

The logic of appropriateness

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Abstract:

The logic of appropriateness is a perspective that sees human action as driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior, organized into institutions. Rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation. The paper is divided into five parts. First, we sketch the basic ideas of rule-based action. Second, we describe some characteristics of contemporary democratic settings. Third, we attend to the relations between rules and action, the elements of slippage in executing rules. Fourth, we examine the dynamics of rules and standards of appropriateness. And, fifth, we discuss a possible reconciliation of different logics of action, as part of a future research agenda for students of democratic politics and policy making.

The logic of appropriateness is a perspective on how human action is to be interpreted. Action, policy making included, is seen as driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior, organized into institutions. The appropriateness of rules includes both cognitive and normative components (March and Olsen 1995, 30-31). Rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation.¹

The present essay focuses particularly on rules of appropriateness in the context of formally organized political institutions and democratic political orders. We ask how an understanding of the role of rule-driven behavior in life might illuminate thinking about political life, how the codification of experience into rules, institutional memories and information processing is shaped in, and shapes, a democratic political system. *First*, we sketch the basic ideas of rule-based action. *Second*, we describe some characteristics of contemporary democratic settings. *Third*, we attend to the relations between rules and action, the elements of slippage in executing rules. *Fourth*, we examine the dynamics of rules and standards of appropriateness. And, *fifth*, we discuss a possible reconciliation of different logics of action, as part of a future research agenda for students of democratic politics and policy making.

The basic ideas

A vision of actors following internalized prescriptions of what is socially defined as normal, true, right or good, without, or in spite of, calculation of consequences and expected utility, is of ancient origin. The idea was, for example, dramatized by Sophocles more than 2000 years ago in Antigone's confrontation with King Creon and by Martin Luther facing the Diet of Worms in 1521: "Here I stand, I can do no other". The tendency to develop rules, codes and principles of conduct to justify and prescribe action in terms of something more than expected consequences seems to be fairly universal (Elias 1982) and echoes of the ancient perspectives are found in many modern discussions of the importance of rules and identities in guiding human life.

¹ This draft is prepared for the forthcoming *Handbook of Public Policy*, edited by Martin Rein, Michael Moran and Robert E. Goodin, Oxford University Press. We thank Jeffrey T. Checkel, Robert E. Goodin, Anne-Mette Magnussen, Michael Moran and Ulf I. Sverdrup for constructive comments.

The exact formulation of the ideas varies somewhat from one disciplinary domain to the other, but the core intuition is that humans maintain a repertoire of roles and identities, each providing rules of appropriate behavior in situations for which they are relevant. Following rules of a role or identity is a relatively complicated cognitive process involving thoughtful, reasoning behavior; but the processes of reasoning are not primarily connected to the anticipation of future consequences as they are in most contemporary conceptions of rationality. Actors use criteria of similarity and congruence, rather than likelihood and value. To act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good. The term “logic of appropriateness” has overtones of morality, but rules of appropriateness underlie atrocities of action, such as ethnical cleansing and blood feuds, as well as moral heroism. The fact that a rule of action is defined as appropriate by an individual or a collectivity may reflect learning of some sort from history, but it does not guarantee technical efficiency or moral acceptability.

The matching of identities, situations, and behavioral rules may be based on experience, expert knowledge, or intuition, in which case it is often called “recognition” to emphasize the cognitive process of pairing problem-solving action correctly to a problem situation (March and Simon 1993, 10-13). The match may be based on role expectations (Sarbin and Allen 1968, 550). The match may also carry with it a connotation of essence, so that appropriate attitudes, behaviors, feelings, or preferences for a citizen, official, or expert are those that are essential to being a citizen, official, or expert -- essential not in the instrumental sense of being necessary to perform a task or socially expected, nor in the sense of being an arbitrary definitional convention, but in the sense of that without which one cannot claim to be a proper citizen, official, or expert (MacIntyre 1988).

The simple behavioral proposition is that, most of the time humans take reasoned action by trying to answer three elementary questions: What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this (March and Olsen 1989; March 1994)?

The setting: Institutions of democratic governance

Democratic political life is ordered by institutions. The polity is a configuration of formally organized institutions that defines the setting within which governance and policy making take place. An institution is a relatively stable collection of rules and practices, embedded in structures of *resources* that make action possible -- organizational, financial and staff capabilities, and structures of *meaning* that explain and justify behavior – roles, identities and belongings, common purposes, and causal and normative beliefs (March and Olsen 1989,1995).

Institutions are organizational arrangements that link roles/identities, accounts of situations, resources and prescriptive rules and practices. They create actors and meeting places and organize the relations and interactions among actors. They guide behavior and stabilize expectations. Specific institutional settings also provide vocabularies that frame thought and understandings and define what are legitimate arguments and standards of justification and criticism in different situations (Mills 1940). Institutions, furthermore, allocate resources and empower and constrain actors differently and make them more or less capable of acting according to prescribed rules. They affect whose justice and what rationality has primacy (MacIntyre 1988) and who becomes winners and losers. *Political* institutionalization signifies the development of distinct political rules, practices and procedures partly independent of other institutions and social groupings (Huntington 1965). Political orders are, however, more or less institutionalized and they are structured according to different principles (Eisenstadt 1965).

