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Jarle Trondal

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Jarle Trondal
*Political Science and Management Department, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway*



## Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this article is threefold: the primary aim is conceptual by outlining two ideal-typical ideas about organizational life. These models offer rival ideas about how organizations balance seemingly conflicting patterns of behaviour and change in everyday life. The second ambition of the article is to outline a theoretical approach of organizational life arguing that even fairly loosely coupled organizations may be profoundly patterned by everyday routines as much as by ambiguity. The third and final ambition is to offer empirical illustrations from organizations that are often considered as archetypes of loose coupling and ambiguities: jazz orchestras and university organizations. The empirical discussion, however, illustrates that behaviour and change in these organizations are coined by routines and rules.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Two common dynamics often observed in organizations are highlighted: first, organizations viewed as sets of formal structures and routines that systematically bias organizational performance and change, and secondly, organizations as loosely coupled structures that enable improvisation with respect to organizational performance and change. How organizations live with and practice such seemingly contradictory dynamics is empirically illuminated in two types of organizations that are seldom analysed in tandem – university organizations and jazz orchestras. Drawing on contemporary research on these seemingly contradictory laboratories of organizational analysis, some observations are highlighted that indeed are common to both types of organizations. Furthermore, it is argued that lessons may be drawn from organizations where turbulence is common and where seemingly un-organized processes are quite regular. University organizations and jazz orchestras represent such types of organizations.

**Findings** – First, the degree of ambiguity in organizations is a matter of degree, not an either/or, and that the uncertainty and spontaneity observed in organizational behaviour and change is more patterned than often assumed (see Heimer and Stinchcombe, 1999; Strauss, 1979). As such, organization theory may be a useful extension of the garbage can model, suggesting that streams in decision-making processes may be systematically pre-packed and patterned by the availability of access and attention structures (Cohen *et al.*, 1976). Secondly, scholarship in organizational studies needs to do away with over-simplistic dichotomies when facing complex realities. This challenge is equal for studies of public sector organizations as for scholarship in business and management. Organization studies often face the tyranny of conceptual dichotomies (Olsen, 2007). This article suggests that the distinction between loose and tight coupling in organizations, as between improvisation and pre-planned activities in organizations, face the danger of shoehorning complex data into simple categories.

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**Originality/value** – How organizations live with and practice seemingly contradictory dynamics is empirically illuminated in two types of organizations that are seldom analysed in tandem in organizational studies – university organizations and jazz orchestras. These conflicting organizational dynamics pinpoint one classical dilemma in university and jazz life beleaguered on the inherent trade-off between instrumental design and the logic of hierarchy on the one hand, and individual artistic autonomy and professional neutrality on the other. "[T]he purpose of developing the jazz metaphor is to draw out the collaborative, spontaneous and artful aspects of organizing in contradiction to the engineered, planned and controlled models that dominate modern management thoughts" (Hatch, 1999, p. 4). This dilemma highlights competing understandings of organizational life, of institutional change, and of what the pursuit of organizational goals ultimately entails.

**Keywords** Academia, Organizational change, Decision-making, Higher education, Organizational theory, Public administration

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Human behaviour and change in organizations entails balancing competing, inconsistent and loosely coupled dynamics, often simultaneously (Olsen, 2013; Wilson, 1989, p. 327). These ambiguities in organizations generate the threefold ambitions of this article:

- The chief ambition is conceptual by outlining two ideal-typical ideas about organizational life. These models offer rival ideas about how organizations balance seemingly conflicting patterns of behaviour and change in everyday life.
- Secondly, these rival ideas of organizational life are theoretically accounted for by outlining an organizational approach. It is argued that organization theory may be a useful extension of the garbage can model, suggesting that streams in decision-making processes may be systematically pre-packed and patterned by the availability of access and attention structures. An organizational approach suggests that even fairly loosely coupled organizations may be profoundly patterned by everyday routines as much as by ambiguity. It is argued throughout this article that the garbage can model of organizations overstates the randomness of behaviour and change. Similar to an argument offered by Strauss (1979), organizational processes tend to be "patterned – contingent on specific structural conditions".
- Finally, this article offers empirical illustrations from organizations that are often considered as archetypes of loose coupling and ambiguities: jazz orchestras and university organizations. The ambition is to illuminate *similarities* – not differences – between these seemingly diverse organizations. The empirical laboratories illustrates that behaviour and change in both jazz orchestras and university organizations are coined by routines and rules.

This article shows that organizational studies may draw lessons from organizations where internal turbulence (ambiguity) is common and where seemingly un-organized processes are quite regular. University organizations and jazz orchestras both represent such types of organizations. This case selection has two main rationales. First, these empirical laboratories are relatively hard "tests" of our argument on organizational "patterning" and the routinization of behaviour and change in organizations. Secondly, these organizations are seldom analysed in tandem in organizational studies.

Comparing unfamiliar organizations may illuminate empirical patterns and theoretical lessons that may otherwise be overlooked.

The article highlights two observations.

