

Voluntarism as an organizing principle for ‘responsible organizations’.

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Abstract

Responsible governance is as much to do with how organizations engage their human capital as it is to do with the relationship between the owners/agents of capital. In pluralistic organization forms, the assumption that board directors, through traditional hierarchy, can ensure appropriate degrees of control over the managers of capital seems increasingly problematic. An imposition of control that fails to take account of diverse employees interests is of questionable ethical rigour, and certainly unlikely to be effective in encouraging responsible corporate behaviour. Building responsible, moral organizational communities must therefore be concerned with reconfiguring hierarchy in a way that builds the voluntary commitment of employees to super-ordinate goals. Borrowed from political philosophy, this paper develops the idea of voluntarism as an organising principle that can further the development of corporate responsibility by mediating between the demands for corporate control and efficiency and the need to respond to calls for greater inclusion.

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Responsible governance is as much to do with how organizations engage their human capital, as it is to do with the relationship between the owners and agents of capital (Child, 2005, Child and Rodrigues, 2003). In today's highly plural organization, - where stakeholders hold a diversity of conceptions about organizational purpose, organising and intended outcomes (Huzzard and Östergren, 2002), - the assumption that the board of directors, through traditional hierarchy, can ensure appropriate degrees of control over the managers of capital seems increasingly problematic (Child, 2005). A one sided imposition of control that fails to take account of diverse employees interests is at least of questionable ethical rigour, and certainly unlikely to be effective in encouraging responsible corporate behaviour (Rousseau and Rivero, 2003, Crane et al, 2004). Building responsible, moral organizational communities is thus intimately concerned with reconfiguring hierarchy in a way that builds the voluntary commitment of employees to super-ordinate goals (Courpasson and Dany, 2003).

In the context of contemporary hyper-competitive business environments, this issue is considered critical to effective organization (Child, 2005). In these conditions, organizational success may be as much the product of continual innovation as it is of efficiency (Child and McGrath, 2002). Such innovation is recognised as being inextricably intertwined with organizational knowledge networks (Ashmos et al, 2000) and the willingness of employees to share their social and intellectual capital freely (Stewart, 1997). Greater employee participation provides organizations with the opportunity to self organize, innovate and co-evolve in more effective ways (Ashmos et al, 2002). In such pluralist settings, "harnessing the capabilities and commitment of knowledge workers is, it might be argued, the central managerial challenge of our time. Unfortunately it is a challenge that has not been met" (Manville and Ober, 2003:48). Despite, several decades of attempts to reconfigure the role of organizational hierarchy by empowering workers and enabling them to participate in organization decision making, little progress has been made (Heller, 1998) and employees remain essentially disenfranchised (Manville and Ober, 2003).

For at the same time as organizations strive to build the commitment of their employees, they are engaged in a second objective tugging in the opposite direction; one of standardizing procedures, integrating systems and creating consistent corporate cultures (Adler, 1999). The rational bureaucratic model of organising, implicit in this objective runs deep in managerial mindsets; how can business leaders improve on such a well-developed concept of how human beings collectively best accomplish their objectives (Child and McGrath, 2001)? Despite their best intentions to empower employees, most are still working from a perspective that values unity and control over plurality (Brunson, 2002). Thus attempts to liberalise the workplace through strategies of empowerment and culture management have only tended to reinforce a hierarchical approach to organization, one that values conformity, a priority toward economic and technical values, power focussed at the corporate centre and top down decision making (Willmott, 1993, Cludts, 1999).

In recent years, there have been a variety of academic discourses that have sought in different ways to address the issues of coherence and plurality. These have included the development of stakeholder theory (Clarkson, 1995, Donaldson, 1999)

Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB) (Organ, 1988, Podaskoff and Mackenzie, 1997), Community of Practice (COP) theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001) and the nascent coevolutionary and complex systems movements (Lewin and Volberda, 1999, Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001). Often coming from different epistemological traditions, each makes a helpful contribution to the debate. However, we argue in this paper that, despite offering rich insights into the issue, none provide, nor in some cases are intended to provide, senior managers with clear and practical methods of re conceptualising the role of bureaucracy in organization.

We therefore suggest that there is a significant lacuna in the literature as to how executives can best capitalise on plurality whilst still retaining levels of organizational coherence. This paper will contribute to this debate by developing the concept of organizational voluntarism as a potential contribution to re configuring the role of hierarchy in pluralist organizational forms. The COP conceptualisation of organizations as communities of communities, mirrors a similar discourse in the political philosophy literature about the role and value of voluntarism as a constituency of mature societies (Etzioni, 1999, Putnam, 2000, Verba et al, 1995). From a communitarian perspective, in the 'good' society the moral voice that determines the nature of good citizenship is the product of a diversity of voluntary associations or communities. These groups serve to mediate between the private world of individuals and the large institutions of society. However, most importantly, a good society is determined by such voluntary associations implicitly inculcating a level of self-control in its members by introducing them to particular values that reinforce individuals' normative commitments to that society. We propose that in an organizational setting, voluntarism can provide a means of harnessing plurality whilst still encouraging voluntary levels of coherence because identification with the organization or its constituent parts are cultivated within a framework free from senior management control.