This institutional perspective stands in contrast to current interpretations of politics that assume self-interested and rationally calculating actors, instrumentalism and consequentialism. In the latter perspective rules simply reflect interests and powers, or they are irrelevant.² It can never be better to follow a rule that requires actions other than those that are optimal under given circumstances (Rowe 1989, vii); and the idea that society is governed by a written constitution and rules of appropriateness is seen as a possible reflection of the

² Following the logic of consequentiality implies to treat possible rules and interpretations as alternatives in a rational choice problem and it is usually assumed that “man’s natural proclivity is to pursue his own interests” (Brennan and Buchanan 1985, ix). To act on the basis of the logic of consequentiality or anticipatory action includes the following steps: a. What are my alternatives? b. What are my values? c. What are the consequences of my alternatives for my values? d. Choose the alternative that has the best expected consequences. To act in conformity with rules that constrain conduct is then based on rational calculation and contracts, and is motivated by incentives and personal advantage.

naïve optimism of the eighteenth century (Loewenstein 1951). The logic of appropriateness, in contrast, harks back to an older conception that sees politics as rule-driven and brands the use of public institutions and power for private purposes as the corruption and degeneration of politics (Viroli 1992, 71).

Rules of appropriateness are also embodied in the foundational norms of contemporary democracies. Subjecting human conduct to constitutive rules has been portrayed as part of processes of democratization and civilization; and legitimacy has come to depend on *how* things are done, not solely on substantive performance (Merton 1938; Elias 1982). For example, an important part of the modern democratic creed is that impersonal, fairly stable, publicly known, and understandable rules that are neither contradictory nor retroactive, are supposed to shield citizens from the arbitrary power of authorities and the unaccountable power of those with exchangeable resources. Self-given laws are assumed to be accepted as binding for citizens. A spirit of citizenship is seen to imply a willingness to think and act as members of the community as a whole, not solely as self-interested individual or as members of particular interest groups (Arblaster 1987, 77). Judges, bureaucrats, ministers and legislators are expected to follow rules and act with integrity and competence within the democratic spirit. Official-ness is supposed to imply stewardship and an affirmation of the values and norms inherent in offices and institutions (Hecló 2002).

In short, actors are expected to behave according to distinct democratic norms and rules and the democratic quality of a polity depends on properties of its citizens and officials. If they are not law-abiding, enlightened, active, civic-minded and acting with self-restraint and a distance to individual interests, passions and drives, genuine democratic government is impossible (Mill 1962, 30). Yet, as observed by Aristotle, humans are not born with such predispositions. They have to be learned (Aristotle 1980, 299).

Democratic governance, then, is more than an instrument for implementing pre-determined preferences and rights. Identities are assumed to be reflexive and political, not inherited and pre-political (Habermas 1998) and institutions are imagined to provide a framework for fashioning democrats by developing and transmitting democratic beliefs. A democratic identity also includes accepting responsibility for providing an institutional context within which continuous political discourse and change can take place and the roles, identities,

accounts, rules, practices, and capabilities that construct political life can be crafted (March and Olsen 1995).

Rules of appropriateness in action

The impact of rules and standard operating procedures in routine situations is well known (March and Simon 1958; Cyert and March 1963). The relevance of the logic of appropriateness, however, is not limited to repetitive, routine worlds, and rule prescriptions are not necessarily conservative. Civil unrest, demands for comprehensive redistribution of political power and welfare, as well as political revolutions and major reforms often follow from identity-driven conceptions of appropriateness more than conscious calculations of costs and benefits (Scott 1976; Lefort 1988; Elster 1989).

Rules prescribe, more or less precisely, what is appropriate action. They also, more or less precisely, tell actors where to look for precedents, who are the authoritative interpreters of different types of rules, and what the key interpretative traditions are. Still, the unambiguous authority of rules can not be taken as given -- it can not be assumed that rules always dictate or guide behavior. Rather, it is necessary to understand the processes through which rules are translated into actual behavior and the factors that may strengthen or weaken the relation between rules and actions. How do actors discover the lessons of the past through experience and how do they store, retrieve and act upon those lessons? How do actors cope with impediments to learning and resolve ambiguities and conflicts of what the situation is and what experience is relevant; what the relevant role, identity and rule are and what they mean; and what the appropriate match and action are?

Sometimes action reflects in a straightforward way prescriptions embedded in the rules, habits of thought, “best practice” and standard operating procedures of a community, an institution, organization, profession or group. A socially valid rule creates an abstraction that applies to a number of concrete situations. Most actors, most of the time, then, take the rule as a “fact”. There is no felt need to “go behind it” and explain or justify action and discuss its likely consequences (Stinchcombe 2001, 2).

