

# International Health Organizations as Purposive and Strategic Actors: Theoretical Gains and Methodological Implications

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## Introduction

What are international health organizations? Can they be studied like other international organizations or is there something unique about them, about the fact that their mandate encompasses health, that sets them aside? And is there a reason to think that all international health organizations are the same? Specifically, does the conventional understanding of a shift from an ‘international’ to ‘global’ public health require a different way of conceptualizing international health organizations?<sup>1</sup>

This paper makes a number of claims, in regard to international organizations in general but with particular attention to international health organizations. In the second section of the paper I argue that international organizations are purposive actors. This means that they have independent goals and purposes that may, but may also not, influence the international realm. I argue that international health organizations do have unique qualities – because international health organizations are likely to have a clear organizational mission and because the bureaucracies of international health organizations have traditionally been dominated by a relatively unified professional community, they are likely to act purposively as well as strategically. I also argue, however, that this might have changed over time – so that today international health organizations are less ideationally coherent and professionally unified, which may also mean lesser capabilities to effectively influence the external environment. In the third section I argue that

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1 Theodore Brown, Marcos Cueto, and Elizabeth Fee, “The World Health Organization and the Transition from ‘International’ to ‘Global’ Public Health”, *American Journal of Public Health* 96: 1 (2006), 62-72.

international organizations are not only purposive but also strategic actors. This means that they are at least at times able to successfully pursue their goals even in the face of external constraints. The section describes the types of strategic action that are available to international bureaucracies. I differentiate between passive and strategic responses – and between those that lead to compliance and those that lead to resistance. I illustrate the various options by briefly referring to cases from the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as other specialized agencies of the United Nations (UN). In the fourth section, I identify a number of conditions that make strategic response likely and more likely to succeed. These include: having independent goals and preferences, minimal supervision and strong leadership. Based on these conditions, I argue, recent international health organizations seem less likely to act strategically than older ones. Finally, in the fifth section of the paper I analyze a number of methodological implications of viewing international organizations as purposive and strategic actors.

## International health organizations as purposive actors

In the social sciences, it is common to view international organizations as sites where member states are the only carriers of interests and the only ones capable of acting. In the field of international relations, the neorealist perspective generally views international institutions as ‘arenas for acting out power relationships’ and scholars do not normally grant them causal power of their own.<sup>2</sup> A competing theoretical perspective, neoliberal institutionalism allows international organizations to have some causal, albeit indirect, relevance.<sup>3</sup> Institutional arrangements, according to this approach, ‘change the incentives for states to cheat; they... reduce transaction costs, link issues, and provide focal points for cooperation’ and in this way transform states’ preferences, their behavior and, ultimately, policy outcomes.<sup>4</sup> However, while neoliberal institutionalists argue that institutional frameworks impose constraints on states, like neorealists they do not grant international

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2 Tony Evans and Peter Wilson, “Regime theory and the English School of International Relations: A Comparison”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21: 3 (1992), 329-351; John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”, *International Security* 19: 3 (1994), 5-49.

3 Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, 1984); Robert Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory”, *International Security* 20:1 (1995), 39-51.

4 Ibid., 49.

organizations any capacity to act.<sup>5</sup> In sociology theories interested in the international realm tend to see it as more homogenous than scholars of international relations do, including using terms such as ‘world culture’ and ‘world society’,<sup>6</sup> but here too international norms and conventions originate from nation states, particularly Western Europe and North America.<sup>7</sup>

But international organizations – and, I would argue, particularly international health organizations – are not simply arenas where only others get to act. While negotiations and compromises among members are central to the decision-making process in international organizations, policies are often influenced by the international bureaucracy itself. The leadership and staff of an international organization – those who plan the budget, rank program priorities, author position papers, formulate arguments, and advocate policies to its members – have an essential role in influencing policies. And this is not simply about being a *neutral* mediator – helping to find a workable compromise among competing positions or disseminating ideas developed elsewhere. Instead, I argue that international bureaucracies may act as interested, and therefore biased, actors. They incorporate their own goals and perceptions into the policies negotiated by members.

### *Purposive Action and Its Limits*

The view of international organizations as purposive actors is held by a number of theories in international relations that challenge the state-centered approach that is dominated in the scholarship on international relations. Earlier theories that regarded international organizations as actors include the epistemic communities literature<sup>8</sup> and the international organization decision-making literature.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary formulations include

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5 Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*, (Ithaca, 2004).

6 John Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas and Francisco O. Ramirez, “World Society and the Nation-State”, *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 1 (1997), 144-181; Georg Krücken and Gili S. Drori, eds, *World Society: The Writings of John W. Meyer* (New York, 2009).

7 Meyer et al.

8 Ernst Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization* (Stanford, 1964).

9 Robert Cox, “The Executive Head: An Essay on Leadership in the ILO”, *International Organization* 23:2 (1969), 205-29; Robert Cox and Harold Jacobson, eds, *Anatomy of Influence: Decision Making in International Organization* (New Haven, 1974).

constructivism<sup>10</sup> and the principal-agent theory.<sup>11</sup> While in agreement with these theories in regard to some of their insights, this paper offers a different approach to analyzing both the origins of an organizational autonomy and, even more importantly, the interplay between autonomy and external constraints.

To identify the institutional factors determining the partial autonomy of international organizations, it is useful to draw on insights from political sociology and organizational sociology. Political sociology is useful for understanding the capacity of public bureaucracies to develop independent goals, preferences and interests. Indeed, the debate over the nature of international organizations echoes the debate on the nature of the state, between society-centered and state-centered approaches. State-centered scholars have shown that elected officials and civil servants develop interests independently of their constituencies and donors and that while ‘autonomous state actions will regularly take forms that attempt to reinforce the authority, political longevity, and social control of the state organizations’<sup>12</sup> these interests go beyond sheer need of survival.<sup>13</sup> In turn, sociologists of organizations have shown that organizations develop distinct identities: beliefs about what kind of organization it is, what it should look like, and how it should behave.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, international bureaucracies too are actors with independent goals. These include both material and ideational goals.

