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The OECD Civil Servant Between Scylla and Charybdis

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Abstract

Civil servants in international secretariats are exposed to numerous, cross-cutting and, at times, conflicting pressures and expectations. The OECD secretariat is no different. This study reveals a fundamental 'misfit' between external demands and internal dynamics in the OECD secretariat. On one hand, OECD analysts are employed on the basis of merit. Compared to employees in central administrations in many OECD member states, OECD personnel is very competitive in terms of experience and academic skills. Thus, the OECD secretariat can be seen as a veritable power-house of idea generation, data collection and analysis. On the other hand, OECD member states seem to be reluctant to let the OECD do what it does the best: producing bright, challenging and provocative ideas. In many regards, OECD personnel is, in practice, being reduced to undertaking basic secretariat functions such as organizing meetings, writing summaries and arbitrating between conflicting national interests. Despite having a vast role-repertoire at their disposal, this article reveals the paradox when OECD officials play out only two roles: the epistemic role, in which creative thinking and innovation is rewarded, and the bureaucratic role, in which rule-following and regularity is rewarded. This paradox is characterized as a role-dilemma which is compatible with the idea of the OECD as an international compound bureaucracy. The article concludes by suggesting three scenarios of how the observed dissonance between the internal and external dimensions of the OECD identity can be accommodated.

Keywords

OECD — organizational reform — role-set — role-conflict — organizational identity

To be or not to be

The literature on international organisations has only recently started conceptualising and empirically illuminating the varied roles played by international bureaucracies (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Biermann and Siebenhuner, 2009; Reinalda and Verbeek, 2004; Trondal et al. 2010). This lacuna reflects a more general gulf between various social science sub-disciplines, such as public administration and organisation theory (March 2009) and research on international organisation and their administrations (Heady, 1998: 33; Jörgens et al., 2009). More recent research on international organizations pays scant attention to the bureaucracies of these organisations (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2006; Karns and Mingst, 2004). Most likely, these scholarly gaps reflect mutual ignorance as much as mutual conflict. The last two decades, however, have seen several bridge-building exercises between organisational studies, public administration scholarship, and international organisation studies (e.g. Checkel, 2007; Egeberg, 2009; March and Olsen, 1998; Ness and Brechin, 1988; Trondal, 2007). This article contributes to this 'bridging-the-gaps' literature by bringing the literature of public administration, international bureaucracy, and institutional theory together in a study of the OECD Secretariat.

Over the past twenty years or so, the diagnosis has been the same: the OECD is in search of a distinct identity (OECD, 1997b: 3). No wonder, therefore, that the two previous secretary-generals have had problems in explaining what the OECD actually does:

> Dealing with the full range of public policy issues, it has become increasingly difficult to capture in a few descriptive words what the Organisation actually does (Donald Johnston, OECD Secretary-General, 1996-2005).[1]
>
> [W]e're not a chat club, we're not a debate club, we're not even a think tank, we're much more than that …. But we're not good at spreading the word (Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, 2005-).[2]

The pertinent question targeted by this study is to what extent international bureaucracies such as the OECD Secretariat challenge and supplement an

[1] OECD (1997b: 3).
[2] Angel Gurría in *The Daily Telegraph*, February 26, 2007: "Spreading the Word on Globalisation", by Edmund Conway.

inherent Westphalian intergovernmental order based on territorial governance (Gourevitch, 2003; Kegley and Raymond, 2002: 192; March and Olsen, 1998; Rosenau, 1996). To what extent do international bureaucracies supplement the inherent international intergovernmental order with a *multidimensional* international order subjugated by a compound set of decision-making dynamics? In order to approach these large-scale questions, this article focuses on the following research question: How do OECD bureaucrats balance competing internal and external expectations as regards the roles they should play in everyday decision-making processes? More specifically, to what extent are OECD officials supplementing an inherent intergovernmental behavioural dynamic with a menu of supranational, transgovernmental and/or epistemic role perceptions?

In simple terms, there are basically two ways by which we can study multidimensional role sets. One approach is to focus on the external dimension of the OECD, i.e. its organizational identity and *raison d'être* in relation to its member-states. The second focus is to explore the internal dimensions of the OECD identity, i.e. the perceptions of OECD officials themselves. In combination, these two approaches may illuminate the compound nature of the OECD bureaucracy. Empirically, this study illustrates the dilemmas in which OECD civil servants currently find themselves when trying to combine a compound set of roles and identities driven by colliding external and internal demands and expectations. They become caught between Scylla and Charybdis. Despite having a menu of at least four roles to play, this study reveals that OECD officials mainly adopt two roles: the transnational epistemic role and the role as rule-following bureaucrats. On one hand, they enact distinct transnational epistemic roles according to which their loyalty is directed towards science and knowledge. OECD civil servants may find inspiration by asking open-ended questions and by conducting autonomous research. On the other hand, however, current organizational reforms reward an entirely different role according to which OECD civil servants should be of immediate operational value in the day-to-day handling of governance problems in the member states. They feel reduced to rule-following bureaucrats. This indicates a decoupling between the external and internal dimensions of the OECD identity (cf. Barnett and Coleman, 2005).

The article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines an institutional approach to the roles and identities that OECD officials may enact. This approach conceptualises international bureaucracies as compound bureaucracies that may activate multidimensional role sets among its incumbents. The next section briefly introduces the data and methods used to illuminate the compound nature of the OECD Secretariat. The subsequent empirical section follows in two steps. Step I explores the external dimension of the OECD secretariat, whereas Step II conducts an in-depth analysis of the internal dimension of the world of OECD officials. The final section concludes by presenting three scenarios of how the observed dissonance between the internal and external dimensions of the OECD identity can be accommodated.

Roles and reasons within the OECD – An institutionalist approach

Existing international organization research has largely ignored international bureaucracies as autonomous institutions and, in consequence, partly by-passed the study of international civil servants (Mathiason, 2007). This lacuna is both due to the hegemony of rationalist and legal approaches in current international organization research, in addition to the role of contingency theory (Trondal et al., 2010). To remedy these shortcomings, and to get a more profound insight into the reform dilemmas confronting the OECD, an institutional perspective can be adopted. Rather than studying rules and regulations imposed on the OECD by top-management, an institutionalist approach highlights the roles and reasons inside the OECD (Schein, 1996; Selznick, 1957). An institutionalist approach aspires to open the black box of international organizations, i.e. to highlight who is employed in the organization, what they think, how they perceive themselves and their organization, with whom they interact, and to where they aspire to move onto after their OECD career. These are questions that go beyond the legal mandate of the organization. These dimensions pertain to visions and networks inside the organization. Organizational culture refers to a shared frame of reference inside an organization, including beliefs, values and norms that help members of the organization to make sense of the world and by which action is guided. Bureaucratic organizations develop distinctive social forms of authority with their own logics and behavioural patterns. Thus, "IOs … create new categories of actors, form new sets of interests for actors, define new shared international tasks, and disseminate new models of social organization around the globe" (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004: 3).