The analysis of the above literature suggests that this issue is inherently concerned with how institutional schema are influenced by, and exert influence on individual action. The investigation of voluntarism in organizations therefore lends itself to a perspective in which action and structure are linked through social relationships (Giddens, 1984, Hales, 1999, Blaikie, 1993). From this standpoint, we will explore how institutional schemata both constrain and encourage the values of voluntarism and demonstrate why voluntarism may emerge as a natural stage in the evolution of organizations. We explore in greater detail the nature of the disjuncture in the practical and theoretical discourses about the evolving nature of organizations and provide a clear rationale for the adoption of organizational voluntarism as an organising principle in pluralist settings.

Our intention here is to promote the concept of organizational voluntarism, and in doing so, hope to stimulate feedback and debate as to its efficacy in furthering the discourse on corporate responsibility. At a time of growing unease about the role of organisations in society and the attendant consequences for corporate governance and social responsibility, the issue of who determines the 'moral voice' in organisations is significant (Courpasson and Dany, 2003). In this context, voluntary association may serve to mediate between individuals and their work organisation in a way that enables employees to contribute to this debate.

Theories of organising that reflect increasing plurality

There has been much consideration of how the broader shifts in the nature of social institutions are impacting organizational forms (Sparrow and Cooper 1998, Cohen 1999). Gratton and Ghoshal (2003) describe this 'revolution' in terms of a desire for individuals to express their potential, the need for protection from the arbitrary use of power, and involvement in people determining the conditions of their association (2003:1). These types of change are consequently seen to be transforming individual relationships with institutions at both social and organizational levels, but at their core reflect the primacy of individuals and their capacity to act with autonomy (Gratton and Ghoshal, 2003, Patten, 2001).

At the same time as demands for more participative organization forms increase, the competitive business environment forces these organizations to be more efficient and responsive, in turn creating loosely coupled and structurally diverse forms with varied and competing interests (Butcher and Clarke, 2002). In such pluralistic settings 'leadership roles are shared, objectives divergent and power diffuse' (Denis et al, 2001:809) and sustainable competitive advantage is seen to lie in "micro assets that are hard to discern and awkward to trade" (Johnson et al, 2003:4). These assets are most likely to lie at the edges of organizations in the hands of line managers, such that more people, more often, need to be involved in strategy than ever before (ibid).

For an increasing number of commentators this shift in power toward employees substantially changes the role and function of organization hierarchy to a degree that executives cannot ignore (Handy, 1997, Gratton, 2004). Managing these power shifts and plurality of interests therefore reflects a natural evolution in organization form. If this transition is inevitable, then what are the markers of organization form that will facilitate this change in practice? The significance of this question has stimulated rich research and debate about future organizational forms.

In this regard, considerable attention has been given to the conceptual development of stakeholder theory as one approach to resolving these dilemmas (Kochan and Rubinstein, 2000). In stakeholder theory, a firm's survival is seen as being dependent upon its ability to create sufficient wealth, value or satisfaction for all its interested parties, including employees (Clarkson, 1995, Donaldson, 1999, Jones, 1999, Friedman and Miles 2002, Phillips et al, 2003). At its most fundamental, stakeholder theory questions the primary purpose of corporations as the pursuit of shareholder return. This unitary approach to ownership is increasingly seen as unsustainable in a society where multiple stakeholders, in effect, 'invest' in the corporation. Authors such as Etzioni (1998) claim that all such interests should have the opportunity to participate in organizational governance. Aside of high profile debate as a theory of social renewal (Giddens, 1998), stakeholder theorists, however, as John Hendry points out, "have either restricted themselves to very modest claims as to the respect to be afforded to stakeholders within the existing legal and institutional structure, or, more commonly, pitched their claims so high as to sacrifice any practical credibility" (2001:223). Others argue that a more in depth appreciation of the power and identity of different types of stakeholder (including employees) and how they change over time is required (Friedman and Miles, 2002, Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001, Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003).

However, much debate in the stakeholder field reflects the central issue of this paper; how best to resolve the problems of a normative (ethical) response to a plurality of interests, or an instrumental (economic performance) response to stakeholder theory (Donaldson 1999). Yet this dialogue has for the most part, we believe, been conducted in the arcane language of academia and had little practical impact on thinking of senior management (Halal, 2000). In this regard, Hendry (2001), Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003), and to an extent Donaldson (1999), suggest that more progress might be made if stakeholder theory gives greater weight to the idea of the organization as a complex system of social relationships, an area of 'huge importance' in understanding emerging organization forms (Child and McGrath, 2001). In this way, the ethical and economic conflicts of stakeholder theory can be understood as being resolved in the same way as the moral conflicts of individual managers facing the practical dilemmas of everyday life.

Another approach to the problem has been to encourage the development of Organization Citizenship Behaviours (Organ, 1988, Podaskoff and Mackenzie, 1997, Bolino, 1999, Ryan, 2001, Wat and Shaffer, 2005). These are described as individual behaviours that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by formal reward systems and that in aggregate promote the effective functioning of an organization (Organ, 1988). This concept therefore implicitly acknowledges the value of individual contributions. However, despite many years of theoretical development, critics contend that the refinement of OCB as a concept has been constrained by the reliability and validity of the measurement systems employed (Van Dyne et al, 1995, Allen et al 2000) and is merely "old wine in new bottles" and indistinguishable from constructs such as commitment and altruism that have been subject to more rigorous research (Latham et al, 1997). "OCB is currently in danger of degenerating into a contentless construct to the extent it defines everything and anything and hence cannot advance our understanding of employee behaviour" (ibid:207).

