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## **Issue Professionals in Transnational Networks**

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## **Issue Professionals in Transnational Networks**

### **Abstract**

Professionals and organizations both seek to exploit and cooperate with each other. Professionals seek alliances in their own peer networks while organizations do the same. These networks carry not only information that inform incentives but norms about appropriate forms of governance and practices that guide how they actually work. In this paper we outline how professionals and organizations operate in two-level networks through a focus on issue control over issues of transnational governance. As such, this interdisciplinary paper brings together insights from Organization Studies and International Relations to discuss how professionals and organizations battle over issue control through the designation of tasks and the creation of overlapping networks. We outline the emergence of ‘issue professionals’ and how they attempt network management. We do so via a case on transnational sustainability certification that demonstrates how issue professionals are engaged in two-level networks.

**Keywords:** Network theory, professional networks, organizational networks, transnational governance, issue control

### **Introduction**

In recent decades regulatory and professional coordination on a range of issues has been elevated to the transnational level, with International Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and firms all making efforts to control issues in which they have a stake. These organizational forms host professionals that compete and cooperate within and across different types of organizations. A professional agronomist working on food security at the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) may create networks with professionals from others IOs, as well as NGOs like CARE and firms like DuPont to form an alliance on how to treat the transnational issue. Her boss at the FAO may be less keen and block activities that damage his organizational performance objectives, including competing with other UN agencies and the

World Health Organization. In general, both professionals and organizations face a twin-challenge in having to bridge organizational and professional logics to form alliances that support their interpretation of issue control at the transnational level. Change in organizational aims and demands may weaken a professional's ability to control an issue, just as a shifting consensus on particular professional tasks can hinder an organization's capacity to harness the sufficient knowledge and resources to make a legitimate claim at issue control. This paper is concerned with how professionals and organizations navigate different logics in an attempt to control issues in transnational governance. Here we articulate how what we call 'issue professionals' engage professional and organizational networks in their attempts at issue control. We articulate these attempts at control from issue professionals as occurring within two-level networks that include professional networks and organizational networks. Issue professionals engage in both networks, seeking to exploit structural holes and opportunities within and between them (Burt 1992; Burt 2004).

We also suggest that transnationality matters for issue control, and while some efforts have been made to understand community and identity formation that occurs transnationally (Haas 1992; Djelic and Quack 2010), transnationality is more accurately depicted as strategic networks rather than silo-like communities or 'wormholes' (Johnston 2013). Issues in transnational governance are difficult to control because they cannot be held too tightly by one organization. As such, they must be continuously managed through attempts at control, including stratagems to obtain knowledge and resources that enhance the capacity for issue control. Issues do not become transnational unless they have political salience and become focal points of activity for professionals and organizations (Wong 2012). Issues that have transnationality are liberated from being held by professions or organizations in national spaces. Instead, they are opened up for contestation and cooperation at a level where professionals and organizations must continuously justify and adapt their claims to legitimacy on issue control. Attempts at justification often follow professional lines, suggesting that the issue at hand is highly technical and can only be addressed with a specific skill set. Justifications can also follow organizational lines, with organizations seeking to affirm their original mandate or creeping into others' territory as they seek to expand their bureaucratic capacities and reach (Weaver 2008). Certainly national issues are subject to different strategies from professionals and organizations seeking to control them,

including different forms of leaders, entrepreneurs, and brokers who work through or around organizations (Mische 2008). At the transnational level issue control becomes even more complex, leading organizations to vet and select which ones they can tackle, while leaving others fallow (Carpenter 2010).

The selection of issues to control is the same across International Organizations (IOs), NGOs, and firms, who carefully choose issues that enhance public and private goods (Schemeil 2013). Issue control may also be the key objective of the firms, including forfeiting some profit and opportunities if need be (Fligstein 1990). While issue control is important across organizational types, strategies to achieve issue control vary widely according to what professionals are doing the work and who is funding them to do so. The World Bank, for example, has expanded its issue scope during recent decades to have a ‘finger in every pie’, while similar institutions, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB), have chosen not to expand into as many issue areas and have, until the recent crisis, stayed ‘under the radar’. Or, to take another example, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintained tight issue control in some areas, most notably the eradication of smallpox in 1980, while on other issue it seeks to lead through alliances with other IOs, such as its work with a number of UN agencies on female genital mutilation. Once more, issue selection is important because organizations seek to have a clear profile and identity on issues, leading some issues to receive less attention for fear of creating noise in the system (DeLaet 2009). The WHO’s campaign on female genital mutilation can be contrasted with its stance on the importance of male circumcision in decreasing HIV transmission. The latter issue is controlled by the WHO but difficult to promote within and from the organization because it may cloud the female genital mutilation issue. In such cases, professionals act to form strategies to control and promote issues through professional alliances and networks rather than through the formal organizational hierarchy.

NGOs face the same problem when it comes to controlling issues in transnational governance. Historically those operating from NGOs and within transnational advocacy networks (TANs) have chosen issues linked to bodily harm or inequality of access, since such issues can more readily garner support (Keck and Sikkink 1998). NGOs select issues and then engage in tactics and information politics, selecting and vetting issues that they can campaign on (Carpenter

2007). For example, campaigning for ‘children born of war’, from rape during wartime, is one issue NGOs have great difficulty with (Carpenter 2010), compared to Amnesty International’s letter writing campaigns on forgotten prisoners of conscience (Hopgood 2006). Issue selection and attempts at control vary among NGOs due to organizational reasons, including the capacity to create networks that are easy for non-professionals to join (Wong 2012). Oxfam provides a good example of a well-resourced NGO that covers a wide variety of issues, from arms trading to climate change to HIV to tax justice, acting as a host and organizer of professionals working on those issues. Other NGOs closely align their professional skill set and tasks with issues they seek to dominate through demonstrations of scientific competence.