There is an external as well as an internal dimension to organizational identities. The institutionalist perspective focuses on the self-perceptions of individuals inside organizations and the ways in which they relate to others (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). Managers cannot simply create a culture from the top down. Cultures are sticky and tend to accompany organizational inertia and relative stability (Olsen, 2008: 193).

Following the institutional approach, international bureaucracies such as the OECD Secretariat may be conceptualised as a *compound bureaucracy*. The key to compound bureaucracy, as understood here, is, first, that institutions tend to mobilise a multi-dimensional set of conflicting roles and identities that incumbents may attend to and act upon. The idea of compound administrative systems is not new. This view of "political order harks back to a tradition from Plato, Aristotle, Polybius and Thomas Aquinas and their ideas about how 'mixed' orders and combinations of competing, inconsistent and contradictory organising principles and structures may co-exist and balance interest, values and claims to power" (Olsen, 2007a: 13-4). However, the *study* of compound administrative systems signifies a fairly new scholarly turn (Olsen, 2007a: 13) and it tends to see administrative systems as combining and balancing "a repertoire of overlapping, supplementary and competing forms…" (Olsen, 2007b: 22-3). This classical tradition in the study of public administration argues that robust and legitimate administrative systems tend to balance several competing dynamics sequentially and/or simultaneously (Jacobsen, 1960; Olsen, 2007a). Multi-dimensional orders are considered more robust against external shocks and therefore preferable to uni-dimensional orders (March and Olsen, 1989; Vibert, 2007). Conceptualising public administration as compound systems is based on the assumption that bureaucracies rest on the mobilisation of multiple complementary sets of institutions, actors, interests, decision-making arenas, values, norms and cleavages (Schmidt, 2006). The empirical yardstick thereof, as applied in this study, is the mobilisation of a four-folded role-set among OECD officials: intergovernmental, supranational, transgovernmental and epistemic roles (Table 1). These role perceptions highlight competing understandings of bureaucratic organisation, administrative behaviour, and bureaucratic change (Aberbach et al., 1981; Wilson, 1989). Governance within international bureaucracies such as in the OECD Secretariat is ultimately influenced by how trade-offs between these role perceptions are balanced by individual officials (Wilson, 1989: 327). International bureaucracies are multi-dimensional administrative apparatuses, embodying contradictions and dilemmas that are difficult to resolve and that affect how decisions are made. International bureaucracies are not merely neutral tools used by member governments to fulfil predetermined preferences; they are also Weberian rule-driven bureaucracies, transnational epistemic communities of professional experts, and transgovernmental institutions that transform officials into community-minded supranational officials (Checkel, 2007; Haas, 1992).

As suggested by early contingency theory (Thomson, 1967: 44), integration research (Pentland, 1973: 196) and recent institutionalist scholarship (Olsen, 2007a: 13), bureaucracies tend to combine and integrate a multidimensional set of organisational components and decision-making dynamics (cf. Herrmann et al., 2004). We suggest that a compound system of public administration manages to integrate certain sets of behavioural predispositions and role perceptions. Role perceptions are generalised receipts for action as well as normative systems of self-reference that provide *spontaneous* codes for behaviour and feelings of allegiance to organised communities (Mayntz, 1999: 83). Ultimately, such perceptions may guide the actual behaviour of actors because roles provide "conceptions of reality, standards of assessment, affective ties, and endowments, and […] a capacity for purposeful action" (March and Olsen, 1995: 30; Selden, 1997: 140).

Table 1: The role repertoire

	Role perceptions			
	Intergovernmental	*Supranational*	*Transgovernmental*	*Transnational*
Role ideal	State-identity	IO-identity	Civil-servant identity	Expert-identity
Role base	Territorial base	Community base	Functional base	Sector-specific base
Driving force	'What is my state's interest'?	'What is the common good'?	'What is legally correct'?	'What is scientifically correct'?

According to an *intergovernmental* role perception an official is guided by a loyalty towards the home government (Figure 1). S/he has a preference for national interests and enjoys close contacts with his or her home base. Basically, to be a civil servant in an international organization is considered to be a frontline worker for a national government. The civil servant may be thought of as a "Trojan horse" within the international bureaucracy. Such a member-state based role perception clearly stands in sharp contrast to a *supranational* role perception. A supranational or cosmopolitan role perception focuses on actors' feelings of loyalty and allegiance to the international bureaucracy as a whole and/or their feelings of loyalty and allegiance to the international organisation as a whole (Johnston, 2001). A supranational role implies a "shift of loyalty" and a "sense of community" that is integral and endogenous to actors' self-perceptions (Deutch et al., 1957: 5-6; Haas, 1958: 16). A supranational role perception denotes that a shared system of rules, norms, principles and codes of conduct is inducted, internalised and taken for granted by actors. This is consistent with the "type II socialisation" as suggested by Checkel (2005: 804) whereby actors acquire a collective interest and a positional "organisational personality" inside the international bureaucracy that is distinct from the roles previously internalised (Searing, 1991: 1249; Simon, 1957: 278). They identify personally with the international bureaucracy in which they are employed.

A *transgovernmental* role perception is related to the idea of civil servants as Weberian officials (Olsen, 2010). Whereas international organisations basically establish rules for the world (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004), international bureaucracies establish *action capacity* at the international level (Biermann and Siebenhuner, 2009). Accordingly, civil servants of international bureaucracies would primarily be intelligent, generalist professionals who advise their principal(s). A classical Weberian civil servant is guided by formal rules and procedures in every-day decision-making, being party-political neutral. They attach identity towards their unit and division, and abide to administrative rules and proper procedures of their international bureaucracy. This is the Westminster model that sees officials as permanent and loyal to shifting cabinets. The transgovernmental officials share the belief that there is a concrete distinction to be made between activities that are inherently controversial (political) and those that are noncontroversial (non-political) (Trondal et al., 2010).

