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Abstract

Modern institutions may exhibit considerable inconsistency between beliefs and practices. Standard belief systems about markets and organizations may deviate considerably from much local market and organizational practice. Practice does not wholly determine belief systems, nor do belief systems wholly determine practice. Rather, there can be other more indirect kinds of relations between the two. It is argued here that differences between beliefs about markets and beliefs about organizations lead to differences in the way responsibility is allocated within these institutions. Beliefs also affect legitimacy and legitimacy problems. The way responsibility is allocated and the problems of legitimacy may in turn have important practical consequences. They affect the extent to which organizations and markets are subject to attempts at reform, as well as determining who the reformers are and the content of their reforms.

Societal institutions have been defined as sets of beliefs about the world which generate rules about how to act and, consequently a corresponding pattern of action, which in turn strengthens the beliefs and the rules (Berger and Luckman 1966, Ch II:1). This implies a notion of consistencv between institutionalized beliefs, rules and practices. The actual degree of such consistency can be expected to vary: some modern institutions may be highly consistent, others less so. In this article I will argue that the modern market and organization institutions contain substantial inconsistencies, and that these have important effects. First, I will point to some general sources of institutional inconsistency in modern society.

Institutional inconsistency

One important factor which promotes institutional inconsistency, particularly between institutionalized beliefs and practice, is the discrepancy between knowledge and experience that tends to arise in modern societies, partly as a result of the prevalent mass-education systems.

Formal education is of crucial importance in the modern societies, both as regards its scale and penetration, and its impact on the social and economic stratification of people within the system. Modern education is less oriented towards training for work tasks and more towards the teaching of general, abstract knowledge (Meyer and Jepperson 1996). This general knowledge is typically determined by mainstream science (Meyer 1994).

In the modern world science has a major role in defining the truth. Social sciences like economics, organization theory, psychology and political science formulate what is considered to be the truth about institutions such as the market, the formal organization, the individual and the nation state. In this way social science not only "studies" institutions, but also participates in their construction. In addition, science often provides norms regarding the way institutions should work, and helps to determine the intentions that are seen as relevant or justifiable within them.

Through the formal education system and the professions, and in other ways as well, science possesses great potential for influencing the belief systems - the institutionalized truths, norms and intentions - that are related to their objects for study, and in particular the belief systems that can be used in the public discourse. Under modern conditions people acquire a large amount of knowledge about practices of which they have no personal experience. Modern science provides such knowledge.

Science produces theories of practice, and these theories typically focus on limited aspects of practices, rather than providing detailed and rich descriptions of all variations in practice (Abbott 1988, Ch 2). These limitations facilitate clarity, simplicity and logic and make the theories relatively easy to understand and learn. Also, relatively simple scientific ideas can be expected to be more readily adopted by mass education and in the popular discourse, than complex ideas: ideal types would spread more easily than very complex theories and classifications. Ideas for which scientists claim a high degree of generality are seemingly more worth learning and using than those describing small segments of reality. Furthermore people may sometimes confuse prescriptions with descriptions. General norms may influence people's beliefs about what practice is actually in operation.

The potential of science for influencing practice is less than its potential for influencing beliefs. Scientific ideas are very general, while practice takes place under very varied and specific local conditions. Hence, people may find it difficult to transfer scientific ideas into terms applicable to their own local and complex practice. And they may have little interest in doing so, since they do not find scientific knowledge particularly relevant to their own practice. As observers and commentators of life in general, we need general knowledge; as practioners we need specific knowledge.

All this can lead to a situation in which the generally accepted truth, i. e. the belief system, deviates considerably from many actual practices. People's personal experience of their own or others' practices may be different from this general truth. Science has then regulated belief systems more than practice.

Even so, the general truth is not necessarily questioned or refuted. Our personal experience is always local and specific. When relating it to the general case, we may in principle lean towards either of two opposite strategies. One is generalization, whereby our beliefs about what is general are formed on a basis of our own experience; the other could be called localization, whereby our own experience is explained as a special case and an exception to what is generally true. The modern situation strongly favours localization over generalization: science explicitly warns against generalizing from one or a few cases. And a well established general truth makes it both difficult and unnecessary to use the generalization strategy - most people already know what is generally true.

Instead people understand much of their own experience as consisting of special cases and unimportant exceptions to the general rule. The specific and exceptional character, and consequently the general irrelevance, of personal practice and experience is an important aspect of modern life. If people see their own practice and experience as specific and exceptional, they are far less likely to disbelieve the general knowledge on a basis of their own experience. It is also less likely that their own personal knowledge will affect other people's belief in the general knowledge: there doesn't seem much point in reporting special cases to others at all, and the others may not in fact be very interested in hearing about them. Thus, aspects of local practice that deviate from institutionalized belief systems tend to be perceived as less true than the general beliefs.

