

Transnational organizing: Issue professionals in environmental sustainability networks



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Abstract

An ongoing question for institutional theory is how organizing occurs transnationally, where institution building occurs in a highly ambiguous environment. This article suggests that at the core of transnational organizing is competition and coordination within professional and organizational networks over who controls issues. Transnational issues are commonly organized through professional battles over how issues are treated and what tasks are involved. These professional struggles are often more important than what organization has a formal mandate over an issue. We highlight how ‘issue professionals’ operate in two-level professional and organizational networks to control issues. This two-level network provides the context for action in which professionals do their institutional work. The two-level network carries information about professional incentives and also norms about how issues should be treated and governed by organizations. Using network and career sequences methods, we provide a case of transnational organizing through professionals who attempt issue control and network management on transnational environmental sustainability certification. The article questions how transnational organizing happens, and how we can best identify attempts at issue control.

Keywords

Expertise, issue control, network theory, organizational networks, professionals, professions, environmental governance, sustainability

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Introduction

How are transnational institutions organized? Understanding how transnational organizing works has long been a concern for Organization Studies, Sociology, and International Relations (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Whitley, 1994). This work points to how transnational organizing takes place through community formation around particular identities (Djelic and Quack, 2010), shared conceptions of science and standards (Drori and Meyer, 2006; Haas, 1992), how organizing occurs through the transplantation to new local contexts (Fourcade, 2009), and through recursive learning between transnational and national actors (Halliday and Carruthers, 2007; Meyer et al., 1997). Most of this work suggests that transnational organizing is channeled through organizations, albeit in a variety of ways. These approaches view the agency of actors from organizations in different ways, mainly suggesting they are organizationally ensconced or bound to each other through sharing common professional or cultural identities (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). Contributing to this literature, we argue that transnational organizing relies on semi-autonomous interactions between professionals and organizations. This view relaxes deeply held assumptions in what can be understood as organizational nominalism. We contribute to ongoing critical scholarship in Organization Studies, Sociology, and International Relations that does not have formally bounded organizations as the unit of analysis but rather processes of interaction in complex ecologies (Padgett and Powell, 2012; Abbott 2001; Lawrence et al. 2011).

Our claim is that transnational organizing takes place within professional and organizational networks that are analytically distinguishable and productively thought of as operating at two levels with room for cross-level interactions. Our two-level network consists of a level of organizational ties, a level of professional ties, and ties connecting the two levels. The content of observed ties can vary empirically. Our two-level network is a ‘thin’ context of action calibrated for researching transnational environments.

We propose the term ‘issue professional’ as a novel analytic device to understand change in issue control. Issue professionals are individuals who move between professional and organizational networks. They cooperate and compete with each other, as do organizations, over how issues are treated, and who and what organizations are permitted to work on them. Issue professionals have three distinguishing characteristics. First, issue professionals claim particular expertise that is not bound by professional associations, formal training, or one-dimensional organizational values. Second, issue professionals’ expertise is not derived from expert consensus within a scientific community or independent objectivity, but from professional experience linked to an extended commitment to the issue that can be traced from their careers. Third, issue professionals seek to advance their agenda by exploiting ‘structural holes’—missing information ties—within professional and organizational networks. A commitment to the issue, and not particular professions or organizations, propels them across these networks to where they can engage in meaningful institutional work. Issue professionals are promiscuous as they seek to maximize issue control within their professional and organizational networks. The claims they make do not come exclusively from their training or employer, but from their career experience and networks (cf. Eyal, 2013; Kamoche et al., 2011).

We provide a case of transnational sustainability certification to illustrate the role of issue professionals and the explanatory power of our two-level network. This is a complex network of different organizations involved in changing issue control in environmental governance (Henriksen, 2015). Previous attempts by states to create an international regime for environmental sustainability systems collapsed during the 1980s and early 1990s, leaving the issue to be addressed by professionals and organizations operating transnationally (Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2009). We trace the evolution of the network and provide methods for identifying the prominence of issue professionals, using

sequence analysis of professional careers to characterize the expertise involved, as well as network analysis to locate particular individuals in professional and organizational networks. We find that organizational mobility is an important attribute of sustainability certification and identify key professional strategies at play. From our case study, the analytic device of the issue professional is developed further, locating prominent individuals in the network as central actors that act through organizational and professional brokerage.

We argue that competition and cooperation in professional and organizational networks are often more important than what organization has a formal mandate over an issue or what profession is dominant. In this context, issue professionals have strategic advantages in fostering institutional work because they can navigate different professional and occupational value sets. While there has been work that identifies how professionals, normally lawyers, transnationally organize (Dezalay and Garth, 1996), it is more common to discuss the organization of transnational issues according to institutional mandate or domain, such as international organizations (intergovernmental), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and firms. For example, different macroeconomic policy issues belong to the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, many human rights issues belong to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, accounting issues belong to the International Accounting Standards Board and the Big Four accountancy firms, and so on.

Transnational issues can be dominated by particular organizations, but professional networks can change how an issue is treated and who has the right to work on it. Transnationality matters for the flexibility in how issues are treated, as it permits greater diversity in who seeks to control issues (Seabrooke, 2014). Issues that have transnationality are potentially liberated from intense jurisdictional battles in national spaces (Abbott, 1988). This permits those with high career mobility a greater chance to occupy central positions in professional and organizational networks. Career mobility can enhance a professional's capacity for 'robust action' (Padgett and Ansell, 1993; Henriksen, 2014) and to be seen as those with 'good ideas' (Burt, 2004). The mobility of professionals in transnational governance also leads to high levels of 'distributed agency' in how organizing occurs (Quack, 2007; Whittle, et al., 2011). Akin to work on organizations as having a '*always-already* changing texture' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), we argue that transnational organizing for issue control is a continual process of competition and cooperation in professional and organizational networks. To our minds, these interactions are ontologically prior to organizational mandates over issues (Alcadipani and Hassard, 2010). Following this logic, we suggest that issue professionals are commonly at the forefront of how issues are controlled and tasks defined. Issue professionals are distinguished by their capacity to control issues in and through transnational organizing, navigating across two-level networks.