Finally, a *transnational* epistemic role would imply that the staff of international bureaucracies enjoys a great deal of discretion, being influenced primarily by external professional reference groups (Asher, 1983). It is assumed they prepare dossiers, argue and negotiate on the basis of their professional competence and legitimate their authority using scientific references (Marcussen, 2010). Their role perceptions are expected to be guided by considerations of scientific and professional correctness and the power of the better argument. Thus, their role perceptions are primarily directed towards their expertise, educational background, as well as towards external professional networks. This is the "expert official" who is institutionally loosely coupled to shifting cabinets (Asher, 1983; Haas, 1992). It denotes the high-flying and mobile technocrat. International bureaucracies dominated by a transnational dynamic challenge institutional unity by being loosely coupled to the international organization. Transnational bureaucracies are typically porous and open institutions staffed by actors from different external expert institutions such as universities.

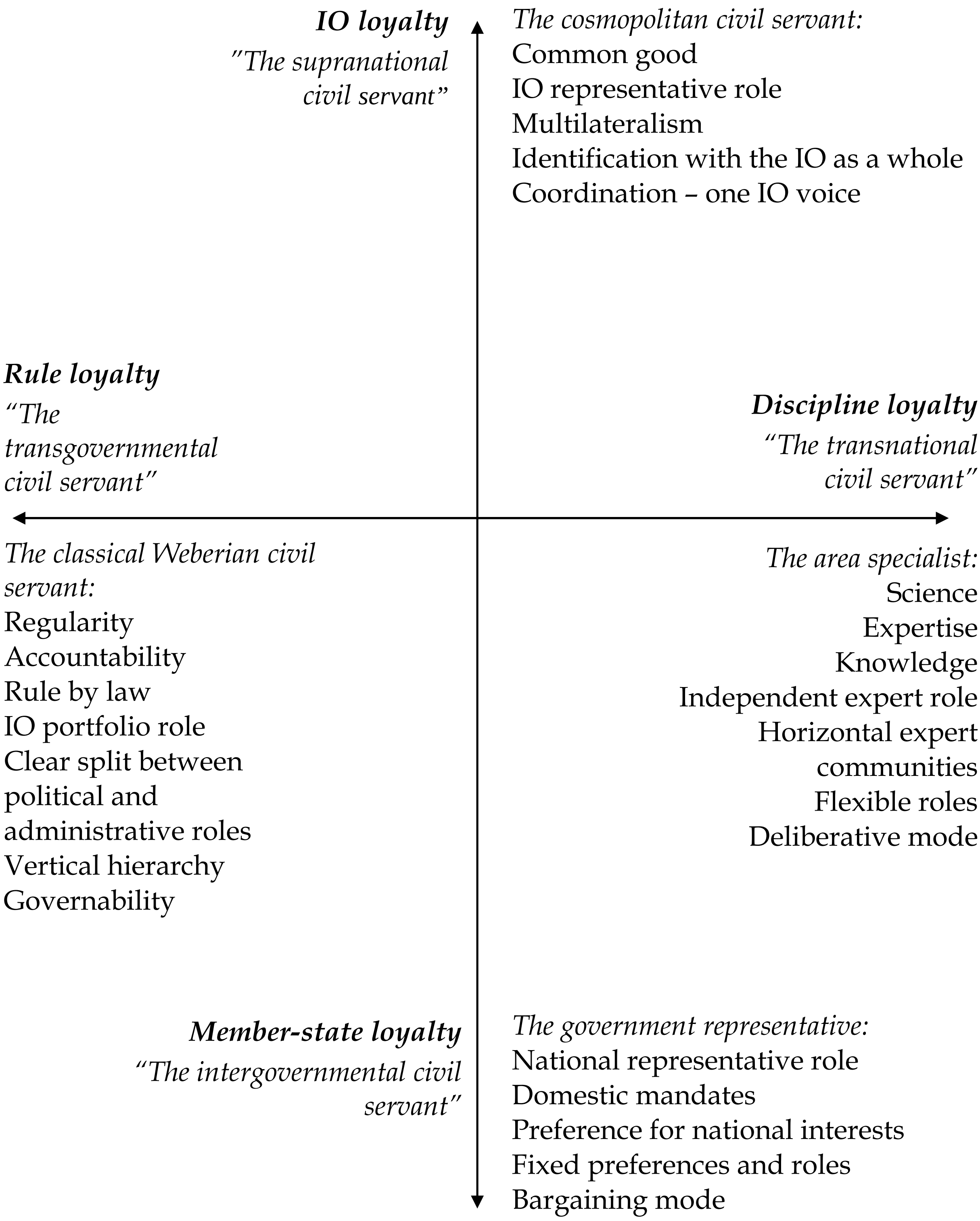

Figure 1: Ideal-typical IO Role Perceptions

Data and Methods

On the basis of twenty-eight interviews with civil servants in the general secretariat (a horizontal dimension of the OECD secretariat) and in the trade-related sections and departments (a vertical dimension of the OECD secretariat) the next section explores the roles evoked by OECD civil servants. When selecting officials for interviews in these departments, individuals were selected from the staff category "professional", or, what the OECD refers to as "A" staff. All "A" staff appointments usually require a university degree. Care was taken to include respondents from high, medium and low levels in the hierarchy in order to reflect their respective weights in the organization. Nevertheless, our results did not show significant differences in role perceptions based on these three sets of civil servant rankings. The interviews were carried out during 2006 and 2007 in Paris. All interviews were taped and fully transcribed. The empirical analysis in the next section is illustrated with quotes from these interviews. In this study, we do not attempt to quantify the interview material, so the analysis in the following sections can best be described as thick description supported by illustrative quotes. A more in-depth presentation and treatment of the data material can be found in Trondal et al. (2010). All interviewees are treated with full anonymity. Consequently, quotations from particular interviews are referred to in the following way: OECD, 2; OECD, 15, etc. The four ideal typical role perceptions may be interrelated in different ways. This article argues that the four roles cross-cut along two dimensions: one intergovernmental – supranational dimension and one transnational–transgovernmental dimension (Figure 1). We did not expect our interviews to reveal that OECD civil servants can be placed neatly into one of the four quadrants that come out of our conceptualization (Trondal *et al.*, 2010). Rather, we would expect that international civil servants may enact diverse roles in different situations. It is more accurate, therefore, to talk about role-sets, i.e. the entire array of roles that one official plays at any given time (Merton, 1957).

The external and internal dimension of compound bureaucracies

Step I: The external dimension: Rules and regulations imposed on the OECD

A standard portrayal of on-going reform programs of the consecutive OECD Secretary-Generals is consistent with the view that decision-makers are rational goal-seeking actors that are modifying organizations' characteristics to the expectations of its environment. Organizations are open systems whose survival and growth depend on managers' ability to adjust organizational structures to given contexts. If the environment is characterized by high levels of uncertainty, complexity, threats and low levels of stability, a manager needs to undertake appropriate structural reforms of the organization.

