ORCHESTRATION

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1. Definition

Orchestration is a mode of governance in which one actor (the orchestrator) enlists an intermediary actor or set of actors (the intermediary) to govern a third actor or set of actors (the target) in line with the orchestrator’s goals, rather than attempting to govern the target directly. In global environmental governance, orchestration is employed by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), treaty bodies, supranational authorities, states and other governance actors; it is also used in many other issue areas where governance actors have ambitious goals but limited capabilities. Crucially, governance through orchestration is indirect, involving three parties; this is captured in the O-I-T model, representing Orchestrator, Intermediary and Target (Abbott et al. 2014 a). Orchestration thus differs from governance modes in which governance actors directly address the ultimate targets. Direct modes include mandatory regulation as well as softer and more collaborative measures such as codes of conduct and negotiated self-regulation.

An orchestrator lacks firm control over the actions of intermediaries; it must enlist their voluntary cooperation in a joint governance effort. As a result, the orchestrator must select intermediaries whose policy goals are aligned with or broadly similar to its own. This limited control distinguishes orchestration from indirect but hard governance modes in which a governance actor invests a second actor with authority, retains the option of rescinding its authority and therefore retains control over its activities. Indirect but hard modes include delegation and other principal-agent relationships (Hawkins et al. 2006).
The distinctions between direct and indirect governance and hard and soft control are ideal types; in practice both characteristics are matters of degree. For example, orchestration blends into delegation as orchestrators gain influence over intermediaries, while direct collaboration with targets blends into orchestration as intermediaries (such as associations formed by targets) take on larger roles. In addition, governance arrangements frequently combine multiple modes: for example, both agents and intermediaries may take on the role of orchestrator. Governance modes also interact dynamically: for example, failures of direct governance may lead actors to turn to orchestration.

Because an orchestrator cannot control its intermediaries, it orchestrates primarily by providing them with support, enabling them to more effectively pursue their aligned goals. Orchestration therefore benefits intermediaries as well as orchestrators, and actors may seek to be orchestrated in order to realize those benefits (Elsig 2014). However, an orchestrator can gain some ability to steer intermediary behavior by attaching conditions to its support or directing support to favored activities. Orchestrators may provide material support, e.g., financial or administrative assistance; they may also provide ideational support, e.g., information, cognitive or normative guidance, or endorsement. In addition, orchestrators can use the convening power their position, resources and legitimacy provide to catalyze formation of new intermediaries and to coordinate the actions of multiple intermediaries, thereby increasing their impact.

Orchestration is a general governance mode that can be employed by any governance actor, including national governments addressing both domestic and transnational issues (Hale & Roger 2013). For example, in European neo-corporatist arrangements following
World War II, national governments enlisted peak industry and labor associations and provided them support, enabling them to pursue national goals vis-à-vis their private members (Streeck & Kenworthy 2005).

In global governance, diverse IGOS, treaty organs and supranational authorities such as the European Commission employ orchestration (Abbott et al. 2014 a, b). In many cases they seek to influence the conduct of private actors (e.g., to encourage business firms to disclose their environmental impacts) or to provide them with public goods (e.g., to deliver humanitarian assistance). In such cases intermediaries are frequently private, because of their superior access to private targets. Private intermediaries include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business associations, multi-stakeholder organizations and transnational public-private partnerships. In other cases international governance actors seek to influence the behavior of states (e.g., by monitoring compliance with commitments) or to provide them with public goods (e.g., financial assistance). Here intermediaries may be either governmental (e.g., transgovernmental networks of national regulators or IGOS) or private (e.g., NGOs).