Nor is there any great clarity as to the motives for employees to adopt OCB without which operationalising the concept at work remains difficult. Differences of opinion seem to exist as to the importance of context (Karambayya, 1990, Turnipseed and Murkison, 2000), protestant work ethic, (Ryan, 2002), moral reasoning (Ryan 2001) and impression management (Bolino, 1999). Most importantly, Graham (2000) draws attention to the inherently unitary conception of the central OCB tenet of 'civic virtue'. In most of the OCB literature, this construct reflects purely affiliative and conformist (Speier and Frese, 1997) behaviour. In doing, so it avoids discussion about the legitimacy of existing power distributions and negates the value of challenge and political action central to the traditional conception of citizenship and thus for citizens to change the social order in which they are located.

A further avenue of research is to be found in the development of communities of practice theory (COP) (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001). From a COP perspective, the plurality of organizational life is reflected in the conception of organizations as dynamic communities of communities (Brown and Duguid, 1991). In these communities learning, innovation and its dissemination take place in both formal and informal groups. The COP literature sheds light on how knowledge and innovation is freely shared or restricted by structure and potentially provides insight into how senior managers might address some of the tensions of coherence and plurality in hierarchy.

However, as Fox (2000) and Swan et al (2002) highlight, there has been a growing trend in the COP literature to emphasise the idea of communities as a managed rather than spontaneous process, one that gives preference to a discourse that omits the role of organizational power and politics. Again, this observation reinforces the problem facing senior management, how can they encourage informal groups without recourse to diktat yet still create levels of organization coherence? Some light is shed on the issue by Swan et al (2002) in their study of networked innovation within the health care sector. The authors note how a group of senior managers were able to address this issue by “sublimating their business motivations in the cause of community building” (2002: 494). However, COP theory is essentially concerned with the relationship between work, learning and innovation (Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001) not explicitly with the reconfiguration of hierarchy.

Two other complimentary fields of study, which address several of the shortfalls discussed above, have been the nascent complex systems and co evolutionary movements (Lewin and Volberda, 1999). Both take as their point of departure the idea that organization change and evolution are a reflection of multi level and multi directional causalities in both inter and intra firm interdependencies and thus play close attention to the plurality of interests at play in organizations. Taken from these perspectives, organizations are viewed as complex adaptive systems that are continually self organizing and co evolving (Colbert, 2004). In particular, in contrast to some of the research agenda discussed above, research into the micro-processes of evolution emphasise the influence of social connectivity (Ashmos et al 2002) in mediating plurality and coherence.

For example, research by Schilling and Steensma (2001) suggests that firms that experience complexity in terms of “high levels of demand and input heterogeneity” (ibid 2001:1161) place great value on modular organization forms. That is, firms need internal structural divergence in order to work with growing variations in strategic opportunities and industry sub environments (Malnight, 2001). The structural fluidity reflected by these modular forms emphasises the importance of social capital and diverse relationships as a significant process for mobilising coherent activity rather than merely hierarchical position (Denis et al, 2001, Butcher and Clarke, 2002). Indeed, research by Ashmos et al (2002) suggests that increasing participation in decision making increases this social connectivity which in turn gives the organization the opportunity to self-organise and co evolve in more effective ways. In this way, levels of coherence are produced from a plurality of interests.

Nevertheless, considerable questions remain unanswered about mediating coherence and plurality. For example, whilst some insight into the effect of institutionalised power relationships is provided by Pettigrew (1995) and Child and McGrath (2001), this issue warrants further attention. For example, Ashmos et al (2002) provide little information as to exactly what form participation should take; in what way is it constrained or enabled by hierarchy? In a similar vein, Levinthal and Warglien (1999) note, with some irony, that while ideas of self-organization have captured enormous attention, practitioners and academics have been left with a puzzle, how are such self-organizing systems to be controlled and directed? Furthermore, what might be the motivation of individual managers to work in this way? Brown and Eisenhardt (1997), in highlighting the role of ‘semi structures’ in complex environments that help create a balance between chaos and inertia, focus on the motives of autonomy, choice and an opportunity for improvisation. However, there is no rigorous framework that seeks to map out the cognitions of managers

working in these ways. Thus Denis et al stress that “the question of how pluralistic organizations develop enough coherence among their parts to allow deliberate strategic change remains unanswered” (2001:809).

The disjuncture between organizational theory and practice

The size of this lacuna is further magnified by a substantial disjuncture between the theory and practice of organization design. Despite increasing employee participation noted by commentators such as Gratton and Ghoshal (2003) and Cloke and Goldsmith (2002), Thompson and Davidson (1995) suggest that this alleged ‘progress’ bears little resemblance to the reality of organizational life. Despite the pressure on executives to reconsider the conventions of organizational structure, these emerging operating principles remain in their infancy because they appear at odds with the dominant bureaucratic logic of organizing (Child and McGrath, 2001).

This logic has been described as a ‘rational mindset’ (Butcher and Atkinson 2001) or ‘rational myth’ (Czarniawska, 2003). This type of mental model or schema is developed through experience of the wider institutions of organizational and social life and acts as a deep influence on action (Giddens, 1984). In this rational mindset priority is given to the enactment of a hierarchy that reflects technical and economic values, power focussed at the corporate centre, top down decision making and organizational structures and systems that encourage unitary working (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001, Brunson, 2002).