(1) The degree of ambiguity in organizations is a matter of degree, not an either/or, and that the uncertainty and spontaneity observed in organizational behaviour and change is more patterned than often assumed (see Heimer and Stinchcombe, 1999; Strauss, 1979). As such, organization theory may be a useful extension of the garbage can model, suggesting that streams in decision-making processes may be systematically pre-packed and patterned by the availability of access and attention structures (Cohen *et al.*, 1976).

(2) Scholarship in organizational studies needs to do away with over-simplistic dichotomies when facing complex realities. This challenge is equal for studies of public sector organizations as for scholarship in business and management. Organization studies often face the tyranny of conceptual dichotomies (Olsen, 2007). This article suggests that the distinction between loose and tight coupling in organizations, as between improvisation and pre-planned activities in organizations, face the danger of shoehorning complex data into simple categories.

To rescue the tyranny of dichotomies, the paper suggests that two complementary ideas about organizational life exist among scholars and practitioners:

(1) Organizations are viewed as sets of formal rules and routines that systematically bias organizational performance and change.

(2) Organizations are pictured as loosely coupled structures that enable improvisation with respect to organizational performance and change.

This study argues and empirically substantiates that the "normal" dynamics in organizations tend to be a balancing-act between these ideal-types – one pattern that is fairly organized by stable routines and one pattern that is seemingly loosely coupled, driven by some kind of improvisation and largely temporarily arranged. These contrasting ideas targets one classic puzzle in the study of organizational life: To what extent are organizations largely meritocratic communities of peers established on the basis on the principle of the autonomy of the knowers, and to what extent are such organizations chiefly instruments to achieve societal goals that are exogenous to the organization itself (Heclo, 2008)? These ideas about organizational life pinpoint an inherent trade-off in organizations between instrumental design and the logic of hierarchy on the one hand, and individual artistic autonomy and professional neutrality on the other. This puzzle highlights competing understandings of organizational life, of institutional change and of what the pursuit of organizational goals ultimately entails (Olsen, 2001; Trondal, 2010a).

The article is sequenced as follows. The next section outlined an organization theory approach that may make sense of the two above-mentioned ideal-typical dynamics of behaviour and change in organizations. The subsequent section illuminates empirically how formal organizations may affect human behaviour and organizational change. The article concludes by suggesting avenues for future research. The natural research challenge is twofold: first, to allow reality to be subsumed under several theoretical categories, and secondly to account for conditions under which different parts of reality observed fit each category. This article suggests that behaviour and change in organizations in seemingly loosely coupled organizations – such as jazz orchestras and university organizations – may sometimes be more rule-driven than often assumed. Before proceeding, a disclaimer is needed: acknowledging that the organizational change literature is vast (e.g. Aldrich, 1999; Burke, 2008; March, 1965, 2010; Powell and Dimaggio, 1991), this study is capable o.f only reviewing a fraction.

## From garbage cans to an organization theory approach

The garbage can model suggests that decision-making processes consist of relatively loosely coupled set of problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities (Cohen *et al.*, 1976, pp. 26-27). "In its 'purest form', the model assumes that problems, solutions, decision-makers, and choice opportunities are independent, exogenous streams flowing through a system" (Olsen, 2001, p. 191). Decision structures are characterized by problematic preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation. Loosely coupled organizations, such as universities, have been seen as loosely coupled meritocratic communities of fellow peers that enjoy large degrees of autonomy from state, society and markets. This conception views universities as republics of autonomous peers where behavioural freedom is a *raison d'être*. In historical context, university autonomy was essentially about the relative independence of universities *vis-à-vis* state governments, not independence generally *vis-à-vis* societal stakeholders write large. Autonomy in this regard has been core to the definition of universities and also seen as a core ingredient of its *modus operandi*. According to this idea, organizational change is seen as the outcome of the choices made by autonomous actors in organizations. Change is *initiated and pursued* by loosely coupled organizational members. Moreover, the justifications of organizational change are based on criteria endogenous to scholarly disciplines and university departments.

The garbage can model was initially not assumed to be free of organizational structures. Already included in the original garbage can model was the idea that formal organizations may bias degrees and types of ambiguities in decision-making processes and organizational change. Formal organizations may facilitate couplings of streams in decision cycles. "For instance, the four streams have been assumed to be more or less independent, tightly or loosely coupled" (Olsen, 2001, p. 192). "Organizations regulate connections among problems, choice opportunities, solutions, and energy by administrative practice" (Cohen *et al.*, 1976, p. 31). "The less the organizational regulation of the four streams [...] the more important the timing of the four streams for a decision process and its outcome" (Cohen *et al.*, 1976, p. 32). In the latter, one implication might be a relative de-coupling of problems and choices (Cohen *et al.*, 1976, p. 36). Organizations sometimes develop capacities to act. Such organizational capacities involve attention structures and access structures (Cohen *et al.*, 1976; March and Olsen, 1976, p. 40). However, those who have used the garbage can model might have overstated the lack of attention and access structures and rather over-emphasized the image of so-called organized anarchies. "Saying that organizational processes are not always ordered as conventionally assumed did not mean [...] that the processes should exhibit no order" (Olsen, 2001, p. 192). "The truncation of theorizing about the origin and coherence of elements of decision streams has led researchers to overemphasize the random nature of decisions" (Heimer and Stinchcombe, 1999, p. 27).

