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Article — Accepted Manuscript (Postprint)

A Mandated Basis of Interorganizational Relations: The Legal-Political Network

Human Relations

Suggested Citation: Raelin, Joseph A. (1980) : A Mandated Basis of Interorganizational Relations: The Legal-Political Network, Human Relations, ISSN 1741-282X, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, Vol. 33, Iss. 1, pp. 57-68,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678003300104> ,
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/001872678003300104>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/269219>

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... to appear in Human Relations

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A MANDATED BASIS OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS:
THE LEGAL-POLITICAL NETWORK

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September 5, 1978

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to broaden our understanding of inter-organizational phenomena by focusing on the mandated basis of interorganizational relations, which is distinguished from the exchange and power-dependency bases. In particular, the paper defines and elaborates upon a subset of mandated interorganizational relations - the legal-political network. Five characteristics of the legal-political subset are identified based upon the author's prior empirical research. Avenues for future research are cited.

A MANDATED BASIS OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS:

THE LEGAL-POLITICAL NETWORK

The field of interorganizational relations (IOR) has received considerable attention in recent years although much of the empirical work has focused on transactions between organizations under a voluntaristic or exchange interaction basis (i.e., Selznick, 1949; Levine and White, 1961; Klongan et. al., 1969; Tuite, 1972). The exchange basis of IOR concerns a voluntary interaction between organizations which are interested in realizing individual and mutual goals.

Schmidt and Kochan (1977) have recently suggested, largely on the basis of their own research (Schmidt and Kochan, 1972; Kochan, 1975; Kochan et. al. 1975), the inclusion of a second basis of IOR, referred to as the power-dependency approach. Under this basis, not all of the potential participant organizations are interested in interaction. Therefore, a powerful organization(s) within a network must supply the motivation to interact.

This paper recognizes a third basis of IOR which is distinguished from the above two. Originally coined and then studied by Hall et. al. (1977), it is referred to as the "mandated" basis of IOR, and has received empirical treatment as an interorganizational construct by Warren (1967), Turk (1970, 1973), and Aldrich (1976). Under this basis, organizations are assembled into a network by a mandate in order to realize individual and mutual goals. It differs from the exchange basis in that although the interacting organizations are expected to be willing participants, the motivation to interact is provided by the mandate rather than strictly by the parties under mutual consent. The mandated basis also differs from the power-dependency basis since an element of mutuality is provided by the mandate, thereby reducing the overriding concern with power as the motivation for interaction.

In this paper, the author will attempt to sketch a reasonably complete picture of one form of the mandated basis of IOR, the legal-political network, thereby broadening Hall's (1977) seminal work in this area. I will first elaborate upon the concept of mandated networks and provide a description of the subset, the legal-political network. Next, I will discuss some of the identifying characteristics of legal-political networks, based primarily on my own empirical research findings. Finally, I will close with a discussion of avenues for future research both from a general perspective of mandated networks as well as from a specific perspective based upon some of the characteristics to be identified for the legal-political subset.

THE CONCEPT OF MANDATED NETWORKS

As indicated earlier, the motivational force behind interaction under the mandated basis of IOR is the mandate itself. The mandate is an expression of an interorganizational decision shaped by either a personal effort on the part of a set of organizations interested in mutual advancement or by an institutional effort imposed on a set of organizations by the larger society. Therefore, the source of the mandate distinguishes two types of networks: one created by formal agreement, the other externally imposed by law. Figure 1 depicts the three different bases of interorganizational relations in terms of the symmetry of initiation of interaction on the part of the network participants. The two subsets of the mandated network, formal agreement and legal-political, are also indicated.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Before proceeding with a discussion of these two subsets, it is important to note, as Aldrich (1976) and Hall et.al. (1977) have suggested, that the basis of networks is not always constant. In fact, it is more commonly evolutionary. Mandated networks usually have been preceded by either exchange or power-dependency bases. However, organizations participating in mandated networks are assured at least a modicum of permanence. In exchange networks, member organizations may choose to leave the network when their goals and interests are no longer mutual with that of the network. In power-dependency networks, an organization may leave the network when it no longer is dependent on a parent or sponsor organization. In mandated networks, on the other hand, the mandate itself assures a degree of permanence as one of its founding principles. Organizations remain in the network for a minimum duration due to managerial-contractual or legal-political obligations.