While scholars of IOs and NGOs tend not to look at firms and their behavior in markets, firms are involved in the same struggles for control over issues in transnational governance. For example, JP Morgan’s development of Riskmetrics, an asset class trading and risk management system, was released to Over the Counter derivatives traders for free as a mean of shepherding issue control in that market (Wigan, forthcoming). With support from the Group of Thirty expert group, a hybrid organization of highly-esteemed professionals (Tsingou 2012), Riskmetrics became a standard template and the basis for the argument that risk management on derivatives was sufficiently sophisticated and did not require targeted regulation. We now know differently. To take another market-based example, professional service firms (PSFs) spend a great deal of time engaging in templating activities that permit them issue control rather than simple profit generation (Suddaby et al. 2007; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008). This is certainly the case for the Big Four accountancy firms (Strange 1998), as well as for transnational law firms seeking to provide consistent treatment of issues across national legal boundaries (Quack 2007; Faulconbridge, Muzio and Cook 2012). In general professional interaction on standard-setting and benchmarking replicates dominant discourses about how to govern, favoring neoliberal forms of ‘government at a distance’ (Higgins and Tamm Hallström 2007).

A key claim in this paper is that competition and cooperation in professional networks for issue control is more important than what organization has a formal mandate over an issue. This immediately reverses the common logic of how to identify who is in charge on transnational issues. Normally it is assumed that macroeconomic policy coordination belongs to the

International Monetary Fund, human rights belong to Amnesty International, and accounting standards belongs to the International Accounting Standards Board. This assumption mistakes a mandate for rule-making for control, when professional and organizational networks working on these issues may well be changing how the issue is understood at the transnational level and who has the right to work on it. At the transnational level of activity, professionals and organizations exhibit high levels of distributed agency in their activities, with both incremental and strategic activities taking place from a range of actors working on an issue (Quack 2007, Whittle, et al. 2011). Transnationality permits greater diversity in who seeks to control issues, as well as often fracturing control through multiple levels of formal and informal governance (Cerny 2010). While a number of theories in International Relations compete for attention in identifying their favored agents as the drivers of change, such as states rationally designing IOs (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal, 2001) or norm entrepreneurs operating from IOs and NGOs (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), transnationality muddies these images by introducing greater complexity between the range of actors in the international political economy.

### **1. Professionals and Professions in Transnational Governance**

Scholarship on professionals and professionalism in transnational governance that mixes Organization Studies with International Relations can be traced to the early 1970s, especially Robert W. Cox and Harold K. Jacobson's (1973) work *The Anatomy of Influence*, which identified 'initiators, vetoers and brokers' who had influence within IOs as individuals, depending on how they were positioned in the organization. The Cox and Jacobson project stopped soon thereafter as the stress within International Relations literature turned to Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's (1972, 1974, 1977) work on 'complex interdependence' that provided a basic network understanding of how non-state actors achieve influence over issues.

On professions, Ernst Haas was early in pointing to the importance of experts within transnational governance, pointing to non-technical IOs as bodies that 'simply regulate a well-defined area of undisputed and absolute interdependence' (Haas 1969: 199). Peter Haas's (1992) work on 'epistemic communities' followed the view that shared scientific expertise could lead to the diffusion of knowledge and what we would now understand as norms. The members of

epistemic communities were explicitly understood as a ‘network of professionals’ who could make an ‘authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge’ (Haas 1992: 3). They were brought together by shared normative frameworks and understandings of what constitutes proper science in their field (Djelic and Quack 2010: 20). Less emphasis was placed on how networks of professionals strategized to control issues, to create new markets, and how professionals create demand for their services. We also know much more about how epistemic communities are built around often rigid epistemic cultures that inhibit collaboration across professional fields (Knorr Cetina 1999). We build from this earlier literature while adding strategic elements to professional competition and cooperation.

In many ways the 1970s agenda on anatomies of influence and complex interdependence returned in the late 1990s with work on IOs that stressed the importance of technical expertise for IOs’ authority (Barnett and Finnemore 1999), as well as new work on Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANS) that placed emphasis on tactics and information politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999, 2004) highly influential work on ‘pathologies’ in IOs recalls some of the themes of Cox and Jacobsen but within a framework where the stress is on bureaucratic cultures within IOs and how while they have more autonomy than often thought they also produce policies through a range of pathologies, such as the ‘irrationality of rationalization’, ‘bureaucratic universalism’, ‘normalization of deviance’, and ‘insulation’. Insulation is linked to professionals and professionalism in that training is not simply technical but also involves the shaping and orientation of one’s worldview, which is then accentuated when the same type of professional are grouped together in a bureaucracy (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 722-3). The punchline here is that technical expertise matters for IOs to have authority, but that technical expertise often comes at a high cost from pathologies that distort the policy-making process and implementation. This framework provides the iron cage version of earlier work on epistemic communities.

In the late 1990s work on TANS, the framework distinguished activists as motivated by values rather than professional norms, and that they use information politics via a range of tactics. Crucial here is defining and controlling issues, stating that ‘Influence is possible because the actors in these networks are simultaneously helping to define the issue area itself, convince target

audiences that the problems thus defined are soluble, prescribe solutions, and monitor their implementation' (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 30). TANS ideally place themselves at the center of a network to push certain ideas. This work also saw networks as sites of 'cultural and political negotiation' (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 211), viewing earlier work on epistemic communities and World Polity models of change as too accepting of the automatic rolling out of Western norms to developing countries.