A straightforward and almost automatic relation between rules and action is most likely in a polity with legitimate, stable, well defined and integrated institutions. Action is then governed

by a dominant institution that provides clear prescriptions and adequate resources, i.e. prescribes doable action in an unambiguous way. The system consists of a multitude of institutions, each based on different principles. Yet, each institution has some degree of autonomy and controls a specified action-sphere. The (living) constitution prescribes when, how and why rules are to be acted upon. It gives clear principles of division of labor, maintains internal consistency among rules, prevents collisions between divergent institutional prescriptions and makes the political order a coherent whole with predictable outcomes. Together, a variety of rules give specific content in specific situations both to such heroic identities as statesman or patriot and to such everyday identities as those of an accountant, police officer, or citizen (Kaufman 1960; Van Maanen 1973).

In other contexts actors have problems in resolving ambiguities and conflicts among alternative concepts of the self, accounts of a situation, and prescriptions of appropriateness. They struggle with how to classify themselves and others -who they are, and what they are- and what these classifications imply in a specific situation. The prescriptive clarity and consistency of identities are variables, and so are the familiarity with situations and the obviousness of matching-rules. Fulfilling an identity through following appropriate rules often involves matching a changing and ambiguous set of contingent rules to a changing and ambiguous set of situations.

A focus on rules and identities therefore assures neither simplicity nor consistency (Biddle 1960; Berscheid 1994). It is a non-trivial task to predict behavior from knowledge about roles, identities, rules, situations and institutions, and describing action as rule-following is only the first step in understanding how rules affect behavior. As a result, a distinction is made between a rule and its behavioral realization in a particular situation in the study of formal organizations (Scott 1992, 304; March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, 23), institutions (Apter 1991) and the law (Tyler 1990). The possible indeterminacy of roles, identities, rules and situations requires detailed observations of the processes through which rules are translated into actual behavior through constructive interpretation and available resources (March and Olsen 1995). We need to attend to the interaction between rules and purposeful behavior and the factors that enhance or counteract rule-following and mediate the impact rules have on behavior (Checkel 2001).

Defining a role or identity and achieving it require time and energy, thought and capability. In order to understand the impact of rules upon action, we need to study such (imperfect) processes as attention-directing, interpretation of rules, the validation of evidence, codification of experiences into rules, memory-building and retrieval, and the mechanisms through which institutions distribute resources and enable actors to follow rules, across a variety of settings and situations.

For example, individuals have multiple roles and identities and the number and variety of alternative rules assures that only a fraction of the relevant rules are evoked in a particular place at a particular time. One of the primary factors affecting behavior, therefore, is the process by which some of those rules, rather than others, are attended to in a particular situation, and how identities and situations are interpreted (March and Olsen 1989, 22). Fitting a rule to a situation is an exercise in establishing appropriateness, where rules and situations are related by criteria of similarity or difference through reasoning by analogy and metaphor. The process is mediated by language, by the ways in which participants come to be able to talk about one situation as similar to or different from another; and assign situations to rules. The process maintains consistency in action primarily through the creation of typologies of similarity, rather than through a derivation of action from stable interests or wants.³

Individuals may also have a difficult time interpreting which historical experiences and accounts are relevant for current situations, and situations can be defined in different ways that call forth different legitimate rules, actors and arguments (Ugland 2002). Where more than one potentially relevant rule or account is evoked, the problem is to apply criteria of similarity in order to use the most appropriate rule or account. In some cases, higher order rules are used to differentiate between lower orders rules, but democratic institutions and orders are not always monolithic, coordinated and consistent. Some action-spheres are weakly institutionalized. In others institutionalized rule-sets compete. Rules and identities collide routinely (Orren and Skowronek 1994), making prescriptions less obvious. Actors sometimes

³ Processes of constructive interpretation, criticism, justification, and application of rules and identities, are more familiar to the intellectual traditions of law than economics. Lawyers argue about what the rules are, what the facts are, and what whom have to do when (Dworkin 1986, vii). Law in action –the realization of law- involves legal institutions and procedures, legal values, and legal concepts and ways of thought, as well as legal rules (Berman 1983, 4).

disobey and challenge some rules because they adhere to other rules. Potential conflict among rules is, however, partly coped with by incomplete attention. For instance, rules that are more familiar are more likely to be evoked, thus recently used or recently revised rules come to attention.

In general, actors may find the rules and situations they encounter to be obscure. What is true and right and therefore what should be done may be ambiguous. Sometimes they may know what to do but not be able to do it because prescriptive rules and capabilities are incompatible. Actors are limited by the complexities of the demands upon them and by the distribution and regulation of resources, competencies, and organizing capacities, that is, by the institutionalized capability for acting appropriately. A separation between substantive policy making and budgeting is, for example, likely to create a gap between prescribed policy rules and targets and the capabilities to implement the rules and reach the targets.