Finally, it should also be noted that the designation of the three separate bases of IOR, as depicted in Figure 1, is meant to be illustrative and does not rule out the formation of hybrids, which indeed represents a fair portion of the real world. However, the three-way differentiation may be a useful distinction for purposes of future empirical interorganizational analysis.

Turning, then, to the two subsets of mandated networks, the network mandated by formal agreement is closer to the exchange basis of IOR than the legal-political network in the sense that the initiation of interaction on the part of the participating organizations is relatively symmetrical. In other words, parties are willing to establish some form of regularized exchange and so utilize the formal agreement as the implementing vehicle. Pfeffer has been particularly active in examining the interorganizational implications of formal agreements in terms of mergers (Pfeffer, 1972) and joint ventures (Pfeffer and Nowak, 1976). There have also been a number of studies which have researched less tightly structured varieties of formal agreements, such as joint activities (Clark, 1965; Aiken and Hage, 1968).

The legal-political subset

Perhaps, the most popular form of mandated network assembled in recent years has been the legal-political network. As Figure 1 shows, the legal-political network approaches the power-dependency basis of IOR in that its constituent organizations are not all necessarily in agreement as to the formation of the network or initiation of interaction. The motivation to interact is produced by conformity to a higher authority expressed in the form of a law or set of regulations. The mandate is most often the result of political action by elements of society, not necessarily involved in the network, which desire new or improved products or services.

The recent popularity of legal-political networks in the United States is largely due to the impact of revenue-sharing forms of intergovernmental relations and, in particular, of intergovernmental finance in our federalistic political system. The categorical grant system typical of the Sixties and reminiscent of the redistributive political culture of the Great Society was more an instigator of voluntary or power-dependency rather than mandated networks. Recipients of grants at the local level would interact but not in conformity to a mandate as much as due to a desire for mutual cooperation or for avoidance of competition. The demise of the Great Society saw an overwhelming concern of critics with the duplication of effort rampant at the local level. Besides the political transition of the period which advocated transfer of control of social programs to local governments, efforts were being made to insure the "intergration of services."

Therefore, written into special revenue-sharing and other social legislation of the Seventies were provisions stipulating the participation of specific organizations and actors which would be mandated to coordinate services and efforts at local, sub-state, state, and/or regional levels. Representative of this type of legislation were four laws: Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, and National Health Planning and Resources Development Act of 1974. In each, local networks were created throughout the country, each composed of a multitude of organizations and actors, and each mandated to perform functions expressly designated by legislation.

Although legal-political networks were created well before 1973, the special revenue-sharing legislation of the recent period makes network creation relatively explicit by naming potential participants or role occupants. Prior mandates allowed more hybridization. For example, the role of the Employment Service in coordinating the functions of manpower agencies under the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 (MDTA) is not comparable to that of the prime sponsor under CETA. The former, it is contended, allowed both more voluntarism and power-dependency relations than is characteristic of the CETA prime sponsor.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEGAL-POLITICAL NETWORKS

Below, five conceptual characteristics of legal-political networks are identified based upon the author's empirical findings. These characteristics apply to the "pure" form, typical, for example, of networks created under special revenue-sharing legislation.

1. The most important characteristic of legal-political networks emanates from the basis of formation, the mandate itself. It has been referred to by Raelin (1978) as network distributional balance, which compares the actual distribution of the dimensions of influence and domain in the network with the normative distribution stipulated by the mandate. It is essential for sound network development that there be balance or correspondence to the normative designs of the mandate. This may appear to represent a conservative view of development since it does not seem to prescribe a change mechanism for the network. It is preferable in the legal-political network, however, that the operational component perform its task functions in conformity to the mandate, at least initially so that lawmakers and top-level

administrators may assess the responsiveness of the mandate. Adaptations can then be more correctly made at the source. Naturally, not all specifications regarding network influence and domain will be clarified in the mandate; as a result, there will be ample opportunity for corrective mutual adjustment. This might be most appropriately organized by debate within the operational component, thus insuring not only a sense of ownership over important operational decisions but also providing for adaptation and renewal at that level.