The intergovernmental logic, as outlined above, has gradually grown in the OECD – as an external dimension to the organisation (Marcussen, 2004a, b, c). Since the beginning of the 1990s, a number of factors have accumulated to challenge the basic rationale of the organization. During the cold war, the OECD was frequently seen as the economic counterpart of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Likeminded countries worked together with a view to creating the "right" conditions for economic growth and stability. The OECD was an inward-looking organization which primarily focused on the problems related to its members. The main financial contributors to the OECD, because they perceived of the organization as a brick in a larger organizational edifice of the West, did not ask too much of the organization. As long as the organization helped to sustain coherence among its members, and as long as it contributed to the development and consolidation of a capitalist economy, the OECD was generally unchallenged by its members. Starting with the end of the cold war, criticism started to mount. The context of the OECD changed radically. Member-states, particularly those that financed the organization, started to demand a *different kind of value for money*. The West had won its ideological battle over the state-directed economies. Now time had come to fine-tune their economic system to a much more detailed level. Advice, very concrete advice, was needed. With each OECD member-state requiring targeted advice, the number of tasks for the OECD exploded.

As regards the transnational logic, the *OECD's monopoly of expert advice is challenged* from outside the organisation. Technological developments and the general increase in competence in national as well as in international bureaucracies quickly created the basis for a different kind of evidence-based decision-making. Whereas previously, OECD reports and the very particular OECD peer-review technique were defining characteristics of the organization, other international and national, public and private organizations now started to do similar activities. They quickly invaded the OECD's territory, sometimes even doing a better job. The OECD, as a multipurpose organization, was forced to do everything at the same time, whereas other more specialized organizations could focus on one task only. In addition, organizations such as the IMF and the European Union were able to bolster their analyses with hard law and/or finance – something the OECD has never been able to do. In competition with other expert organizations, the OECD has nothing but the better argument. The OECD appeared to be a talking shop, and the consequences of its talking seemed to be difficult to detect in real life

(Armingeon and Beyeler, 2004). Media attention turned towards more powerful organizations, threatening to leave the OECD out in the cold.

On top of these challenges, the very essence of what matters to economic development and stability has partly been redefined over the last two decades. A consensus has developed worldwide that globalization cannot anymore be defined as either being economic, political, technological or cultural. Globalization is all this at the same time. For the OECD this means that when it is dealing with economic growth and prosperity, it also has to deal with a number of *cross-cutting issues* such as terrorism, financial unrest, crime, diseases etc. Concomitantly, the "silo thinking" that has dominated work on economic issues is increasingly challenged within the OECD Secretariat. Horizontal, holistic and "whole of government" perspectives are more appropriate for tackling the kind of issues which are of most concern for the OECD member-states (such as the environment). Again, this challenges the organisational structure of the OECD Secretariat, where the Economics Department traditionally dominated the entire organization. New issues related to welfare, education, environment, energy, health, safety and risk need to be integrated with the traditional economic analysis (Mahon, 2011).

Finally, over the past two decades, the *global power configuration* has evolved radically. The cold war east-west dimension has been replaced by a much more scattered cleavage and actor pattern in which emerging economies have become decisive players. Brazil, Russia, India and China are the most obvious new actors on the world economic scene, attracting immense attention from the traditional economic superpowers placed in Europe and the USA. Traditionally, the category of "OECD economies" has been synonym with the rich world. This has become increasingly outdated as a mode of thinking. For OECD, this means that an essentially introvert organization needs to look beyond its borders to be on top of things (Ougaard, 2010).

With these external dimensions in mind we observe that consecutive secretary-generals have had reforms high on their agenda. Just a week before the commencement of Donald J. Johnston as Secretary-General back in 1996, the OECD member-state ministers in unambiguous terms called for structural reforms of the OECD. They urged

> [T]he OECD to accelerate the process of structural change in the Organisation, in particular by adopting more stringent priority-setting and by formulating and implementing reforms of management and working methods, with a view to further enhancing the relevance,

efficiency and effectiveness of the Organisation, consistent with available resources (OECD, 1996).

Donald J. Johnston had received a clear mandate for reform. This was a mandate that he vigorously spelled out year after year in his annual "Challenges and strategic objectives" statements (OECD, 1997b, 1998a, 1999, 2000a, 2001, 2002a). No area or dimension of the organization was left unreformed. Everybody inside the organization directly felt that new and colder winds were blowing. For instance, from 1996, the number of staff was cut drastically. It was only ten years after, in 2006, that the total number of staff reached its 1996 level (Table 2). In terms of numbers, however, A-grade staff has continued to grow steadily (Table 3) supplemented by a quite considerable increase in the number of staff temporarily assigned to individual projects, external consultants as well as seconded personnel from the member–states (Table 2).

Table 2: Evolution of Staff by Category

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Regular staff	1,803	1,805	1,86	1,894	1,905	1,934	1,867	1,818	1,696	1,663
Project staff	28	43	37	46	68	111	118	142	166	198
OECD-employed	1,831	1,848	1,897	1,94	1,973	2,045	1,985	1,964	1,862	1,861
Consultants	74	70	86	98	100	99	104	88	110*	124*
Auxiliaries	107	122	169	191	198	184	173	177	152	145
Trainees	38	27	41	39	50	52	41	42	17	22
OECD-paid	2,05	2,067	2,193	2,268	2,321	2,38	2,302	2,269	2,141	2,152

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Regular staff	1,657	1,663	1,687	1,67	1,674	1,637	1,619	1,638	1,634
Project staff	254	304	317	307	341	384	475	542	574
OECD-employed	1,911	1,967	2,004	1,977	2,015	2,021	2,094	2,18	2,208
Consultants	116*	133*	142*	143*	171*	168*	161*	168*	200*
Auxiliaries	160	180	157	138	117	99	81	72	90
Trainees	21	32	32	37	29	28	42	42	38
OECD-paid	2,208	2,312	2,335	2,295	2,332	2,316	2,378	2,462	2,536

Source: OECD (2009: 8), OECD (2001b: 3). *includes 30-40 "seconded consultants"

Table 3: Evolution of Grade A staff

	1960	1969	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total grade A staff	135	205	643	668	705	714	761	747	778	755
Average age	-	-	45	45	44	44	45	45	44	44
Average years in grade A	-	-	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	4
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total grade A staff	773	797	839	874	906	931	934	979	1,045	1,081
Average age	45	44	44	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
Average years in grade A	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Source: OECD (2009: 9), OECD (2001b: 16), OECD (1996c: 4), Sjöstedt (1973: 198).

