrative elites like the cosmopolitically educated and socialized work force of international organizations (Trondal 2008). However, the case studies we analyzed suggest that reform promoters often have a background of a particular administrative reform culture through their experience in their 'home country'. In fact we know little about whether and to what extent particular role understanding, or images of political order, particular career paths (predominant national or international socialization), particular patterns of staff representation and unionization, flexible or rigid career structures actually affect administrative reforms in international organization. As Ellis points out correctly, this intraorganizational level of analysis so far has been widely neglected in the study of international organizations (Ellis 2008).

(3) *Encourage dialogue between the sub-disciplines*. It would be a huge mistake to analyze organizational change in international bureaucracies only from the perspective of distinctive academic sub-disciplines. Rather the challenge is to identify common ground and to combine tools, theories and explanations from the various related sub-disciplines (public administration, international relations, organization theory, political science). However, as it stands now, we see a problematic division of labor among the disciplines where "international lawyers remain hard at work proposing new IOs or proposing institutional reforms to correct the 'birth defects' of the IOs that we now have" (Alvarez 2006: 339) while scholars of international relations continue to play down or even deny the autonomous agency of intergovernmental organizations as well as their independent influence on international governance processes. Political scientist and international relations scholars who are acquainted with the driving forces of organizational reform in international administrations as well as the political and institutional obstacles that prevent an optimal design of international organizations could contribute a more cautious note to the often overly optimistic debate among national policymakers and international lawyers.

(4) Finally, we encourage researchers intending to explore the field of administrative reforms of international organizations *not to lose sight of the 'so what' question*. In other words, we should not stop at describing and explaining organizational change as the dependent variable. It is rather an important step of further research to take administrative reforms of international organizations as the independent variable and ask what difference particular patterns of reforms make for actual policy outputs and policy outcomes (Bauer 2008a). If we know more about these relationships, the discussion of organizational change in international bureaucracies can be fruitfully linked to questions of policy-making under the conditions of multilevel governance that are of crucial importance for policy-analysts, organizational sociologists, scholars of international relations as well as professionals and politicians.

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