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10 Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, 1996); Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Catherine Weaver and Ralf J. Leiteritz, “‘Our Poverty is a World Full of Dreams’: Reforming the World Bank”, *Global Governance* 11:3 (2005), 369–388.

11 D. Roderick Kieweit and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation* (Chicago, 1991); Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson and Duncan Snidal, eds, *The Rational Design of International Institutions* (New York, 2001); Don Nielson and Michael Tierney, “Delegation to International Organizations: Agency Theory and World Bank Environmental Reform”, *International Organization* 57:2 (2003), 241–276.

12 Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, 1992), 15.

13 Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes Toward a Marxist Theory of the State” *Socialist Revolution* 7 (1977), 6-28; Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds, *Bringing the State Back In* (New York, 1985); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, 1992).

14 Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten. “Organizational Identity”, *Research in Organizational Behavior* 7 (1985), 263-295; Jane Dutton and Janet M. Dukerich. “Keeping an Eye on the Mirror: Image and Identity in Organizational Adaptation”, *Academy of Management Journal* 34:3 (1991), 517-554; Karen Golden-Biddle and Hayagreeva Rao, “Breaches in the Boardroom: Organizational Identity and Conflicts of Commitment in a Nonprofit Organization”, *Organization Science* 8: 6 (1997), 593-611; Mary Ann Glynn,

Most generally, the *material* goals of international bureaucracies include possessing authority to act and having funds to act effectively. International bureaucracies also develop expansionary tendencies, attempting to attain broader mandates and bigger budgets. However, material goals are not absolute. Opportunities for expansion may be rejected, for example, if they threaten the autonomy of the organization or undermine its legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the amount of funds is rarely the sole consideration. International bureaucracies, for example, would prefer to maintain control over how resources are spent.

But international bureaucracies do not only have material preferences. They also develop principles, preferences, and philosophies that guide their perception in regard to the mission of the organization and their understanding of the best way to achieve that mission.<sup>16</sup> These principles shape the staff's view on the organization's policies and programs. Although both the sources that generate ideational goals and the perceptions drawn from those sources may change over time, there are two sources that are particularly important. First, an international bureaucracy is heavily influenced by the values and goals of the organization's founders, especially as these are expressed in the organization's foundational texts, such as its constitution.<sup>17</sup> Second, if the bureaucracy is dominated by one profession, the organization's principles are strongly shaped by professional expertise and ethos.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, these two sources – founding declarations and expert knowledge – are considered, also by members, to be legitimate references to justify preferences. Consistency with the Constitution confirms that the organization functions within its mandate and that it is apolitical; reliance on

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“When Cymbals Become Symbols: Conflict Over Organizational Identity Within a Symphony Orchestra”, *Organization Science* 11:3 (2000), 285-298.

15 Michael Barnett and Liv Coleman, “Designing Police: Interpol and the Study of Change in International Organizations”, *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (2005), 593–619.

16 Ron Jepperson, “Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism” in W. W. Powell and Paul DiMaggio, eds, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago, 1991), 143-163; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Barnett and Coleman 2005.

17 Lloyd Harris and Emmanuel Ogbonna. “The Strategic Legacy of Company Founders”, *Long Range Planning* 32:3 (1999), 333-343; Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution: How the Royal Paris Opera Survived the End of the Old Regime* (Chicago, 2008).

18 Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields”, *American Sociological Review* 48:2 (1983), 147-160; Mary Ann Glynn 2000, 285-298; Sarah Babb, “Embeddedness, Inflation, and International Regimes: The IMF in the Early Postwar Period”, *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (2007), 128-64; Jeffrey Chwieroth, “Normative Change From Within: The International Monetary Fund’s Approach To Capital Account Liberalization” *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (2008), 129–158; Weaver and Leiteritz.

professional knowledge signifies impartiality and objectivity – as well as reliance on legitimate expertise – and creates the appearance of political neutrality.<sup>19</sup>

While most international bureaucracies are likely to have similar material goals, there is a reason to think that there is more variance in regard to ideational goals – in regard both to the substance of the goals as well as to the commitment to them. Such variance is likely to be the outcome of differences in the ideational contours of the founding documents and of differences in professional socialization. International health organizations are among the international organizations most likely to have bureaucracies that develop autonomous ideational goals and that are highly committed to those goals. This is because international health organizations are likely to have foundational documents that are inherently ideational (these they share with many other international organizations, of course) *and* because they are often dominated by staff coming from the same profession – public health – so they are professionally socialized into a coherent, and shared, professional ethos. Interestingly, this is where one can predict differences between the more traditional international health organizations, such as the WHO, and the newer organizations, like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It is possible that the presence of high commitment to shared ideational goals may be less present in the newer international health organizations. They are designed as public-private partnerships are more ‘open’ in regard to disciplinary orientation and therefore are less dominated by public health or other medical expertise as they also employ other experts – such as health economists, lawyers, and others – who may have a different interpretation of the mission of the organization and how to achieve it.

In short, while there is variation across types of organizations, international bureaucracies are likely to develop material goals and ideational perceptions that determine their positions on initiatives and other demands placed by members. We also need to remember, however, that the capacity of international bureaucracies to act upon their independent preferences is constrained by their relations with members and other external forces. To analyze the relations between international bureaucracies and those who make demands on them, it is useful to once again refer to sociological theories of organizations, particularly the resource dependence approach<sup>20</sup> and the

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19 Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations”, *International Organization* 53:4 (1999), 708.

20 Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, (New York, 1978).

neoinstitutionalist approach.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on that literature, I argued that the ability of international bureaucracies to pursue these goals is bounded by three types of dependence: resource dependence, procedural dependence, and normative dependence.