There may be other reasons, too, why accounting for local experience that deviates from general beliefs may be unwise. The local practice might easily appear deviant, strange or incorrect, or the accounts might sound incredible or at least difficult to understand. It is often safer to describe and defend local practice in terms of the general belief system, even if this is a very poor description of the practice. So even when general beliefs are not consistent with practice, or with very little of it, they still influence the way practice can be accounted for in social life. As a result we get a discrepancy and "de-coupling" between the formal and informal (Meyer and Rowan 1977), between espoused theories and theories -in-use (Argyris and Schön 1978), between reconstructed logic and logic-in-use (Kaplan 1964), between talk and action (Brunsson 1989). Such discrepancies arise because institutionalized beliefs and institutionalized practice are regulated differently, and because beliefs and practice do not wholly determine each other. Because of these discrepancies, it is important to differentiate analytically between beliefs and practice, to investigate their different causes and consequences as well as their interaction.

A discrepancy can persist between belief systems and practice, so long as practice does not wholly shape beliefs and beliefs do not wholly shape practice. I have argued that this is a likely outcome in modern institutions. But there may be other relations between beliefs and practice, apart from one of them shaping the other. Even when beliefs do not describe practice very well, they can still have important practical effects. Below I will argue that the market and the organization institutions can be considered as cases in point, i.e. that general beliefs about the market and the organization have important practical effects even when they are poor reflections of practice. Belief systems may affect the allocation of responsibility as well as legitimacy and reforms in these institutions. In the next two sections I will first compare some belief systems and practices of markets and organizations.

Markets and organizations - beliefs and practices

The market and the formal organization are fundamental institutions of modern society. The distinction between market and organization has also been fundamental in much theorizing . Markets and organizations can be understood as very different ideal types for human interaction (Coase 1937, Dahl and Lindblom1953, Williamson1975). They have even been the basis for dividing the social sciences themselves into disciplines: during this century the study of markets has been heavily dominated by economics, and organization theory has evolved as a fairly independent subfield over the last few decades.

A standard description of the market as an ideal type based on neoclassical economic theory posits two types of actor - sellers and buyers (Samuelsson 1964). These actors are given, they are simply there, and their appearance does not demand special explanations. They are taken for granted even in more sophisticated discussions, as are markets themselves; they appear as something natural rather than planned and created - as a "spontaneous order" (Hayek 1990). The active regulation of markets can be perceived as interferences with a "free" market.

The seller and buyer are described as actors whose boundaries are clearly defined; they possess internal consistency and specific preferences, and they act in accordance with these preferences. The boundaries must be clear if exchange is to take place; we must know when the commodity is inside or outside each actor. The exchange is driven by preferences and purposes. The sellers try to increase their profits, and the buyers try to increase their utility. These are their only fundamental interests; they are therefore perceived as striving for their "self-interest". This leads to a conspicuous lack of loyalty; the actors are ready to dump each other as soon as they find they can satisfy their interests better with a new partner. On a "free" but not "perfect" market this is both possible and usual, since there are many possible sellers and buyers of a certain product, who should work under competitive conditions. Volatility is an important aspect of markets.

The organization, too, has been described as an ideal type (Weber 1924 (1947) Ch. III, Etzioni 1964). In these descriptions the organization is very different from the ideal description of the market. Organizations are described as instruments - their purpose is to achieve a certain common result. The organization has a task, a mission, which is either formulated on a basis of common interests among its members, or it is decided by its principals. Either way, it is created on a basis of the task in question. The organization members are prevented from promoting interests other than those of the organization, by the existence of a hierarchy between values (common or principals') on the one hand, and actions on the other. There is consistency between what organizational members say and what they do. Coordination is achieved by local rules, which also produce stability. Since every organization has a specific mission and specific rules, organizations tend to differ from each other. Missions and rules can also be changed within a single organization, but not without effort and only from above. In this version organizations are believed to be actors - coherent entities with preferences and clear boundaries vis-à-vis other actors (Meyer 1994). They are constructed along basically the same lines as another actor, namely the individual (Brunsson 1995).