Rules, then, potentially have several types of consequences but it can be difficult to say exactly how rules manifest themselves, to isolate their effects under varying circumstances and specify when knowledge about rules is decisive for understanding political behavior. While rules guide behavior and make some actions more likely than others, they ordinarily do not determine political behavior or policy outcomes precisely. Rules, laws, identities and institutions provide parameters for action rather than dictate a specific action, and sometimes actors show considerable ability to accommodate shifting circumstances by changing behavior without changing core rules and structures (Olsen 2003).

Over the last decades focus has (again) been on the pathologies and negative effects of rule-following, in the literature as well as in public debate in many countries. The ubiquity of rules, precedents and routines often makes political institutions appear to be bureaucratic, stupid, insensitive, dogmatic, or rigid. The simplification provided by rules is clearly imperfect, and the imperfection is often manifest, especially after the fact. Nevertheless, some of the major capabilities of modern institutions come from their effectiveness in substituting rule-bound behavior for individually autonomous behavior.

Rules, for example, increase action capabilities and efficiency -- the ability to solve policy problems and produce services. Yet the consequences of rules go beyond regulating strategic

behavior by providing incentive structures and impacting transaction costs. Rules provide codes of meaning that facilitate interpretation of ambiguous worlds. They embody collective and individual roles, identities, rights, obligations, interests, values, world views and memory, thus constrain the allocation of attention, standards of evaluation, priorities, perceptions, and resources. Rules make it possible to coordinate many simultaneous activities in a way that makes them mutually consistent and reduces uncertainty, for example by creating predictable time-rhythms through election and budget cycles (Sverdrup 2000). They constrain bargaining within comprehensible terms and enforce agreements and help avoid destructive conflicts. Still, the blessing of rules may be mixed. Detailed rules and rigid rule following may under some conditions make policy making and implementation more effective, but a well-working system may also need discretion and flexibility. Consequently, short-term and long-term consequences of rules may differ. Rules may, furthermore, make public debate obligatory, but rule-following may also hamper reason-giving and discourse.

A one-sided focus on policy consequences may furthermore hide a broader range of effects. Logics of action are used both to describe, explain, justify and criticize behavior and sometimes the primary reason for rules is to proclaim virtue rather than to control behavior directly, making the implementation of rules less important (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Brunsson 1989; March 1994, 76). Rules and institutions of government are, in addition, potentially transformative. More or less successfully, they turn individuals into citizens and officials by shaping their identities and mentalities and making them observe the *normative* power of rules (Mill 1862; Fuller 1971; Joerges 1996).

An important aspect of rules, then, is their possible consequences for the development of a community of rule, based on a common identity and sense of belonging. A key issue of political organization is how to combine unity and diversity and craft a cooperative system out of a conflictual one; and the democratic aspiration has been to hold society together without eliminating diversity – that is, to develop and maintain a system of rules, institutions and identities that makes it possible to rule a divided society without undue violence (Wheeler 1975, 4; Crick 1983, 25).

The growth and decay of institutions, roles and identities, with their different logics of action, are therefore key indicators of political change (Eisenstadt 1965; Huntington 1965). Rules

also help realize flexibility and adaptiveness as well as order and stability. This is so because part of the democratic commitment is the institutionalization of self-reflection and procedures through which existing rules can legitimately be examined, criticized and changed.

The dynamics of rules of appropriateness

Why are the rules of appropriateness what they are? Why are specific behavioral prescriptions believed to be natural or exemplary and why do rules vary across polities and institutions? Through which processes and why do rules of appropriateness change? A conception of human behavior as rule- and identity-based invites a conception of the mechanisms by which rules and identities evolve and become legitimized, reproduced, modified and replaced. Key behavioral mechanisms are history-dependent processes of adaptation such as learning or selection. Rules of appropriateness are seen as carriers of lessons from experience as those lessons are encoded either by individuals and collectivities drawing inferences from their own and others' experiences, or by differential survival and reproduction of institutions, roles and identities based on particular rules. Rule-driven behavior associated with successes or survival is likely to be repeated. Rules associated with failures are not.

A common interpretation of rules, institutions, roles and identities is that they exist because they work well and provide better solutions than their alternatives (Goodin 1996; Hechter, Opp and Wippler 1990; Stinchcombe 1997, 2001). They are, at least under some conditions, functional and consistent with peoples' values and moral commitments. In contemporary democracies, this interpretation is reflected in high learning aspirations. Appropriate rules, in both technical and normative terms, are assumed to evolve over time as new experiences are interpreted and coded into rules, or less attractive alternatives are eliminated through competition. Lessons from experience are assumed to improve the intelligence, effectiveness and adaptability of the polity and be a source of wisdom and progress. The key democratic institution for ensuring rational adaptation of rules is free debate where actors have to explain and justify their behavior in public through reason-based argumentation, within a set of rules defining appropriate debates and arguments.