Since the concept of network distributional balance has been referred to in terms of the critical dimensions of influence and domain, these will receive additional attention.

a. Influence may be broken down into two categories: power and authority. The latter carries a notion of legitimacy which is accorded by the mandate. In the legal-political network, oftentimes the authority structure is mapped by the legislation. In most cases, a focal agency is designated, in which event the normative design should approach a wheel configuration with the focal agency at the hub (Evan, 1972). In the health field, the health systems agency (HSA) would perform this role; in the manpower field, the corresponding role incumbent would be the planning office or administrator of the CETA prime sponsor. Besides the focal agency, other network organizations will be named in the legislation creating legal-political networks. Their relative authority in the network, if not designated clearly by the mandate, might well be established by the directorate, which, depending upon the particular law or its interpretation, might be the focal agency, the funding source, or the grant recipient. (I will refer to the directorate hereupon as the focal agency.) Correspondence to the normative design of authority is again crucial in those instances where it is expressly stipulated.

However, where it is not stipulated, or in general, where the network begins to operate aside from the written mandate, notions of power come into play. Although power is not as active a dimension in the legal-political network as in the exchange or especially the power-dependency network (Hall et. al., 1977), it is nevertheless present in some degree in any instance when there is an assemblage of actors who must get things done. Some organizations which are not mentioned in the mandate or accorded much attention by the focal agency of the network may jockey for position and influence in the network. The focal agency, although situated at the helm of the network, must use some form of power besides whatever authority it has been accorded in order to carry out its role effectively as operational manager. Bunker (1980) has suggested that the focal agency's power

will be intrinsic to its task performance. In other words, its mandated functions must be done well. In addition to this, however, other efforts must be undertaken by the focal agency to establish its power posture. These include the promotion of a variety of external inputs into the network's development, the participation of a full range of network actors in the formation of strategic and operational commitments, the broad dissemination of developmental procedures, and the continuous corrective adjustment of plans and programs undertaken by the network.

b. Domain, referring to the allocation of resources among network participants, is a pre-condition to coordination in exchange networks and is therefore open to deliberation. In legal-political networks, however, the domain is specified, at least in broad terms. Most of the network participants are aware of their potential responsibilities before entering the network. Conformity to the assigned task is therefore critical until the normative designations are altered by debate within the network, by rule of the focal agency, or by legislation. In addition, clarity of role as well as specification of a host of operational functions peculiar to the network and not part of the mandate, are subject to further debate or to assignment by the focal agency.

The concept of consensus, either of domain or of ideology or operating philosophy, given the preceding discussion, is not critical in the legal-political network (Benson, 1975; Aldrich, 1976; Raelin, 1978). There is relatively high agreement on the nature and distribution of the task environment since it is instrumental to network formation under the mandate. If consensus is not arrived at early on in the network, a socialization process exists to bring members into relative conformity on domain.

2. Although domain consensus does not emerge as a discriminating concept in legal-political networks, there are other traits or attitudes which are important. Among these are performance evaluation, linkage evaluation, and leadership evaluation (Raelin, 1978). For example, although there may be relative agreement in networks as to "who does what," there will be considerable disagreement as regards "how well."

Performance evaluation refers to the adequacy of the network as a whole as well as of each component organization in performing its assigned task functions. Linkage evaluation includes such constructs as the assessment of working relationships and of the reliability, content, and timeliness of communications among network participants.