To understand transnational organizing, we propose a two-level professional and organizational network that provides an exploratory framework. Professional networks involve individual actions, peer recognition, and task definition. Organizational networks involve alliances between collective actors, focusing on formal ties and mandate articulation. We call upon network theory to assist us in conceptualizing this two-level network, especially in explaining how professionals are important in exploiting information asymmetries, or 'structural holes' (Burt, 1992) within networks, and how professionals can create 'small worlds' that insulate them from organizational dominance (Watts, 1999).

In the following sections, we discuss the concept of issue professionals, and how the two-level network provides a context of action. We then provide a case of transnational environmental sustainability certification, first outlining our data and methods, and then discussing how issue professionals operate in this two-level network. Our methodological strategy combines network and career sequence forms of analysis. Sequence analysis is used to trace the career mobility of key

professionals in the case of transnational sustainability certification. While sequence analysis has been recently used to identify traits in who makes up organizations (Abbott and Tsay, 2000), including activist groups (Fillieule and Blanchard, 2013), international organizations (Seabrooke and Nilsson, 2015) and transnational networks (Henriksen, 2014) it is an unusual method for organization studies and we discuss our data and how the method works. Social network analysis, a more established method, is used to locate professionals and organizations in the two-level network in the case under investigation. We conclude by identifying issue professionals and discussing why the study of them can enrich our understanding of transnational organizing.

Issue professionals in transnational organizing

Professionals are individuals with abstract higher-level learning and specific skill sets to address particular tasks. As well known, the ‘Sociology of Professions’ typically identifies how professions engage in ‘jurisdictional’ battles over who is permitted to work on what tasks, often enforced through codification through law and with the support of the state (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986). Professional tasks are composed of objective elements, such as technological advancements, organization, natural objects and facts, and slow changing cultural structures, as well as from subjective qualities in how professionals construct the problem to be addressed by the task (Abbott, 1988: 39–40). This also includes gearing the science or knowledge involved in task allocation to support ‘defensive institutional work’ (Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012). Professionals are usually conceived as belonging to the discipline of their training and their occupational roles, such as lawyers, accountants, doctors, and so on. This focuses our attention on professions as both a form of organizing work and a type of organization. We suggest that we need to delve further in how *professionals* behave outside of the organization of professions (Scott, 2008). Rather than relying on the conventional link between professionals and organizations in how issues are addressed (see also Noordegraaf, 2011), issue professionals actively foster professional and organizational networks in their attempts at issue control.

The dominant work on professionals in transnational governance has been via Peter Haas’s (1992) work on ‘epistemic communities’. Haas argues that such communities involve a ‘network of professionals’ that can make an ‘authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge’ and can diffuse new norms on how issues are treated. Broader work on institution building by ‘transnational communities’ shares this view that professionals can be brought together around what constitutes proper science (Djelic and Quack, 2010). Recent work on ‘international practices’ (Adler and Pouliot, 2011), an approach imported from ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998), studies how experts with shared conceptions of competence agree on tasks. Other work points to how transnational professionals forge common identities (Colic-Peisker 2010). These approaches to transnational organizing concentrate on community and consensus as forms of institution building. This focus provides a blind spot by concentrating our attention on established expert groups, who cohere through scientific and normative consensus, as well as the organizations they work for.

To correct this, our emphasis is less on consensus and identity formation, and more on strategy and the role of professional experience (cf. Carter and Spence, 2014). In being strategic, issue professionals differ from ‘issue entrepreneurs’ (Carpenter, 2007), or institutional entrepreneurs (Levy and Scully, 2007), in that they do not necessarily need to campaign for or invent issues, but they are involved in generating, maintaining, and defending attempts at issue control. Issue professionals can be involved in professionalization activities, but formal institutionalization is not a requirement to be considered relevant when it comes to issue control. Issue professionals have more power in transnational organizing because there are fewer professional jurisdictional hurdles,

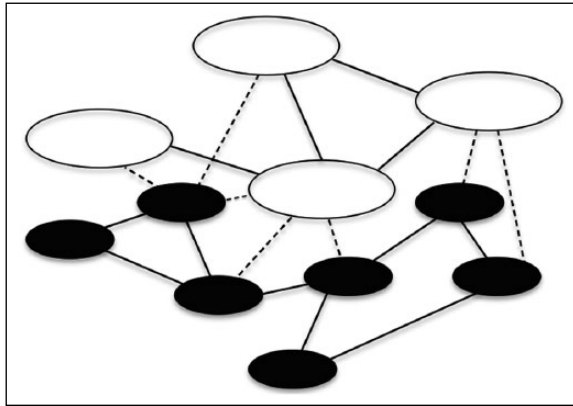


Figure 1. Professional–organizational two-level network.

commonly found in domestic systems of professions, and also because there is greater organizational diversity. Transnational organizing often occurs in a highly ambiguous environment.

Figure 1 depicts an illustration of a simple two-level network that is involved in organizing a particular transnational issue. At the top of the diagram are organizations (the white discs), which are networked, with the one on the far left the most isolated and the one in the center the most connected. Below the organizations are professionals (the black discs), who have their own network. The professionals in the center are the most connected. Dashed lines between the professionals and the organizations represented ties between the two levels. It can be seen here that the professional in the upper left is linked to three organizations, while the professionals on the far left and bottom are not connected at all. On this hypothetical transnational issue, the professional with three ties to organizations may have a lot of influence on how the issue is treated. Our case on transnational sustainability certification illustrates how such networks operate in practice.

Within two-level networks prominent professionals are often ‘multiple insiders’ (Vedres and Stark, 2010) through shared memberships and participation in organizations, events, work teams, and so on, through which they build their issue-specific personal networks (Lazega et al., 2008). These professionals will often inhabit similar ‘thought worlds’ across different organizational contexts (Baunsgaard and Clegg, 2013), occasionally alerting organizations to potential conflicts with their particular objectives. Accordingly, organizations also strategize about where to send staff to participate in these events, committees, and so on, to give them access to knowledge and opportunities that go beyond their pre-defined work roles.