An organization theory approach assumes a direct and intimate relationship between formal organization, decision-making processes and organizational results (Egeberg, 2012). Organizations have both attention and access structures. Behavioural change is thus the product of wilful redesign of such structures. This represents a reform-optimistic perspective assuming that organizational change is the direct product of wilful political-administrative leaders who have comprehensive insights into and power over administrative reform processes (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002, p. 24). Comprehensive reforms are crafted by powerful executive institutions with relevant means-end knowledge and considerable political and administrative resources (March and Olsen, 1989; Skowronek, 1982).

This idea departs from the assumption that formal organizational structures mobilize systematic biases in the behaviour of organizational members because formal rules and routines provide cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and guide decision-makers' behaviour and role enactment (Schattschneider, 1975; Simon, 1957). Organizations offer cognitive maps that simplify and categorize complex information, offer procedures for reducing transaction costs, give regulative norms that add cues for appropriate behaviour and physical boundaries and temporal rhythms that guide decision-makers' perceptions of relevance with respect to public policy (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; March and Olsen, 1998). University staff resembles the "administrative man" faced with computational limitations with respect to the potential mass of problems, solutions and consequences present (Simon, 1957). Owing to the bounded rationality of decision-makers, the horizontal specialization of organizations – such as universities – systematically reduces the span of attention among organizational members – such as academic staff – into a limited number of relevant considerations (Gulick, 1937). Moreover, by carving the organization into vertical hierarchies of rank and command, the behaviour evoked by organizational members is assumed guided by the political – administrative hierarchy through disciplination and control (Lægreid and Olsen, 1978, p. 31). For example, the research problems chosen by academic staff may be biased by the horizontal departmentalization of university organizations where mutually exclusive groups of participants, problems, alternatives and solutions reside in separate faculties (Olsen, 2003).

An organizational approach basically argues that organizational change is contingent and profoundly affected by pre-existing organizational structures, and thus highly patterned. Formal organizations do not emerge as organizational solutions to functional needs, as a reaction to external events or as local translations of institutional standards and ideas. Organizational capacity does not emerge automatically as a response to functional needs but tend to be extorted from already-established institutional structures, in particular from the constituent states. An organization theory approach as applied here ascribes an autonomous role for organizational structures in explaining organizational behaviour and change. Organizations create elements of robustness, and concepts such as "historical inefficiency" and "path dependence" suggest that the match between environments and new organizational structures is not automatic and precise (Olsen, 2007). New governing arrangements do not arise automatically in response to new problems. Instead, they must be extorted from and mediated by pre-established organizational frameworks that empowers and constrains organizational designers (Skowronek, 1982). Organizational structures also often exist within larger organizational orders, and organizational change includes processes at the interface of different organizational orders and the often complex interactions that may occur between them (Orren and Skowronek, 2004). In sum, the compound organizational terrain of organizations may serve as an important source of both resilience and opportunity in the genesis of new institutions and in the change of old ones (Pierson, 2004, p. 47).

Applying an organizational theory approach may be useful in at least two respects. First, it may add new *knowledge* on how different organizational architectures shape change processes and the prospects for wilful design of organizations. Secondly, it may also add *practical value* for organizational change. *If* organizational variables are shown to affect human behaviour in particular ways, these variables may subsequently be "manipulated" to achieve different behavioural patterns and subsequently reach some desired goals (Egeberg, 1994, 2012). In this way, theoretically informed empirical research may serve as instrumental devices for organizational design and redesign. In public administration, administrative policy encompasses attempts at wilful design and redesign of the government infrastructure – that is, the deliberate change of organizational structures, organizational demography and organizational *locus*.

Organization theory may be instrumental in our *understanding* of behaviour and change in organizations in two regards. First, organization theory might be used as an analytical device for studying *effects* of organizational structures. Organizational variables in thus applied as *independent variables* that may explain variation in organizational life. Secondly, organization theory may be utilized to shed light on how organizational structures emerge, change and disappear. In this regard, organization theory is applied to explain organizational continuity and change. Organizational structure thus serves as *dependent variable*. The following section applies organizational structure in both ways.

## Empirical illustrations

### *The jazz orchestra*

This first empirical section centres attention to an empirical laboratory less attended to in social sciences generally and organizational studies in particular: The jazz orchestra:

> [T]he purpose of developing the jazz metaphor is to draw out the collaborative, spontaneous and artful aspects of organizing in contradiction to the engineered, planned and controlled models that dominate modern management thoughts (Hatch, 1999, p. 4).

According to the first ideal-typical idea of organizational life outlined above, the jazz orchestra is pictured as a loosely coupled organization that merely changes due to the semi-autonomous behaviour pursued by individual musicians. According to the second ideal-typical idea of organizational life, jazz orchestras are to be conceived of as organized communities where individual behaviour is largely biased by routines and rules about "ways of doing things". During the past 30 years or so, an embryonic organizational and management literature has developed that partly uses jazz metaphorically (e.g. Hatch, 1999; Knudsen, 2002) and partly as empirical laboratories for understanding organizational behaviour and change (e.g.Weick, 1998). Departing from the latter approach, this section offers some empirical illustrations from the jazz orchestra: in short, jazz combines loosely coupled processes with behaviour driven by routines and rules. The choices made by actors during rehearsals and concerts are built on striking delicate balances between routines and the ambiguity of improvisation.