Although these ideal descriptions of markets and organizations differ greatly, they are also consistent with each other. A market requires actors of the kind described in the ideal organization type. And such actors are likely to need markets - arenas where they can aquire the resources they need to achieve their missions. So the descriptions complement and reinforce each other. If we believe that markets actually work as described, it is hard to perceive organizations as actors on such markets in any way that differs greatly from the ideal type described. And if organizations actually worked as described, they would at least facilitate the functioning of the markets as described. Doubts about one description would easily raise doubts about the other.

The ideal models of markets and organizations constitute two complementary institutionalized belief systems. Indeed, they are part of the way we define markets and organizations: if many of their characteristics were absent in a specific case, we would doubt whether it was a case of a market or an organization at all. For instance, scientists sometimes define systems that are legally markets as "non-markets", as subsumed under a different regime such as a network system, if the actual interaction differs very much from the ideal market type (Grahber 1993, Håkansson and Johanson 1993).

The ideal models have had an impact on the way markets and organizations are described in the modern public discourse; they are part of standard belief systems. The models are simple, and consequently easy to understand. They also provide common norms; it has been argued that both markets and organizations which actually work according to these ideas, are more efficient than others (Samuelson1964, Etzioni 1964). Their descriptions are popular among proponents of both institutions (Nilsson and Åslöv 1990). And when organizations are presented by their leaders, they are typically described roughly according to the ideal organizational type. The models regulate intentions even more strongly: it is difficult to present any other intentions for markets and organizations than that they should work roughly as described in the ideal types. The models form the basis for many formal rules.

When thus described, markets and organizations appear as radically different institutions, which complement each other in a larger system, but which individually are likely to have very different effects, advantages and disadvantages. These different effects are frequently invoked in many discussons, for instance in the long-running debate about planning versus market economies (Dahl and Lindblom 1953), or in the discussion about boundary-setting in companies: whether or not they should incorporate some suppliers or customers into their own organizations. (Williamson 1975, Scott 1987).

Market and organization practice

Science produces not only ideal types but also accounts based on empirical studies of local practices. These are often compared to the ideal types and described as "inefficiencies" or deviations from the formal or from the rules. Such studies of markets have led to many descriptions of practice that are very different from the ideal types (Swedberg 1994; Håkansson 1989). Industries and their markets have been described as fairly organized with a substantive degree of co-operation and hierarchy (Richardson 1972, Grahber 1993), of social embeddedness (Granovetter 1985) and of shared meanings (Spender 1989, Hellgren and Melin 1992).

Some studies of industrial markets have presented a picture far removed from the ideal market type (Håkansson 1989, Axelsson and Easton 1992). These markets are described as networks of multiple sellers and buyers in complex vertical and horizontal patterns. The networks are characterized by a high degree of stability and loyalty. Relations between market actors are often long-lasting. It is often difficult or inappropriate to break such relations, even if they do not work well all the time and even if the actors can think of better alternatives.

Stability is created, since the market actors are heavily dependent on each other. Adaptation to and by the partner is important. Buyer and seller exchange information and knowledge about products and technology, and about other market actors, and together they modify products and production technology or develop new ones. They adapt their storing and transportation systems, their payment system, and their administrative routines and planning. New products are developed by common effort. Resources and goods are thus both created within the network. Deep trust and loyalty can easily develop over time between the partners, based on long-term co-operation, insight into each other's activities and a history of common problems and solutions.

Actors are also created within the network. One can only become an actor on this kind of market as part of a network. The preferences of the buyers and sellers are created and moulded in the interaction. Actors are interested not only in their own profitability and viability but also in those of their partners.

When buyers and sellers are large companies or other organizations it is seldom meaningful to analyze the whole organization as a single actor. Rather, individual departments, groups or even people are the decision units for buying and selling; they are parts of their organizations that can differ from other parts, including top management, as regards both resources and preferences.

All these market practices differ from the descriptions of the ideal market type. The same kind of discrepancy between ideal type and practice is described in empirical studies of organizational practice. Such studies have produced a picture that deviates considerably from the ideal organization type. Organizations are described as being difficult to control from outside or from above. Instead of being obedient instruments for principals or top management, organizations tend to create their own values and interests (Selznick 1949). Nor are these values and interests necessarily homogeneous; on the contrary, different departments, groups and individuals in organizations tend to create and act in accordance with different, conflicting interests (Pfeffer 1981). Different departments can act very independently of each other and of top management. Control is often exerted from below; top management is dependent on the knowledge of activities that lower levels possess (Baier et al. 1986). What the leaders say and what the organizations do, are not the same thing. Rather than - or in addition to - hierarchy, unity and consistency, it is local autonomy, conflict and inconsistency that are predominant characteristics of many large organizations (Weick 1976, Pfeffer 1981, Brunsson 1989). Furthermore, internal market mechanisms such as transfer pricing are often installed in large organizations.