### *Resource dependence*

International organizations need financial resources to survive and accomplish their goals but most are not self-sufficient. They are therefore heavily dependent on external actors who provide the needed funds.<sup>22</sup> The extent of resource dependence may vary depending on the institutional arrangements in place. A number of conditions are particularly relevant in determining international organizations' level of resource dependence on rich countries. In spite of attempts to draw contributions from private foundations and the private sector, rich countries are still by far the greatest contributors for international organizations. Interestingly, these conditions suggest that new health organizations, such as the Global Fund, are likely to be more dependent on rich countries than older health organizations, such as the WHO.

(1) *The amount of external funds needed.* The greater the amount of funds required by an international organization for pursuing its mission, the more dependent it is on exogenous donors. The World Bank, for example, is especially vulnerable to donors because its operations require great amounts of funds. The World Trade Organization, in contrast, requires a small budget and therefore exogenous actors cannot influence its actions and policies simply by withholding resources or promising additional ones. The International Monetary Fund, in turn, needs significant resources but is less vulnerable than the World Bank since it generates its own revenues.<sup>23</sup> International health organizations do not generate their own revenues. Their level of resource dependence, in turn, largely depends on whether they are operational or focus on policy advocacy or technical assistance. The WHO is clearly dependent on member states and other donors for funds. Still, its programmatic scope is

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21 Paul DiMaggio, "Constructing an Organizational Field as a Professional Project: U.S. Art Museums, 1920-1940" in Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, (Chicago, 1991), 267-292.

22 Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; see also Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, (New York, 1964), James Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, (New York, 1967); Sarah Babb, *Behind the Development Banks*, (Chicago, 2009).

23 Nitsan Chorev and Sarah Babb, "The Crisis of Neoliberalism and the Future of International Institutions: The IMF and the WTO in Comparative Perspective", *Theory and Society* 38 (2009), 459-484.

limited compared to the Global Fund, which is therefore even more dependent than the WHO on financial support.<sup>24</sup>

(2) *The difference in the size of members' contributions.* The greater the amount of funds given by wealthy members compared to the amount of funds given by poor members the more international organizations are dependent on their wealthier members. International organizations like the World Bank, which only rely on contributions of rich countries, are particularly vulnerable. UN specialized agencies, including the WHO, normally rely on a proportionate formula for assessing contributions, usually according to member-states' capacity to pay. While clearly appropriate, this created disproportionate dependence on the United States and other rich countries. Of course, organizations such as the Global Fund, where only some members are donors (the others are recipients) rely even more heavily on rich countries. A related condition is *the number of those who contribute significant funds to the organization and the coherence of their position*. The smaller the number of consequential contributors and the more homogeneous their position, the less leverage an international organization has.

(3) *Mandatory versus voluntary contributions.* Mandatory contributions reduce the ability of wealthy members to use their payments as a bargaining leverage. At the WHO, the budget used to be mostly made of mandatory contributions of member states but over the years the balance has changed and today voluntary contributions, which are also earmarked, consist of a very large part of the annual budget.<sup>25</sup> In organizations like the Global Fund contributions are entirely voluntary.

(4) *Competition with other organizations for access to resources.* Resource dependence is greater when a number of institutions with overlapping mandates compete for the same funds. In this regard, the WHO's dependence increased with the establishment of the Global Fund and many public-private health partnerships in the 2000s.

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24 Between 2002 and 2011 the WHO's total budget was approximately \$1.4 billion per year on average. During the same period the Global Fund was able to raise around \$2 billion per year on average. See Global Fund, "Strategic Investments for Impact: Global Fund Results Report 2012" <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/library/publications/>). For WHO budgets see [http://www.who.int/about/resources\\_planning/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/about/resources_planning/en/index.html)

25 Since the mid-1970s the share of voluntary contributions gradually increased. Voluntary contributions increased to almost 30 percent of WHO total expenditures in 1974–1975, and then to 53 percent in 1980–1981. During the 1980s they remained around 50 percent but increased to closer to 60 percent during the 1990s. By 2004 it was 70 percent (Kelley Lee, *The World Health Organization*, (London and New York, 2009); Patrick Vaughan et al., "Financing the World Health Organization: Global Importance of Extrabudgetary Funds", *Health Policy* 35 (1996), 229–245.



## *Procedural dependence*

Since members are often represented in the governing body, international organizations are vulnerable not only to the power of external forces to withhold their funds but also to the power of members to withhold their votes. To function properly, international organizations require a majority of voting members to agree on policies and programs. If international bureaucracies were neutral, they would have little interest in the content of the policies and programs that are passed by a majority of members. However, since international bureaucracies are interested in the content of the policies and programs, they do depend on members' positions as manifested in the votes. As with resource dependence, institutional arrangements shape the degree of procedural dependence.

(1) *Voting arrangements.* Voting patterns vary across international organizations. Some international organizations that have nation-states as their members follow one-country/one-vote rule, while others follow a 'weighted' arrangement, in which the weight of a state's vote reflects its proportionate financial contribution to the organization. Arguably, procedural dependence has not attracted much attention in the literature because in the international organizations most often studied, the World Bank and the IMF, rich countries have the majority of votes, which creates a likely overlap between resource dependence and procedural dependence. In UN agencies, however, the one-country/one-vote rule has created procedural dependence on poor countries, which have the majority of votes. Because the WHO follows a one-country/one-vote rule, its bureaucracy depends on a majority rule of member-states. The WHO Executive Board – where members reflect the geographical and economic diversity of the WHO member-states – creates an additional layer of procedural dependence that is similarly divorced from resource dependence. The Global Fund is structured very differently. Instead of an assembly of nation-states, the main governing body of the Global Fund is the Board. The Global Fund board has twenty voting members that represent seven 'constituencies.' Constituencies are donor country governments (8 votes), 'implementing' country governments (7 votes), NGOs from both developed and developing countries (1 vote each), private foundations (1 vote), the private sector (1 vote), and people living with AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (1 vote). One important difference between the WHO and the Global Fund, then, is that voting members are not only member-states. Another is the fact that the board is designed so that it is divided into two groups of ten voting members each: donors in one, and

beneficiaries in the other.<sup>26</sup> This eliminates the procedural advantage that poor countries – those that cannot rely on resource dependence – had at the WHO.