*Ambiguities in jazz orchestras.* Jazz is commonly portrayed and understood spontaneous and loosely coupled activity. One essential aspect much attended to in organization theory to jazz is improvisation. Improvisation involves some kind of experimentation, as in natural science, but not randomized controlled experiments. Improvisation "deals with the unforeseen, it works without a prior stipulation, it works with the unexpected" (Weick, 1998, p. 544). Improvisation also involves the "on the spot" transformation of already available items – such as composed written music – or "flexible treatment of pre-planned material" (Berliner, 1994, p. 400, in Weick, 1998, p. 544). Improvisation also involves real-time composing (Weick, 1998, p. 546). Jazz musicians regularly meet "wicked problems" that are characterized by high degrees of uncertainty and where existing solutions seem invalid. Also, problems and solutions tend to be interdependent with the consequence that there are no exhaustively described set of potential solutions, as in chess.

Organization theory has largely treated organizational improvisation as a dysfunction – as an unintended outcome of organizational processes (Lewin, 1998, p. 539):

> Garbage can processes were perceived as pathological and rrational […]. The temporal nature of garbage can processes with their perceived disorder and chaos could be reduced or eliminated by reforming organizations to make them conform better to the normative ideas of a culture giving primacy to human agency and purpose (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 25).

According to a garbage can approach, however, key characteristics of organizational processes come close to a general understanding of improvisation: the absence of consistent and shared goals, trial and error learning, shifting attention and fluid participation (Lomi and Harrision, 2012, p. 10). In jazz, improvisation serves partly to define the music genre as such. However:

> [a]central notion of the original [garbage can] paper was not that the world was inexplicably chaotic but that the appearance of chaos came from the application of an erroneous model to an orderly temporal reality (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 28).

Improvisation serves as an essential behavioural logic for individual jazz musicians when interacting with fellow musicians. As the tonal environment of jazz musicians is continuously changing, seemingly unpredictably, the musical flexibility of musicians is one strategy often used to adapt and to innovate. The behaviour of jazz performers reflects the explorations of possibilities known to the performer (March, 2008). In jazz, however, the seemingly unordered sequencing of items is orchestrated and thus structured by temporal timing of notes and harmonies that are mutually adjusted among the participants in the orchestra. Improvisation in jazz implies that musicians "compose in the moment", and make sense of their performance post hoc (retrospective sense-making) (Barrett, 1998, p. 615; Weick, 1998, p. 543). In this sense, the execution of musicians also tend to be loosely coupled to pre-planned intentions (Weick, 1998, p. 547). The outcome of improvisation is, however, closely linked to the temporal couplings of streams of actors, problems and alternatives during play. The garbage can model emphasized:

> A temporal understanding of events, in contrast to an intentional or consequential one. The framing of decisions may be to a considerable extent determined by temporally unfolding processes of participation and attention (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 26).

The loosely coupled character of improvisations is also something cherished by jazz musicians. For them to keep being creative and not trapped by taken-for-granted routines, some session musicians such as Miles Davis, deliberately search for unplanned and non-rehearsed jazz concerts and recordings (Barrett, 1998, p. 609f).

*Routines in jazz orchestras.* The spontaneity of improvisation in jazz, however, may be overstated. The degree of discretion available to performers may be systematically patterned. Improvisation may be profoundly biased by history and practice, as well as by the sheer instrument at hand. Improvisations may be shaped by the available items at any time and the history of interaction among musicians. The history of interaction among sets of actors may shape likely future patterns of improvisations among these. Thus, what may look like pure spontaneity for the audience may in fact be improvisations with a strong path-dependency and resilience from history. We should, therefore, talk about degrees of improvisation in the sense that all spontaneous composition on the spot is not fully unpredictable or profoundly novel. Improvisation builds on pre-existing tunes and pre-existing routines of handling this tune. Thus, "improvisation involves the embellishment of something" pre-existing (Weick, 1998, p. 546). Improvisation is "not just a matter of pulling notes out of thin air" (Barrett and Peplowski, 1998, p. 558).

"Jazz is [thus also] a rule-bound activity" (Barrett and Peplowski, 1998, p. 559). Improvisation is organizationally embedded. First, the rules and rhythms of jazz "lock in" the engaged musicians in a joint mutual encounter (Barrett, 1998, p. 614). They are guided by pre-arranged coordination arrangements. In jazz these are often songs. "Songs act as minimal structures that allow maximum flexibility" (Barrett and Peplowski, 1998, p. 559). "Songs impose order and create a continuous sense of cohesion and coordination" (Barrett, 1998, p. 612). These arrangements constrain what musicians can do, but they also enable discretionary behaviour within these arrangements, in concert with other musicians. Just as in chess, there are some rules that define songs, such as bars, phrases and sections. Without some degree of pre-structuring of these items it might be difficult to subsume activities and sounds under the rubric of jazz, or even music.