The interaction between different parts of one organization may be considerably less frequent, less intensive and less stable than the interaction between one part of one organization and one part of another. When large corporations sell and buy different business units and companies at a great pace, the hierarchical relations in these companies begin to fluctuate a great deal, while external relations with suppliers and buyers may be much more stable.

These more complex and to some extent contradictory accounts of markets and organizations have been less influential than the ideal types when it comes to shaping belief systems: they are not part of the way markets and organizations are defined; they have little normative impact and they do not regulate intentions. It is hard to intend to create the kind of markets and organizations described in these accounts, at least if one intends them to be real markets and organizations.

When practice works as described above and belief systems continue to resemble the ideal types, the differences between the two institutional practices will be less clear than those between the beliefs. Market practice may be fairly organized, and organizational practice may have some characteristics similar to those of the ideal market type. And, more importantly, market practice can be very diffferent from standard market beliefs, and organization practice can be very different from standard organization beliefs.

When the beliefs and practices of an institution have a low degree of consistency, it becomes more complicated to analyse and understand it. Good analyses of institutional beliefs can be very misleading if they are meant to be analyses of institutional practice, and vice versa (Wilensky 1975, Ch. 2). It is therefore important in analytical terms to distinguish between beliefs and practice. If we analyze markets and organizations as ideal types, we may assume that transactions which are uncertain and repeated and which call for big transaction-specific investments, can be expected to occur within organizations rather than within markets (Williamson 1975). But this does not mean that there is necessarily an equally strong reason to assume that this would happen in all markets and organizations in practice. When practice works as described above, we might even sometimes expect the opposite.

But a difference between beliefs and practice is not only important in the context of analysis: it can also have practical effects. A difference exists because practice does not wholly determine beliefs, and beliefs do not wholly determine practice. But beliefs and practice may still be connected in more indirect ways. Beliefs may influence practice, even though this does not make practice consistent with beliefs. In the next two sections I will discuss how belief systems can affect the allocation of responsibility and the legitimacy of markets and organizations, and how these factors in turn can have practical effects. In a concluding section I will examine a particular practical effect more closely, namely attempts at reforming organizations and markets.

Allocation of responsibility

Markets and organizations both regulate interactions among social actors. The crucial actors here are individuals and organizations. Individuals and organizations can be sellers or buyers on markets; organizations consist of individuals or, sometimes, of a set of other co-operating organizations.

The main difference between markets and organizations as belief systems is that organizations are believed to be actors while markets are not. This difference has several effects, which I will discuss below. First, it affects the way responsibility is allocated in organizations and on markets. Second, the market and the organization ideas vary as to how easily, and in what way, they can be combined with the idea of the individual as an actor. This in turn affects the legitimacy of the institutions.

In Western culture perceived power produces responsibility: someone who is believed to be the deliberate cause of events, is also held responsible (Aristotle 1, Book III, Chapter 1; Edwards 1969). It is perceived power, i.e. beliefs about power, that bestows responsibility, not power in practice.

Social actors are bounded, coherent and purposeful entities (Meyer 1994). They perform actions and can therefore be held responsible for these actions and for their outcomes. Standard beliefs about the organization portray it as an actor, thus endowing it with responsibility.

But organizations also allocate responsibility internally, among their own members. This is accomplished by beliefs in hierarchy: some actors within the organization are thought to control the others. In standard beliefs, it is assumed that the leadership of organizations controls organizational activities. Leadership thus becomes responsible. The fact that the leadership's power in practice may be greatly limited is not important.

The notion of hierarchy makes the notion of the organization as one actor plausible. So it endows the organization as a whole with responsibility. The notion of hierarchy also concentrates responsibility within the organization by placing it on the leadership. There is a small number of people who carry most of the responsibility.

Organizations often demonstrate, and thus further reinforce, such concentrated responsibility. Centralized responsibility is typically reflected in legislation about organizations, in which leaders are held legally responsible for a great many things over which they may have had no real influence. For this and other reasons it is often important to keep responsibility concentrated to the leadership. The standard way for someone to claim responsibility is to claim influence, to argue that they or other leaders are or have been influential, i. e. to support the belief in concentrated control. This may reinforce the general belief in concentrated power in organizations, thus promoting the further concentration of responsibility in organizations in general.