Table 4: Breakdown of A-grades by Type of Appointment, 2008

Grade	Fixed term contracts	Indefinite contracts	Total	% of fixed term
A7	23	4	27	85%
A6	25	3	28	89%
A5	42	81	123	34%
A4	193	181	374	52%
A3	245	121	366	67%
A2	101	11	112	90%
A1	51	-	51	100%
Total	680	401	1.081	62%

Source: OECD (2009: 15).

Another reform that has had considerable impact on employment conditions at the OECD has to do with the duration of employment (Balint and Knill, 2007). Open-ended contracts are being scaled out, and time-limited contracts are being scaled in (Table 4). Well above half of the A-grade population are on fixed-term contracts (62 percent in 2008). The distribution within the A-grades shows that more than 80 percent of staff at A7 and A6 (the top staff level) are on fixed-term contracts. Staff hired at A6 and A7 are not eligible to have their contracts converted to open-ended appointments and A5s promoted to A6 or above must give up their open-ended contracts. Some 67 percent of A3 staff and 90 percent of A2 staff are on fixed-term contracts, while the proportions of fixed-term contracts at grades A4 and A5 are somewhat lower at 52 percent and 34 percent respectively. All A1 grades are on fixed-term contracts.

Apart from these reforms in personnel policy the organizational reforms had, broadly speaking, internal as well as external dimensions (Bourgon, 2009). Internal reforms were targeted towards enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the organization. The purpose of the external reforms was to turn an introvert organization into an extrovert, proactive, inclusive team-player with focus on outreach. Internally, structural reforms, management systems reforms, governance reforms, and financial reforms were undertaken. Externally, initiatives were taken to expand the outreach of the organization through global forums, participation of non-members in committee work, enhanced engagement, and enlargement (Table 5).

Table 5: Examples of internal and external reform initiatives

Internal reform initiatives				External reform initiatives	
Structural reforms	Management system reforms	Gover-nance reforms	Financial reforms	Global forums and Non-members in committee work	Enhanced engagement and Enlargement
Creation of executive directorate Centre for cooperation with non-members Directorate for Public Affairs and Communication 6 thematic clusters on priority areas Committee review, reduction, evaluation and sunset clauses	Integrated management cycle Program of Work and Budget (PWB), results-based budgeting, resources to high-priority areas Program implementation reports (PIRs) Medium-term orientation surveys (MTOs)	Qualified majority voting Identification of normal cases, fundamental issues, special cases, delegated cases A and B-points on agenda	Relative expansion of Part 2 budget Differentiated financial conditions for new and old members Limits on budget-increases for the largest contributors	Identification of ten OECD expertise areas Multi-disciplinary and horizontal coordination Knowledge-sharing	Enhanced engagement with China, Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa Membership negotiations with Chile, Estonia, Israel, Russia and Slovenia

Source: OECD (2002b); OECD (2004).

These reforms were undertaken as a response to member-states' demands and the new environment in which the OECD found itself after the end of the cold war. The identity problem for the OECD regarded its attempts of adapting the organization to these external demands. The perception among OECD officials was that if there is a fit between what the organisation is supposed to do (supply) and what the member states expect it to do (demand), the identity problem would disappear by itself. Order and regularity would be re-established and the OECD would be able to "getting to grips with globalization" (OECD, 2004).

Step II: The Internal Dimension: Role-sets inside the Black Box

Our expectation was that we would identify multi-dimensional role-sets among civil servants of the OECD. This expectation is confirmed. When describing their lives, visions, justifications, understandings and aspirations, the 28 interviewees in the OECD secretariat dynamically combine roles. The interviewees are very explicit and conscious about the multiplicity of roles they play.

Interviewees report being entirely devoted to the organization and its values, and similarly detached from the member-states. For instance, one argued that "… I feel very strongly that I represent the organisation" (OECD 4, p. 8) and another held that "… I really do pride myself on being an international civil servant and I have no more contact with my own government, that I would do with any other government" (OECD 8, p. 12). One interviewee explained:

> Fundamentally, my impression is that when people have joined the OECD, and they have worked here for a while, they no longer behave as nationals of any particular member country. But they serve the interests of the organization and it doesn't really matter whether they are Canadian, Australians or Belgians. They work towards the common aim of the organization (OECD 11, p. 10).

This is clearly in line with the *supranational* role perception as outlined above. The presence of supranationality among the OECD civil servants does not imply, however, that nationality and national culture is irrelevant in everyday practice. Many interviewees argue that particular officials (e.g. from Japan and Korea) stick out as very different in terms of culture and social interaction. In addition, interviewees report that those who do not speak English fluently face serious communication problems inside the organization. Native English speakers enjoy clear advantages in professional communication. Managers among the interviewees recognize that nationality and culture matter. For instance, being asked whether it is a challenge to be a Head of Section, one OECD civil servant replies:

> I think to some extent, yes, because of this cultural diversity. You have to be very, very aware of the fact that, for instance, something which is culturally admitted in a country X, can be a 'no, no' in a country Y; you have to know that. For instance, you have to know there is a body language with the Japanese colleagues (OECD 7, pp. 10-11)

Other civil servants see intergovernmentalism as an ideal that could be fostered more strongly than is the case in today's OECD:

> I think the nationality is extremely important …
> *.. but isn't the point of being an international civil servant that they should represent the organisation as such, or how do you feel about that?*
> I don't believe in that.
> *You believe that all people represent their own countries, at least to some extent?*
> Yeah, I think international cooperation should not delete the differences between countries. The objective should be the opposite: keep differences (OECD 14, pp. 8 and 9).

In addition, some interviewees claim that they do not believe in the socializing effects of international organizations. They argue that the national characteristics are very sticky:

> The fact that you work in an international organisation does not mean that you become an acolyte, like another world. No, you bring with you your culture, your experience, your strength, your weaknesses and it is the combination of this that makes international organisations successful and a very interesting place to work (OECD 28, p. 5).