More recently, work on professionals and professionalism in transnational governance has continued these themes at greater level of magnification. Jeffrey Chwieroth's (2007, 2010, 2012) excellent work is the most explicit on the role of professions, studying how professional training is important alongside organizational socialization. Chwieroth demonstrates how economists trained by elite American institutions then went to the IMF and then went back to their home countries, mainly in the Americas, and change policies on capital account liberalization to conform with their professional education and IMF socialization. Importantly, the impact of professional training and socialization determines much of that is going on here and Chwieroth and others, such as Stephen Nelson (forthcoming), identify *trajectories* from a professional experience rather than how professional experience permits strategies to change how issues are controlled. The recent work on IOs has also stressed how norms about appropriate behavior and the construction of policies work within singular organizations rather than across them (Park and Vetterlein 2010; Broome and Seabrooke 2012). Developments in the literature on NGOs and TANS has moved towards studying how they differ based on organizational variance (Wong 2012) and how they operate through various forms of multilevel governance (Montoya 2013). This agenda can be loosely coupled with recent work on experimentalist governance that also has a European focused concentration on learning among those qualified to govern across organizational types (Sabel and Zeitlin 2010). The more recent work on TANS have provided much more advanced understanding of networks and network thinking, including questions of centrality and brokerage (Olesen 2009; Gallemore and Munroe, 2013).

Recent literature has also pointed to states increasingly delegating transnational governance issues to private actors (Büthe and Mattli 2011), professional interaction with a variety of organizations has been the norm, including a role for firms and NGOs in transnational

governance networks (Cashore 2002, Abbott and Snidal 2009). Firms and NGOs create alliances with fellow organizations to obtain or retain resources and knowledge with issue control in mind (see Das and Teng 2000, 37-38). The establishment of various commodity roundtables by Firms and NGO since the mid-2000s provide one example. In one case the World Wildlife Fund and Solidaridad have worked closely with global firms controlling agrofood markets, such as Unilever, Nutreco and Carrefour, but also private and public banks such as Rabobank and the Inter-American Development Bank, to establish standards for issues concerning product sustainability (see Henriksen 2013; Brassett, Richardson and Smith 2012). Such alliances are unlikely to lead to differences in organizational logics being ironed out (profit seeking vs. non-profit behavior), but at the inter-personal level they are more likely to have an impact. As professionals from these firms and NGOs become part of the professional network of commodity roundtables they develop issue-specific opinions and mindsets which connect them to projects and opportunities both inside and outside their host organizations.

In general, identifying such interaction among professionals and organizations in transnational governance is hampered by an ongoing concern with understanding what organizations have more authority. Recent work on transnational governance has sought to identify how new actors have power compared to standard frameworks that concentrate on the power of states. The emphasis here has been on how different 'global governors' can create different forms of authority (in institutional, delegated, expert, principled, and capacity-based types, see Avant, Finnemore and Sell 2010), or how new global rulers are emerging from organizational entrepreneurship (Mattli and Woods 2009; Büthe and Mattli 2011). This work should be celebrated for stressing the diversity of actors involved in transnational governance, but for our tastes the search for authority obscures strategies for control through professional competition and coordination. In the end the advance is seeing non-state actors as having authority alongside state actors, including professional associations, advocacy groups, and firms. Coordination between the actors occurs via organizational form and in many ways we are back to the complex interdependence framework of the 1970s. We suggest that while organizational forms are important, professionals often form networks to circumvent and manipulate them in their battles for issue control in transnational governance. Concentrating on control permits a focus on

practices and strategies and the treatment of interactions between professionals and organizations as blind to the formal designations of IO, NGO or Firm.

## **2. Professional Tasks and Transnational Issue Maintenance**

Professionals and organizations seek to control issues in transnational governance, and a capacity for control over an issue has a strong relationship to how professionals understand their tasks. Following Andrew Abbott, professional tasks are composed of objective elements, such as technological advancements, organization, natural objects and facts, and slow changing cultural structures, as well as from subjective qualities in how professionals construct the problem to be addressed by the task (Abbott 1988: 39-40). The subjective qualities of tasks include the modalities of action for professionals in how they classify, reason and take action on identified problems, or how they diagnose, infer, and treat their identified problems. In areas of governance that are highly technical and narrow, professional tasks and transnational issue control may go hand in hand. The response to the SARS and bird flu crises provide an example, where transnational issue control was held by doctors and health scientists who diagnosed and treated the problem. Professional tasks were closely matched to issue control. By contrast, concern over demographic change and falling fertility in the OECD has led to a range of professionals assigning tasks to problems, such as doctors working on subfertility and demographers working on delayed family formation, without any particular group exercising transnational issue control despite the obvious political salience (Seabrooke and Tsingou 2013). Differentiating professional tasks and how professionals and organizations attempt to control transnational issues directs us to the work content in issue management, as well as to strategies for contestation and cooperation.

Issues of transnational governance can be contested and open up considerable space for professionals who seek to influence them by bringing together resources from their personal networks that are derived from relationships with other professionals and organizations. Both professional tasks and issues can be transformed through institutionalization, including movements to liberalize what were national tasks in the creation of a transnational profession, as with neo-classically trained economists (Fourcade 2006). Changes to tasks can also occur

through processes of professionalization, including demands for conducting work in particular ways, according to codes of ethics, as well as treating professionalism as a capacity to manage and organize tasks rather than the knowledge and training that inform their execution (Muzio and Faulconbridge 2008; Evetts 2013). Professionals have a strong incentive to maintain their position within a network by excluding others who do not agree with their understanding of issues or threaten their resources. In some areas, such as financial reform, professionals behave according to prestige incentives and will be reluctant to introduce controversial ideas and topics in which they have little expertise, such as shadow banking, or political power, such as tax havens. Rather, they will control debates in a manner that confirms their affiliations and prestige networks (Seabrooke and Tsingou 2014). Similarly, as is well known in organization studies, professionals can network to ensure that knowledge production is under their control rather than by bureaucracies formally running the organization (Brivot, 2011; Kamoche, Pang and Wong, 2011). Professionals interacting on transnational issues also tend to replicate power relations between different groups, including those that assume to operate with a ‘flattened hierarchy’, such as feminists seeking to advance a common transnational project (Mendez and Wolf 2001). Furthermore, an important and poorly understood factor here is what we can refer to as professional ‘style’ (White 2008). The capacity to induce deference on who can control an issue is not simply a matter of formal training and socialization but also professional presentation, manners, and behavior. Professionals can use style to maneuver within professional networks and organizational networks, heightening their control over an issue and focusing their tasks.