Standard beliefs about the market, on the other hand, emphasize the lack of concentrated power and thus produce little concentrated responsibility. It is assumed that the actors in the market control only themselves, that they make agreements of their own free will and not as a result of someone else's power. In this version nobody has control over anybody else's actions. Every actor is responsible for their own actions, not for those of others. Nor are actors responsible for the effects of their own behaviour on their partners, so long as they have followed the formal rules of the market. Responsibility is widely spread. Further, the market as a whole is not an actor, and cannot carry responsibility. Nor is any single market actor responsible for the functioning of the market as a whole, or for its results. These limitations on responsibility are reflected in most legislation about markets. Thus, even if power can often be concentrated in market practice, standard beliefs prevent the equivalent responsibility from being created.

Thus, when beliefs and practice are as they have been described above, organizations tend to produce more concentrated responsibility than concentrated power, while markets tend to produce more power than responsibility. This can have important practical effects. The different tendencies to produce responsibility may be one important reason why actors engage in market relations or in organizational solutions. For instance, when managers consider incorporating a supplier in their own organization, or maintaining a market relationship, they can be expected to consider the different effects these solutions will have on their legal and moral responsibility towards the supplier.

Differences in the way responsibility is allocated go some way to explaining the differences in the formal regulation of organizations and markets. Those held responsible can be expected to be interested in having some control over what they are responsible for (Fayol 1920). Or at least they can be expected by others to try to exert control. One way of trying to achieve control is to establish, or at least to influence, formal rules. Thus we can expect considerable local organizational regulation: the local organizational leadership determines rules for its own organization. If market actors have less responsibility, they can be expected to be less active in the formal regulating. The formal regulation of markets is carried out mainly by actors outside the specific market, primarily by the state. In that respect markets are more centralized than organizations.

So responsibility stimulates formal regulation, and regulation in turn reinforces responsibility: those who are involved in regulating become responsible for the regulations. This increases the local responsibility of organizations, and it reduces responsibility on the market even further by redirecting it to the state.

Responsibility and naturalness

It is not only responsibility for daily actions and outcomes that is allocated differently in organizations and markets. Responsibility for the construction and existence of the institutions themselves is also distributed differently. As will be explained below, organizations are the responsibility of specific people, while the responsibility for markets is less clear.

Organizations are commonly conceived as human constructions, as something created by people. Organizations are presented as founded and maintained through the efforts of one or more individuals. And, as argued above, their fate is perceived as being in the hands of a responsible leadership. Actors within the organization have been allotted their tasks, purposes and resources by someone else.

Typically, responsibility for the existence of markets is more dispersed. There are even fewer indications that markets are "constructed" at all; they seem less the result of a human plan. In some versions markets even seem to have been created by nature rather than constructed by people. As we have seen, standard beliefs about markets do not contain many ideas about how markets are created, about how the actors and their interests arise, for instance - they just seem to be there. People seem to be natural actors. Customers or sellers apparently appear without anyone's intervention, complete with the interests and action logics of such actors. Nor does the market as a whole appear to be constructed by people; rather, it seems to have arisen naturally.

These ideas about naturalness find strong support in several important academic treatises: to Smith (1776, Book 1, Ch 2) the tendency for business and bargaining was a trait of human nature and the resulting order was shaped by an invisible hand, Mandeville (1724) used the metaphor of a bee colony for describing market behaviour; and a more recent analyst called markets a "spontaneous order" (Hayek 1990).

Bases and problems of legitimacy

Ideas about naturalness constitute one factor affecting the legitimacy of institutions: when institutions are perceived as parts of a natural order, they are less likely to be questioned (Douglas 1986). When markets are perceived as natural orders, they are less difficult to question than organizations.

But perceived naturalness does not necessarily make institutions attractive. Although nature is difficult to question, it is not necessarily valued more highly than human constructions. Nature can be perceived as something to avoid, particularly when it is understood as disordered. Standard market and organization ideas are apt to offer different impressions of order: markets appear to be much less ordered than organizations. As we have noted, organizations seem to be so highly ordered that they are perceived as actors in themselves. Markets, on the other hand, are perceived as arenas only, arenas for organizations and other actors. What happens in the market arena is the result of the actions of many actors, and can be quite chaotic.

The individual as a problem for legitimacy

The legitimacy of institutions is affected not only by ideas of naturalness but it is also affected by the consistency between the institution in question and other institutions. If beliefs in two insititutions are inconsistent with each other, at least one of the institutions is likely to be questioned or criticized. Standard beliefs about markets and organizations are both inconsistent - although in different ways - with standard beliefs about one of the actors in both systems, namely the individual.