Such is the influence of this mindset, that attempts to empower employees and to create less authoritarian organization cultures only tend to reinforce levels of normative control and unitary approaches to managing (Cludts, 1999, Willmott, 1993, Robertson and Swan, 2003). This has the effect of creating a gap between the rhetoric of employee participation and the reality of organizational control (Legge, 1995). In turn, this encourages cynicism (Dean et al, 1998) and a calculative approach to participation (Cludts, 1999). The pre eminence of this schema also has the effect of diminishing the legitimacy of alternative models of organising and thus the opportunity for radically reframing the role of participation and its role in hierarchy remains under-explored by senior managers (Cludts, 1999). Therefore, not only is there a substantial lacuna in organization theory as to how executives should seek to reconceptualise the role of bureaucracy (Adler, 1999), but this gap is exacerbated by a managerial mindset that actively ‘rationalises’ attempts to address the issue.

Based on this review, we argue that any new theory of hierarchy and participation must be comprehensive enough to make good the shortfalls identified in the existing discourses we have discussed. We believe that there are at least four different criteria that any such new theory in this area must adequately reflect. Firstly, axiomatic to the debate, is the need to reflect the increasing trend toward plural organization settings (Denis et al, 2001) in which the need to respond to individual autonomy and independence, particularly amongst critical knowledge workers and managers is central to organization success. Secondly, any new theory must be able to surface the influences of dense and interrelated social relationships and community norms on participatory behaviour. Managers negotiate these relationships both as part of what they do and to establish what they should do (Hales, 1999) and this process is therefore critical in understanding how systemic structural characteristics (Giddens, 1984) both influence and are influenced by an alternative conceptualisation of hierarchy. Thirdly, against this backdrop of partisan interest, new

theory must therefore also be able to explain why managers might want to adopt a different approach to hierarchy and participation. What are the interpretative schemas that managers use to make meaningful actions that apparently challenge existing conventions of management? Finally, in order for such an approach to gain legitimacy with senior managers working with a rational mindset, any new theory must be able to make strong linkages to improved organization performance.

The extent to which each of the four perspectives discussed here reflect these criteria is summarised in figure 1. However, in brief, whilst each approach provides a useful contribution to the issue of coherence and plurality, there is no one approach that satisfactorily accounts for all four. Stakeholder theory has given insufficient focus to the requirements of employees – and other stakeholders – (Friedman and Miles, 2002), and OCB has neglected the issue of power and politics in the conceptualisation of citizenship (Graham, 2000). This has also largely been an omission in COP theory (Fox, 2000), albeit that more recent treatments are seeking to redress this position. The Complexity and Co evolutionary theories reflect well the issues of social connectivity but provide insufficient insight into the motivations of individual actors to work with or encourage greater levels of participation and how these cognitions are influenced by dominant power relationships. Nor do any of these approaches (nor are they really intended to) really provide senior leaders with clear and practical principles about reconfiguring the role of hierarchy – especially without resorting to unitary and rational values that implicitly undermine the value of the plurality they seek to establish.

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Having established the extent of the lacuna in this issue and the priorities that new theory must reflect, we turn our attention to an alternative approach – organizational voluntarism.

Organizational Voluntarism

In attempting to address this central organizational issue we have found in the arena of political philosophy a parallel debate that we consider to be instructive. In the political discourse surrounding the basis for a ‘good’ democratic society, the same polarised tension between coherence and plurality can be identified. Should society rely on the state to shape good citizens, as social conservatives would have it, or should good citizens be the product of a liberal moral pluralism? Writers such as Etzioni (1993, 1995, and 1999), Box (1998), and Putnam (2000) promote a third, communitarian approach to tackling this issue that has many parallels for the debate about the role of organizational hierarchy. From a communitarian perspective, in the good society the moral voice that determines the nature of good citizenship is the product of a diversity of voluntary associations. These associations range from membership of local community action groups to membership of political parties and serve to mediate between the private world of individuals and the large institutions of society. The opportunity to selectively participate in associations, free from state influence, is fundamental to the creation and preservation of liberty. However, most importantly, a good society is determined by such voluntary associations implicitly inculcating a level of self-control in its members by introducing them to particular values that reinforce individuals’ normative commitments to that society. It is the opportunity to choose the psychological communities to which one is committed and

the ability to cultivate a set of core values within a framework as free from coercion as possible, that is the hallmark of a mature democratic society.

Whilst we acknowledge that organizations do not mirror society exactly, there are increasing similarities between the two contexts to justify the value of a theory of social participation in an organization setting. In both an organizational and political institutional setting the issue is the same, how best to encourage collective commitment toward super ordinate goals without recourse to sanctions (Brightman and Moran, 1999). In both settings, power is increasingly distributed across different institutions and interest groups (Etzioni, 1998) and there is continual competition between groups for support of worthy causes (Denis et al 2001, McPherson and Rotolo, 1996, Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003). In this context, organizational leadership, like its political institutional counterpart, is implicitly concerned with how to coalesce support for action whilst valuing difference and conflict (Peters and Williams, 2002).