2. Overview and Key Findings

Orchestration is widespread in global governance, employed by diverse IGOS, treaty bodies, supranational authorities and other actors across widely varying issue areas. For example, in the European Union (EU), the Commission enlists transgovernmental networks of national regulators to promote member state implementation of EU norms in areas such as competition and telecommunications policy (Blauberger & Rittberger 2014). Human rights bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and Committee on the Rights of
the Child promote and support NGO monitoring of state compliance, variously providing
NGOs with information, training, endorsement and funding (Dai 2014; Tallberg 2014).
The World Health Organization (WHO) mobilizes, supports and relies on NGOs and
scientific or technical organizations for epidemiological surveillance and research
(Hanrieder 2014). The G-20 can be understood as orchestrating international financial
institutions through coordination and support (Viola 2014). As these examples illustrate,
orchestrators may be strong or weak (European Commission, Committee on Rights of the
Child), highly institutionalized or informal (WHO, G-20).

Global environmental governance, especially the activities of the United Nations
Environment Programme (UNEP), provided the initial model for the concept of
orchestration (Abbott & Snidal 2009 a, b, 2010). In the 1990s and 2000s, UNEP – acting
primarily through its Division for Technology, Industry and Economics – undertook a
variety of initiatives to engage the private sector and civil society in improving
environmental practices. Some involved direct collaboration with targets, but others took
the form of orchestration. In the best-known case, UNEP became co-convenor of the
negotiating process that created the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), now a multi-
stakeholder organization that administers a widely used standard for sustainability
reporting. UNEP supported GRI by naming it a collaborating center; endorsing it (e.g.,
inaugurating it in a ceremony at UN headquarters and arranging recognition by the World
Summit on Sustainable Development and UN Global Compact); providing administrative
assistance; and helping it to secure financial support (Dingwerth 2007).

UNEP similarly helped to create and supported other organizations that serve as
intermediaries addressing private targets. Notably, UNEP and the UN Global Compact
were central in establishing the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), which promotes use of environmental, social and governance criteria in investment decisions. By 2012, over 1,000 investment institutions had signed the Principles, although not all signatories apply them to their entire investment portfolios. UNEP convened potential participants, promoted the Principles and endorsed them informally; the Global Compact provided administrative assistance. Other UNEP-sponsored intermediaries include the Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Development, Global e-Sustainability Initiative and Sustainable Building and Construction Initiative (Dingwerth & van der Lugt 2014).

Other global environmental governance actors also employ orchestration. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) relies heavily on the NGO network TRAFFIC to monitor wildlife trade; in addition, under a memorandum of understanding with the Secretariat, TRAFFIC assists CITES in capacity building. Organs of other treaties, including the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and the Whaling Convention, also engage NGOs to monitor targets and supply information, often in parallel to formal mechanisms such as state reporting (Dai 2014; Tallberg 2014). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) channels environmental funding through IGO intermediaries including the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme and UNEP; those organizations implement projects within recipient countries, while GEF supports, coordinates and steers them (Graham & Thompson 2014). The World Bank initiates and supports transnational environmental funds, partnerships and other initiatives (Hale & Roger 2013). The EU Directorate-General Environment relied heavily on NGOs, especially in its early years, for information and technical expertise and for assistance in rule drafting and implementation.
(Mattli 2014). As these examples demonstrate, international governance actors employ orchestration for diverse purposes, from rulemaking and rule implementation to provision of varied public goods.

Orchestration research suggests that the “focality” of an IGO or other governance actor – its recognized position as a leader in an issue area – makes that actor both more likely to orchestrate and more successful at doing so (Abbott et al. 2014 b; Hale & Roger 2013). For example, GEF’s initial focality facilitated its orchestration of influential, pre-existing implementing agencies, while a recent decline in GEF’s focality may be undermining it (Graham & Thompson 2014). Similarly, WHO orchestrates successfully in areas where it remains focal, but less successfully in areas where its focality is challenged by other IGOs and by increasingly influential non-state actors such as the Gates Foundation (Hanrieder 2014).