In practice, however, the willingness and ability of democracies to learn, adapt rules and improve performance on the basis of experience is limited (Neustadt and May 1986; March 1999). Rules are transmitted from one generation to another or from one set of identity-

holders through child rearing, education, training, socialization and habitualization. Rules are maintained and changed through contact with others and exposure to experiences and information. Rules spread through social networks and their diffusion is constrained by borders and distances. They compete for attention. They change in concert with other rules, interfere with or support each other, and they are transformed while being transferred (Czarniawska and Joerges 1995; March, Schulz and Zhou 2000). Change also takes place as a result of public discourse and deliberate interventions. These dynamics reflect both the effects of change induced by the environment and endogenous changes produced by the operation of the rule system itself.

Yet, as is well-known from modern investigations, such processes are not perfect. For example, the encoding of history, either through experiential learning or through evolutionary selection does not necessarily imply intelligence, improvement or increased adaptive value. There is no guarantee that relevant observations will be made, correct inferences and lessons derived, proper actions taken or that imperfections will be eliminated. Rules encode history, but the coding procedures and the processes by which the coded interpretations are themselves decoded are filled with behavioral surprises.⁴

We assume that new experiences may lead to change in rules, institutions, roles and identities and yet we are not committed to a belief in historical efficiency, i.e. rapid and costless rule adaptation to functional and normative environments and deliberate political reform attempts, and therefore to the functional or moral necessity of observed rules (March and Olsen 1989, 1995, 1998). Democratic institutions, for example, are both arranged to speed up and slow down learning from experience and adaptation. Democracies value continuity and predictability as well as flexibility and change, and usually there are attempts to balance the desire to keep the basic rules of governance stable and the desire to adapt rules due to new experience. The main picture is also one of renewal and continuity, path departures and path dependencies. Different rules, roles and identities are evoked in different situations and when circumstances fluctuate fast, there may be rapid shifts within existing repertoires of behavioral rules based on institutionalized switching-rules. However, the basic repertoire of rules and standard operating procedures change more slowly.

⁴ March and Olsen 1975, 1989, 1995, 1998; Levitt and March 1988; March 1994, 1999; March, Schulz and Zhou 2000; Olsen and Peters 1996.

Change in constitutive rules usually requires time-consuming processes and a strong majority, a fact that is likely to slow down change. The same is true when the basic rules express the historical collective identity of a community and embody shared understandings of what counts as truth, right and good. Deliberate reform then has to be explained and justified in value rational terms, that is, in terms of their appropriateness and not solely in efficiency-terms (Olsen 1997); and change in entrenched interpretative traditions and who are defined as the authoritative interpreters of different types of rules, are also likely to change relatively slowly.

Core political identities are not primordial and constant. Nevertheless, barring severe crises, processes of identity formation and reinterpretation are likely to be slow. All political rulers try to transfer naked power into authority. Civic virtue and shared internalized principles of rights and obligations⁵ and identities are to some degree accessible to political experience, reasoning and action. They can, for example, be affected through policies of nation-building, mass education and mass media, even if the causal chains are long and indirect. In democracies, where the authority of law is well established, identities may also be fashioned through political and legal debates and decisions (Habermas 1996). Legalization may in some settings be a prelude to internalization of rules of appropriateness, even if they in other settings may substitute for internalized rules.

There is, however, modest knowledge about the factors that govern targets of political identification and codes of appropriate behavior, and where, when and how different types of actors obtain their identities and codes -- for example the relative importance of specific political ideologies, institutions, professions and educations, and belongings to larger social categories such as nation, gender, class, race, religion, and ethnicity (Herrmann, Risse and Brewer 2004). Neither is it obvious how well different institutions today embody and encourage democratic identities and make it more likely that citizens and officials act in accordance with internalized democratic principles and ideals. Furthermore, an improved understanding of rule-dynamics may require better insight into how the dynamics of change may be related to normal, new and extraordinary experience in different institutional settings.

⁵ As observed by Rousseau: 'the strongest man is never strong enough to be always master unless he transforms his power into right, and obedience into duty (Rousseau 1967: 10). In modern society, Weber argued, the belief in legality -- the acceptance of the authority of law, legal actors, reasoning, precedents and institutions -- is the most common form for legitimacy (Weber 1978, 37).

Consider normal experience and routine learning. Experiences are routinely coded into rules, rules into principles, and principles into systems of thought in many spheres of life. Routine refinement of rules can be imagined to improve their fit to the environment, and one study showed that the stability of rules is related positively to their age at the time of last revision. However, changes in rules can also create problems that destabilize rules, and the current stability of rules is related negatively to the number of times they have been revised in the past (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000).

In some spheres, i.e. weberian bureaucracies and court systems, these processes are systematic and institutionalized (Weber 1978; Berman 1983); in other spheres they are less so. Conflict between competing situational accounts, conceptions of truth and justice and interpretations of appropriate behavior are also routine in contemporary democracies. Democracies are at best only *partly* communities of shared experiences, communication, interpretative traditions and memory that give direction and meaning to citizens. They are glued together by shared debates, controversies and contestations and by fairly broad agreement on some basic rules for coping with conflicts.