Contingency theory suggests that as organizations grow, so do the degree of formalization (Pfeffer, 1982, p. 149). Increased *organizational size* is assumed to increase the opportunity for organizational specialization, for example the development of organizational sub-units. Both developments might imply the growth of organizational capacities at different levels of organizations. The supply of organizational capacities has certain implications for how organizations and humans may act. An organizational approach assumes that organizational capacity-building supply organizations with leverage to act relatively independently from its environment. Thus, organizations with large capacities would be able to coordinate random items in decision-streams more easily than organizations with fewer capacities. Secondly, organizations may have powerful leaders. However, the relative role of leaders may be contingent on organizational size. Observations made in jazz orchestras largely support such general insights from organizational studies. Small jazz bands may thus have greater potential for non-planned encounters and the ambiguity of conduct than large jazz bands. In small bands, the lack of organization, plans and procedures are compensated by the real-time activation of call-and-response between the artists. Large bands, by contrast, tend to upgrade the influence of the band leader in coordinating larger groups of actors and instruments. One illustration of this is the development of the small jazz bands in New Orleans into the larger jazz bands in Chicago during the 1920s. This organizational grown accompanied a parallel amplified role for the band leader. Succeeding World War I, musicians went by riverboats upstream Mississippi, and the jazz style changed from old-style "sweet" New Orleans jazz to what became known as Chicago style Dixieland. This was paralleled with growth in band size, changes of instruments and, essentially, increased orchestrating and arrangements used for the bands. In effect, the loosely coupled New Orleans jazz band was succeeded by the fairly organized, conductor-led, Chicago jazz bands (Knudsen, 2002).

With *institutionalization* comes patterning of previously random connections of items. This is also observed in jazz orchestras. Improvisation may be patterned by previous efforts and the emergence of inter-subjective rules of conduct. A vast literature has revealed that the impact of pre-socialization on actors' roles and identities is modified by organizational re-socialization (e.g. Checkel, 2005; Meier and Nigro, 1976). Actors entering organizations for the first time are subject to an organizational "exposure effect" (Johnston, 2005, p. 1039) that may contribute to re-socialization. Socialization is a dynamic process whereby individuals are induced into the norms and rules of a given community (Pratt, 2001). Re-socialization processes are often uni-directional in the sense that the socializator educates, indoctrinates, teaches or diffuses his/her norms and ideas to the socializee. The role perceptions evoked by actors may change due to *enduring* exposure to institutions, accompanying new perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Herrmann *et al.*, 2004). According to the social identity theory, the self-perceptions developed by actors are motivated by a cognitive need to "reduce subjective uncertainty […]" (Hogg and Terry, 2001, p. 6). This claim rests on socialization theory that emphasizes a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group develop perceptions of group belongingness and an *esprit de corps*. Protracted and intensive actor interaction is conducive to internalization of collective norms, rules and interests of the community (Checkel, 2005). Similarly, well established jazz bands where members are mutually socialized are likely to experience patterned behaviour and less "free" improvisations and embellishments. By contrast, newly established jazz bands or bands with ever-changing membership are likely to be less subject to socialization of conduct, and thus better equipped to improvise. Repetitive endeavours among band members lead to adaptive learning due to iterated mutual responses among them.

Behaviour and change in organizations has also a *temporal dimension* to it, which is essential to the garbage can approach. One essential temporal variable in organizations is tempo, or speed, of conduct. One might assume that with increased speed comes a tendency to repetition. Organizations may thus experience a tendency to repeat past successes, or what is perceived as past successes. By repeating this way, organizations and musicians may be victims of trained incapacity to improvise – merely due to high speed of conduct. The robustness and absorptive capacities of organizations are often taken for granted during periods of stability. During turbulent times when tempo in organizations increases, organizations tend to be subject to test, contestation and requests for major reform. Crises are marked by the lack of "order, rationality, control and predictability" (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 7). Actors face choices that need to be made under high degree of uncertainty (Tamuz and Lewis, 2008, p. 158) and often under high degree of speed. If jazz musicians play a very fast tune, repetition of patterns is sometimes necessary just "to keep the performance going" (Weick, 1998, p. 553). Slow moving jazz, by contrast, would enable musicians' larger leeway for embellishment of items – both as regards their choice of notes, harmonies and rhythmic patterns. Thus, up-speed decision-making may affect the likelihood of exploration or improvisation.