We therefore believe that voluntarism has the potential for illuminating organization theory and offers two particular benefits. Firstly, at a time of increasing concern over the role of organizations in society, and the attendant consequences for corporate governance and social responsibility (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2001) the issue of who determines the moral voice in organizations is of growing interest (Courpasson and Dany, 2003). As democratic systems of governance protect the right to voluntary association, so organizational hierarchy may serve to legitimise this same principle (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000, Courpasson and Dany, 2003). In doing so, such voluntary association may serve to mediate between individuals and their work organization in a way that enables participation in the establishment of organization values and which builds commitment to the establishment of moral communities (d'Iribarne 2003, Courpasson and Dany 2003). Secondly, the application of voluntarism in a pluralistic organization setting may provide an alternative conception of hierarchy in so much that voluntarism encourages a level of self-organization that can facilitate organizational coherence irrespective of managerial diktat. This self-organization is increasingly viewed as critical for encouraging the necessary levels of innovation and continual reconfiguration of strategic capabilities necessary for sustained competitive advantage. (Child and MacGrath, 2001, Rindova and Kotha, 2001).

At this time, when set against the dominance of the rational mindset and the illegitimacy of alternative approaches, voluntaristic behaviour in organizations can be best understood as an expression of individual agency. Its wider adoption as a managerial approach will depend upon its legitimisation as a useful organising principle. It is important to note however, that we see hierarchy and plurality as always being in tension; they are at one level dialectically opposed, and at another, both essential aspects of organizing (Brunson, 2002). As in mature societies, once levels of democracy have been attained, the focus for political discourse is one of expressing preferences about its enactment. We do not suggest therefore that voluntarism will resolve this tension in plurality and coherence, but instead that it provides a 'relational synthesis' (Clegg, 2003:378) of both, in which progress toward more responsible organization forms may be made by going beyond the notion that more of one necessitates less of the other.

In this context we define organizational voluntarism as *a stage of organizational evolution/a marker of pluralistic organizational form in which managers recognise the*

need to engage in debate and action to pursue matters of individual and organization concern irrespective of hierarchical position or explicit authority. This definition is premised on the idea that unofficially constituted groups in organizational settings are able to provide the level of self-control necessary for the maintenance of organizational congruence; a multiplicity of stakeholder agendas does not necessarily create organizational incoherence (Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003, Thietart and Forgues, 1997). Further, that these groups are more likely to do so when they can express voice and contest views about which organization values are important to them (Cludts, 1999, Rousseau and Shperling, 2003) without the intervention of formal authority. As with voluntary associations, such organizational arrangements would bring people together to pursue interests through collective action, serve to distribute power, and mediate between individuals and the organization, thereby creating a sense of involvement (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002). It is in the nature of voluntarism that some groups may be focussed on issues of critical organization concern, others may be more parochial in outlook. Crucially however, they would collectively and voluntarily facilitate the flow of information between different groups (Brown and Duguid, 1991) and the organizational connectivity required to stimulate innovation (Ashmos et al, 2002).

The concepts of voluntarism and communitarianism are not without their detractors. For example, communitarianism has often been seen as taking insufficient account of institutionalised power relationships (Reynolds, 2000, Giddens, 1984). Critical theorists have been keen to highlight the dark side of communities that tend to imply or assume coherence and consensus (Contu and Willmott, 2003, Reynolds, 2000). Thus, it is important to stress here that the conception of voluntarism discussed in this paper is very much concerned with the “politics of difference” (Reynolds, 2000:71) where conflicts and differences are accepted as being inevitable and not always resolvable. This orientation is similar to the notion of an ‘arena’ described by Burgoyne and Jackson, (1997) in the context of management learning in which “differences ‘meet’, are fought over and reconciled and reconfigured into new groupings, factions and alliances” (1997:61). In this way, voluntarism is the synthesis of a ‘managed’ and a non coercive process of participation.

The difference between one system of governance and another is the capacity that individuals have to both deliberate and make decisions (March and Olsen, 1995). Organizational voluntarism redefines hierarchy as a process to encourage voluntary groups and individuals to deliberate *and* decide upon their own identity minimising, regulation through institutional control. This may still take the form of praise, reward or support, but avoiding coercion towards unitary priorities, in order that these groups themselves in turn influence the establishment of organizational core values. Extending the parallel with democratic governance, the role of hierarchy would also be to mediate between deserving causes, challenging constituents to justify the significance of their agendas and their demands for resource. The role of top management would remain to provide fundamental organizational framing, but that this would take into consideration many voices, and by satisfactorily justifying their conclusions and actions to their constituents.

In this context, organizational leadership comes to reflect a collective phenomena (Barker, 1997) in which the *representation* of different organization constituencies, by a wide range of individuals assumes a greater significance. In practice, this means that politics, as with its counterpart in a political institutional setting, is a necessary and logical process by which diverse interests and stakeholders are reconciled

(Butcher and Clarke, 2002, Held, 1987). Indeed, as with the political institutional model, significant interest groups serve to check the power invested in formal hierarchy. Therefore, far from politics being an irrational organizational response (Stone, 1997), such activity becomes a judicious way of managing inevitable differences. The legitimate pursuit of individual and often competing agendas also provides greater opportunities for individuals to negotiate self and work identities and thus their identification with wider organizational priorities. This voluntary process is best achieved by leadership behaviours that encourage self-organization (Daboub, 2002), valuing difference and conflict (Ashcraft, 2001), the protection of weaker groups (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001) and helping groups to create their own values and ethics (Cludts, 1999).

This 'representative leadership' is essential to ensure that participation does not become 'enforced' and thus merely provide a more sophisticated form of control (Robertson and Swan, 2003). This form of participation is predicated on leaders acknowledging their responsibility to act as stewards of constructive political activity, without which individuals have no legitimate process of positioning causes and reconciling differences. The legitimate use of politics is dependent upon leaders being able to demonstrate the ethical content of their decisions by their ability to balance personal and organizational interests (Butcher and Clarke, 2001) in the pursuit of causes that are worthy, from a social, as well as economic point of view (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001). As such, senior managers will be actively embracing the role of community architect in which the need for civic virtue (Starrat, 2001), the ability to balance individual interests with those of the social and economic interests of the wider organizational community, becomes central to leadership.