Professional and organizational networks must be studied through interactions on issues of concern, through the allocation and defense of professional tasks. We draw on network theory to assist us in doing so. A key lesson from network analysts is that the formation of social alliances in attempts to achieve control cannot be fully understood by ever more subtle categories of groups and identities, but has to take seriously the concrete patterns of interaction in which individuals and organizations are embedded (Granovetter, 1985). A network is a set of actors, or nodes, along with a set of specific relations that connect them. Relations in networks interconnect through shared points and form paths or pipes that indirectly link actors that would otherwise not be directly related. This conception enables a view of a network as a connected system, where local behaviors are linked to the system as a whole. Much network analysis is concerned with characterizing network structures and actor positions and relating structural properties and positions to group and actor outcomes. Network theory makes claims about the mechanisms and processes that interact

with a network structure to allow certain actors in the network to act (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011). In general, a network view of strategy pays attention to the flow of knowledge and resources between professionals and organizations and the strategic behavior emerging from their attempts to gain control over the ongoing distribution patterns within these flows.

Two-level networks also exhibit so-called 'small world' network characteristics that have implications for the strategies of issue control that professionals and organizations may pursue. The idea of a small world comes from the observation that actors in a 'big world' often experience being surprisingly close to each other (Watts, 1999). For transnational organizing, the professional networks have large geographical distances and the number of individuals and organizations working on an issue may be in the thousands. This multiplies the social distances across which organizing must be performed. Forging ties to central organizations can minimize these distances. Such tie formation is often facilitated by pre-established interpersonal ties that establish trust about the motivations of counterparties. Small world characteristics come into place when the formation of a few ties decreases the average social distance between actors significantly. Even if these networks are clustered inside organizations or densely concentrated around organizational alliances or professional communities, a few connections across these clusters or alliances are likely to lead to the experience of the network as a small world. Through being central nodes in a network, professionals can use their skills and knowledge to shape the way organizations treat and organize issues (Kroeger, 2011; Harvey et al., 2014).

Understanding the character of ties between professionals is also important. We know that professionals build connections transnationally by spending otherwise valuable work time at seemingly 'fluffy' conferences or events that may actually be important in organizing how issues are treated (Lampel and Meyer, 2008). This network activity can be experienced as superfluous, but 'sharing a card' may actually be enough reason to contact a potential ally. Such 'weak ties' may generate unique knowledge of activities that are at a greater social distance from an actor's immediate neighborhood (Granovetter, 1973). This is not only useful for people who are searching for new challenges in their professional lives, but also important in understanding why organizations value professionals who can demonstrate high job mobility. Professionals of high job mobility that are not linked to any particular organization or organizational type can be seen as 'weak but broad' in their embedding strategy across two-level networks. Their sources of knowledge as well as their reach for influence are likely to be more 'robust' (Bothner et al., 2010; Padgett and Ansell, 1993).

Furthermore, 'getting' a new idea often occurs with actors occupying sparse network regions (Burt, 2004) abundant with 'structural holes' (Burt, 1992). Structural holes are network locations where two nodes are disconnected, presenting an opportunity for a third node to bridge the gap and gain control of the flow of information between the otherwise disconnected nodes. In transnational organizing, where network densities are comparatively low, exploiting disconnections can be a successful strategy for organizations and professionals working to change perceptions on particular issues. Those with high career mobility may be more able to engage in 'epistemic arbitrage' and exploit structural holes to their own advantage (Seabrooke, 2014). Mobility is likely to lead to new non-redundant ties to other professionals and organizations. The structural properties of networks are important in understanding how agents can behave and how transnational organizing occurs within two-level dynamics.

Data and methods

Issue professionals can heighten issue control in highly ambiguous environments. A case of transnational organizing was chosen in which organizational and professional tensions were known to

be high. In this context of action, we expect to find issue professionals that act as bridges between organizations, professionals, and organizations and professionals.

We focus on a particular set of environmental sustainability certifications that are governed through multi-stakeholder initiatives. These initiatives bring together prominent issue actors from different organizational domains to agree on product standards, including key firms, NGOs, and public agencies. Decisions are taken in stakeholder boards where the most prominent issue actors are represented. These boards are responsible for the oversight and sanctioning of standards, including their content and regulatory scope. Board members are specialists in sustainability issues. We provide a historical introduction to the case based on a survey of primary and secondary documents and then apply a combination of social network analysis techniques and career sequence measures to quantify the structural characteristics of identified issue professionals. We draw on this method to explore our analytical propositions regarding issue professionals, tracing the trajectories of their professional careers and their centrality within a two-level network. Network analysis is also used to visually locate professionals and to calculate four conventional measures of centrality. Career sequence analysis is used to compute a measure of career complexity for the professionals involved, taking advantage of the TraMineR package in the R system (R Core Team, 2012; Gabadinho et al., 2011).

We constructed a two-mode network matrix with the rows being board members and the columns being multi-stakeholder institutions and stakeholder organizations. The population of board members was 109. The data set contained all board member network ties with common affiliations in 2013. A tie is present in the professional network when two professionals were on the same board or when they employed with the same organization. A tie is present in the organizational network when organizations are linked through board affiliations. One individual served on multiple boards (Jan Kees Viis, The Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS) and The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)) and one individual represented two different organizations for the year 2013 (Jose Villalon, the WWF and Nutreco). In all, 24 of 109 were interlockers. We calculated the four conventional measures of network centrality: degree, closeness, eigenvector, and betweenness. These variables measure different aspects of influence, status, and power. *Degree* centrality is simply the number of ties connected with an actor in a network. *Closeness* centrality is another well-known measure that is seen as an indication of an actor's ability to disseminate information and knowledge without relying on other actors. An actor's closeness is measured by taking the sum of the shortest distances from all other nodes in the network. *Eigenvector* centrality is a variation of degree centrality that considers the importance of a nodes' alters. *Betweenness* centrality is yet a different measure of centrality that takes non-local network dynamics into account. Betweenness centrality counts the number of shortest paths that pass through a node. It is seen as an indicator of a node's ability to block or facilitate flow processes in the overall network (for a detailed discussion of these measures, see Bonacich, 1987; Borgatti, 2005; Freeman, 1979). The career histories of the board members were mapped from 1980 to 2012. Of the 109 individuals identified, 106 complete career histories were assembled. The mapping involved collecting CVs by requesting them on email, extracting them from LinkedIn profiles, and reconstructing them from detailed written bios. We ensured that individuals who provided non-public information gave their informed consent. The mean career length for the board members was 22.42 years, varying from 5 to 33 years. A coding system was developed to record the organizational domain of employment for a given year. Five organizational domains were distinguished: (1) NGO; (2) national or international public organization (public); (3) firms, industry associations, and private sector interest organizations (industry); (4) public or private research institutions and universities (research); and (5) and professional service firms and/or independent consultancies. Most career states could be unambiguously assigned to these categories although some board members also had secondary and tertiary