A third set of perceptions is represented by the *transgovernmental* role. According to such a role, OECD civil servants argue that "I am just an international civil servant who works for the OECD" (OECD 17, p. 7) and "I like to present myself as an international civil servant" (OECD 28, p. 6). Basically, a transgovernmental civil servant could have worked for any kind of international organization. It is the metier of being a bureaucrat which is the defining feature. Accordingly, the application of rules and the principle of regularity become important:

> [the staff rule book] is fairly general, but it stresses professionalism, which is what I stress with my staff. And that they work and maintain professional work habits, communicate in a professional manner - especially in any written communication – not engage in unprofessional conduct, which includes writing inappropriate things in emails, maintaining positive communication whenever possible. I have tried to foster that culture in the treasury division, in the finance service. Also, we tried to push the idea of being responsible, being responsive, being accountable, following up on questions (OECD 23, p. 10).

In addition, reflecting the transgovernmental dynamic, the most important point of reference is not with the OECD writ large but the unit or department in which s/he works. According to such logic there will be huge procedural and cultural differences from one department to the next within the larger OECD edifice. This is best expressed in the following citation:

> The way in which some rules are applied is quite heterogeneous, quite different. Within the same framework there are different work styles, organisations. So from this point of view, people who move from one directorate to another can from time to time find very big differences. It depends on the culture of that particular directorate, the style that the director gives to the whole directorate and so on (OECD 28, p. 7).

The fact that the OECD civil servant professionally copes with different conflicting demands and plays around with different roles in complex role-sets does not mean that s/he is always happy with this state of affairs. The simultaneous occupancy of conflicting structural positions inside the OECD seems to cause occupational role-conflicts (Hall, 1968; Stryker and Macke, 1978). Concretely, the kind of role-conflict that we have identified concerns a clash between the multi-dimensional aspirations, hopes and desires of the individual civil servant, on one hand, and the externally demanded reforms of the OECD over the past two decades, on the other.

Among the various roles to which the OECD civil servant subscribes, there is one role which strongly advocated by most interviewees – the *transnational* epistemic role perception. As described earlier, this is a role perception which emphasizes scientific ideals and procedures such as colleague control, free exchange of information, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and personal professional development (Hagstrom, 1965; Kornhauser, 1962). The first Secretary-General of the OECD, Thorkil Kristensen, emphasized this role when taking office. He considered himself a scientist. Those were the days when an OECD Secretary-Generally literally could close his office door for weeks to fully engage with the latest advances in development studies. He defined the OECD very much in contrast to the OEEC. The OEEC was a purely administrative and coordinating entity, helping the European states to benefit the most from the Marshall Plan and to initiate structural reforms and planning. The OECD was, in Thorkil Kristensen's view, completely different. Its *raison d'être* was to constantly be in front as a politically detached knowledge organization. In the member states, knowledge producers were all somehow embedded in and dependent on the national political games as a result of which we should not expect them to think the unthinkable. In the name of progress, the role of the OECD was to exploit the best experts that could be found in the member states, provide these with the best conditions to work together and then inject objective knowledge into national reform processes. Thorkil Kristensen went as far as arguing that it was a democratic obligation of the OECD to inject vitamins into the national reform debates because "who else should do that" (Marcussen, 2002)? Because the OECD was politically and financially free to say and study whatever it wanted to do, this in itself was a guarantee that the OECD would help improve global conditions for reform.

Most OECD civil servants had obtained master degrees in economics or politics and some had defended a PhD degree. Nearly all interviewees report that they have pursued academic research, lectured as university professors, or worked as analysts before taking up OECD positions. Interviewees also claimed that the entire purpose of seeking a position inside the OECD was to satisfy a desire to go much deeper into the material than is possible in other international organizations such as the European Union, in private businesses, or in national public administration. In other words, they had hoped to activate larger parts of their intellect. Most interviewees report working as full time researchers:

> It's almost a hundred percent research. I have quite a few projects going on at the same time, and I spent almost all my time either doing the research – which for me is a lot of quantitative research – and then, the rest of my time writing up papers and briefs about that research (OECD 1, p. 2).

The transnational civil servant very much identify with a profession, such as an economist or a statistician, and the contribution of the OECD to world society is independent knowledge:

> How do you feel that the other organisations benefit from your work?
> We have, in many areas, superior expertise in economics, in statistics, we have more staff with more competence, and so we contribute to the international development work that works in different kinds of statistics.
> Would you also say that you are considered perhaps more independent than some of the other organisations?
> Yeah, I think that it is probably fair to say (OECD 4, p. 7).

> I suppose my code of conduct is that I am not here to sprout propaganda about the organisation; I am here to provide information. In a way, that is a certain personal code of conduct, which I think is generally shared among the other people in my unit, although it is not written down formally as a formal code of conduct. It is our *esprit de corps* (OECD 24, p. 8).

Contact with the outside world is primarily directed towards other members of a transnational community of experts:

> *What about external experts, universities, research institutions …?*
> Yeah. We do what we do with them a lot, including the theme-based and country-specific work. For all the work that I have done in the last several years, I spent a lot of the time working with experts – frequently academic experts […] most of what we work on we'll have some interaction with experts – often at universities or research institutes (OECD 17, p. 5).

The internal – external dimension misfit

The essential dilemma facing the OECD at present is that member state expectations and consequent OECD reforms stand in sharp contrast to the scientific ideal. They pressure scientists to move out of research into administration, accounting, top-down management, and control. In other words, the conflict between internal dynamics and external demands seems to be one between an internal epistemic role perception among OECD officials and a set of externally defined national interests for utility maximisation