(2) *Location of decision-making authority.* Voting arrangements matter only as long as decisions are made by voting members and are not diverted to non-representative sites. At the WHO, one effective way for rich countries to reduce the organization's dependence on the majority of votes has been providing voluntary contributions, which are earmarked. The Global Fund, in contrast, does not allow for earmarking. This prevented the US government, for example, from ordering the Global Fund not to use US contributions to fund, for example, clinics that also support abortion. But it is also the case that the Global Fund is relatively decentralized and many of the decisions are not made by the Board.

### *Normative dependence*

As sociologists of organizations remind us, international organizations need symbolic resources in addition to material ones. To generate support, an organization's presentation of itself, its mission, and its programs have to be accepted as legitimate.<sup>27</sup> Most sources of legitimacy are internal.<sup>28</sup> To be considered 'internally' legitimate, the policies and programs of international organizations need to be consistent with and not go beyond their original mandate. They also have to be seen as neutral: they cannot be seen, for example, as serving the interests of rich countries (or multinational corporations) or to be the mouthpiece of poor countries. Finally, international organizations have to show managerial competence. Competence and efficiency have often been related to the question of neutrality, as rich countries, in particular, blamed politicization for leading to organizational malfunction. Other sources of legitimacy are external. To attain 'external' legitimacy, international organizations need to conform to global norms,

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26 Michel Kazatchkine, "Blog-interview", *The Herald Tribune*, March 12 (2008), <http://blogs.iht.com/tribtalk/business/globalization/?p=672>.

27 John Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutional Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony", *American Journal of Sociology* 83:2 (1977), 340-63; Mark Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches", *Academy of Management Review* 20:3 (1995), 571-610; Ian Hurd, *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council*, (Princeton, 2007).

28 Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 166-170; Hurd 2007; Terence Halliday and Bruce G. Carruthers, *Bankrupt: Global Lawmaking and Systemic Financial Crisis*, (Stanford, 2009).

rules, and principles as they are defined and redefined by dominant global actors.<sup>29</sup>

To summarize, international organizations are dependent on resources, voting majorities, and legitimacy. Due to the institutional arrangements characterizing many international organizations, resource dependence has made them attentive to the demands of rich countries, as well as to private foundations and business. This seems to be even more the case with new international health organizations. Procedural dependence could potentially balance resource dependence by forcing international organization to attend to the wishes of the poor majority. Procedural dependence, however, characterizes older international health organizations but not the new ones. Finally, normative dependence makes international organizations particularly vulnerable to criticisms regarding their scope of authority, neutrality, and competence.

Notably, the focus on the dependence of international organizations on their member states is compatible with the theories that suggest significant influence of member states over policy outcomes, but it shifts the source of this influence from relations among states, which is the focus of most theories of international relations, to relations between states and the international bureaucracy. Policy outcomes, according to the analysis here, do not depend only on the ability of members to shape the position of other members, but also on their ability to control the international organization's leadership and staff. In the next section I argue that, on the contrary, international bureaucracies are often able to bypass exogenous pressures, in spite of their dependence.

## International health organizations as strategic actors

The likely tensions between potentially-autonomous international bureaucracies and their members (as well as non-members) that are emphasized in this paper bring up a question that the literature frequently ignores: given the dependence of international organizations on members, how can international bureaucracies protect their goals and interests when those clash with exogenous demands?

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<sup>29</sup> Meyer and Rowan 1977; W. Richard Scott and John W. Meyer, "The Organization of Societal Sectors" in John W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott, eds, *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality*, (Beverly Hills, 1983), 129-153; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Elizabeth Goodrick and Gerald R. Salancik, "Organizational Discretion in Responding to Institutional Practices: Hospitals and Cesarean Births", *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41:1 (1996), 1-28; Hurd 2007.

General formulations of the constructivist view do acknowledge the external constraints imposed by states.<sup>30</sup> In most of the empirical analyses, however, the potential tension between the independent goals of the international bureaucracy and external demands is bypassed by choosing case studies in which international organizations act independently but in line with states' interests, or case studies in which international organizations act where states are indifferent to the outcome.<sup>31</sup> Hardly any of the analyses in the literature pays attention to instances in which international organizations fail to carry out state demands or act in ways that run against states' interests.<sup>32</sup> One of the outcomes of this bias in the choice of empirical cases is that, in practice, many constructivist accounts tend to overstate the power available to international organizations and downplay the influence of external pressures and constraints.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the oversight of constructivist accounts is not in overstating the autonomy of international organizations, but in neglecting to explore the factors that enable international organizations to advance their autonomous interests under conditions of external opposition.

Principal-agent analyses, in turn, hold that an international organization (the agent) 'can exhibit significant independence' because member states (the principals) are impeded by the complications of 'collective principal,' 'multiple principals' and 'chain of delegation,' which limit their effective supervision.<sup>34</sup> While this formulation reflects greater attentiveness to the potential tensions between member states and international organizations than most constructivist accounts, the principal-agent literature has mostly focused on identifying the characteristics of principals that allowed for more or less effective supervision. As a result, by some scholars' own admission, the analysis 'contains a remarkably thin view of agent behavior'.<sup>35</sup>

In short, most constructivist and principal-agent studies have not analyzed the capacity of international organizations to protect those goals *when these clash with the preferences of member states*. I argue that to understand the capacity of international organizations to protect their goals and preferences also in cases of a potential conflict with member states, we have to analyze not organizations' symbolic resources, such as authority or knowledge, as these

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30 Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 12.

31 Rawi Abdelal, *Capital Rules: The Construction of Global Finance*, (Cambridge, 2007).

32 Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 28.

33 Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Abdelal 2007; Chwiero 2008a.