employment. This necessitated a three-digit coding system to account for multiple affiliations. With this coding system, only job transitions involving mobility between organizational domains (e.g. NGO>industry) were recorded. Promotions or demotions within an organizational domain were not included. Our interest in studying how issue professionals act as bridges across organizational domains informed this choice.

Our measure of career complexity is what sequence analysts commonly call *entropy*. Entropy is a measure of the amount of information in a sequence. Entropy takes into account the uncertainty of, or difficulty in predicting, a sequence (Gabadinho et al., 2011: 77–78). Simple sequences (e.g. AAAA), as it were, contain little information because they are easily reducible (e.g. 4A). Complex sequences (ADCB) are difficult to reduce and therefore contain more information. Entropy is sometimes viewed as the expected number of optimal yes-no questions to determine a sequence's composition.

The two-level network of transnational environmental sustainability certification

To demonstrate how professionals operate in two-level networks, we provide a case study of the emergence of environmental sustainability certification. Our particular focus is on the success of the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature and a group of issue professionals in promoting sustainability certification as a form of market governance. We provide the historical background of sustainability certification; describe the two-level network involved in controlling the issue; and highlight important characteristics of the professionals involved using network analysis and career sequence analysis.

The issue of product sustainability emerged against a background of failed inter-state regulation on issues such as deforestation, biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions. WWF's success in establishing sustainability certification was due to a small group of WWF-based issue professionals who were vital in switching from a more traditional activist logic of operation (based on environmentalist mandates) to a logic of 'transforming markets'. This was achieved by acting as brokers in both professional and organizational networks, providing these issue professionals with high degrees of control. They did so by populating a structural hole in the professional and organizational networks revolving around the issue, connecting governments, firms, and other environmental NGOs (cf. Mauz et al. 2013). While it is tempting to attribute the success to an organization, the WWF, the success in issue control comes from these issue professionals within a two-level network.

As an organization, the WWF succeeded in institution building through strong alliances with the firms dominating environmentally important commodity markets and by widening their issue mandate from one exclusively focused on 'conservation' and 'wildlife' to one concerned with broad conceptions of social and ecological sustainability. The skill set of their conservation professionals (usually trained in biology, animal, or plant sciences), who usually represent the WWF in their policy activities, has evolved to resemble the field of Sustainability Certification and Management. This field has become an institutionalized area of work in many organizations, in which issue professionals have altered task allocation. For them less emphasis is placed on providing only scientific expertise in favor of combining scientific and managerial expertise. Such a shift has been characterized in transnational law as a change from 'occupational value' to 'organizational value' in how professionals work, from being based on formal education training to establishing common forms of transnational organizational practice (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2011). Such characterization fits here. Issues professionals working on transnational sustainability certification have greater affinity with consultants than scientists within an epistemic community, or the standard conception of issue entrepreneurs in activism.

It is well known in Organization Studies that professional emergence often leads to the destabilization of established hierarchies and the formation of unlikely alliances (Brivot, 2011). This case does not disappoint in providing similarities. Initially, sustainability certification was conceived in battles over how to deal with the adverse effects of tropical timber on biodiversity and involved a broad network of environmental NGOs (Bartley, 2003). But as certification increasingly became about defining the broader sustainability of markets and commodities, and about collaborating with industries and firms, the NGO side of the network shrunk. The presence of issue professionals who could provide a bridge to corporate players, who were moving in a 'progressive' direction on sustainability issues, was instrumental for the WWF's claim to an organizational mandate on the issue, boosting the organization's legitimacy and resources (Ponte, 2014).

Certification and labeling emerged as a form of governance in the mid- to late-1980s in response to growing public concern over adverse environmental and social consequences related to the 'life cycle' of certain commodities (Counsell and Loraas, 2002: 11–12; Gale and Haward, 2011: 48). The first labels to certify consumers of the 'fairness' of products were established in the Netherlands (Max Havelaar) and the United Kingdom ('Good Wood Guide') by, respectively, the Dutch NGO Solidaridad and the UK-based Friends of the Earth group (Cadman, 2009: 120). At the same time, the US-based Rainforest Alliance developed the Smart Wood Program, launched in 1989 (Gulbrandsen, 2010: 52). These early systems were based on 'sustainability' criteria but were mere forerunners (Cadman, 2011: 45; Synnott, 2005: 17). The first comprehensive sustainability certification system focused on forestry products and was developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The FSCs now certifies more than 1200 FSC certified forest areas in 80 countries, covering more than 40% of the total certified forest area in Europe and the United States (FSC, 2013).

Before the FSC came into place, professional and organizational networks of environmentalists affiliated with Solidaridad, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Rainforest Alliance, and the WWF for Nature collaborated in raising sustainability issues related to forestry products (Synnott, 2005). After having failed to push the issue of forest certification at the inter-state level with the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the WWF started to mobilize business interests directly into negotiations circumventing state or inter-state locations of decision-making (Humphreys, 1996: 72–75). The WWF also established 'trade networks' aimed at convincing large-scale timber consuming businesses to source sustainable product, as well as a partnership with the World Bank to promote global demand. Since the sustainability of forestry products was already a major concern of mass consumer movements, some producers and retailers also saw an opportunity in protecting their brands against public shaming and in potentially capturing niche markets for environmentally conscious consumers (Counsell and Loraas, 2002: 12).