The relation to the individual has in fact long been a crucial topic in the moral and scientific discourse about the market and the organization institutions. The individual is constructed as a bounded and coherent actor possessing a specific or even a unique set of preferences, i.e. as an autonomous entity giving rise to actions. These aspects of the individual have been much reinforced in modern times (Luckmann 1967, Meyer et al 1987): there are more autonomous individuals around, and they exhibit a higher degree of individualism. The extent to which the individual can or should exert his autonomy within the other two institutions acting in accordance with his own preferences, then becomes an even more crucial issue than before. But it has long been a spur to discussion.

In the market case the assumed egoistic preference of the individual for enriching himself has been a particularly frequent subject of discussion, and the debate about whether there should be any difference in the norms for individual behaviour in general and norms for individuals on markets is an old one. Aristotle 2 (Book I), Luther (see Segal 1990) and Calvin (see Tawny 1926) all considered the norms for individual behaviour to be no different in markets from those in other areas of life. People should not be egoistic in any situation. Greed and striving for one's own enrichment were no less blameworthy on the market than anywhere else. And to Aristotle at least the result of greed, i.e. wealth, was equally negative.

Mandeville (1724) and Smith (1759) argued against these ideas, claiming that the outcome of collective greed was greater wealth for all, and this was a positive thing. These ideas have been much quoted in contemporary discussions, and the standard market belief system assumes selfish market actors. Such actors are also more likely to be present when individualism is being generally reinforced. Modern market ideas exhibit a certain fit with modern ideas about the individual. Modern individuals are very apt for the role of market actors: they have clear boundaries and their own specific preferences, which they have the right to satisfy through voluntary exchange with others.

The idea of the formal organization, on the other hand, implies the direct subsumption of the individual's interests and preferences under those of the organization. The preferences of the individual are subsumed under a more general interest, the common task. Individual autonomy is reduced by organizational hierarchy. It has been more difficult to defend this subsumption of the individual in modern times, when the belief in individualism has become stronger. While beliefs about markets and individuals tend to converge, beliefs about organizations and individuals tend to diverge more and more.

There have been many attempts at justifying the subsumption of individuals in the organization, and many ideas have been presented whereby individuals and organizations can coexist. Members can be compensated for their participation, thus satisfying their own interest at the expense of the organization (March and Simon 1958, Ch 4). A balance can often be struck which is tolerable to both parties. Or members can democratically elect the leaders they must subsequently obey, thus creating a feeling that to some extent they are controlling themselves.

Another notion is that individual organization members have the same interest (and have perhaps created the organization together for that reason). A modern version of this attempt at reconciling organizational and individual interests is expressed in the idea of the "corporate culture", whereby the individuals in an organization share values and beliefs which are also beneficial to the organization (Alvesson och Berg 1992). Another modern project with a different angle of approach involves attempts to allow more individualism within the organization, perhaps through job differentiation and advanced accounting systems. This means creating well-defined tasks for each individual organization member, accounting for individual results and, sometimes, introducing related incentive schemes. Although such schemes have been regarded as a threat to individualism when the tasks and accounting systems are very rigid (Miller and O'Leary 1994), they can be interpreted in the opposite way if the tasks are more flexible and if it is results rather than procedures that are accounted for.

All these efforts to reconcile organization with individualism suffer from obvious weaknesses. It is not easy to combine modern individualism with standard beliefs about organizations, while beliefs about markets do fit modern individualism better. The situation can be expected to vary between different cultures which uphold different versions of individualism. In cultures with a relatively weak sense of individualism, organizations can be expected to be easily tolerated and to have little need for legitimating adaptations to individuals. In such cultures markets can be expected to be less legitimate. In other cultures the typical individul may think of himself as a purposive actor, but may be less clear about what his purpose or preferences are. This makes him a weak market actor but might make him willing to commit himself to a societal or organizational purpose - to become an agent for general interests (Meyer and Jepperson 1996). This facilitates organization. If individuals are not only purposeful but have specific purposes and preferences of their own and strong claims to uniqueness, then it can be expected that organizations will be difficult to legitimate and markets much less so.

In some cases, too, the same culture may be able to accept several versions of individualism <u>and</u> strong organizations and markets at the same time - the modern mind is able to live in several worlds at once (Berger et. al. 1974).

For instance, people may accept selfishness on markets as well as subsumption in their organizations (and to some extent most people probably in fact do so). Or people are able to separate the economic and the other parts of life. Different orders in different parts of their lives might compensate each other. For instance, it may be easier to get support for autonomy, naturalness and disorder in groups and societies which are able to realize ideas of subsumption, construction and order in areas other than economic life. Smith (1776) differed from Aristotle in his conclusion about acceptable market behaviour, just by arguing that economic life could and should be treated in a morally different way compared with life in general.