Focality operates in complex ways, however. Successful orchestration can increase focality, as WHO orchestration of the international response to SARS did in the area of surveillance; yet success can also attract competitors, undermining focality, as may have occurred with GEF. In addition, the visibility that often accompanies focality may trigger close oversight by member states, whereas less-focal institutions may be able to “fly under the radar” of state supervision. For example, UNEP’s Division for Technology, Industry and Economics, located in Paris, had the latitude to organize intermediaries such as GRI and PRI because the national environment ministries with which UNEP primarily interacts were not sensitive to its growing efforts to promote corporate responsibility (Dingwerth & van der Lugt 2014).
Nonetheless, IGOs and treaty bodies are not free to engage in any governance activities they wish. They are fundamentally agents of their member states, although states normally grant them some limited autonomy (Abbott & Snidal 1998), and they can develop further autonomy through their expertise, focality and activities (Biermann & Siebenhüner 2009). Whether member states approve or disapprove of IGO orchestration, whether member state positions are convergent or divergent, and what oversight mechanisms, authorization requirements and voting systems are in place for states to approve or block actions by IGO officials are important determinants of whether and in what form orchestration is employed (Abbott et al. 2014 a, b).

Often, IGOs, treaty organs and other international governance actors turn to orchestration, subject to state oversight, because member states restrict harder and more direct forms of governance. For example, states rarely authorize or provide sufficient resources for environmental or human rights IGOs to monitor compliance aggressively; as a result, IGOs collaborate with and support NGOs and other intermediaries with monitoring capabilities. Similarly, WHO turned to orchestration for disease surveillance to avoid constraints its member states had imposed (Hanrieder 2014). And World Bank member states have given the organization only a weak mandate to address global public goods issues (Hale & Roger 2013). Because orchestration allows IGOs to gain expertise and legitimacy and to build relationships with intermediaries, while requiring limited resources, it may enhance IGO influence, and even IGO autonomy.

While member state oversight is often a constraint, however, a significant finding of orchestration research is that states sometimes welcome IGO orchestration or cause IGOs to engage in it, even when they are its intended targets. For example, states established
both GEF and the G-20 with a mandate to orchestrate other IGOs. In such cases, orchestration allows states to pursue their governance goals (including binding themselves and others to agreed commitments), at least to a limited degree, without having to delegate strong authority to international institutions or to incur significant material or sovereignty costs. States can, moreover, structure how IGOs orchestrate, especially by specifying or rejecting particular intermediaries (Abbott et al. 2014 b).

A lack of necessary governance capabilities is another important factor leading IGOs and other international governance actors to orchestrate (Abbott et al. 2014 a, b). Most IGOs lack the authority and access to directly regulate private targets; as a result organizations such as UNEP turn to or help create private intermediaries such as GRI and PRI. Even powerful, well-resourced actors such as the European Commission may lack specialized expertise; in business accounting, for example, the Commission was forced to turn to the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) to supply harmonized rules for the EU (Mattli 2014). WHO possesses substantial expertise and authority, but lacks sufficient resources to engage in costly operational activities such as research and disease surveillance; it relies on collaborating centers and ProMED, respectively, to provide the missing capabilities (Hanrieder 2014). Similarly, even governance actors with broad governance capabilities may turn to orchestration because it demands fewer resources (at least from the orchestrator) than more direct modes. In all these cases, capability deficits may be inadvertent, or intentional constraints imposed by member states.

Governance actors cannot orchestrate without intermediaries. Global environmental governance benefits from a wealth of potential intermediaries with strong capabilities and appropriate goals, especially among NGOs and technical experts; IUCN, TRAFFIC and
the many other NGOs that provide monitoring are examples (Dai 2014). Even where no appropriate intermediaries exist, moreover, UNEP’s experience suggests that under favorable conditions influential governance actors can catalyze the formation of new ones with relative ease. Orchestrators may also be able to shape the goals and capabilities of existing intermediaries, through support and steering, to satisfy their governance needs, as GEF did with certain regional financial institutions (Graham & Thompson 2014).

The availability of intermediaries with appropriate goals and capabilities affects the distributional impacts of orchestration as well as its effectiveness. Where multiple intermediaries exist, an orchestrator can choose among them, giving it significant leverage in the relationship. In contrast, where only a single intermediary possesses the necessary capabilities – as may be the case with TRAFFIC – the intermediary has greater bargaining power (Mattli 2014).