Still, organizations are far from helpless. Tightly held professional tasks can also be challenged by organizations through ‘mission creep’ or ‘crowding’, whereby those less able to provide professional services competently barge in nevertheless to fulfill organizational objectives (Weaver 2008: 140). Such behavior is common from competing IOs and NGOs who seek to demonstrate policy relevance across issues even when they do not employ the relevant professionals (Cooley and Ron 2002: 17).

Following this understanding of tasks, we define professionals as individuals with abstract higher-level learning and specific skill sets to address tasks. We do not restrict professionals to formal professions, such as law, medicine, etc. Many professionals attempting issue control have

mixed educational backgrounds and are not usefully conceived as ‘lawyers’ or ‘accountants’, etc. We suggest that ‘Issue Professionals’ are an emergent type of actor that comes from attempts at issue control. Rather than located in specific associations, such as the American Medical Association or the like, these professionals combine knowledge and skills to enhance their attempts at control on a specific issue in transnational governance. Issue professionals differ from issue entrepreneurs in that they do not necessarily need to campaign or invent issues, but they are involved in generating, maintaining and defending attempts at issue control. Issue professionals can be involved in professionalization activities, but formal institutionalization is not a requirement to be considered relevant when it comes to issue control. We highlight how issue professionals network and engage with organizations, as well as how, in some cases, organizations and organizational networks enable issue professionals.

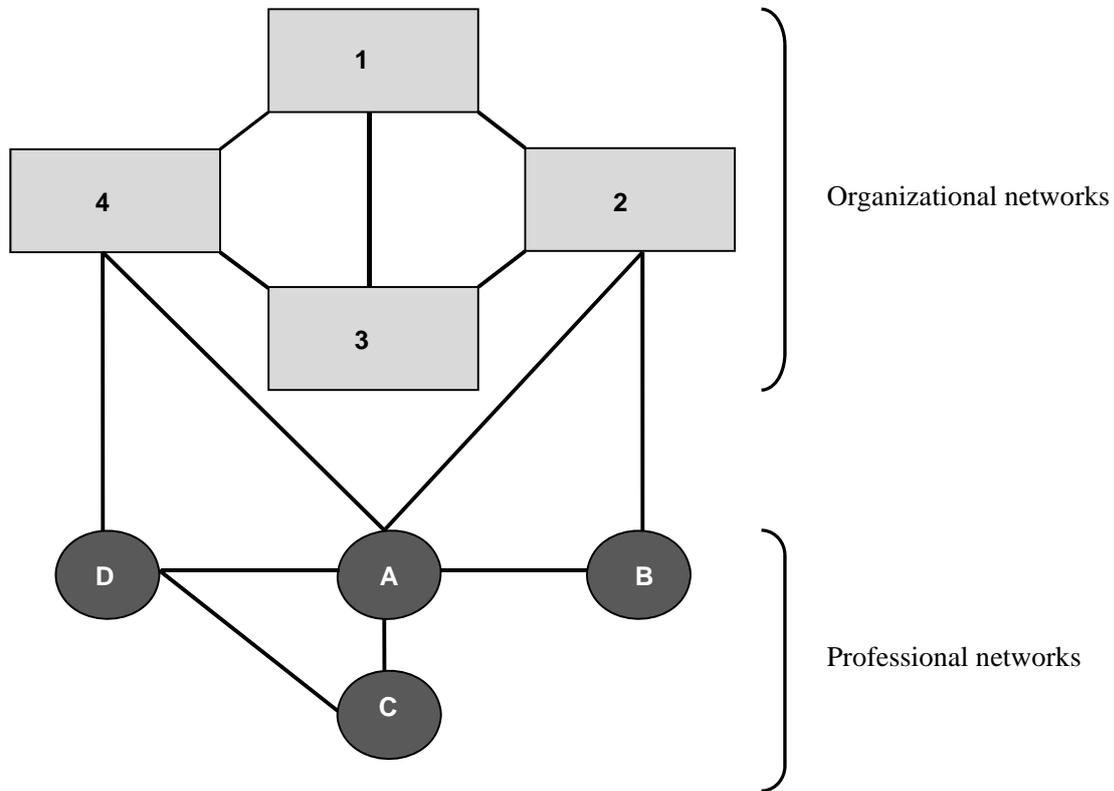
We suggest that reflecting on how professionals use networks to navigate organizational logics is much more a reflection of these characteristics rather than the formal designation of the organization. As suggested at the beginning of this paper, the agronomist from the FAO will select to include professionals in her network based not only on their knowledge and resources but what access they can provide to organizational resources they are connected to. DuPont may well be able to finance a new initiative in food security that is not possible in the FAO, with the agronomist still maintaining a high degree of knowledge centralization on the issue at hand. Such interplay between professionals and organizations is how most transnational issues are governed. We suggest that issues in transnational governance exist within a *professional-organizational nexus*.