Practical effects of legitimacy

The legitimacy of markets and organizations has potential practical effects. It may influence the extent to which these institutions can expand into new areas, or whether their area of application is reduced. Legitimacy also affects the smoothness with which young people can be socialized in the institutions. And again, it influences the extent to which people follow the rules of the market and organizational institutions. Thus, standard institutional beliefs have indirect practical effects, since they affect legitimacy.

But the difference between beliefs and practice within a certain institution can also be expected to have practical implications. The legitimacy of both markets and organizations is uncertain, not least because standard beliefs tend to clash with common beliefs about the individual. But if practice is different from beliefs, it may make the clash less clear. If we find the standard beliefs about individual selfishness and greed on markets intolerable, we might still accept a particular market in which we have personal experience of people not behaving very selfishly or greedily. Or even if we find the general idea of the individual's subsumption under the organizational hierarchy repulsive, we might have no problem in accepting the existing loose structure and control at our own workplace.

Further, the institution of the individual may contain some inconsistency between beliefs and practice, just as the institutions of the market and the organization do. Our beliefs about ourselves and our own actual practice may be very different things, the one having little impact on the other. Individual practice may then be adapted to organizational or market practice, while our beliefs remain unaffected. For instance, even if we heartily subscribe to the general idea of individual autonomy, we may in practice obey many orders issued by higher organizational levels, thus making life in organizations easier. Similarly, if individuals do not behave as unselfishly as they think they do, they will do better on a market that requires some selfishness.

So just as markets and organizations tend to differ more as beliefs than in practice, they can both be less reconcilable with beliefs in the institution of the individual than with individual practice. This helps to reconcile market and organization beliefs and practice with individual practice. So individuals can tolerate organizations and markets as they actually work in practice, and individuals are seldom a big practical problem for organizations or markets - even though some people hold beliefs about themselves and others as individuals which are highly inconsistent with their beliefs about organizations and markets. When they think about how these institutions generally work, they find it almost impossible to combine them, but in their daily practice they can combine them fairly easily. Beliefs are inconsistent but practice is less so. In this situation the practical aspect of the combined institutions can be described as fairly legitimate, while the belief aspect is not. Practice then continues even if the institutional beliefs are characterized by inconsistency and consequently a certain illegitimacy. A difference between beliefs and practice can be an important societal lubricant.

To those with little or no practical experience, young people for instance, the inconsistencies between belief systems are likely to appear more serious. For example, if such people strongly believe in the individual, they will find the organization highly illegitimate. This is consistent with contemporary trends in society where young people show considerably less tolerance of hierarchy than older people (Inglehart 1977; Anderssson, Fürth and Holmberg 1993).

Thus, a discrepancy between institutional beliefs and practice may increase the legitimacy of institutions, but it can sometimes reduce it instead. This is the topic of the next section.

Reforms

A discrepancy between standard beliefs and practices is not always tolerated - it can lead to the questioning of beliefs or the questioning of practice. In a world where science is a crucial authority, any serious questioning of beliefs requires scientific support. Such questioning will then also be part of a global scientific discourse, in which basic assumptions do not change easily (Kuhn 1962) and from which many changes only slowly reach the more general discourse.

The questioning of practice can be a much more mundane affair, taking place locally within each individual, organization or market. The practice of which we have experience may appear not only as an exception in light of our beliefs about individuals, organizations or markets in general; it can also be regarded as a bad example. This situation provides several reasons for reform, or attempts at changing the local situation.

As noted above, belief systems include norms, intentions and truths. So the local situation may be in conflict with standard institutional norms about the way individuals, organizations or markets should work; it represents something incorrect that should be corrected. Or local practice does not work as intended. This is what is called a problem, and if it persists over time it's a failure. It is a strong incentive to reform. Finally, local practice may not reflect the way a real organization or market works. This makes criticism of local practice an ontological question: the discrepancy between beliefs and practice makes people doubt whether local practice can be subsumed at all under a certain institution. If relations between buyers and sellers look like those which have been described above as being common industrial market practice, then people may argue not only that there are "imperfections" or unintended consequences, but even that this is not a market at all. Or it can be argued that an organizational practice like the one described above makes it doubtful whether this is a real organization.