### *The university organization*

*Ambiguities in university organizations.* The activities of university staff has often been seen as loosely coupled to government goals (Trondal 2010b). For centuries, the norms, resources, organizational capacities, routines and personnel of European universities were loosely tied to European government(s). Compared to other fields of society, the field of research and higher education was rather loosely coupled to the Westphalian state (Olsen, 2007; Weick, 1976). Since medieval times, one endogenous aspect of research and higher education has been its insensitivity to national borders and national governance (Scott, 1998; Teichler, 2004). During these periods, students and university teachers were internationally free floaters – relatively speaking – between European universities (Amaral, 2001, p. 124). Universities were loosely coupled *host* institutions, and not government agencies. In the middle ages, the Catholic Church, through the international Church administration, the Catholic educational system and the common Latin vocabulary, was an important facilitator of standards of research and higher education throughout Europe. National top civil servants were socialized into European cosmopolitans through the Catholic Church. European universities also contributed to secular learning and socialization of national civil servants and contributed to shared notions of appropriate policy standards among top civil servants throughout Europe (Knudsen 2002). University staff in Europe was subject to transnational diffusion and learning among communities of scholars. By contrast, there was a lack of organizational capacities, recourses, routines and traditions – both in governments and universities – for research and educational activities at European universities.

The European university organization is often seen as loosely coupled – both internally and *vis-à-vis* governments. Internally, universities are often loosely coupled between the administrative pillar with the director (or equivalent) at top and the scientific pillar with the principal (or equivalent) at top. In such organizations, the executive leadership in the administrative pillar may have trouble steering the research activities in the scientific pillar. In addition, it is often assumed that the internal coupling of the scientific pillar is loosely coupled between the principal, the dean and the professor. Decisions made by the dean may only marginally guide the research activities of the professor. Moreover, the research activities at universities are often more loosely coupled to the formal university organization than the educational activities. For example, most of the administrative capacities at European universities are today earmarked for educational purposes. Only a small fraction of the university administration is a research support system. Consequently, the potential for hierarchical steering of the research activity at European universities is modest and the leeway for academic staff to steer their own research portfolio is correspondingly wider.

Loosely coupled organizations increase the explanatory potential of *demographic characteristics* among organizational members (Selden, 1997). We may assume that the positional level among faculty members will be of outmost importance to explain their research activity, both with respect to research volume and quality. One prediction would be that scholarly hierarchies inside universities may explain the research behaviour of staff. Professors may thus be expected to be more research active than assistant professors. We may also assume that experienced scholars with doctoral degrees are generally more active in research than junior scholars without a doctoral degree. In sum, and hardly surprising, experienced professors are assumed to be more active in research than young assistant professors due to their international attractiveness and research networks (cf. Olsen and Svåsand, 1971).

Another prediction would be that *disciplinary differences* would accompany different patterns of research behaviour between different university faculties and departments. One example would be variation in the internationalization of research activity among academic staff. Different disciplines may have different levels of international contact. More precisely, the so-called "hard" sciences are often assumed to be generally more internationally oriented than the "soft" sciences (Kyvik and Larsen, 1997). Conceptualized as a continuum, "hard" and "soft" disciplines are characterized by degrees of paradigmatic status and consensus (Becher, 1989; Braxton and Hargens, 1996; Smeby, 2000). To understand disciplinary differences in international communication patterns, the nature of research subjects and audience structure is of particular relevance (Kyvik, 1991; Kyvik and Larsen, 1997). Some disciplines are global in the sense that research results are not influenced by the country or region where the research is undertaken. Experimental physics is one example of such a discipline. On the other hand, some research subjects are situated in a social, cultural, biotopical and geographical context that makes the research results particularly regionally oriented. Such research subjects are more often found in "soft" than in "hard" fields of science. A national and regional lay audience is also more common in the former than the latter scholarly fields. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that internationalization varies accordingly between hard and the soft fields as well as between individual disciplines. The internationalization of research activity among academic staff thus results from endogenous characteristics of disciplines, relatively de-coupled from actions and initiatives of the university leadership – or say, from national governments. Hence, "[p]rocesses of internationalization are neither supported nor effectively hindered by government actions […]" (Gornitzka *et al.*, 2003, p. 26). This is the century-old mode of "voluntary" internationalization where such processes are loosely coupled to hierarchical command and organizational design (Engel, 2003, p. 244). Secondly, this conception of "internationalization by "choice" and discipline" suggests that the internationalization of academic staff is organized through academic networks, often limited to small groups of scholars that share some basic perceptions of appropriate scholarly standards (Knudsen, 2002, p. 38). Processes of transnational imitation through epistemic networks are less guided by government command than by learning processes among circles of peers. Network models assume that international contacts cluster around fairly stable networks of actors, disciplines, paradigms and research programmes (Smeby and Trondal, 2005).

*Routines in university organizations.* The assumption that the research activity of academic staff at universities can be designed and steered is central to recent European university reforms advocating "strong university leadership, the formulation of clear, consistent and stable goals, and the development of long-term-strategies for managing change" (Olsen, 2007, p. 45). During recent decades, European universities have faced demands for urgent and radical institutional reform (Olsen and Maasen, 2007, p. 20; Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013). In contrast to the classical *laissez-faire* model of *free movers* of internationally active research professors (see above), organized international contact and collaboration among scholars is likely to increase *if* systematic political and administrative attention that is devoted to it (Van der Wende, 1997). Whereas the classical internationalization model conceived contact as a basically individually driven activity (see above), the model of organized mobility considers individual discretion as considerably patterned by organizational rules and routines. For example, research funding from international and supranational organizations often accompanies expectations and obligations of international research visits, conferences, study visits, etc. (Gornitzka *et al.*, 2003). The rules embedded in funding and programme schemes seem to affect the behaviour of academic staff. Funding and programmes on national and supranational levels seem to be successful in terms of stimulating research collaboration in Europe. Research collaboration is the most demanding type of contact between researchers by presupposing attractiveness, international visibility and often involving significant involvement by the researcher (Smeby and Trondal, 2005).