### **3. The Professional-Organizational Nexus as a Two Level Network**

We argue that it is a *professional-organizational nexus* that is the key to explaining who controls issues at the transnational level. We provide a framework for understanding how professionals and organizations interact in transnational issue networks based on differentiating professional work roles and organizational types. Professionals in our framework draw on organizational and professional domains at the same time - building alliances from where they can draw action from both domains as they seek to control issues and how they should be treated. Our claim here is

that professional battles are essential for transnational issue control, and that patterns of coordination and competition of professionals and organizations is decisive for the capacity of actors to interpret and influence issues in transnational governance. As such, we build on earlier work on transnational governance that studies ‘individual behaviors, interactions and processes, with studies of institutional and cultural forces’ (Djelic and Andersson 2006: 19). This agenda has long turned its attention to professionals and how they create networks to transform organizations and carve out their own markets. This scholarship also complements the research agenda on ‘transnational communities’ that studies the formation of transnational identities, including among professionals and professions (Djelic and Quack 2010). We suggest that the professional-organizational nexus can best understood as a *two-level network*, where professionals have relationships, organizations have relationships, and where professionals and organizations interact. While others prefer to describe professionals as operating in organizational fields, we stress that both professionals and organizations have agency in forming strategies – and that neither provide a passive space for the other to operate within. Rather than seeing fields as independent spaces of activity, both professionals and organization can act as ‘fields of agents’ in establishing their differences and alliances (Bigo 2011: 239). As such, professionals will seek to extend their networks through common identification with other similarly trained professionals, though often not through formal professional associations, or by creating alliances with professionals with different but complementary sets of skills. Those who manage to exploit opportunities to enhance their influence on an issue are likely to maximize issue control beyond their intrinsic organizational capacities. This is, in part, because organizations do not participate in issue networks with their full portfolio of activities, but with specific segments of professionals working on this or that issue within the organization.

Figure 1.1: Professional-Organizational Two-Level Network



Organizations face an apparent trade-off when seeking issue control via knowledge: to dampen issue flux, organizations may choose to increase the technicality of an issue rendering issue competitors without the necessary expertise obsolete. If organizations control areas of expertise that are deemed legitimate as solution to a given issue, or if professional and organizational logics overlap, this strategy may yield successful outcomes. But if expertise for the governance of a highly technical issue is not controlled by a particular organization, groups of professionals may gain considerable discretion and develop strategies of issue control that differ from, or at worse oppose, that of the organizational network. Organizations may also pursue the opposite strategy of politicizing or moralizing an issue, bringing principles and value to the fore to trump expert opinion. Both strategies require engaging other organizations and professionals.

Understanding the professional-organizational nexus as a two-level network permits us to look at relations between two different sets of actors when it comes to processes of issue control. Our two-level network consists, first, of professional networks that are inter-personal and build throughout careers and activities linked to transnational issues. Second, organizational networks exist where alliances between organizations or their subunits endure in ways that do not hinge on specific professionals. Figure 1.1 depicts a two-level network. Professionals who act as brokers (A in the diagram) in their professional network are in a good position to attempt issue control compared to organizations that may have the formal mandate but do not hold sufficient knowledge and resources to control an issue. Figure 1.1 also indicates that in situations where organizations are in structurally equivalent positions in a network (organizations 2 and 4), professionals (A, B, D in the diagram) can strategize to attempt issue control in different ways.

Prominent professionals in transnational governance are often ‘multiple insiders’ through shared memberships and participation in events, organizations, committees, commissions, expert groups, etc., through which they build their issue-specific personal networks, but also get access to varied organizational contexts. Organizations also strategize about where to send staff to participate in these events, committees etc. which give them advantages in terms of access to knowledge but also give professionals opportunities beyond their pre-defined work role. Much of the activity on issues in transnational governance can be characterized as two-level networks.

Describing the professional-organizational nexus as a two-level network also permits us to consider how professionals and organizations take positions on particular issues relative to their peers (as in a field), as well as the character of the ties between those involved on the transnational issues (as in network). For scholars of IOs, NGOs, and TANS, networks have been depicted as both actors and structures (Kahler 2009). Our focus is less on the networks as coherent actors and more on professional and organizational interaction within networks. As such, professional and organizational networks must be studied through interaction on issues of concern, through the allocation and defense of professional tasks, and conflict and points of cooperation established by different in position towards the issue. In this sense our understanding

of networks is not at odds with more Bourdieu-inspired works on professional fields and organizational fields (Dezalay and Garth 2010).

Our approach is also not at odds with new work in International Relations on 'international practices' (Adler and Pouliot 2011), which draws directly from organization studies and, in particular, Wenger's (1998) work on 'communities of practice'. 'International practices' operate from shared conceptions of 'competence' on an activity and communities adhere this way in a fashion quite similar to the work done by Wenger and others. Our view on practices is that they are important to understand, but the literature on practices places too much stress on community building and less on competition and cooperation within overlapping networks. Once the notion of communities of practice removed from a domestic context and placed in a transnational context the chance of overlapping and competing notions of competence is greater. Such battles are also about issue control rather than proving a common glue for community building.

In the following section we present elements of a network approach to understanding the emergence of professional and organizational strategies to control transnational issues. We build on and further develop network theory of inter-organizational and inter-personal networks to conceive of strategies that actors at the micro as well as macro level follow to gain issue control. The section develops a way of thinking about the complex sources of issue control in transnational governance by considering two principled actor units, professionals (persons) and organizations, and how they relate and form strategies within two level networks.

#### **4. Networks, Strategies and Control**

A key lesson from network analysts is that the formation of social alliances in an attempt to achieve control cannot be understood by ever more subtle categories of groups and identities:

Categorical models rarely partition people in a way that confirms with observed action, because individual activity in the world is organized through and motivated not by categorical affiliations but by the structure of tangible social relations in which persons are embedded (Bearman 1993, 10).