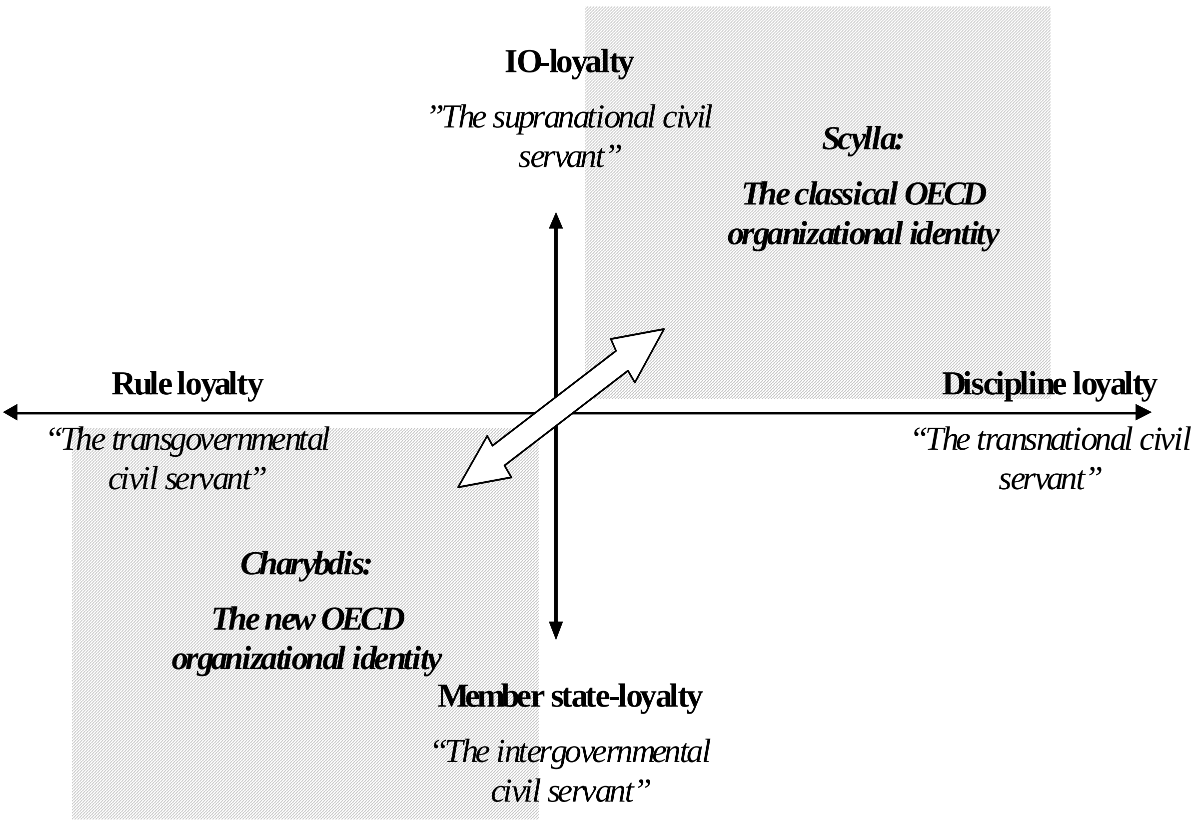

Figure 2: OECD civil servants between Scylla and Charybdis

This particular diagonal role-pattern manifests itself in various ways. One important indicator is the ever present shadow of the member-states. Researchers at the OECD are not free to think the unthinkable. They have to take account of the interests of each and every member state. After all, the OECD depends on their financial contributions and political backing:

> …certainly, you have to understand that all these international organisations have kind of partly one hand behind their back, because we are not a university. We don't have freedom to say what we like, because governments constrain what we do. We try and get a consensus here, though we try and break out of that sometimes (OECD 19, p. 8).

> In my view, we are far too focused on serving – or placating – the Permanent Delegations. I think that has been a mistake. That has happen particularly the last four-five years. That has increased (OECD 8, p. 10).

The strong presence of the member state shadow in everyday work does not create the optimum conditions for scientific work. One example that illustrates the problem has to do with the high degree of complaisance and low level of academic in-fights inside the directorates.

> There are not that many who question the consensus. That is something which is a little bit, you know, personally, coming from a university background, is a little bit disappointing. That they don't have their own dynamic in a sense (OECD 19, p. 8).

Another indicator of this role-dilemma has to do with the roles of managers. The dilemma is that in order to become a manager in the first place, you need to be a gifted analyst. However, the more management responsibility you get the less time there is to actually develop new ideas. Managers are supposed to encourage other people to get new ideas and to engage actively in interdepartmental fights about resources. Interviewed high-level A-officials refer to internal fights for resource allocation between departments as a primary challenge! Being asked about the amount of administrative duties undertaken by managers, one senior manager explains:

> Much more administrative work than we do at the national administrative governments, actually. Particularly at the OECD, where the actual product is made by the committees and the directorates; it's not made by the Executive Director, or the Council, or the Budget Committee, or even the Secretary General, senior management. All the real products of the OECD are down, at the directorate-level, and the committees (OECD 8, p. 7).

> The biggest challenge in the OECD is the politics […] No one is responsible or people try to avoid responsibility and they try to avoid accountability. That has been kind of a challenge to try to make people accountable, try to get decisions made. It usually takes ten times as long and ten times as much work and explanations in writing to get a change and to get important decisions made. It takes a long time (OECD 23, pp. 2-3).

In that regard, interviewees think that the internal bureaucracy has become slower and more difficult to handle on an everyday basis. When comparing their jobs in the OECD Secretariat with previous jobs in the private sector or in national administrations, two comments are recurrent: the OECD is a wilderness of procedures and the bureaucratic ladder is higher.

> Here is, perhaps, less independence, rather than other places I've worked. There is, of course, heavier bureaucracy, heavier hierarchy, but there is also, perhaps…
> *More independence?*
> No. I would say I have less independence, because of the bureaucratic structure. In the private sector, for instance, I was freer to take a decision, the consequences of those decisions weighed much heavier on me; my productivity was measured in a different way. Here, as a bureaucrat, my productivity is measured much differently; as a matter of fact, it's very difficult to measure my productivity. So, I would say, I've less influence and less consequence, perhaps (OECD 6, pp. 3-4).

A consequence of the bureaucratic build-up experienced by OECD civil servants is that trust has been replaced by control. Everything written has to be approved by someone else higher up in the hierarchy:

> What I write has to be seen by lots of other people, it has to be approved, sometimes a committee has to approve it […] The countries like to have a say, like to have a look at it. So it is a lot more consensual here, there is a lot more of a bureaucracy to deal with. That takes a bit of learning, how you deal with a bureaucracy, especially if you come from a background like mine, which is not very bureaucratic […] Here there is a sort of huge bureaucratic structure you have to learn to live with. And it has taken time for me personally to adapt to it. So I think the biggest change is working within a structure, within a much, much bigger structure. And having less personal autonomy over the filed product. So many more opinions have to be taken into account here" (OECD 24, p. 3).

> … they automatically review what we do anyway, so for example any piece of work that I do would get sent out to A7-A5 for comments (OECD 17, p. 4).

Review and control is seen as a result of recent reforms, and it exemplifies externally driven reforms that by content collide with the inherent transnational roles of OECD officials:

> That is a model of management of the 19th century […] And that is very detrimental to the human capital here […] That is a shame (OECD 19, pp. 9-10).

There is no doubt in the minds of the interviewed civil servants that everything was better before! The OECD has been going through a large series of reforms over the past decade with huge impacts on work conditions. On one hand, OECD civil servants work extremely hard and they are dedicated to their job:

> One of the myths about a place like the OECD is that people sort of sit around and hash on international money and tax breaks and have a good time. However true that might have been in the past, or whether it is just jealousy or whatever, I can tell you – and this is not propaganda - I work very hard. I am used to have long nights and I happen to be here at two. And I am not the only one. I'm always amazed at people burning the midnight oil here at the OECD, and work hard (OECD 13, p. 6).