34 Nielson and Tierney 2003.

35 Darren Hawkins and Wade Jacoby, "How Agents Matter" in Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, eds, *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*, (New York, 2006), 1999.

theories often do, but their practices, particularly their capacity for strategic action. Indeed, my analysis of the strategic responses available to international bureaucracies when facing demands that threaten their goals builds on explorations that have begun among principal-agent scholars and constructivists. In one study by principal-agent theorists, Hawkins and Jacoby atypically investigate not the agents' characteristics but the strategies they use to try to circumvent principals' controls. Their analysis, however, is limited to strategies intended to influence the agent's level of autonomy, such as reinterpretation of mandates, and they do not discuss strategies used by agents within given levels of autonomy.<sup>36</sup> Some constructivist accounts have also begun to investigate the possibility of autonomous action under conditions of existing pressures.<sup>37</sup>

To more systematically identify the strategies that are available to international bureaucracies to protect their goals in the face of incongruous demands I draw on organizational sociology. The focus on strategic action in organizational sociology came as scholars questioned early articulations of neo-institutionalist theory that suggested that organizations conformed to the dictates of their environments and came to recognize instead organizations' possibility for purposive action and strategic choice.<sup>38</sup> Among other contributions, these studies recognized that exogenous dictates were susceptible to interpretation, manipulation, revision, and elaboration by those subject to them.<sup>39</sup> Most systematically, Christine Oliver listed five possible responses by organizational actors to exogenous pressures.<sup>40</sup> Briefly, the possible responses include: acquiescence (acceding to pressures); compromise (exactng concessions); avoidance (attempting to preclude the necessity of conformity); defiance (rejecting expectations); and manipulation (attempting

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36 Ibid.

37 Barnett and Coleman 2005; Catherine Weaver, *Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform*, (Princeton, 2008).

38 Paul DiMaggio, "State Expansion and Organizational Fields", in Richard H. Hall and Robert E. Quinn, eds, *Organizational Theory and Public Policy*, (Beverly Hills, 1983), 147-161; Walter Powell, "Institutional Effects on Organizational Structure and Performance", in Lynne G. Zucker, ed., *Institutional patterns and organizations: Culture and environment*, (Cambridge, 1988), 115-136.

39 W. Richard Scott, "Approaching Adulthood: The Maturing of Institutional Theory", *Theory and Society* 37 (2008), 430; see also DiMaggio 1991; Jerry Goodstein, "Institutional Pressures and Strategic Responsiveness: Employer Involvement in Work-Family Issues", *The Academy of Management Journal* 37:2 (1994), 350-382; Goodrick and Salancik 1996.

40 Christine Oliver, "Strategic Responses to Institutional Pressures", *Academy of Management Review* 16:1 (1991), 145-179. She draws on earlier articulations of possible strategies, including Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) and Richard Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems*, (New Jersey, 1981), chapter 8.

to actively change the content of the expectations). Barnett and Coleman have argued that the same range of strategies was available to international organizations, and suggested a sixth response, that of strategic social construction (tailoring the environment so that it is consistent with the organization's goals);<sup>41</sup> in her work, Weaver has described in detail the use of avoidance (or 'organized hypocrisy') as a central strategy of the World Bank.<sup>42</sup>

While useful, the list of available responses as described in the literature can be analytically confusing. In particular, responses seem to follow a dual linear logic, varying 'from passive conformity to active resistance'.<sup>43</sup> But the two dichotomies – passive-active and conformity-resistance – do not neatly overlap. What makes a response passive or active is not whether it conforms to or resists the exogenous demands. Rather, it is whether the response includes an attempt to alter the meaning of those demands, be this part of either conforming to or resisting them. For example, Oliver lists manipulation – the purposeful attempt to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures in order to change the content of the expectations – as resistance, because it is 'the most active response to these pressures'.<sup>44</sup> If due to manipulation the organization is able to avoid compliance with the original demands, then manipulation should indeed be viewed as resistance. However, if after manipulating their content the organization adheres to the altered expectations in a way that seems to satisfy the original demands, manipulation should instead be viewed as a form of active – or strategic – compliance. (What Oliver calls 'active' responses I refer to from now on as 'strategic'). Lumping the two dichotomies together prevents an independent assessment of passive vs. active/strategic responses as distinct from compliance vs. resistance, which, I suggest below, is fundamental for our understanding of the ability of international bureaucracies to successfully deviate from exogenous prescriptions.

Table 1 displays the different types of responses that emerge if we create a distinction between the two dichotomies, so that the categories are based on (1) compliance / resistance = whether the response leads to changes that satisfy the exogenous forces (compliance) or whether the response avoids changes or leads to changes that do not satisfy the exogenous forces (resistance) and (2) passive / strategic = whether the organization takes the pressures 'as a given constraint to be obeyed or defied' (passive) or whether it attempts to redefine

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41 Barnett and Coleman 2005.

42 Weaver 2008.

43 Oliver 1991, 146.

44 Ibid., 157.

– ‘alter, re-create, or control’ – the meaning of the exogenous pressures (strategic).<sup>45</sup>

**Table 1.** Types of possible responses

	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Resistance</b>
<b>Passive</b>	Adherence to original expectations	Disobedience
<b>Strategic</b>	Adherence to <u>reinterpreted</u> expectations	Voidance

This categorization creates four types of possible responses.

- Passive compliance & passive resistance

Passive responses are those that accept the demands as given and include *passive compliance*, when the international bureaucracy adheres to the original expectations, and *passive resistance*, when the international bureaucracy explicitly disobeys the exogenous demands. The familiar dichotomy between compliance and resistance refers, in fact, to these ‘passive’ categories. One familiar illustration of passive compliance is the response of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the 1970s to the relatively radical demands of developing countries. In line with those demands, UNESCO initiated a controversial New International Information Order with no regard to the likelihood that it would undermine the legitimacy of the organization in the eyes of developed countries. Indeed, the US government argued that the proposed policies undermine independent journalism and withdrew from the Organization.<sup>46</sup> An example of passive resistance is provided by Barnett and Coleman, who describe how Interpol defied pressures to become involved in counterterrorism, in fear that if it became involved in political cases the organization would break up. In response, members punished the organization by establishing competing police networks to coordinate their antiterrorist policies.<sup>47</sup>