Recent research shows that the vision of "internationalization by design" is largely guiding government policy and university strategies in most OECD countries (Paradeise *et al.*, 2009). For example, during the late 1990s and the early 2000 the "Europeanization" of Norwegian research and higher education policies have moved from being largely occasional, non-routinized and non-institutionalized processes towards becoming increasingly routinized, rule-driven and institutionalized (Trondal, 2005). Subsequently, research policy and research behaviour among academic staff sometimes coincide. One empirical prediction would thus be significant variation in international activities between different university faculties reflecting varying faculty strategies for research internationalization.

The internationalization of university staff is increasingly pictured as forged by the university leadership. University organizations have expanded their administrative support staff, routines and economic resources to steer the research behaviour of its faculty members (Ginsberg, 2011; Gornitzka and Langfeldt, 2008). Universities are also increasingly seen as instruments for maximising instrumental and often exogenous goals imposed by governments, university leadership and external accreditation schemes (Margionson and Considine, 2000, p. 4). Internationalization of research is not merely motivated by "voluntary" decisions among individual university staff. Rather, the internationalization of universities has emerged as an independent policy area supported by a formal administrative apparatus and under pressure from global standards and international standardising organizations (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013; Teichler, 2004, p. 2).

Whereas the first European universities had strong links to the global Catholic Church, present-day universities have increasingly become government agencies in the pursuit of domestic policies for research training and the production of excellent candidates. European universities are increasingly bureaucratized, particularly by an increased proportion of top administration staff with administrative capacities for reform (Ginsberg, 2011; Gornitzka *et al.*, 2009; Paradeise *et al.*, 2009). One may assume that the sheer *size of organizations*, measured by the number of staff, may condition the likelihood for collaboratory strategies to emerge between faculty and university leadership. Rules are often created when organizations grow and become more heterogeneous (March *et al.*, 2000, p. 2). The likelihood of face-to-face encounters among incumbents is generally greater in small organizations than in large organizations. One example is the Graduate School of Administration (GSIA) of the Carnegie Institute of

Technology in Pittsburgh in the period 1955 to 1965. This Institute contained a fairly small number of staff and was characterized by "cooperative interdependence of community of scholars" (March, 2008, p. 380). Also, the history of Stanford University shows how organizational growth in size accompanies increased formalization of rules, increased centralization and less likelihood of face-to-face contacts between university heads and faculty (March *et al.*, 2000). Face-to-face encounters in small research institutions may be one prerequisite for the development of both structural connectedness inside universities as well as the development of informal networks between university leadership and faculty (March, 1999, p. 135). Both types of networks may facilitate trust building and the everyday socialization of ideas among the university leadership and faculty members.

The formalized or honorific *excellence* of faculty members and research groups might increase the potential for collaboration with university leadership. Academic recognition may contribute to attract collaborative partners inside as well as outside universities (March, 1999, p. 141). Research groups that are perceived as "winning teams" within the university organization might more easily gain positive attention from the university leadership and build mutual trust and networks than research groups without this aura of excellence. The GSIA case mentioned above is one eminent example. Formalized centres of excellence within university organizations may have stronger potential for collaboration with the university leadership than faculty members without such formalized centres of excellence (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013, p. 195). However, opportunistic behaviour may appear particularly among young aspiring universities or research groups aimed at short-term academic recognition. "Wannabes allocate top attention to excellence by harnessing a type of instrumental organization whose leitmotiv, utilitarianism, aims to align their components along this conception of quality" (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013, p. 204).

Academic behaviour thus seems to be increasingly embedded in bureaucratic routines forged by the university organization. Most European universities have developed explicit strategies for example to internationalize research and higher education (Frolich, 2008; Teichler, 1998; van der Wende, 1997). The idea of organizational change by hierarchy and design assumes that university strategies and administrative capacities for internationalization may contribute to an internationalization of members of faculty (Paradeise *et al.*, 2009). The university apparatus is thus not a neutral tool available to the university leadership in office, and there is not a neat separation between academic and administrative domains inside universities. The internationalization of academic staff is thus likely to be increasingly shaped by the executive leadership inside university organizations – at different levels – through political will and administrative command, and convened within horizontally specialized faculties and departments.

Moreover, the research behaviour of university scholars may be expected to be affected by *routines even outside* the university organizations. For example, the internationalization of the research activity of faculty may be affected systematically by domestic governments, international organizations and even international non-governmental organizations (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Gornitzka and Langfeldt, 2008; Olsen, 2003). Since World War II the level of international co-operation in the field of research and higher education has increased substantially. One of the main international institutions has become the European Commission – both due to increased legal competences in the field of research and due to increased administrative capacity inside relevant Commission

Directorates-General (DGs) and its "parallel administration" of domestic and European Union agencies. The Commission's administrative capacity has also been extended by the new European Research Council, and by how the Commission DGs partly co-opt national research councils and individual universities (Egeberg and Trondal, 2009; Gornitzka, 2011; Trondal, 2010a) . Hence, the action capacity of the European Commission has become noticeable *vis-à-vis* behaviour and change in university organizations (Gornitzka and Langfeldt, 2008; Olsen and Maasen, 2007).