So the discrepancy between beliefs and practice can be of different kinds, but they can all impel reform, i.e. explicit attempts at reducing the discrepancy by changing the practice. Moreover, whatever the reasons for reforms may be, standard beliefs tend to shape their content. Reformers present intentions for future practice. It is difficult to present intentions other than standard institutional ones, or to present intentions that are inconsistent with generally held beliefs of what is a proper and real market or organization.

Many reforms of organizations are attempts to make the existing organization more like a "real" one, resembling what we think an organization should be. They include attempts to introduce clear goals, more coordination or more top control. Reforms of markets often represent attempts to install more "real market" principles, and reforms of individuals often mean attempts to create more individualism (e. g. more of a purpose in life). Other reforms mean trying to introduce principles from other institutions, for instance attempts to install market-like principles in organizations, or to change organizations so that individuals get more autonomy and more room for their own interests.

But for reforms to occur, reformers are also needed - people who present their intentions and try to implement them. Who become reformers is determined in part by the way responsibility is allocated. Those who are responsible for practice can be expected to react to differences between beliefs and practice, either on their own initiative or as a result of pressure from others. Because responsibility is allocated differently in markets and organizations, the reformers also tend to be different.

Market actors do not bear the responsibility for general market results, which means they are not responsible either for the rules that are to be applied to individual transactions or individual relations on the market. Attempts at reforming markets are therefore normally made by the state or by other central organizations. Attempts at reforming organizations are normally made following an initiative on the part of some individual organization leadership or their principals. So there are far more possible reformers in organizations than in markets and this in turn affects the frequency of reforms in the two institutions.

Local reforms are in fact typical of large modern organizations. The leadership of large organizations often try to change organizational structures, processes or ideologies (March and Olsen 1983, Brunsson and Olsen, 1993). Since there are a great many organizations, this means that reform activities are very extensive, and that a whole industry of management consultants has emerged as a result. The reform of a market is a much more rare event.

The connection between reform and change is a loose one. Change can occur in markets or organizations without there having been any reform. Market relations may be extremely changeable even if no reforms have occurred. Reforms in organizations may be plentiful, but they do not necessarily lead to much change because reforms may fail.

In fact organizational reforms often do fail; it proves impossible to implement them as intended (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973, Baier et al. 1986, Brunsson and Olsen 1993). There are several reasons for this. Standard beliefs are generally unrealistic or at least unrealistic in relation to the practice under reform, which may of course be the reason why the discrepancy between beliefs and practice existed in the first place. Moreover, as we have seen, large organizations are generally difficult to control and to change from above.

Reforms reinforcing beliefs

But even when reforms do not have much practical effect, they may have effects on belief systems. This is due to a difference in the visibility of reform attempts and reform failures. Reform attempts are often proclaimed loudly and extensively; this is a common tactic for getting reform activities started. Reform failures are not usually presented as loudly - few important people have an interest in revealing the failure. Evaluations are rare (Wildavsky

1973). Also, the lack of implementation often appears long after the reform was announced and its relation to the reform attempt may be highly ambiguous. Thus extensive reform activity in organizations can give the impression that big changes are going on, even if very little change is actually taking place. The lack of reforms in markets can give an impression of stability and lack of change.

The number of reforms that are launched may also influence the impression of heterogeneity. If organizations present a variety of reforms over a long time, it is easy to get the impression that organizations are different from one another. If we listen only to the way organizations present themselves, it seems reasonable to assume that organizations which have announced different reforms are now functioning differently from each other, and that organizations which have not yet announced a particular reform are different from those which have. If changes in the way market actors function and interact do not need to be, or cannot be, presented as reforms, markets are less likely to be seen as heterogeneous. Differences are not presented in reforms, and if we do not hear about differences, there is less reason to believe that different markets work in different ways.

Markets thus easily give an impression that actors and interactions are stable and homogeneous, even if in practice there may be a lot of change and heterogeneity, whereas organizations easily give the impression of change and heterogeneity in the way they work, even when there is in fact great stability and homogeneity. This in turn may affect standard beliefs about markets and organizations. For instance, it may lead analysts to believe that organizational behaviour is greatly dependent on local factors in the individual organization, while market behaviour is dependent on the general conditions of all markets.

Further, the volatility and heterogeneity of organizations are depicted as the result of the efforts of reformers; this seems to reconfirm beliefs that organizations can in fact be effectively controlled by certain people. Changes on markets, if they are observed at all, do not seem equally controlled or controllable. Such impressions may reinforce the picture of markets as something natural, and organizations as something constructed. Hence standard institutional beliefs about markets and organizations may be self-reinforcing.

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