The emergence of the two-level network of sustainability certification was driven in part by organizational interests but was also given impetus by professionals seeking to establish their own networks. The idea of the FSC was conceived by Hubert Kwisthout, the head of the UK Ecological Trading Company (ETC), which specialized in sourcing sustainable timber (Cashore et al., 2004: 3–5). In exchanges with Francis Sullivan from the British branch of the WWF, he came up with the idea of an International Forest Monitoring Agency (Synnott, 2005: 10). In 1990 Kwisthout presented the idea at a meeting at the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection (WARP) and a Certification Working Group (CWG) was established. As Timothy Synnott (2005) notes,

Over the next year, most of the activities that led to the founding of FSC were associated with this group or its members. However, it remained quite informal, as a gradually expanding circulation list or forum, rather than a fixed membership. (p. 13)

The first draft of the FSC Charter was first conceived at a meeting in the CWG that took place in San Francisco in April 1991 with the WWF, the Rainforest Alliance, Greenpeace, the British

timber retailers B&Q, ETC, and the original WARP members as participants (Cadman, 2011: 219). The Charter brought together rudimentary standards from the ETC, WARP, and Rainforest Alliance. Prior to the San Francisco meeting, ETC had proposed a set of 'criteria and standards for sustainable forest management' that was accepted at WARP's founding conference. At this point, the object of regulation was forest management rather than product quality.

The founding assembly of the FSC was held in Toronto in September 1993 with 134 participants, 56 of which were from the Global South (Synnott, 2005: 21). A highly contested issue was whether business interests should have voting power and, if so, what proportion. Questions of issue control became imminent as a result. As an NGO, participant recalls,

For two nights and days there was a running battle between the economic group and social environmental stakeholders, who at that time were still joined together ... There wasn't any preliminary agreement until just before the party the last evening. (Cadman, 2011: 46–47)

The argument here was that if the FSC were to 'make a real difference across the entire forest sector rather than develop a "boutique" standard, it needed to include a strong voice from the industry ...' (Gale and Haward, 2011: 51). Simon Counsell, from Friends of the Earth, coordinated the position of the business-skeptics group, but after discussions the number of skeptics dwindled. Chris Elliott of the WWF, who chaired the meeting, 'denied one of Counsell's demands for the right of reply [and] the rump of the group withdrew from the discussion and abstained from voting' (Synnott, 2005: 23). After this controversy, agreement was reached on a formalized Chamber System with social and environmental interests holding 75% of votes in the board and with business holding 25%. Another important outcome of the meeting was that FSC was set up as a member association with a board, and not a foundation, as originally intended. This arrangement was a pragmatic solution to bridge those skeptical of business interest participation with those in favor of it (Cadman, 2009: 121).

This was when the 'multi-stakeholder' certification system took form and mushroomed across a variety of industries and commodity domains. Already in 1998, the Marine Stewardship Council followed with a slightly different institutional set-up, followed by the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil in 2003. The WWF playing a significant foundational role in designing both (cf. Brassett et al., 2012). Since then more have followed, in particular, to certify agrofood and bioenergy products (such as sugar, beef, soy, biofuel, and diesel). Currently, nine sustainability certification systems exist and have operational standards in place with the WWF acting as a central organizational broker in their foundational stages as well as playing a part in their management through board positions in all of the nine systems.

Network and career characteristics in environmental sustainability certification

To identify the presence of suspected issue professionals, we looked into the characteristics of the professionals involved in setting up and governing sustainability certification. The two central figures from the WWF, who brokered the initial FSC deal, were Francis Sullivan and Chris Elliot. Francis Sullivan was the bridge between the mainstream environmental NGOs, the WARP, and B&Q, and was the person behind the UK Forest and Trade Network. Chris Elliot was instrumental in negotiating an institutional set-up, with key firms playing a substantial rulemaking role. As brokers are vital in shaping the institutional elements of the early formative period of the sustainability certification system, they share the common trait of not only being highly networked with fellow issue professionals in the field, but also with powerful organizations. Their specialty has been to bring together public and private partners around common concerns and issues, and to coordinate

the actions of diverse others. Not only are their network strategies similar, but they also share similar career trajectories. Although their entire professional history has revolved around environmental governance issues, they have worked on this issue with different organizations—first in activist roles and later on as professionals in firms. This form of ‘multiple insiding’ is common to issue professionals who have been effective in gaining transnational issue control.

Sullivan had key leadership positions with the WWF, including running the internal change team, the ‘Action Network’, to develop strategies of scaling up conservation activities. As the Director of Conservation at WWF-UK from 1999 and onwards, he was also involved in establishing WWF’s key role in the HSBC (the global financial institution) ‘Investing in Nature’ program. Establishing relations with corporate players was his specialty and he worked with HSBC (from 2004) as their Adviser on the Environment. Sullivan also kept some of his personal contacts from the early FSC days intact: in 2010, he co-launched the Global Association for Corporate Sustainability Officers (GACSO) with Alan Knight from B&Q (who was also part of the initial network of the CWG), an initiative to codify standards and training for ‘sustainability professionals’.

While at the WWF, Chris Elliott was the first chair of the FSC board of directors and has had a similar career. Elliott led a global partnership between WWF and IKEA and went on to become the Executive Director of the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA). CLUA is a collaborative initiative of the ClimateWorks Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Before joining the WWF, he worked for the World Bank, the Bank of Boston, and for a Swiss foundation focusing on organic agriculture and natural medicine. This mixed career experience and his skill set was important in fostering a diverse professional network and links to different types of organizations. Elliott and Francis are both issue professionals whose agency is distributed in two-level networks, and whose impact in terms of changing how transnational issues are organized relies heavily on their ties to organizations and fellow professionals, as well as their strategies within these networks.

Movement between sectors and organizations is a clear career strategy for professionals who wish to operate in central network positions and increase their capacity for influence over how transnational issues are organized. These professionals are able to make the most of ambiguous environments.

Figure 2 identifies career mobility among those studied, plotting career transitions, moving from rows to columns, across organizational domains. The plots show a highly mobile group of professionals with careers that traverse organizational domains. Considering the entire career sequence data set, the probability of domain transition varies from 0 to .44. The most likely transition is from a job in the public sector to a job in industry (.44). The second most likely transition is from an NGO job to a job in industry (.39). Generally, transition rates to industry and NGO jobs are high regardless of the originating domain. The transition rates between NGO-industry (.39) and industry-NGO are high (.32). This structure helps explain the dominance of firms and NGOs in the sustainability certification boards.