Finally, leadership evaluation considers the assessment of the performance of network leadership. The concept of network leadership is purely a network phenomenon in that it involves functions which go beyond the management of single organizations. It includes functions which truly guide the direction of the network as a whole, such as: coordination of activities, information-gathering, initiation of network-wide dialogue, responsiveness, introduction of change, delivery of feedback, and public relations. Network leadership, moreover, need not be performed by only one individual. A number of leaders may emerge to perform separate but necessary leadership functions in the network.

3. Whereas competition and conflict are associated with and perhaps even necessary to network development under exchange and power-dependency bases (Litwak and Hylton, 1962; Schmidt and Kochan, 1977), they are seen as dysfunctional in the mandated case. In legal-political networks, in particular, since the distribution of domain and influence is largely predetermined, competition and conflict constitute evidence that the mandate is not clear and binding or that it is being expressly rejected (Raelin, 1978).

Competition, which according to White (1974), refers to that state when organizations in a network vie for a common pool of resources the allocative criteria of which are set by a third party, may occur in legal-political networks especially where voluntaristic patterns are apparent. Where the focal agency, for example, distributes a specified amount of resources to a non-specified number of actors, competition is likely to ensue to gain shares of the scarce resources. In most cases, the distribution of resources to actors will be explicit in legal-political networks, thereby reducing the likelihood of competition.

Conflict, wherein resources are demanded in a network where no allocative criteria are set (White, 1974), can be a more generalized condition than competition since it has so many interpersonal as well as interorganizational implications. It may also be inherent in legal-political networks which have evolved from prior exchange or power-dependency networks. Changes of this kind almost always entail a redistribution in the power structure of networks, a condition which inevitably provides fertile ground for conflict.

Although resolution of competition or conflict sometimes opens avenues for greater mutual understanding, in the legal-political network, this is seen as a rare phenomenon occurring only in the long-run. Competition and conflict constitute manifestations of a disruption of programs flow, which although must be resolved, represent obstacles to operational clarity. Avenues for network adaption should be

provided by the mandate through the operational component. Competition or conflict might be viewed, then, as defects in that component. Therefore, the emphasis in the legal-political network should be first on the prevention of competition or conflict and then secondly on its resolution.

4. Coordination, the mutual identification and/or implementation of joint activities, is normally construed as a dependent variable in interorganizational analysis. Whereas in non-mandated networks, intensity or frequency of interaction is oftentimes the crucial dimension; in legal-political networks, it does not follow that more coordination is better coordination. Again, depending upon the exactness of the mandate in specifying task performance, coordination among member organizations of the network should correspond to task requisites or to functional interdependence between these organizations (Raelin, 1978). It may well be, for example, that some of the participant actors need not interact at all in the network; others may require constant coordination.

Balanced coordination in accordance with task requisites must not only be considered in terms of degree, but also in terms of type. Certain linkages may need to be standardized to facilitate the exchange of necessary and frequent communications. For example, these may be handled by the simple transfer of records or memoranda or by the holding of occasional meetings. Yet, due to uncertainty in the task environment, there are some linkages which must go unplanned and unstructured. Modes of exchange may be formal or informal, again depending upon the nature of the task. In sum, the precise type of coordination to be used in the network must be worked out so as to adapt to the operational system. The focal agency may be instrumental, in this regard, to develop an appropriate linkage design. Whatever, the design of the necessary linkages must be limited and shaped by the task environment.

5. The final characteristic of legal-political networks to be discussed - effectiveness - has recently been incorporated as a dependent variable in an interorganizational analysis of mandated networks (Raelin, 1978). In the legal-political subset, the familiar goal attainment model of effectiveness is not sufficient either to explain the concept or to provide a suitable measurement mechanism. Rather a systems orientation should be considered (Etzioni, 1960). This acknowledges the multiplicity of functions and the interdependency of objectives typical of the legal-political network. Accordingly,

a two-level analysis of effectiveness might be considered; one at the operational level, the other at the mandate-control level.