Finally, the *justification* for organizational change is not solely endogenous to university organizations but increasingly imported. The overall *rationale for academic life* differs between the two ideal-typical ideas of organizational life envisaged in this article. In line with the first idea of ambiguity in organizations, the Humboldt tradition has put primary emphasis on the importance of academic independence, university autonomy, and the scholarly rationales of university existence. By contrast and following the second idea of organizational life, the dogma and doctrine for reforming public sector organizations during the past couple of decades have emphasized the instrumental value of such institutions in producing public goods (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002; Frederickson, 2005). Justifications for university life and reform are increasingly external to scholarly disciplines, instrumental in focus and short-term (Olsen, 2007; Stensaker *et al.*, 2008, p. 2). Economic rationales have always played an important role in research. Particularly, however, for young universities, instrumental arguments might be emphasized vigorously as a strategy safeguarding organizational legitimacy and survival by adapting to what might be perceived as international models of "good university governance". Universities may thus instrumentally adapt by "learning across space" as to how universities perform in other countries (Rose, 1993), and organizational change may be superimposed by university leadership in an effort to gain some short-term benefits.

## Conclusions

The embryonic literature on organization theory and jazz has used mainly jazz as metaphor for organizational life. This article has primarily used the jazz orchestra as empirical laboratory for learning about behaviour and change in organizations. Parallel observations are drawn from university organizations. One lesson accentuated from these laboratories is that the degree of ambiguity in organizations is a matter of degree and that the uncertainty and spontaneity observed in organizational behaviour and change may be more patterned than often assumed. In this sense, and also in line with the idea of the garbage can model, organization theory may be a useful extension of the garbage can model, suggesting that streams in decision-making processes may be systematically pre-packed and patterned by access and attention structures (Cohen *et al.*, 1976). A second lesson highlighted is the need to do away with over-simplistic dichotomies when facing complex realities. Both the distinction between loose and tight coupled organizations and processes, as between improvisation and pre-planned activity, face the danger of shoehorning complex data into simple categories. "Improvisation is the mixture of pre-composed and the spontaneous" (Weick, 1998, p. 551). Both jazz orchestras and university organizations exhibit patterns of loose and tight coupling and should be considered compound institutional ensembles that consist of apparently competing dynamics of behaviour and change.

The research challenges ahead are at least twofold:

- First, the theoretical challenges in organization studies are to allow reality to be subsumed under several theoretical categories, and, secondly, to account for conditions under which different parts of reality fit each category (Olsen, 2001, p. 196). This challenge is the same for literature on public sector organizations as for scholarship in business and management (Christensen and Lægreid, 2011). This article has suggested that organizational life in seemingly loosely coupled organizations – such as jazz orchestras and university organizations – may sometimes be driven by rules and routines. The embellishment and improvisation in organizational life may sometimes be more patterned by rules and routines than sometimes assumed.
- Secondly, the empirical research challenge is to find promising avenue for future empirical studies in organizational life. This article has suggested that organizational studies may draw lessons from organizations where turbulence (ambiguity) is common and where seemingly un-organized processes are quite regular. One major future research opportunity thus rests in the study of *governance in organizations in turbulent times*. This research avenue is equally promising for public sector organizations as for business and management scholars. During periods of crisis, such systems tend to be subject to test, contestation and demands for major reform. Basic questions about final authority, accountability, and decision-making are often disputed in such situations. Turbulent times – such as those we associate with financial stress, revolution, war, natural disaster and organizational meltdown – are marked by the lack of "order, rationality, control and predictability" (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 7; Comfort *et al.*, 2010; Roe and Schulman, 2008; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). Decision-makers face choices that need to be made under a high degree of uncertainty (Tamuz and Lewis, 2008, p. 158) and often at high speed. Turbulent times can reveal the fragility of institutions and produce surprising cascading dynamics that test the sustainability of existing governance arrangements. Turbulent times also represent an underappreciated opportunity to examine the resilience of well-known governance patterns. Less attended to by contemporary scholarship, *unsettled* organizations offer ample opportunity for scholarly reflection, stock taking and suggest new ways forward. Governance in turbulent times depends on how organized systems face surprises of various kinds and degrees. Organizations must confront situations of relatively high uncertainty and unpredictability with limited knowledge. They must act with unfamiliar speed to address situations of unprecedented complexity – situations where well-tested solutions seem inadequate and where failure is sure to be answered with fierce critique. Organizations facing such circumstances are called upon to balance adaptability and experimentation on the one hand, with continuity and resilience on the other. This balancing act entails confronting the ambiguities associated with unruly problems while maintaining existing organizational routines.

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**Corresponding author**
Jarle Trondal can be contacted at: Jarle.trondal@uia.no