- Strategic compliance & strategic resistance

The two brief examples above reveal the risk attached to both passive compliance and passive resistance – they often require the sacrifice of the bureaucracy’s material and/or ideational goals. It is for this reason that

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Imber, *The USA, ILO, UNESCO AND IAEA: Politicization and Withdrawal in the Specialized Agencies*, (London, 1989); Robert Wells, “Introduction: the UN’s Specialized Agencies: Adaptation and Role Changes in an Altered International Environment” in Robert N. Wells, ed, *Peace by Pieces- United Nations Agencies and Their Roles: A Reader and Selective Bibliography*, (New Jersey, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> Barnett and Coleman 2005.

international bureaucracies often apply the alternative responses of strategic compliance and strategic resistance. Both strategic responses involve altering the meaning of the demands but with different outcomes. In the case of *strategic compliance*, the international bureaucracy alters the meaning of the demands – so the demands are more easily reconciled with bureaucracy’s own position – before it adheres to them. In the case of *strategic resistance*, the international bureaucracy reframes the demands so that it is no longer expected to conform to them. By formulating policies according to altered expectations, international bureaucracies are able, at times, to comply in a way less disagreeable to them, hence minimizing the cost of compliance, and, at other times, to refuse compliance in a way that is not considered resistance, thereby minimizing the risk of sanctions.

When strategically complying with exogenous demands, an international bureaucracy endorses the demands of member states but only after giving those demands a meaning that, while compatible with the original expectations, could be reconciled with the organization’s independent goals. Importantly, reinterpreting expectations (altering the meaning of the demands) is not the same as changing expectations (altering the demands), which should be considered an act of resistance rather than compliance. Strategic compliance is not about making the exogenous forces change their demands so much as convincing those forces that the *original* demands were met. Such strategic compliance leads not to partial compliance, which is one expected outcome of passive compliance (for example, in compromise), but to distorted compliance, that is, a complete adherence to the requirements, once those requirements are reinterpreted. By offering an acceptable reframing of the dominant logic – the challenge is exactly in making such reframing acceptable – international bureaucracies make a distorted compliance look complete.

Unlike UNESCO, the WHO bureaucracy responded to the demands of developing countries in the 1970s not with passive compliance but strategic compliance. By redefining the principles articulated in the developing countries’ call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) – including regarding development as social development, focusing on intra-state rather than inter-state inequities, championing self-reliance while downplaying the duties of developed countries, and supporting the transfer only of appropriate technologies – the WHO bureaucracy was able to successfully present its agenda of Health for All by the Year 2000 and the primary health care approach as compatible with those demands.

When strategically resisting exogenous demands, an international bureaucracy accepts, but does not adhere to, the external principles. Strategic resistance involves directly confronting, rather than bypassing (as in



avoidance), the exogenous demands. Unlike passive articulations of defiance, however, strategic resistance attempts to minimize the extent to which external forces would view the response as challenging the legitimacy of their expectations. An international bureaucracy that strategically resists external expectations does not reject the dominant logic, but rather relies on that very logic to legitimate its refusal to comply. Such justifications may allow an international bureaucracy to void the expectation to comply, thereby rendering what member states might have viewed as provocative (passive) resistance into an agreeable action.

The WHO bureaucracy provides a number of examples of strategic resistance. In the 1980s, the WHO leadership was able to successfully oppose an international code of marketing practices of pharmaceutical products by drawing on NIEO principles of political and economic sovereignty. In a dispute over intellectual property protection a decade later, the WHO secretariat was able to resist the demands of rich countries by implying that it was not resisting at all, since intellectual property rules already contained the flexibilities that the secretariat believed should be used for the manufacturing of generic versions of patented AIDS drugs.

## Conditions for strategic response

Under what conditions do international bureaucracies engage in strategic rather than passive forms of response? When do they choose strategic compliance and when strategic resistance? And under what conditions are they more likely to succeed? Scholars have argued that an organization's choice of response to exogenous pressures is determined by the perceived cost to the organizational goals that compliance would require compared to the cost to the organization if it resisted the exogenous demands.<sup>48</sup> However, strategic responses to exogenous demands lower potential costs: altering the meaning of the demands that the organization complies with reduces the degree to which the organization's principles and goals are sacrificed, and being able to convincingly justify resistance reduces the risk of being penalized for it. The potential ability to reduce costs, by means of strategic compliance or resistance, means that costs alone cannot explain an organization's choice of action. Instead, we need to consider the factors that provide capacity for reducing the potential costs, that is, capacity for adaptive strategies. I argue that there are at least three factors that influence strategic response: how

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48 Ibid.; Oliver 1991.

independent the goals and preferences are, scope of supervision, and type of leadership.

*Independent goals and preferences.* Strategic adaptation is called for only when there is a clash between the demands made by the environment and the bureaucracy's understanding of its material or ideational goals.<sup>49</sup> For such a clash to occur the organization's goals have to develop independently of its political environment. This would normally be the case unless the dominant forces in environment are able to co-opt the organization or its leadership. Cooptation by exogenous forces is more likely when an organization is dependent on the same parties both for votes *and* funds (for example, the World Bank) but can also occur without such an intentional design (for example, UNESCO during the NIEO era was arguably over-committed to the NIEO at the expense of the Organization's own goals). Without the presence of other conditions, however, independent goals and preferences could still lead to passive, rather than strategic, responses. Of course, independent goals and preferences reflect the organization's level of autonomy. Since, as discussed above, international health organizations like the Global Fund are more dependent on rich countries than international health organizations like the WHO – and they also include a more diverse bodies of experts – it is likely that they will act more passively and less strategically than the WHO.