We take this insight seriously. We recognize that the aspiration, motivation as well as observed behavior of persons is influenced by organizational logics and values that are also linked to professional status, and suggest that a network view of this embedding of people in organizations and professions goes a long way in explaining strategies to control issues in transnational governance. As an analytical category, the network concept asks us to pay attention not to the stable substances or attributes of social entities but to relations and connections of people and organizations as the principled unit of analysis when wanting to understand strategy (Wellmann 1997, Emirbayer 1997).

A network is a set of actors, or nodes, along with a set of specific relations that connect them. Relations in networks interconnect through shared points and thus form paths or pipes that indirectly link actors that would otherwise not be directly related. Much network analysis is concerned with characterizing network structures and actor positions and relating properties of structures and positions to group and actor outcomes. Network theory makes claims about mechanisms and processes that interact with network structure to yield outcomes for actors in the network. In general, a network view of strategy pays attention to the flow of knowledge and resources and knowledge between professionals and organizations and the strategic behavior emerging from their attempts to gain control over these flows.

Network theorists have produced a wide array of concepts shedding light on how strategies spring from actors embedding in network structures, or topologies, seeking to access or control resources and knowledge through these structures. They have developed a range of concepts that we quickly note here. Among important network concepts the most prominent is the view that the behavior of the individuals must be placed in the context of their social position, and the concept of 'embedded action' understands behavior from the structure of social relations in network terms (Granovetter 1985). It is frequently opposed to an atomized understanding of action that follow a macro-micro-macro understanding of individual decision-making. A recent restatement of this view is that while 'actors create relations; in the long run, relations create actors' (Padgett and Powell 2012: 2).

Second, a 'strength of weak ties' concept puts forward the argument that it is not simply the number or strength of ties that decides an actor's power in a network, but the strategic deployment of a few specific ties. Having the right friends beats having lots of useless friends. Third is the concept of 'structural equivalence', which points to identifying similarities in networks where actors inhabit identical positions, from which one can infer other traits (White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976). Locating similarity in positions in a social system cuts through unmanageable complexity and permits identification of differences on the principle that 'A network in fact *consists* of holes, decouplings, dissociations; ties can reflect conflict as well as solidarity, they reflect interdependence, not necessarily integration' (Lorrain and White 2010: 78). This is an important reminder that much work on networks overlooks being predisposed to finding the positive benefits of networks. Fourth is the concept of 'structural holes' which further builds on these insights to understand locations in networks where there is no activity between two nodes, in which brokerage practices and competitive advantage from network locations can rise (Burt 1992). Structural holes provide space for 'good ideas' and brokerage as entrepreneurs can call upon social capital and their resources (Burt 2004).

Fifth, the concept of 'small world' networks emphasizes the structural complementarity of close, cohesive relations and weaker far-reaching relations that bridge network gaps (Watts 1999). This concept also includes the notion that affinity within groups and among individuals who may be unconnected, so that through affinity it may be possible to mobilize a large number of people, such as with protest groups or even firms (Vedres and Stark 2010). Finally, sixth is the idea that many networks are 'scale-free' in being widely expansive but based around key hubs (Wong 2012). Such hubs can then exercise a great deal of issue control while also permitting new members to the network at little cost, as long as those new members do not coordinate attacks against the hub. We highlight embedded action, the strength of weak ties, structural equivalence, structural holes, small worlds, and scale-free networks as types of structure and action that can be found in the professional and organizational networks.

We suggest that strategies of controls used by professionals and organizations determines how a transnational issue is treated and evolves. The actors create the relations. When a transnational issue moves from the emergent or growth stage, where diagnosis and solutions to the problem at

hand are still very much open-ended, into the mature stage of having a fixed horizon in identifying problems and solutions, the allocation of professional tasks is established – the relations create the actors. But so long as transnational issues retain their transnationality, there is considerable space for professionals and organizations to re-configure their networks in new attempts and strategies for issue control.

## **5. The Two-Level Network of Transnational Sustainability Certification**

To demonstrate how issue professionals operate in two-level networks we provide a case study of the emergence of sustainability certification with a particular focus on the success of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). This process involves a small group of professional entrepreneurs who are controlling the issue of commodity sustainability transnationally. They did so by populating a structural hole in the professional and organizational networks revolving around the issue, thus being able to act as a liaison between governments, firms and other environmental NGOs. While it is tempting to attribute the success to an organization, the WWF, the success in issue control actually comes from two-level network dynamics. The WWF succeeded, in part, through strong alliances with MNCs dominating environmentally important commodity markets and also by widening their issue mandate from one exclusively focused at ‘Conservation’ and ‘Wildlife’ to one concerning social and ecological sustainability in a much wider sense (this issue drift is clear from the change of name from World Wildlife Fund to World Wide Fund for Nature in 1986). The skill set of their conservation professionals (usually trained in biology, animal or plant sciences) who would usually represent WWF in their policy activities has, as a result, also expanded and now resembles the emergent issue professionalism of Sustainability Certification and Management. This professional task has now become an institutionalized area of work in most organizations. Initially sustainability certification was conceived in battles over how to deal with the adverse effects of tropical timber on biodiversity and involved a broad network of environmental NGOs. But as certification increasingly became about defining the broader sustainability of markets and commodities, and thus about collaborating with industries and firms, the environmental NGO side of the network shrunk, and instead expanded on the corporate side. The presence of issue professionals who could provide a bridge to corporate players, who were themselves moving in a “progressive” direction on

sustainability issues, turned out to be an instrumental move for the WWF which, in return, boosted its legitimacy and received resources and governance ties to strategic nodes in the product value chain (Ponte 2013).