In fragmented, or loosely coupled, systems, competing rules of appropriateness may be maintained over long time periods due to their separateness. As long as rule-following meets targets and aspiration-levels, rules are unlikely to be challenged, even if they are not in any sense “optimal”. Reduced slack resources may, however, call attention to inconsistencies in rules and produce demands for more coordination and consistency across institutional spheres and social groups (Cyert and March 1963). Comparison across previously segmented institutional spheres or groups with different traditions, rules of appropriateness and taken-for-granted beliefs, may then trigger processes of search and reconciliation or dominance and coercion.

Consider new experience and settings. Processes of search and change may also be triggered when an existing order, its institutions, rules of appropriateness and collective self-understandings, are challenged by new experiences that are difficult to account for in terms of existing conceptions (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 103). Entrenched accounts and narratives then do not make sense. They no longer provide adequate answers to what is true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, and what is appropriate behavior; and there is search for new

conceptions and legitimations that can produce a more coherent shared account (Eder 1999, 208-9).

Account and concepts may be challenged because new institutions and meeting-places have developed. An example of a new institutional setting generating increased contact and challenging national traditions is the integration of sovereign nation states into the European Union. Challenges may also follow from institutional collisions between previously separated or segmented traditions, for example the invading of market-rules of appropriateness into institutional spheres traditionally based on different conceptions, such as democratic politics, science and sport. Increased mobility or massive migration across large geographical and cultural distances may likewise create collisions that challenge established frames of reference and institutionalized routines. Such collisions may generate destructive conflicts, but they may also generate rethinking, search, learning and adaptation by changing the participants' reference groups, aspiration-levels and causal understandings.

Consider the unacceptability of the past and institutional emancipation. Actors are likely to learn from disasters, crises and system breakdowns -- transformative periods where established orders are delegitimized, challenged or collapse. Then, institutions and their constitutive rules are discredited as unworkable and intolerable and change initiatives are presented as emancipation from an order that is a dysfunctional, unfair or tyrannical relic of an unacceptable past, as was, for example, the case when communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed (Offe 1996; Wollmann 2004).

In situations of disorientation, crisis and search for meaning, actors are in particular likely to rethink who and what they and others are, and may become; what communities they belong to, and want to belong to; and how power should be redistributed. Often search for legitimate models and accounts are extended far back to possible glorious periods in own history, or they are copied from political systems that can be accepted as exemplary. Short of revolution or civil war, there may be shifts in cognitive and normative frames, in who are defined as legitimate interpreters of appropriateness, in interpretative traditions, and in the system for collecting, communicating and organizing knowledge (Eder 1999), as well as in resource distributions and power relations.

In sum, an improved theoretical understanding of the dynamics of rules, institutions, roles and identities requires attention to several “imperfect” processes of change, not a focus on a single mechanism. Change is not likely to be governed by a single coherent and dominant process. Except under special circumstances, rules of appropriateness develop and change through a myriad of disjointed processes and experiences in a variety of places and situations, even when the result is normatively justified post-hoc by rational accounts (Eder 1999, 203). For example, decrees, command and coercion have a limited role in developing and maintaining legitimate rules, roles and identities. The internalization of rules and identities is usually neither a case of willful entering into an explicit contract. In practice, processes such as learning, socialization, diffusion, regeneration, deliberate design and competitive selection, all have their imperfections and an improved understanding of these imperfections may provide a key to a better understanding of the dynamics of rules (March 1981).

Required then is the exploration of the scope conditions and interaction of such processes as purposeful reform, institutional abilities to adapt spontaneously to changing circumstances, and environmental effectiveness in eliminating sub-optimal rules, institutions and identities (Olsen 2001). In the final part, we explore how an adequate understanding of politics may also require attention to the scope conditions and interaction of different logics of behavior.

Reconciling logics of action

Action is rule based, but only partly so. There is a great diversity in human motivation and modes of action. Behavior is driven by habit, emotion, coercion, and calculated expected utility, as well as interpretation of internalized rules and principles. Here, focus is on the potential tension, in the first instance, between the role or identity-based logic of appropriateness and the preference-based consequential logic; and, in the second instance, between the claims of citizenship and officialdom and the claims of particularistic roles or identities.

Democratic governance involves balancing the enduring tensions between different logics of action, for instance between the demands and obligations of offices and roles and individual calculated interests (Tusman 1960, 18). Political actors are also likely to be held accountable for both the appropriateness and the consequences of their actions. A dilemma is that proper behavior sometimes is associated with bad consequences and improper behavior sometimes is associated with good consequences. From time to time, democratic actors will get "dirty

hands". That is, they achieve desirable outcomes through methods that they recognize as inappropriate. Or, they follow prescribed rules and procedures at the cost of producing outcomes they recognize to be undesirable (Merton 1938; Thompson 1987, 11).