*Scope of supervision.* As principal-agent theorists claim, the scope of supervision available to members over the international bureaucracy affects the agent's capacity for strategic action. Principal-agent theories identify a number of likely imperfections of oversight mechanisms, including uncertainty, lack of information, and multiple-principal problems. One potentially significant condition for effective supervision, not mentioned in the principal-agent analyses, is the position of the delegates representing and talking on behalf of member states at the international organization. States themselves are fragmented into partially autonomous bureaucracies, with officials often representing the position of their respective departments rather than of the government as a whole.<sup>50</sup> Most delegates to the World Health Assembly and other international health organizations come from health ministries and are likely to have their own reasons (such as competition for budget allocations at home) to support policies advocated by the international health organizations. These delegates, like the officials of international health organizations, may also share the professional ethos of public health experts

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49 Barnett and Coleman 2005, 595.

50 Nitsan Chorev, *Remaking U.S. Trade Policy: From Protectionism to Globalization*, (Ithaca, 2007).

(it is interesting that at the Global Fund the US government is today represented not by the Department of Health and Human Services but by the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, under the US Department of State). This potential alliance of delegates with the international organization may undermine effective supervision. This is all the more so when the delegates come from departments relatively marginalized in the government, such as health or education, rather than departments that are likely to be more influential in the government, such as finance or foreign affairs.

Scholars often suggest that a multiplicity of external demands, made by competing parties, decreases members' supervision and increases the organization's room for maneuvering.<sup>51</sup> But conflicting expectations – in international health organizations it may include wealthy countries, poor countries, health activists, pharmaceutical companies, and so on – may limit the bureaucracy's adaptive capacity. In such cases, especially when conflict between members puts the legitimacy of the organization at risk, strategic adaptation is often used to reach a compromise agreeable to the competing exogenous interests at the cost of the bureaucracy's own position. The presence of a multiplicity of demands may also affect the type of strategic responses, when those are employed: a multiplicity of demands limits the organization's interpretive flexibility while providing some external support for a defiant response, and so multiple demands often lead to strategic resistance rather than to strategic compliance, as was the case in the WHO bureaucracy's response to the code of conduct of marketing of pharmaceutical products.

Another factor that determines the scope of supervision relates to the precision of the demands. Goodrick and Salancik have convincingly argued that exogenous pressures are most influential – that is, most likely to lead to passive compliance – when they are certain, since uncertainty creates discretion, which allows organizations to use their own particularistic interests to guide their definition of appropriate action. When the exogenous expectations are imprecise, organizations can 'generate variation in practice while conforming to their [political environment] by pursuing their strategic interests within the limits of the discretion permitted by the [environment] generating it'.<sup>52</sup> The types of expectations, then, set the boundaries of permitted discretion and therefore the range of available strategies. Some organizations are more likely to face loose expectations while others more

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51 Oliver 1991; Nielson and Tierney 2003.

52 Goodrick and Salancik 1996, 2; see also Lauren Edelman, "Legal Ambiguity and Symbolic Structures: Organizational Mediation of Civil Rights", *American Journal of Sociology* 97:6 (1992), 1531-1576.

often receive tailored instructions. The specificity of demands may also affect the choice between the two adaptive strategies: while loose expectations allow for strategic compliance, the possibility for creative interpretation is more restricted when demands are more concise, and organizations are therefore likely to resort to strategic resistance in such cases.

*Leadership.* Another factor affecting the likelihood of strategic action is the leadership of the organization. Most of the literature on international relations concerned with the question of executive leadership has followed a ‘great-man theory of international organization,’ which focused on the personal characteristics of the leader in question. The exception was the work by Ernst B. Haas, which situated the leader within a given environment and emphasized the leader’s capacity to manipulate that environment to expand the agency’s authority.<sup>53</sup> Robert Cox, while agreeing with Haas, has criticized him for an underestimation of the constraints which are inherent in the set of relationships of which the executive head is a part, particularly with the rest of the bureaucracy, member states and the international system.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, just the way that the agency of international organizations is constrained by its environment, as analyzed in detail above, the agency of individuals in an international organization, including leaders, is also constrained by both the organization and the environment. We can think of it in terms of ‘nested agents,’ where individual agents act within the constraints of their organizations that act, in turn, within the constraints of their environments.

Here once again it is useful to draw from organizational sociology, which has similarly struggled with the ‘paradox of embedded agency’,<sup>55</sup> that is, with the possibility for human agency in conditions of organizational constraints. Scholars of organizations identified two types of conditions that enable ‘institutional entrepreneurship’;<sup>56</sup> that is, agents capable of introducing changes that are ‘divergent with reference to the institutional environment in which they are embedded’. The first type of enabling conditions includes ‘field-level’ institutional characteristics that determine the institutional scope of action. The two factors highlighted above – independent goals and imprecise expectations – are such field-level characteristics. However, ‘Although field-level conditions ... seem to play an important enabling role in institutional entrepreneurship, all actors embedded in the same field are not equally likely to act as institutional entrepreneurs’. The second type of

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53 Haas 1964.

54 Cox 1969.

55 Petter Holm, “The dynamics of Institutionalization: Transformation Processes in Norwegian Fisheries”, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40:3, 1995, 398-422.

56 Paul DiMaggio, “Interest and Agency in Institutional Theory” in Lynne Zucker, ed., *Institutional Patterns and Organizations: Culture and Environment*, (Cambridge, 1988).

enabling conditions emphasizes actors' specific, but still institutional rather than personal, characteristics. Particularly important is 'the social position an actor occupies within an organizational field'. An actor's social positions both in the organization *and* in the environment are important.<sup>57</sup>

In regard to a leader's social position in the organization, I suggest that strategic response is more likely to occur when the institutional conditions allow for strong, effective leadership. Institutional conditions for strong leadership provide the head of the organization with the means to transform the organization without such attempts being paralyzed by external opposition or internal debates. UN specialized agencies and programmes have been relatively conducive to strong leaders, such as Raul Prebisch at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and James P. Grant at UNICEF. At the WHO, too, the institutional conditions have allowed Directors-General to effectively shape the direction of the Organization. For example, the Director-General has control over the budget and therefore great influence over the organization's priorities. In addition, Directors-General can often create new divisions, hire new recruits to run those divisions, and in other ways 'layer' new priorities on top of old programs, while avoiding the conflicts which would emerge out of actively abandoning previous priorities.<sup>58</sup> The authority that Directors-General have over staffing is essential for strategic adaptation because, as Chwierothe convincingly argues, while it is possible to change the position of existing staff, it is more common for organizations to change their perceptions through the entry into the organization of new recruits.<sup>59</sup>

The organizational literature on individual characteristics focuses mostly on actors' social position in their organization. In addition, we have to consider the social position of the actor in the environment.<sup>60</sup> I suggest that strategic response is more likely to occur when the leaders are partially

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57 Julie Battilana, Bernard Leca and Eva Boxenbaum, "How Actors Change Institutions: Towards A Theory of Institutional Entrepreneurship", *The Academy of Management Annals* 3:1 (2009), 377–419.