On the other hand, the rewards for hard work are not obvious:

Security in terms of losing a job. That's something, which is eroding away. If somebody asked me "I am thinking of becoming an international civil servant", I would say: "Don't do it" […] the work of an individual is even less appreciated. And it's difficult to get in, but even harder to get out, in a way (OECD 6, p. 16).

In short, the diagonal role-pattern that we have observed in the OECD manifests itself in some degree of frustration among the interviewed civil servants.

Conclusion: making ends meet

It has been argued that there is a dissonance between the external and internal dimensions of the OECD Secretariat's role. There is no doubt that the Secretary-General has a clear mandate for reform emanating from the OECD member states. The world has changed, and so has the role of the OECD (Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2011). The profound structural and procedural reforms that have been undertaken since the end of the Cold War talk directly to the external dimension of the OECD identity. The internal dimension of the OECD identity, however, has to do with the ways in which the OECD Secretariat balances tensions between colliding roles. We have established a conceptualization of ideal-typical role perceptions among OECD civil servants and on the basis of targeted interviews we conclude that there seems to be a role dilemma within the OECD Secretariat. OECD officials partly define themselves and their roles in line with an epistemic ideal which emphasizes autonomy, trust, and horizontal communication inside as well as outside the organization. Expert authority enables international bureaucracies to mobilise power by creating the appearance of depolitization (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004: 24). The problem is that profound organizational reforms seem to reward ideals that favour bureaucratic roles according to which control, rule-following, vertical communication, and checks-and-balances are rewarded. Similar observations are reported in the European Commission administration and WTO Secretariat, and thus generalisable beyond the OECD case (Trondal et al., 2010).

In some organizations, role-conflict and the consistent decoupling of external demands and internal dynamics is just part of every-day work routines (Brunsson, 1989; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In fact, any organization needs a certain degree of conflict in order to remain dynamic and innovative. It is by bridging seemingly conflicting goals and roles that organizational closure and group think is avoided (Burt, 2005). However, our interviews seem to indicate that the kind of role-dilemma experienced by OECD civil servants does not lead to any of these positive organizational dynamics. On the contrary, they report disappointment, frustration and stress – and increasingly so. That is the reason why we choose to point to three forms of coping behaviours that can be applied when confronted with occupational role dilemmas such as this one.

One option is to adapt the external dimension in ways so that it better fits the internal dimension. We will call this option the “Free the OECD from the shadow of the member states” scenario. According to this scenario, the challenge today is to bring the OECD back to basics. The main purpose of the OECD would be to exploit the analytical intellect of its employees in order to be able to inject new and thought-provoking ideas into national public debates. In this scenario, the main competitors to an OECD which is brought back to basics and freed from the shadow of the member states would be the national university institutions. In consequence, a number of changes to current set of organizational routines would be required. Such reforms would include establishing procedures which guarantee the complete autonomy of the organization and its employees. Without autonomy we would not expect anyone to come up with an inconvenient truth. In addition to accommodating the prevailing role conceptions among civil servants within the OECD, management needs to scale down its requirements for quantitative outcome. The risk is that highly qualified analysts are being reduced to book and journal editors and conference organizers. According to this scenario, the number of regular reviews and surveys produced by the staff should be reduced. The same goes for the number of committee meetings, forums, conferences and workshops organized by the staff. Instead, time should be dedicated to thorough thinking and ground-breaking reflection. The problem is accentuated by the fact that other international organizations offer more or less the same service to their member states. Today's international political arena is characterized by a multitude of meeting forums and comparative reviews. In this context, it would have greater impact to produce a limited number of ground-breaking analyses than a large number of irrelevant analyses.

As a second option, the internal dimension could be adapted to the external dimension. We will call this option the "Creating the largest consultancy on earth" scenario. According to this second scenario, the OECD is basically a business organization which is constituted by practical men and women who know how to resolve problems. The organization and its civil servants would be on the ground, assisting in the implementation of concrete reforms. Having done their job, they would then disappear until they are called on for assistance again. To imagine the OECD as the largest consultancy on earth would require that it delivers concrete solutions to concrete problems. It would constantly be looking for new markets and customers to service. In the process, it would be competing with other international organizations that provide technical assistance around the world. It would also be an alternative to existing private consultancy firms with a global reach and not least to the national public administrations who are the ones in need of help. In very concrete terms, part II of the OECD budget (individual country contributions targeted towards specific projects) would grow whereas part I (the fixed contributions of the member states) would form an increasingly smaller part of the overall budget. This is a development that we witness already today. Those who pay for OECD services can get them, whereas those who do not pay will receive fewer services. Emphasis will not be put on basic research. Rather, the OECD directorates would deliver very specific products. Overall, this scenario would imply that the basic profile of existing OECD civil servants would have to be gradually changed. From identifying primarily with epistemic features, OECD civil servants would have to identify with bureaucratic features highlighting regular service to the member states.

Finally a third option would be to create enclaves of research and enclaves of administration within the OECD. We will call this option "let people do what they are trained to do" scenario. In any international bureaucracy, there will be a very large number of secretarial and administrative functions to perform. There are people who are especially trained to undertake these functions. In addition, the *raison d'être* of the OECD still seems to be to undertake specialized and competitive comparative analyses on a number of areas. This requires highly skilled researchers that identify with that kind of function. The internal structure of the OECD would be specialized so as to accommodate conflicting demands and concerns. By establishing so-called free zones for expert knowledge or forward research units within the OECD secretariat the organization as a whole may be more likely to enhance the satisfaction of all its stakeholders. The presence of compound "orders" does not suggest integrated and coherent orders consisting of perfectly-integrated and monolithic institutions and dynamics. Executive orders do not typically "hang together", exhibiting coherence and predictability. Instead, different components of executive orders tend to overlap, counteract, layer and sometimes be out of synch rather than being integrated, coordinated and "ordered" (Orren and Skowronek, 2004). Compound executive orders are typically characterized by the co-existence of multiple and co-evolving governance dynamics. Multidimensional orders are able to accommodate seemingly non-compatible institutional challenges – such as misfit between external demands and internal dynamics as we have seen in the case of the OECD secretariat. Executive orders tend to mobilize multiple sets of actors, interests, decision-making situations, values, norms and cleavages of conflict. At this stage it is difficult to see in which way the OECD is moving. It is clear, however, that the organization is engaged in an important, and on-going, process of external as well as internal transformation.

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