Partly as a result of the tensions between them, there are cycles between logics of action. Compared to the *Rechtsstaat*, with its traditions and rhetoric tied to the logic of appropriateness, twentieth-century democracies (particularly the welfare states of Europe) embraced practices and rhetoric that were more tied to the logic of consequentiality. Consequence-oriented professions replaced process-oriented ones and effectiveness and substantive results were emphasized more than the principles and procedures to be followed. Governance came to assume a community of shared objectives rather than a community of shared rules, principles and procedures (March and Olsen 1995).

More recent reforms have continued that trend. Governments in the 1980s generally tried to change concepts of accountability even more toward emphasis upon results and away from an emphasis on the rules and procedures (Olsen and Peters 1996). While several reforms were processual in character, rules were often seen as instrumental rather than having a legitimacy of their own. In particular, they aimed at binding and controlling elected politicians and experts. One reason of the reforms was the conviction that individuals needed better protection against political interventions. A second reason was the conviction that consequence-oriented professions such as medical doctors and teachers in welfare states were ineffectively subjected to public accountability and that obligations to report and being subject to audit had to be expanded (Power 1994).

Nevertheless, there is no uniform and linear trend making rules of appropriateness outdated. Scandals in both the private and public sector have triggered demands for legal and ethical rules and an ethos of responsibility. The European Union is to a large extent a polity based on rules and legal integration; and in world politics there is a trend towards legal rules and institutions, including an emphasis on human rights, even if the trend may be neither even nor irreversible (Goldstein et al. 2000).

Political systems deal with the multitude of behavioral motivations in a variety of ways and one is separating different logics by locating them in different institutions and roles (Weber 1978). Different logics of action are also observed within single institutions. Individual

institutions, on the *one* hand, separate logics by prescribing different logics for different roles. For instance, in courts of law the judge, the prosecutor, the attorney, the witness and the accused legitimately follow different logics of action. The credence of their arguments, data and conclusions are also expected to vary. On the *other* hand, logics also compete within single institutions. In public administration, for example, there have been cycles of trust in control of behavior through manipulation of incentive structures and individual cost-benefit calculations, and trust in an ethos of internal-normative responsibility and willingness to act in accordance with rules of appropriateness. Historically, the two have interacted. Their relative importance, as well as the definition of appropriateness, have changed over time and varied across institutional settings (deLeon 2003).

A theoretical challenge is to fit different motivations and logics of action into a single framework. Specific logics, such as following rules of appropriateness and calculating individual expected utility, can be good approximations under specific conditions. It is difficult to deny the importance of each of them (and others) and inadequate to rely exclusively on one of them. Therefore, a theory of purposeful human behavior must take into consideration the diversity of human motivations and modes of behavior and account for the relationship and interaction between different logics in different institutional settings. A beginning is to explore behavioral logics as complementary, rather than to assume a single dominant behavioral logic (March and Olsen 1998; Olsen 2001).

If it is assumed that no single model, and the assumptions upon which it is based, are more fruitful than all the others under all conditions and that different models are not necessarily mutually exclusive, we can examine their variations, shifting significance, scope conditions, prerequisites and interplay, and explore ideas that can reconcile and synthesize different models. We may inquire how and where different logics of actions are developed, lost and redefined. We may examine the conditions under which each logic are invoked. We may ask how logics interact, how they may support or counteract each other, and which logics are reconcilable. We may also specify through what processes different logics of action may become dominant.

We may, in particular, explore how different logics of action are formally prescribed, authorized and allowed, or how they are defined as illegitimate and proscribed, in different

institutional settings, for different actors, under different circumstances. We may inquire how institutional settings in practice are likely to prompt individuals to evoke different logics. We may also study which settings in practice enable the dominance of one logic over all others, for example under what conditions rules of appropriateness may overpower or redefine self-interest, or the logic of consequentiality may overpower rules and an entrenched definition of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1998; Olsen 2001).⁶

In the following, focus is on some possible relationships between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequentiality. An unsatisfactory approach is to *subsume* one logic as a special case of the other. Within the logic-of-appropriateness perspective, consequential choice is then seen as one of many possible rules that actors may come to believe is exemplary for specific roles in specific settings and situations. From the logic-of-consequentiality perspective, rules of appropriateness may be seen as the result of higher level or prior utility-calculations, choice and explicit contracts. We see this approach as unsatisfactory because it denies the distinctiveness of different logics.

An alternative is to assume a *hierarchy* between logics. The logic of appropriateness may be used subject to constraints of extreme consequences, or rules of appropriateness are seen as one of several constraints within which the logic of consequentiality operates. One version of the hierarchy notion is that one logic is used for major decisions and the other for refinements of those decisions, or one logic governs the behavior of politically important actors and an other the behavior of less important actors. It is, for example, often suggested that politics follows the logic of consequentiality, while public administrators and judges follow the logic of appropriateness. The suggestion of a stable hierarchy between logics and between types of decisions and actors is, however, not well supported by empirical findings.