58 Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*, (Princeton NJ, 2001); Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen A. Thelen, "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies" in Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen A. Thelen, eds, *Beyond continuity: institutional change in advanced political economies*, (New York, 2005), 22-24.

59 Jeffrey Chwierothe, "Organizational Change "From Within": Exploring The World Bank's Early Lending Policies", *Review of International Political Economy* 15:4 (2008), 481–505.

60 Patricia Thornton and William Ocasio, "Institutional Logics and the Historical Contingency of Power in Organizations: Executive Succession in the Higher Education Publishing Industry, 1958-1990", *American Journal of Sociology* 10:3 (1999), 801-843.

embedded in the exogenous environment, which allows them to function as bridges between the organization and the broader environment. This requires being familiar with and appreciative of the dominant logic that as leaders of international organizations they are expected to navigate. Being part of the new logic allows leaders to adopt, at least in part, to the exogenous principles, and being in possession or being able to gain sufficient knowledge of the environment to be able to manipulate it. While partial embeddedness is an important condition, complete embeddedness – leading to greater loyalty to the environment than to the organization – may lead to passive compliance. Moreover, I argue that there is a tendency for strategic capacity of leaders to decline over the course of their tenure. Newly recruited leaders can rethink the organization's position and introduce strategic changes that, if the leaders are also well-positioned in the environment, are likely to be successfully accepted by the environment. However, these policy changes, and the ideas that inform or legitimate them, then get institutionalized and become barriers if new exogenous conditions introduce themselves and require a response from the organization.

In short, strategic adaptation is more likely to occur when the organization has independent goals and preferences, when external supervision is relatively loose, and when the organization has a strong, well positioned, and recently appointed leader.

### Studying international organizations *as* agents: methodological implications

Studying international organizations as *interested* agents rather than as arenas where others get to act requires a careful conceptualization of the players and a nuance methodological approach to complex organizations.

First, how to define the boundaries of the organization? It is not always clear, for example, which parts of an organization are the 'bureaucracy' and which parts are the external environment. At the WHO, for example, the paid staff – including the Director-General – should be considered the organization's bureaucracy but the World Health Assembly, which consists of delegates of the various member-states, is already part of the exogenous environment that the bureaucracy is facing. This is a relatively simple case since the staff is expected to follow – and likely to internalize – the perceptions of the organization as a whole while the delegates are formally requested to represent their respective countries. For the same reason, the Global Fund's Executive Board is also part of the environment rather than part of the

organization. Other cases, however, may be more complicated. The WHO's Executive Board, for example, is made of representatives of member-states who are expected to serve, however, in their individual capacity. The Board is still part of the environment, since Board members are not expected to consider the interests of the organization but, at minimum, this complicates a clear dichotomy, and other cases may be even more complicated.

Second, how to identify the material and ideational preferences of the organization? Two risks need to be avoided. One is tautology, where preferences are inferred from action. We should not infer bureaucracy's preferences based on its actions given the possibility that the actions already reflect a compromise of the preferences. The other risk is rationality, where preferences are inferred from what a hypothetical 'rational' organization is likely to prefer. Instead, material and ideational preferences – including the balancing between competing preferences – have to be identified through empirical observation that is independent from the choices made in response to a particular event. In addition, of course, there's a need to clearly identify and define the environment and the demands made by the environment.

Finally, and most importantly, there is a need to clearly identify the bureaucracy's response. Is it compliance or resistance? Passive or strategic? This categorization is not trivial. Specifically, it cannot be judged by the outcome alone. Indeed, one of the reasons that the literature has focused on resistance and compliance – outcomes that can be measured *by looking at the outcome* – rather than on the types of resistance or compliance – strategic or passive – is likely to be that types can only be identified by looking at the processes and practices preceding the outcomes. In my study on the World Health Organization the main empirical focus was on showing the possibility of interested, strategic behavior by international bureaucracies, including both strategic resistance and strategic compliance.<sup>61</sup> For that purpose, my analysis was of the interaction between the bureaucracy, on the one hand, and the external environment, on the other. The focus was on the strategies, policies and programs of the bureaucracy as they are presented to and negotiated with the external environment. There are two ways to advance this inquiry. One is through a systematic comparison across international organizations. A comparative analysis across relatively similar organizations (for example, UN agencies) would enrich our understanding of the conditions under which strategic action is possible and the conditions under which it is successful. A comparative analysis between state-centered international organizations (for example, UN agencies) and newer organizations that are structured as public-

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61 Nitsan Chorev, *The World Health Organization between North and South*, (Ithaca, 2012).

private partnerships or as networks would provide a useful way to think of the differences between former and current forms of global governance. Another way of advancing the inquiry is to analyze the internal processes in the bureaucracy that led to the chosen response, which will again help identify the conditions under which strategic action is possible. How are the organizational interests and preferences articulated? What is the process by which such decisions are made? How is opposition, if there is one, managed?

Of course, considering international organizations as agents open very many other important questions, not only in regard to their response to external pressures. We still need to learn much more, for example, about how interests and preferences are constructed and internalized by staff. And once international organizations are recognized as carriers of interests we can also start asking about their ability not only to respond to the external environment but also to influence and shape the external environment. For scholars of international organizations – and international health organizations specifically – this should be an exciting terrain.

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