As these examples suggest, orchestration is not simply a technique for (indirectly) influencing the behavior of targets; it is also a means of managing inter-institutional relationships (Abbott et al. 2014 b). Orchestration is therefore relevant to both explanatory and normative analyses of inter-institutional interactions (Eberlein et al. 2013), regime complexes (Raustiala & Victor 2004; Keohane & Victor 2011) and transnational governance complexes (Abbott 2012), and to issues such as the “fragmentation” or “architecture” of global environmental governance and techniques for managing “assemblages” (Boyd 2010) of environmental institutions (van Asselt et al. 2009; van Asselt & Zelli 2012; Zelli 2011; Zelli and van Asselt 2013).

In terms of explanation, orchestration research suggests that institutional complexes are not simply horizontal structures within which overlapping institutions contest their
authority and their subjects contend with inconsistent rules (Raustiala & Victor 2004); and they are not shaped only by state strategies such as regime shifting (Helfer 2004). Rather, influential organizations within a complex, acting as “regime entrepreneurs” (Abbott 2013), employ orchestration techniques to introduce modest degrees of ordering, on their own initiative or at the behest of states. Where institutions within a complex view fragmentation as limiting their capabilities, the opportunity to achieve higher levels of ordering (Galaz et al. 2011) may lead them to accept or even seek orchestration. Where orchestrators help establish new intermediaries, on the other hand, orchestration increases the complexity of institutional assemblages.

Normatively, research suggests that orchestration, by enhancing ordering within institutional complexes, may help reduce the costs of inter-organizational contestation, enable more demanding collective activities, help to fill governance gaps and reduce overlaps, and otherwise increase governance effectiveness (Abbott 2012, 2013; Abbott et al. 2014 b). Orchestration is particularly valuable for “polycentric” responses to issues such as climate change, in which multiple sites of authority contribute to a solution, as opposed to a single, comprehensive response (Cole 2011; Ostrom 2010). Support and steering by orchestrators can help coordinate “bottom-up” commitments by states, IGOs and/or non-state organizations, and can promote peer pressure, public comparisons (Overdevest 2010), public demand and other means of ratcheting up such commitments over time. Again, orchestration can produce such effects – albeit to modest degrees – without strong delegations of authority by states (unlikely to be granted) or strong impositions on existing organizations (likely to be resisted).

3. Outlook
Orchestration is a new analytical concept, and orchestration research remains in its infancy. Early studies show orchestration to be widespread and significant, employed by varied actors in global environmental governance and many other domains, for a range of purposes, with diverse intermediaries and targets (Abbott et al. 2014 b). These studies, however, focus primarily on factors that explain when governance actors choose orchestration (as dependent variable), such as capability deficits, state oversight and intermediary availability. Even here, many causal factors operate in complex ways. Oversight mechanisms, for example, play different roles where states rather than IGOs initiate orchestration; intermediary availability is less significant where new intermediaries can be established. Further research is needed to clarify the conditions under which governance actors choose to orchestrate.

In addition, it is important that future research address the effects of orchestration (as independent variable). Few studies have analyzed the regulatory outputs, outcomes and impacts of specific orchestration efforts, or their effects on the regulatory capacity and performance of participating actors and institutional complexes (Eberlein et al. 2013). Moreover, while early research suggests some distributional effects on participating organizations (Mattli 2014), other such effects are also relevant. For example, multiple intermediaries may increase information costs for targets; orchestration may (sometimes intentionally) shift administrative costs from taxpayers to intermediaries and those that finance them, and shift compliance costs to actors in different positions along the supply chain (Schleifer 2013).

Effectiveness issues are central for normative analysis. So too are issues of “governance failure:” under what conditions will actors orchestrate wisely, as by
selecting intermediaries that are capable, properly governed and adopt appropriate
standards? Orchestrators may set the bar for acceptable intermediaries too high or too low,
impeding governance in either case (Hale & Roger 2013; Schleifer 2013). Issues of both
effectiveness and governance failure, moreover, should be addressed in comparison to
(often counterfactual) alternatives such as direct regulation or delegation, a difficult
challenge for orchestration research.

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