Organization voluntarism as an emerging theory of organization form

At this stage, this view of organization form represents an exploratory contribution to theory (Boisot and Child, 1999), but one that reflects emerging organization practice in existing pluralist organization settings. For example, Denis et al, (2001), in their study of leadership and strategic change in the pluralistic setting of hospital administration, note, in line with our observations of voluntarism, how leadership is necessarily a collective process. In a situation where power is diffuse and objectives divergent, levels of coherence are achieved by constellations of leaders who are sensitive to the needs of different constituencies in order to gain credibility and support. Constructive political activity, in terms of compromise, lobbying, alliances and collaborative solutions are central to how support is mobilised. In particular, Denis et al note the role of "creative individuals and committed unified groups in proactively moving to make change happen" (2001:834) in situations where the legitimacy of change initiatives cannot be taken for granted. The same conclusions are reached by Clarke and Meldrum (1999) in their study of bottom up change and Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt's (1999) exploration of 'hot groups' reflects similar aspects of unofficial behaviour.

Evidence of the way in which such communities can stimulate change and innovation is provided by Swan et al (2002) who demonstrate how radical innovation in the health care sector was achieved against a backdrop of diverse professional interests and uneven power relations. Coherence in approach was achieved through a discursive strategy, reflective of Reynolds "politics of difference" (2000:71), that sought to align the competing interests and agendas in the innovation process through the rhetoric of community *and* engagement with the diverse interests that

constituted that community. Also, the management team were able to balance commercial interests with the broader values of other groups by sublimating purely economic considerations in the cause of community building. Research by Ashmos et al (2002) suggests that this type of engagement helps to generate multiple perspectives of the environment, In turn, this alters an organization's predisposition to new challenges and opportunities, thus stimulating innovation and continual adaptation. Similar conclusions are reached by Ravasi and Verona (2001) and Foss (2003) in their analysis of the Danish company Oticon. In Oticon, innovation is sustained by highly devolved structures and bottom up project proposals, and strategic coherence the product of negotiation amongst a plurality of internal markets, coordinating groups and roles.

However, notwithstanding these examples, central to our argument here is the need to stimulate broader debate and theory building about the reconfiguration of organizational plurality and coherence. So, to what extent might the concept of voluntarism make good the shortfalls in existing theory building by meeting the four criteria we identified; - the centrality of organizational plurality, the embeddedness of social relations and power in organizational working, accounting for the motivations of managers to pursue actions in contravention of traditional approaches, and the need for clear organizational benefits? Firstly, at a time when plurality of organization form is only likely to increase (Denis et al, 2001), the concept of voluntarism clearly assumes the inevitability and value of plurality, greater autonomy and choice as being central to organization success. Diversity of interest and autonomy of individual action are prerequisites for voluntarism. Reflecting as they do, broader changes in society, ultimately, these factors may well be the most significant drivers for the adoption of voluntaristic principles. In this way, we view voluntarism as a natural stage in the evolution of organization form.

Secondly, borrowed from communitarian philosophy, voluntarism directly reflects the centrality of social relationships, community and power in the structuration of action and thus provides a basis for understanding how institutional power distributions both influence and are influenced by the enactment of these voluntaristic principles. The centrality of power reflected in the dualism of hierarchy and participation, competition and collaboration, local autonomy and strategic coherence, embody the structuration of resources, cognitive and moral rules upon which managers draw that both constrains and enables what they do (Hales, 1999, Giddens, 1984). With organizational voluntarism, power and its negotiation through political discourse is positioned as an explicit leadership activity; "power is the means of getting things done" (Giddens, 1984:283). For example, Denis et al (2001) highlight how leaders in pluralistic settings mobilise a range of symbolic and material resources to create influence and "strategic couplings" which include; aligning with widely held perceptions about organizational issues and environmental constraints, the use of positional authority, secrecy, leveraging the credibility of acknowledged performance, maintaining appropriateness of behaviour in the eyes of significant support groups etc. Through such practices, over time, managers are able to constitute and reconstitute what they do and who they are as contextual forces evolve (Denis et al, 2001).

However, as the authors highlight, their study does not deal with micro level variables of individual motivation. Of particular significance to the concept of voluntarism is the question as to why individuals might wish to engage with ideas that, at least in the short term, are at odds with the dominant rational approach to organising. What are

the interpretive schemata (Hales, 1999, Giddens, 1984) that managers draw upon to make their work meaningful in pluralistic settings? For the authors, this question is the subject of ongoing research but initial theorising suggests that a model of voluntaristic behaviour can be informed by the discourse on identity and work meanings (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001, Robertson and Swan, 2003, Knights and McCabe, 2003).