As can be seen in the movement from rows to columns in the two plots, the patterns of career mobility vary markedly between professionals with long and short careers. The transition to NGO jobs, for instance, originates more from industry and academia for the short careers, whereas the distribution is much more even for the longer careers (+20 years of professional experience). Transitions to industry jobs are supplied in a more concentrated manner from public jobs in the shorter careers, whereas late career professionals are more likely to make the change to industry jobs when coming from NGOs and academia. The transition from public jobs to industry is on the rise with the early and mid-career professionals, even taking into account that their overall career length is shorter. Job transitions to NGOs are also more common for early career professionals.

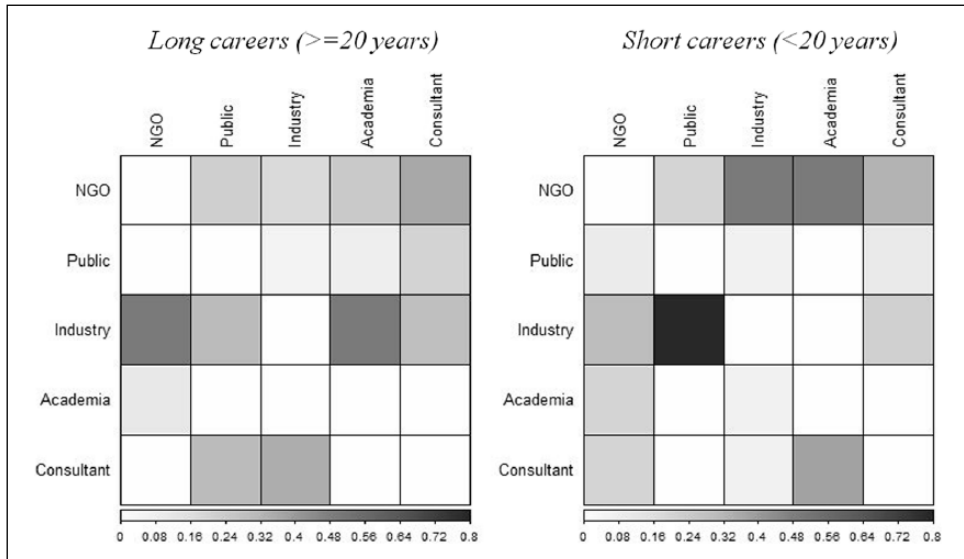


Figure 2. Probabilities of career transition across organizational domains.

The move from academia to industry is more common among late career professionals, where quite a few did doctoral training and moved to industry careers early in their professional life. For the short careers, a move out of academia is more common for professionals pursuing a career in an NGO or as a consultant. In general, the shift to academia and research is most common for professionals from NGOs, indicating that NGO postings are research and knowledge intensive.

Testing career mobility in a two-level network

Today's transnational network of multi-stakeholder sustainability certification is firmly established as a realm of market governance continuously controlled by professionals and organizations. Our observations of Elliott and Francis' career trajectories led us to further investigate the association between the career structure and network position of professionals within today's two-level network. We restrict our analysis to the formal ties of organizations and professionals that stem from their board affiliations with the standards bodies. In Figure 3, we depict the two-level network using the python-based Multilayer Networks Library (Kivela, 2013). We restrict the visibility of actors to organizations and professionals that act as interlockers between two or more boards. The size of the nodes represents their degree centrality.

The organizational network is dominated by the WWF, which has board members on the board of all currently existing bodies of 'multi-stakeholder' sustainability certification. It is not only a broker between various kinds of stakeholders within each body but also acts as an organizational hub for sharing experiences and knowledge about emergent sustainability issues across sectors. Other organizations have entered key positions in the network as brokers of various standards bodies, including major agrofood firms like Nutreco, Unilever, and Carrefour. The Interamerican Development Bank also holds a central position as a board 'interlocker', together with the Dutch development NGO Solidaridad and the US-based National Wildlife Federation.

In the professional network, the most central are those employed with the WWF but other professionals have central positions. To dig further into the relationship between career mobility

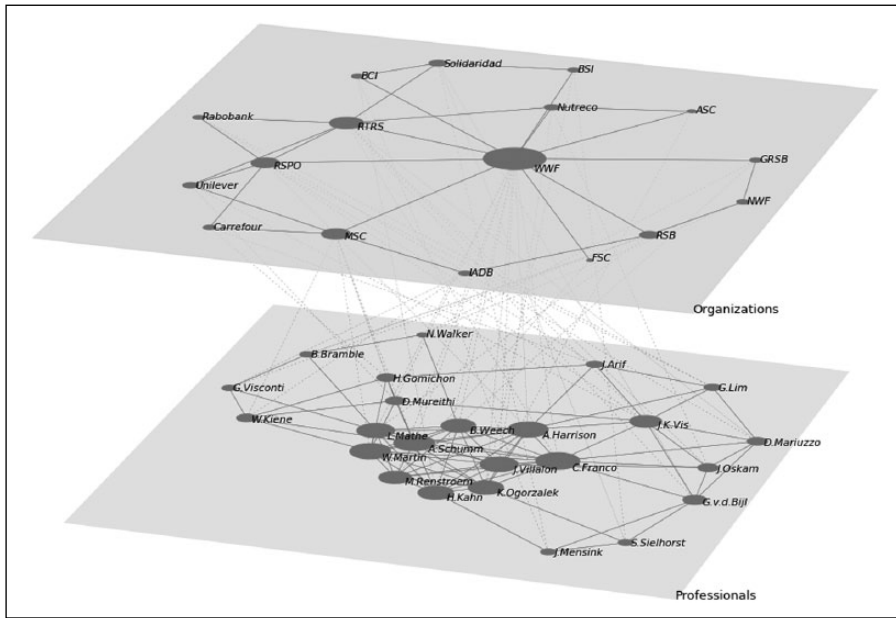


Figure 3. Sustainability certification two-level network.