A more promising route may be to differentiate logics of action in terms of their *prescriptive clarity* and hypothesize that a clear logic will dominate a less clear logic. Rules of appropriateness are defined with varying precision and provide more or less clear prescriptions in different settings and situations. For instance, rules are in varying degrees

⁶ Such questions are raised in several disciplines and sub-disciplines, for examples by Fehr and Gächter 1998, 848; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 912; Clayton and Gillman 1999; van den Bergh and Stagl 2001, 26; Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel 2003.

precise, consistent, obligatory and legally binding. There are more or less specified exceptions from the rules and varying agreement about who the authoritative interpreter of a rule is. Likewise, the clarity of (self) interests, preferences, choice alternatives and their consequences vary. Bureaucrats, for example, are influenced by the rules and structural settings in which they act, yet they may face ambiguous rules as well as situations where no direct personal interest is involved (Egeberg 1995; 2003). *In brief*, rules and interests give actors more or less clear behavioral guidance and make it more or less likely that the logic of appropriateness or the logic of consequentiality will dominate.

Even when actors are able to figure out what to do, a clear logic can only be followed when available resources make it *possible* to obey its prescriptions. Following rules of appropriateness, compared to predicting the future, clarifying alternatives and their expected utility, partly require different abilities and resources. Therefore, variation and change in the relative importance of the two logics may follow from variation and change in the resources available for acting in accordance with rules of appropriateness and calculated (self) interest.

Examples are shifting mixes of public and private resources, budgetary allocations to institutions that traditionally have promoted different logics, and changes in recruitment from professions that are carriers of one logic to professions that promote the other logic. Tight deadlines are also likely to promote rule following rather than the more time and resource demanding calculation of expected utility (March and Simon 1993: 11). The relation between level of societal conflict and logics of action is not obvious, however. In democratic settings, confrontations and conflicts usually challenge existing rules and possibly the logic of appropriateness. But protracted conflicts also tend to generate demands for compromises and constitutive rules that can dampen the level of conflict.

Lack of resources and understanding may also be one reason why different logics of action are used for different *purposes*, such as making policies and justifying policies. In institutional spheres and societies where policy making is prescribed to follow the logic of appropriateness, the rule of law, traditions and precedents, and the prescriptions are difficult to implement, the logic of appropriateness is likely to be used to justify decisions also when it is not used to make them. Likewise, in institutional spheres and societies where policy making is prescribed to follow the logic of consequentiality, rational calculation and an orientation

towards the future, and where following the prescription is difficult, the logic of consequentiality is likely to be used for justifying decisions, whatever the underlying logic of making them. We hypothesize, however, that rationality and the logic of consequentiality is more easily used to justify decisions. This is so because consequentiality is behaviorally more indeterminate in its implications than rule following and the logic of appropriateness in situations of even moderate ambiguity and complexity. It is easier to rationalize behavior in terms of one interest or another, than to interpret behavior as appropriate, simply because rules of appropriateness are collective, publicly known and fairly stable.

The time dimension is also important. A polity may institutionalize a *sequential* ordering of logics of action, so that different phases follow different logics and the basis of action changes over time in a predictable way. In democracies, an example is the vision of an institutionalized demand for expert information and advice as a precondition for informed political decision, followed by technical-logical implementation, monitoring and adjudication of decisions. Another example is the habermasian vision of an institutionalized public sphere, providing an ideal speech situation that makes it necessary even for self-interested, utility-calculating actors to argue in universal rather than particularistic terms. Over time deliberation and reasoned arguments becomes habitualized and normatively accepted, turning egoists into citizens (Habermas 1989). More generally, Mills (1940: 908) have hypothesized that the long acting out of a role or rule of appropriateness “will often induce a man to become what at first he merely sought to appear”.

Finally, change between logics of action may be the result of *specific experiences*. Rules of appropriateness are likely to evolve as a result of accumulated experience with a specific situation over extended time-periods. Therefore, rules and standard operating procedures are most likely to dominate when actors have long tenure, frequent interaction and shared experiences and information; when they share accounts and institutionalized memories; and when environments are fairly stable. Consequences are fed back into rules and rules are likely to be abandoned and possibly replaced by the logic of consequentiality, when rule-following is defined as unsatisfactory in terms of established targets and aspiration levels.

In particular, rules are likely to be abandoned when rule-following create catastrophic outcomes, and in periods of radical environmental change, where past arrangements and rules

are defined as irrelevant or unacceptable. Similarly, recourse to rules and standard operating procedures is likely when consequential calculations are seen as having produced catastrophes. In particular, rational calculation of consequences is easiest when problems are of modest complexity and time perspectives are short. When applied to more complex problems and longer time perspectives they are more likely to create big mistakes, afterwards seen as horror stories (Neustadt and May 1986).

As these speculations show, the scope conditions and interaction of different logics of action and types of reason are not well understood. Accomplishments are dwarfed by the large number of unanswered questions. Nevertheless, the gap may also be seen as providing a future research agenda for students of democratic politics and policy making.

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