Certification and labeling emerged as a form of governance in the mid- to late 1980s in response to growing public concern over adverse environmental and social consequences, including health issues, related to the 'life cycle' of certain commodities (Gale and Haward 2011, 48; Counsell and Loraas 2002, 11-2). The first labels to certify consumers of the 'fairness' or 'goodness' of products were established in the Netherlands (Max Havelaar) and the UK ('Good Wood Guide'), respectively by the Dutch environmental-cum-development NGO Solidaridad and the UK-based Friends of the Earth group (Cadman 1999, 120). At the same time, the US-based Rainforest Alliance had developed the Smart Wood Program which was launched in 1989 (Gulbrandsen 2010, 52). These early systems were based on 'sustainability' criteria but were mere forerunners to the later ones which would abandon the vocabulary of sustainability (Synnott 2005, 17; Cadman 2011, 45). Since then many more labels have been tailored to certify different products. The first comprehensive sustainability certification system was focused on forestry products and developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). With more than 1200 FSC certified forest areas in 80 countries covering more than 40% of the total certified forest area in Europe and the US (FSC 2013), the FSC has been an important global player in the past decades whose features have had significant institutional imprint on subsequent schemes.

From early on, organizational and personal networks of environmentalists affiliated with Solidaridad, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Rainforest Alliance and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) collaborated in raising sustainability issues relating to forestry products in a wide array of decision-making arenas. While the scale and scope of FSC increased massively in the past two decades following the first pioneering initiatives, the original network of environmentalists did not remain stable. Questions of issue focus, governance arrangement and institutional set-up became a growing object of contestation as actual certification systems were designed to take account of divergent organizational and personal mandates and perspectives (Synnott 2005; Gale and Haward 2011, 48). What at first seemed like a relatively cohesive network coalition of organizations evolved into a more fragmented and overlapping network

with some organizations increasing their control with processes related to the design and management of sustainability certificates, displacing others to more peripheral positions.

One crucial change to the network was the entrance of business. After having failed to push the issue of forest certification at the inter-state level with the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the WWF started to mobilize business interests directly into negotiations circumventing state or inter-state locations of decision-making (Humphreys 1996, 72-5). The WWF also established so-called 'trade networks' aimed at convincing large-scale timber consuming businesses to source sustainable product, and a significant partnership with the World Bank to promote global demand. Since the sustainability of forestry products was already a major concern of mass consumer movements, some producers and retailers also saw an opportunity in protecting their brands against public shaming and in potentially capturing niche markets for particularly environmentally conscious consumer segments (Counsell and Loraas 2002, 12). The WWF's close connections to forest businesses in tandem with Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth permitted more hostile shaming and boycotting strategies that were central in giving the pre-FSC process a certain impetus. The combination of failed state coordination and the relative alignment of the early NGO networks with 'progressive' business interests in consequence lead to a series of meetings where the FSC institutional design was developed.

The emergent network on certification came from different organizational interests but also from professionals seeking to establish their own networks within and among the organizations. The idea of the FSC was conceived by Hubert Kwisthout, the head of the UK timber import company called the Ecological Trading Company (ETC) who had specialized in sourcing sustainable timber (Cashore et. Al 2004, 3-5). In exchanges with Francis Sullivan from the WWF-UK he had come up with the idea of an International Forest Monitoring Agency (Synnott 2005, 10). In 1990 Kwisthout presented the idea at a meeting at the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection (WARP) and a Certification Working Group (CWG) was established. As Timothy Synnott (2005, 13) notes, 'Over the next year, most of the activities that led to the founding of FSC were associated with this group or its members. However, it remained quite informal, as a gradually expanding circulation list or forum, rather than a fixed membership'.

The first draft of the FSC Charter was first conceived at a meeting in the CWG that took place in San Francisco in April 1991 with the WWF, the Rainforest Alliance, Greenpeace, the British timber retailer B&Q, ETC, and the original WARP members as participants (Cadman 2011, 219). The Charter brought together rudimentary standards developments from ETC, WARP and Rainforest Alliance. Prior to San Francisco meeting ETC had already proposed a set of ‘criteria and standards for sustainable forest management’ which was accepted at the founding conference of WARP. Note that at this point the object of regulation had become forest management rather than actual qualities relating to the product. Moreover, the Rainforest Alliance had published its Smartwood Guideline which carried the same style of ‘Principles and Criteria’ as the Charter would carry. After the San Francisco meeting the Charter was re-drafted several times with first Francis Sullivan WWF-UK in 1991 and later in 1992 Ivan Ussach and Richard Donovan who had both been affiliated with the Rainforest Alliance playing a significant role (Synnott 2005, 18). In parallel, a consultation process was run in 10 countries to take stock of institutional support.

The founding assembly of the FSC was held in Toronto in September 1993 with 134 participants, 56 of which were from the Global South (Synnott 2005, 21). A highly contested issue was whether business interests should have voting power and if so what proportion. As an NGO participant recalls: ‘For two nights and days there was a running battle between the economic group and social environmental stakeholders, who at that time were still joined together... There wasn’t any preliminary agreement until just before the party the last evening’ (quoted from Cadman 2011, 46-7). The argument here was that if the FSC were to ‘make a real difference across the entire forest sector rather than develop a “boutique” standard, it needed to include a strong voice from the industry...’ (Gale and Haward 2011, 51). Simon Counsell from Friends of the Earth coordinated the position of the business skeptical group, but after a number of discussions where the skeptics dwindled, Chris Elliott of the WWF, who chaired the meeting, ‘denied one of Counsell’s demand for the right of reply [and] the rump of the group withdrew from the discussion and abstained from voting’ (Synnott 2005, 23). This is but one example of how organizations are strategically coupled and decoupled from and to personal professional networks. After this controversy, agreement was reached on a formalized Chamber System with social and environmental interests holding 75% of votes in the board and with business holding

25%. Another important outcome of the meeting was that FSC was set up as a member association with a board, and not a foundation as originally intended, which was arguable acceptable as a pragmatic solution bridging those skeptical of business interest participation with those in favor of it (Cadman 2009, 121). In essence, this was when the ‘multistakeholder’ certification system as a form of governance took form and given its subsequent mushrooming across a variety of industries and commodity domains it is difficult to underestimate its institutional imprint. ‘Multistakeholder’ fora, now a popular form of governing complex transnational issues, often includes overlapping professional and organizational networks rather than simply reflecting organizational cooperation.