(entropy) and centrality in the network, we ran a series of tests on the data with a focus on assessing associations between the entropy and centrality measures. The correlations and results from our linear regression model can be found in Tables 1–3 in the Appendix. To summarize the results, we found a positive association between entropy and the four centrality measures across the board, with the strongest effects on closeness and degree centrality (Table 1). WWF and/or NGO affiliates were, on average, more central than were other board members, whereas firm board members had lower entropy and centrality scores. The strongest confounder of the relationship between entropy and centrality was clearly organizational affiliation. Because the WWF affiliation was also what drove the positive association between centrality and NGO affiliation, we use a regression model to control for WWF affiliation and gender.

In the regression (Table 3) it can be seen that, for all four linear models, entropy remained positively associated with centrality across the board, although the magnitude of the association decreased after we controlled for WWF affiliation and gender. The association was particularly strong for eigenvector centrality (where the WWF affiliation effect was also weak and insignificant), suggesting that diverse experience is particularly important in interactions with well-connected professionals. Affiliation was also more important for closeness centrality than was entropy, although the association was still considerable. In contrast, entropy and affiliations were more or less equally associated with degree centrality. The only significant effect of gender was on eigenvector centrality, for which a slight negative association could be traced. These results reinforce that although the positive gains in terms of network centrality were higher for WWF affiliates, entropy was consistently associated with higher centrality regardless of the organization's claim to a mandate. We contend that the positive centrality gains from entropy are because central organizations need issue professionals to coordinate complex professional and organizational interactions, and because professionals deliberately pursue a strategy of seeking out structural holes. The results support our stress on two-level interactions across professional and organizational networks as important for attempts at issue control.

Conclusion

This article highlights the need to study issue professionals and their role in conducting institutional work across professional and organizational networks. Issue professionals are crucial for *transnational organizing*. We argue that transnational organizing takes place through issue professionals operating in a two-level network. We claim that transnational issues can be organized by issue professionals, and that their interactions within professional and organizational networks to influence how issues should be treated are more important than organizational mandates. Organizations are important in maintaining issue control but only insofar as they occupy strategic positions where they can engage in favorable interactions across professional and organizational networks. To do so, they mobilize issue professionals. Issue professionals are also important for organizational emergence. As we saw in the case of environmental sustainability certification, key professionals shaped the novel approach taken by the WWF in the early 1990s and built networks that remain relatively stable today.

Issue professionals are conceived as people who have a long-term stake in applying their skills to an issue, and where the mix of skills and career experience is broader than the classic understanding in the sociology of professions, which assumes actors' behavior based on formal educational training and associational membership. Certainly, domestic battles over professional jurisdictions are important, but this approach is less useful in studying more ambiguous environments, such as transnational governance. Issue professionals operating transnationally have much greater flexibility in combining mixed careers and experience with different types of organizations in defining tasks and how issues should be treated. These mixed skills and experiences are important in establishing relationships with other professionals and organizations, including claims to knowledge that draw from expertise as experience rather than only formal professional learning (cf. Eyal, 2013). These actors are vital for transnational organizing, but largely absent from the literature on how transnational institution building occurs within institutional theory (cf. Bjerregaard and Nielsen, 2014). In our case study, we show that this is the case. We have identified a two-level network of organizations and professionals and show that experience with institutional complexity, measured via professionals' career trajectories, gives them an advantage in controlling issues via their networks.

Our depiction of issue professionals operating in two-level professional and organizational networks contributes to work on transnational organizing, but also cuts against the grain of common themes in this scholarship. Most of this research places emphasis on consensus formation and cooperation among professionals, or how organizations, such as NGOs, strategize to control issues (Bartley and Smith, 2010). Our theoretical contribution is to provide a two-level network as an exploratory framework. This framework helps us to identify relationships that do not conform to the logic of profession jurisdictions or organizational mandates. We also offer the concept of 'issue professionals' as an analytic device. They populate this two-level network and act strategically between professionals and organizations. These individuals are certainly present in our case on transnational environmental sustainability certification, which shows how issue professionals engage in strategy and competition as much as they do cooperation. Professional competition is important for how issues are treated and controlled and transnationality provides a great deal of flexibility in devising stratagems on how to retain issue control when dealing with professionals and organizations.

The character of interactions in our two-level network differs from the established literature on transnational organizing. For example, Sigrid Quack's (2007) excellent work on global institution building points to how lawyers develop transnational law making through 'nested cycles' of incremental and strategic reform (see also Halliday and Carruthers, 2007). This explanation works well with a single professional group but adding greater complexity provides a challenge for institutional theory. In our case professional homogeneity is not the key source of identity construction. Issue professionals

gain prominence in professional and organizational networks partly through their diversity and capacity to be 'multiple insiders'. While they also engage in recursive cycles of institution building, as shown in the case above, their way of working differs from that of a single professional group. This also requires us to think through what methods are appropriate for handling greater complexity. Here, we provided a methodological innovation in combining network and sequence forms of analysis to study the two-level network and differentiate the careers of issue professionals within it.

Issue professionals' use of diversity also places them in a different relationship to uncertainty when compared to other theories of how transnational organizing takes place. Uncertainty is commonly viewed as propelling consensus and identity formation, and compelling organizations to search for authority in securing their mandates. From the perspective of issue professionals operating in two-level networks, uncertainty is a resource. Uncertainty means that there are structural holes, missing pieces of information between unconnected nodes within a network (Burt, 1992), that offer strategic advantages to increase control over an issue. So while organizations may rush to bolster their claims to authority, uncertainty can be productive for issue professionals seeking to affirm their place within networks. Issue professionals can profit from uncertainty in propagating their view on how issues should be treated, how tasks should be allocated, and how best to govern. This professional use of uncertainty can be seen in a range of transnational issues, such as finance and taxation, where issue professionals have been reluctant to empower any particular organization, preferring to move between organizations to block or facilitate post-crisis reform (Seabrooke and Tsingou, 2014; Seabrooke and Wigan, 2016; Tsingou, 2015). The new scholarship on transnational organizing that focuses on 'orchestration' (Abbott et al., 2014) should also consider the role of issue professionals and two-level networks. International organizations can only act as orchestrators on transnational issues if they can harness the correct expertise and much activity here involves the transnational consultant community—a group that is difficult to understand without a two-level network approach (Seabrooke and Nilsson, 2015).