At the operational level, an effort is made to determine if the operational procedures are being correctly observed and if the tasks are being performed to insure the proper delivery of products and services, all in accordance with the stipulations of the mandate. Goal criteria can certainly be attached to the accomplishment of product or service delivery, but the process of delivery must also be considered, particularly where a number of actors are participating and concurrently representing external non-participating interests, as is the case with advisory councils. The evaluation of effectiveness at the operational level will most likely be conducted by the focal agency.

Administrative adaptations are also initiated by the operational component in an orderly fashion as prescribed by the mandate. These latter changes may be procedural as well as structural such as might be incorporated in a re-design of the delivery system. Such basic changes as this fall under the natural purview of the operational component since it carries out the provisions of the mandate and maintains first-line contact with the ultimate recipients of the network's products or services.

Even if the operational criteria are satisfactorily met, the overall purposes behind the creation of the mandate as well as the design must be reviewed to insure that the ultimate need addressed by the mandate be continuously fulfilled. Thus, at the mandate-control level broad changes may be considered to adapt the network to the prevailing needs of society and the involved publics. This can be effected by changes in the authorizing legislation or in the regulations and may be stimulated through such vehicles as oversight hearings, longitudinal evaluations, press coverage, etc.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final section of the paper, avenues for future research are cited in terms of mandated networks in general as well as in terms of the characteristics discussed heretofore regarding the legal-political subset.

First, following the lead of Whetten (1974) and Aldrich (1976), interorganizational research might pursue the impact on IOR of changing the basis of networks; for example,

what is the impact of mandating network cooperation through public policy? This latter question can be particularly intriguing, in light of this paper, if the network in question were existent previously on a voluntary basis. Findings could have broad implications for decisions as to whether to implement public policy through mandate and if so, under what conditions.

Research might also consider the perspectives of various actors in a network as regards the policy implications of mandated interaction. For instance, the perceptions of chief executives, regarding the participation of their office in a program network in conjunction with a diverse set of other policymakers, might be isolated for study. Finally, methodological research should be considered as a potentially valuable contribution to IOR research of mandated networks in its own right.

In terms of the specific characteristics of legal-political networks cited here, each of the five concepts needs follow-up examination. For example, the most important interorganizational research issue concerns the concept referred to as network distributional balance, which compares the actual distribution of influence and domain with the normative pattern prescribed by the mandate. Attempts should be made to measure the concept of network distributional balance, especially so as to determine instances and conditions of imbalance. Moreover, we need to know whether variations from the normative pattern can be allowed in some instances and whether, in fact, any of these variations may be potentially constructive.

An appraisal of network distributional balance, as well as other mandated network phenomena, is largely affected by the monitoring and evaluation procedures of the government funding and authorization source. How effective and valid are the evaluations? Do they detect interorganizational patterns which can be harmful to network activity? Do they provide sufficient data to determine the effectiveness of the network in question? Studies are needed to compare and contrast the institutional assessments with other evaluation strategies (Steers, 1975).

In terms of the most researched of all interorganizational concepts - coordination - this paper has called forth Thompson's balance paradigm (1967) matching coordination with interdependence. Alternative paradigms of the experience of various combinations of these and other interaction dimensions need to be tested.

Dimensional research, as has been suggested for coordination (viewing it in terms of both degree and type), should be conducted not only for coordination but for the other interaction modes, competition and conflict, as well. Differential analyses of the three interaction modes considered together would be beneficial.

Finally, it is now appropriate for researchers of interorganizational relations, regardless of basis, to develop a set of applied activities with the objective of improving existing networks. This effort, which might be termed "interorganizational development" or "I-OD," would attempt to find practical applications for disseminating the knowledge gained through basic interorganizational research.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph A. Raelin is assistant professor of administrative sciences at the School of Management, Boston College, where he teaches in the areas of policy analysis, public management, and interorganizational relations. His current research efforts lie in applying knowledge from interorganizational analysis to improve interagency settings, particularly in social science agencies. He has published in the above area, particularly as applied to the manpower field.

Dr. Raelin is also the Director of the Institute for Public Service at Boston College.

Figure 1

**The Basis of Interorganizational Relations vis-a-vis
Symmetry of Initiation of Interaction**