From this perspective all managers are continuously engaged in forming and repairing a sense of self-identity that is coherent and distinctive (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Self-identity is thus a complex mixture of conscious and subconscious elements, an interpretative and reflexive grid of schemas shaped by experience of endless interactions with individuals and societal institutions (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Giddens, 1984). We argue that the idea of voluntarism as we have described it here reflects a bundle of such schemas or cognitions about organizational working that enable some managers to create and sustain viable definitions of who they are and what they do, often in contravention of institutionalised arrangements, but that still enhance affirmation of self (Hales 1999, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001, Weeks and Galunic, 2003). At this stage, we propose that voluntaristic leadership behaviour is influenced by four cognitions about the nature of organising and managing; (1) the degree to which organizations are conceptualised as places of either plural or unitary interests, (2) the degree to which 'managing' concerns the pursuit of individual and or organizational goals, (3) the extent to which this influences perceptions of managerial discretion versus perceptions of managerial responsibility and (4) the extent to which political debate is considered an appropriate mechanism for managing competing interests. These briefly are amplified below.

Firstly, we argue that voluntaristic behaviour is influenced by the extent to which individuals perceive organizations as unitary or pluralistic in form. Organizational voluntarism reflects the notion that in order for managers to deviate from the bureaucratic model they must be able to appreciate the genuine legitimacy of a wider range of interests than those determined by a unitary mindset. In turn, this suggests that differences and their resolution must be seen as a central and valuable aspect of organizational working rather than an aberration or an additional factor to be considered in the mix of management behaviour (Nahapiet et al, 2005).

The second cognition reflects the idea that if organizations are seen to reflect a plurality of interests, it follows from this those individuals will also view autonomy and personal interest as being legitimate. However, as in a political institutional setting, such a predisposition can only be predicated the basis that this individuality is balanced with a collective sense of morality (Barker, 1997, Knights and McCabe, 2003). This 'civic virtue' (Starrat, 2001) reflects an understanding "that the very source of [this] individuality is in effect social not individual" (Knights and McCabe, (2003:1594). In this way, 'representative' leaders recognise that the pursuit of their own interests is inextricably interwoven with the successful achievement of others goals.

The third cognition concerns perceptions about organization discretion and autonomy. This is a function of whether managers perceive responsibility – the common denominator of all managerial work (Hales, 1999) – to be given or taken. In other words do managers perceive themselves bound by the responsibility for achieving assigned outcomes or free to pursue matters of individual or group agency

as well (Hales 1999, Kakabadse and Kakabadse 2005)? Perceptions of discretion are also a function of senior management support and the extent to which such individuals are able to redefine the rules and resources that constrain voluntaristic managerial action (Hales, 1999).

The fourth cognition concerns the legitimacy of political debate. Managerial work is implicitly concerned with the positioning of causes and is thus inherently political (Buchanan and Badham, 1999, Butcher and Clarke, 2001). As in a political institutional context this may include covert as well as publicly sanctioned activity and can only be viewed as legitimate if employed in the pursuit of organizationally worthwhile outcomes. However, such outcomes may be interpreted in different ways. Thus, political behaviour can only be construed as legitimate if leaders are able to demonstrate the ethical content of their decisions by their ability to balance personal and organizational interests (Patten, 2001, Butcher and Clarke, 2001) in the pursuit of causes that are worthy, from a social, as well as economic point of view (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2002). This is similar to Buchanan's (1999) notion of a 'logic of political action' in which individuals justify their behaviour by reference to the maintenance of their reputations, being able to account for their actions and being able to identify positive organizational outcomes. In this regard, cognitions of personal interest, predicated on civic virtue, are distinct from perceptions of self interested political behaviour.

It is our proposition that these four cognitions act reflexively on each other, and in turn, influence the degree to which individual managers may pursue voluntaristic behaviour. In the absence of legitimate alternative models of working with plurality, this cognitive framework enables managers to interpret their circumstances and thus their identities, in very individual (pluralist) ways. In enacting these schemas, managers are able to establish levels of micro emancipation (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996, 2002) because they enable individuals to resolve or at least, work with, rather than "close off" some of the chronic structural uncertainties of management (Hales 1999). That is, a voluntaristic mindset promotes a plurality of discourses about the nature of organising and thus extends the opportunities for identity formation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). It is also our premise that even though, over time, voluntarism may gain greater legitimacy in the eyes of senior management, these schemas will remain of significance because coherence and plurality, hierarchy and participation and so on will always remain in tension. To varying degrees, managers will always struggle against the unequal distribution of power implicit in the bureaucratic model.

The fourth criterion by which new theory must be judged is that of providing strong linkages to improved organization performance, for without which, there is little incentive for senior management to adopt such principles. In this regard, we see the idea of voluntarism fitting well within the co evolutionary discourse in which the need for organizational flexibility and the continual reconfiguration of strategic capabilities is viewed as critical to sustainable competitive advantage in dynamic environments (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001, Rindova and Kotha, 2001). The concept of voluntarism and its themes of local autonomy and diversity, reflect emerging views as to the importance of self-organization in allowing for a dynamic feedback between itself and its environment in order to co evolve (Lewin and Volberda, 1999, Ashmos et al, 2002). The self-organization inherent within the voluntaristic form clearly facilitates the process of rapid reconfiguration to respond to different market circumstances (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001, Child and McGrath, 2001, Eisenhardt

and Martin 2000). Perhaps, most acutely for senior managers, the concept of voluntarism also provides a framework for capitalising on diversity in the pursuit of innovation. Local communities, being at the interface of the organization and its environment are seen to be a rich source of innovation (Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001). Research by Ashmos et al (2002) and Ravasi and Verona (2001) highlight how participation helps to generate multiple perspectives that in turn alters an organizations predisposition to new challenges and opportunities and thus potentially stimulates innovation. In effect, these ideas reflect further schemas about the structural characteristics of institutions that will serve to legitimate voluntarism in the eyes of senior management.