Our case illustrates that while organizations can occupy a 'hub'-like position in their network, influence may come less from holding a mandate on an issue and more from being involved in the professional networks that enable the design and diffusion of standards. This is true for the WWF and the sustainability certification case discussed above. It is a dynamic also present in many other cases, and issue professionals are vital in the replication of 'government at a distance' forms of standard setting (Higgins and Hallström, 2007; Gibbon and Henriksen, 2012). We do not suggest that issue professionals are present in all cases and the limitations of the concept and our explanatory framework must be noted. In cases where there is a clear mandate from international authorities that is supported by powerful states and firms issue control may not be open to contestation by outside influences. The politics of oil immediately comes to mind. And in cases where the issue is strongly governed by hard law rather than soft law issue professionals may have less influence due to domestic and international jurisdictional strictures. The global trade regime, and its persistent problems in moving ahead on core issues, is an oft-noted example (Abbott and Snidal, 2000).

Finally, the prominence of issue professionals in organizing transnational issues should be viewed with a critical eye. We have noted how issue professionals are indicative of a general change in professions, away from occupational values and towards organizational values, where organizing in particular ways trumps formal training. The mix of unique skills and career experience makes issue professionals potentially sensitive to different interpretations of how issues should be treated and how they are governed. This permits them to be brokers within networks to facilitate coordination and move ahead with how transnational issues are organized. We should also keep in mind that while organizations such as NGOs, international organizations, and firms can be help to account for failing to fulfill their mandates, transnational issue professionals can easily avoid accountability. It is important to consider the extent to which issue professionals are

accountable to their own customized professional standards, especially when they are central to transnational organizing.

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Appendix

Table 1. Normalized centrality measures of interlockers (ranked by mean).

Name	Stakeholder organization	Multi-stakeholder institutions	Degree	Close	Eigen	Between	Mean
Laszlo Mathe	WWF	RSB	.267	.629	.356	.238	.373
Alfred Schumm	WWF	MSC	.248	.619	.168	.096	.283
Will Martin	WWF	MSC	.248	.619	.168	.096	.283
Adam Harrison	WWF	RSPO	.238	.614	.100	.174	.282
Gloria Visconti	IADB	RSB	.181	.487	.308	.017	.248
Kevin Ogorzalek	WWF	BSI	.190	.590	.080	.130	.248
Barbara Bramble	NWF	RSB	.181	.478	.302	.015	.244
Bryan Weech	WWF	GRSB	.190	.590	.082	.114	.244
Cassio Franco	WWF	RTRS	.200	.595	.086	.093	.244
Margareta Renstroem	WWF	FSC	.171	.581	.078	.126	.239
Hammad Kahn	WWF	BCI	.200	.595	.087	.074	.239
Jose Villalon	WWF, Nutreco	ASC	.162	.576	.078	.097	.228
Jan Kees Vis	Unilever	RSPO, RTRS	.248	.533	.049	.043	.218
Werner Kiene	IADB	MSC	.171	.484	.128	.017	.200
David Mureithi	Unilever	MSC	.171	.492	.114	.017	.199
Herve Gomichon	Carrefour	MSC	.171	.478	.113	.010	.193
Joko Arif	Carrefour	RSPO	.152	.481	.036	.010	.170
Gert van der Bijl	Solidaridad	RTRS	.133	.494	.018	.025	.170
Janet Mensink	Solidaridad	BCI	.143	.476	.024	.019	.166

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Name	Stakeholder organization	Multi-stakeholder institutions	Degree	Close	Eigen	Between	Mean
Geraldine Lim	Rabobank	RSPO	.152	.460	.031	.001	.161
Sven Sielhorst	Solidaridad	BSI	.124	.467	.012	.021	.156
Jaap Oskam	Nutreco	RTRS	.114	.452	.020	.005	.148
Nathalie Walker	NWFF	GRSB	.105	.443	.028	.014	.148
Daniela Mariuzzo	Rabobank	RTRS	.114	.444	.017	.001	.144
Mean interlockers			.178 (.05)	.528 (.07)	.103 (.10)	.061 (.06)	.218 (.06)
Mean entire network			.138 (.05)	.457 (.06)	.088 (.11)	.015 (.04)	.174 (.05)

Table 2. Correlation table.

N = 104	Entropy	Degree	Close	Eigen	Between	WWF	Firm	NGO	Gender	North
Degree	.30***									
Close	.35***	.84***								
Eigen	.20**	.65***	.32***							
Between	.27***	.51***	.86***	.04						
WWF	.21**	.45***	.75***	.06	.87***					
Firm	-.18*	-.24**	-.30***	-.21**	-.29***	-.31***				
NGO	.36***	.36***	.47***	.26***	.41***	.41***	-.76***			
Gender	-.13	-.14	-.04	-.23**	.02	.02	-.03	.02		
North	.11	.01	0	-.01	.08	.04	0	-.07	-.23**	
MBA	-.2*	-.16	-.17	-.17	-.14	-.08	.38***	-.27**	.06	-.21*
MSc	-.03	-.19*	-.12	-.27**	.01	.12	.05	-.11	.07	.03
MA Soc	.24**	.14	.07	.31***	-.01	-.1	-.1	.14	-.11	-.03
Law degree	.11	.32***	.37***	.18*	.30***	.41***	-.23**	.29***	-.08	.01

Significance codes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, $p < .1$.

Table 3. Linear logistic regression.

Independent variable	Degree	Close	Eigen	Between
Entropy	.05**	.06***	.10*	.02*
WWF	.07***	.15***	.01	.10***
Gender	-.01	0.00	-.06**	.00
Constant	.13***	.44***	.12***	.00
N	104	104	104	104
Residual standard error	.04	.003	.10	.01
Adj. R ²	.24	.58	.06	.76
p value	<.001	<.001	<.030	<.001

Significance codes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, $p < .1$.