Already in 1998 the Marine Stewardship Council followed with a slightly different institutional set-up, followed by the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil in 2003, with the WWF playing a significant foundational role in designing both sustainability certification systems. Since then more have followed, in particular, to certify agrofood and bioenergy products (such as sugar, beef, soy, biofuel and -diesel), and yet more are in the making (Brassett et al. 2012). Currently 9 sustainability certification systems exist and have operational standards in place with WWF having played central roles in their foundational stages as well as playing a part in their management through board positions in all of the 9 systems. Henriksen (2013) has elsewhere showed how these board positions enable the WWF to coordinate and control the wider professional and organizational networks linked to sustainability certification. Closer investigation of what appears to be organizations siding together in meetings reveals that personal professional networks underpin organizational authority in practice within a two-level network.

The two central figures from the WWF, who in a sense were the two-level network architects or brokers behind the formation of the FSC, and later other sustainability certification systems, were Francis Sullivan and Chris Elliot. Francis Sullivan was the bridge between the mainstream environmental NGOs, the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection and B&Q, and was the person behind the UK Forest and Trade Network. Chris Elliot was instrumental in negotiating an institutional set-up with key firms playing a substantial rulemaking role. As brokers or entrepreneurs crucial in shaping the institutional elements of the early formative

period of the sustainability certification system, they share the common trait of being highly networked with fellow issue professionals in the field, but also with powerful organizations. Their specialty has been to bring together public and private partners around common concerns and issues, and in coordinating actions of diverse others. Not only their network strategies are similar, to some extent their career trajectories also share common traits. Although their entire professional history has revolved around environmental governance issues, they have worked on this issue with different organizations - first in activist role and later on as professionals in firms. We contend that this form of ‘multiple insiding’ (Vedres and Stark 2010) is common to issue professionals who have been effective in gaining transnational issue control.

Sullivan had key leadership positions with the WWF, including running of the internal change team ‘Action Network’ to develop strategies of scaling up conservation activities. As the Director of Conservation at WWF-UK from 1999 and onwards he was also involved in establishing WWF's key role in the HSBC ‘Investing in Nature’ programme. Establishing relations with corporate players was seemingly his specialty in the WWF. After this, he moved on to actually work with the HSBC (from 2004) as their Adviser on the Environment. Interestingly, Sullivan has kept some of his personal contacts from the early FSC days intact: in 2010 he co-launched the Global Association for Corporate Sustainability Officers (GACSO) with Alan Knight from B&Q (who was also part of the initial network of the Certification Working Group) which is an initiative aiming at codifying standards, codes and training for “sustainability professionals”.

Chris Elliott was, while at the WWF, the first chair of the FSC board of directors and has had a similar career. Elliott led the development of a global partnership between WWF and IKEA but went on to become the Executive Director of the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA). CLUA is a collaborative initiative of the ClimateWorks Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Before joining the WWF, he worked for The World Bank, the Bank of Boston and for a Swiss foundation focusing on organic agriculture and natural medicine. Elliott and Francis are both the kinds of entrepreneurial issue professionals whose agency is distributed in two level network sense, and whose impact in terms of changing how things are done in a transnational issue arena relies

heavily on their ties to organizations and fellow professionals, as well as their strategies of operating within these networks.

## **Conclusion**

This paper provides a framework for understanding how professionals and organizations operate in two-level networks, as both seek to exploit and cooperate with each other as they seek to gain control over transnational issues. Professionals seek alliances in their own peer networks while organizations do the same. We have brought together insights from organization studies and international relations to articulate how these two-level networks operate on issues of transnational governance, and provide a perspective that neither field can do on its own, given the former's concern with microprocesses among fluid entities and the latter's concern with structural dynamics among fixed entities. We blend Organizational Studies and International Relations to discuss how professionals and organizations battle over issue control at the transnational level through the designation of tasks and the creation of overlapping two level networks. From this interdisciplinary marriage we highlight the importance of a new category of the 'issue professional' that emerges as attempts at managing two level networks requires an organization of expert labour that is not uniquely tied to formal organizational boundaries. The concept of issue professionals in two-level networks was then fleshed out via a case study of sustainability certification. By tracing the strategies of issue professionals - and the two level network configurations within which they operate - we contribute to current work in network studies on strategies of managing and maintaining dynamic and complex networks. Issue professionalism, we contend, is also an important attribute of actors who are central in coordinating action on issues in two level networks. By extension, we contribute to the study of transnational elites, who both seek to establish 'command posts' from which to control issues (Zald and Lounsbury 2010) as well as highlighting the presence of 'open elites' who draw on resources from diverse network reservoirs (Padgett and McLean 2006). In sum, this paper pushes the current analytical boundaries of transnational governance scholarship, which has mainly been concerned with the organizational level of analysis, and not sufficiently attuned to understand where the skills and experience of professional actors working on the fringes of organizations come from. The concept of issue professionals, and the analytic apparatus required to support it,

demonstrates the need for interdisciplinarity in understanding how networks are composed, as well as how ideas, norms, and power are articulated through them.

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