However, above all else, we believe that the concept of voluntarism provides senior managers with a model for merging hierarchical structure with greater egalitarian practice (Ashcraft, 2001). Whilst cooperation declines as organization size increases, voluntary group discussion in value setting leads to increased commitment (Cludts, 1999) and contribution (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002). Such communication also enhances group identity and personal responsibility, which are powerful mechanisms of self control (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002, Cludts, 1999). Indeed, paradoxically, managers are seen to enhance their authority by participating in this debate (Cludts, 1999). By acknowledging the tension between, for example, the seemingly paradoxical relationships of hierarchy and participation, or local autonomy and strategic coherence, the resulting 'organized dissonance'; - the "strategic union of forms presumed to be hostile" - can produce critical levels of organizational resonance (Ashcraft, 2001:1304). Indeed, voluntarism may come to be considered as one of the 'few simple but often contradictory rules' (Galunic and Eisenhardt, 2001) that are believed to guide the development of successful co-evolution.

Conclusion

At a time when society is questioning the nature of governance, and corporate executives searching for more responsible ways to harness the commitment of employees, the concept of voluntarism provides an organising principle that may help to synthesise the contradictory demands for strategic coherence and organizational plurality. In so doing, it also offers a framework in which work organizations might fulfil a broader role in mediating the needs of individuals and society at large.

Our aim here has been to layout the basic tenets of voluntarism in order to invite further research and debate. At this stage, when set against the dominance of the rational mindset, voluntarism is most likely to be seen as legitimate in contexts that require high levels of self-organization and where "the unceasing bubbling of communities allows the organization to innovate constantly" (Cohendet et al, 2004:39). However, on the assumption that society and organising will continue to reflect an increasing plurality of interests (Denis et al, 2001) we envisage that the emancipatory possibilities and operational flexibility offered by voluntarism will become evermore attractive to senior managers and employees alike.

The asymmetric distribution of power evident in most organization settings suggests that voluntarism will not emerge bottom up. Kochan and Rubinstein (2000) and Patten (2001) note that the influence of powerful leaders is critical to the establishment of more democratic forms of governing. Leaders wishing to encourage the wider adoption of such principles are thus faced with a dilemma; how to ensure that voluntarism, like that of COP, does not come to reflect a more sophisticated

process of social control? To avoid this trap, organization leaders will need to be genuinely interested in representing the motivations and interests of those they lead. Based on our analysis here we offer the following proposition;

That managers who pursue 'representative leadership' behaviours will be influenced by cognitions of organization working that reflect (1) plurality of interests, (2) the value of personal interest and (3) the need to 'take' responsibility and (4) the value of political models in the reconciliation of competing interests.

That is, perceptions about organizational pluralism (1) drive perceptions of the value of individual interest (2) and the need to exercise discretion (3). These cognitions in turn encourage a positive approach to a political model of behaviour (4). Each of these informs and reinforces the others in a reflexive manner.

This proposition now forms the basis for a research agenda that will focus on the lived experience of individual managers, and can be seen as a response to calls for more research on the micro activities of what managers do and why they do it (Johnson et al, 2003). In particular, it will attempt to illuminate the relationship between identity formation and micro emancipation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) by investigating some of the "material, moral and cognitive grounds of managing" (Hales, 1999).

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Figure 1, Comparison of Emerging Theories of Organizational Plurality

	Stakeholder Theory	OCB Theory	COP Theory	Complexity and Co evolutionary Theories
Increasing plurality & need for individual autonomy	Plurality and success central but tended to under emphasize range and nature of certain stakeholders (Friedman and Miles 2002)	Plurality implicit, but greater emphasis on subordinating individual interests to corporate good (Graham 2000, Speier and Frese 1997)	Organizations as community of communities of interdependent learners critical for competitive advantage (Brown and Duguid 2001)	Plurality of interests central to multi directional causality of action (Lewin and Volberda 1999)
Embeddedness of social relationships and power	More emphasis needed on organization as a dynamic system of social relationships (Hendry 2001, Rowley and Moldoveanu 2003) and on the relative power of different stakeholders (Friedman and Miles 2002)	Under emphasizes issue of challenge and political action central to citizenship (Graham 2000)	Learning as a socially situated process but role of power underdeveloped (Fox 2000)	Social connectivity central to co evolution (Ashmos 2002, Frank and Fahrback 1999) but role of power and politics underexplored
Practical Implications for managers & motivators for action	More research required (Donaldson 1999, Hendry 2001), managers not yet grasped profound [practical] implications of collaborative stakeholder relationships (Halal 2000)	Varied and inconclusive explanations- impression management (Bolino 1999), context Karambayya (1990), moral reasoning (Ryan 2001).	Learning communities are a forum in which individuals create and sustain identity (Brown and Duguid 2001)	Action guided by desire for autonomy, choice, freedom to improvise (Brown and Eisenhardt 1997) but little detailed research on individual cognitions.
Links to organization performance	Inconsistent results (Jawahar and McLaughlin 2000, Halal 2000)	Correlation between some dimensions of OCB and organization success but what is direction of causality? (Podaskoff and Mackenzie 1997)	Strong links to innovation (Swan et al 2002, Brown and Duguid 2001)	Includes links between participation, goal plurality and performance (Ashmos 2002), semi structures and product innovation (Brown and Eisenhardt 1997)