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Pathologies of a Different Kind: Dysfunctional Interactions between International Organizations

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This article develops the concept of "interorganizational pathologies" as an extension of Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore's work on bureaucratic pathologies. Adopting an open system perspective, I argue that dysfunctional interactions may arise between international organizations (IOs) even when their cooperation is fairly institutionalized. To advance this line of reasoning, I examine interactions between the International Monetary Fund (IMF or Fund) and the World Bank (or Bank). Evidence from more than ninety stakeholder interviews indicates that the interactions have been marked by what Barnett and Finnemore call "insulation." In particular, two opposing types of interorganizational insulation have been common in the context of Fund–Bank relations: (1) *groupthink*, or sustained intellectual decoupling by the two IOs from the outside world; and (2) *silence*, or (temporary) communicative disruption between them. This finding is partly puzzling because while we may expect IMF–World Bank interactions to produce groupthink given the organizations' highly similar worldviews, we would expect them to prevent silence given established protocols for continuous cross-organizational information sharing. The analysis sheds fresh light on the promises and pitfalls of cogovernance by IOs as key players in regime complexes and transnational networks.

Cet article développe le concept de « pathologies inter-organisationnelles » en tant qu'extension du travail de Michael N. Barnett et Martha Finnemore sur les pathologies bureaucratiques. J'adopte une perspective de système ouvert et je soutiens que même lorsque la coopération inter-organisationnelle est relativement institutionnalisée, des interactions dysfonctionnelles peuvent se développer entre organisations internationales (OI). J'examine les interactions entre le Fonds monétaire international (FMI ou Fonds) et la Banque mondiale (ou Banque) pour faire avancer ce raisonnement. Des preuves issues de plus de quatre-vingt-dix entretiens avec des parties prenantes indiquent que les interactions ont été marquées par ce que Barnett et Finnemore qualifient « d'isolement». Deux types opposés d'isolement inter-organisationnel ont en particulier été courants dans le contexte des relations entre le Fonds et la Banque: (1) pensée unique, ou déconnexion intellectuelle continue des deux OI du monde extérieur; et (2) silence, ou perturbation (temporaire) des communications entre elles. Cette conclusion est en partie déconcertante, car bien que nous puissions nous attendre à ce que les les interactions entre le FMI et la Banque mondiale produisent une pensée unique du fait de la très grande similarité des visions du monde de ces deux organisations, nous nous attendrions aussi à ce que ces organisations empêchent le silence du fait des protocoles établis de partage continu des connaissances entre elles. Cette analyse apporte un nouvel éclairage sur les promesses et les écueils de la cogouvernance par les OI en tant qu'actrices clés des complexes de régime et des réseaux transnationaux.

Este artículo desarrolla el concepto de "patologías interorganizativas" como una extensión del trabajo de Michael N. Barnett y Martha Finnemore sobre las patologías burocráticas. Desde una perspectiva de sistema abierto, sostengo que, incluso cuando la cooperación interorganizacional está bastante institucionalizada, pueden producirse interacciones disfuncionales entre las organizaciones internacionales (OI). Para avanzar en esta línea de razonamiento, analizo las interacciones entre el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI o Fondo) y el Banco Mundial (o Banco). Las pruebas recogidas en más de noventa entrevistas con las partes interesadas indican que las interacciones se han visto marcadas por lo que Barnett y Finnemore llaman "aislamiento." Concretamente, en el contexto de las relaciones entre el Fondo y los bancos, son frecuentes dos tipos opuestos de aislamiento interinstitucional: (1) el pensamiento de grupo, o la desvinculación intelectual sostenida por parte de las dos OI del mundo exterior; y (2) el silencio, o la interrupción comunicativa (temporal) entre ellas. Este hallazgo es en parte sorprendente, ya que si bien cabe esperar que las interacciones entre el FMI y el Banco Mundial produzcan un pensamiento de grupo, dada la gran similitud entre las cosmovisiones de las organizaciones, esperaríamos que eviten el silencio, teniendo en cuenta los protocolos establecidos para el intercambio continuo de conocimientos entre las organizaciones. El análisis arroja nueva luz sobre las promesas y los peligros de la cogobernanza por parte de las OI como actores clave en los complejos de regímenes y las redes transnacionales.

Introduction

Many contemporary international organizations (IOs) with overlapping mandates interact on a regular basis and in various ways. Their staff exchange information, coproduce data, and coauthor reports; sometimes, IOs even coordinate policies or institute official frameworks for cooperation. Given the prevalence of such extensive interactions in many settings, assumptions that one IO is an expert on this transnational issue and another on that issue are quickly misleading. IOs themselves tend to cultivate impressions of commanding expertise for distinct global governance domains (Boswell 2008; Freeman and Sturdy 2017; Kranke 2020a) although their epistemic authority is often infused with other actors' knowledge (Seabrooke and Nilsson 2015; Littoz-Monnet 2017a). The conventional wisdom about the

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boundedness and specialization of bureaucracies extends to instances in which they succumb to what Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore (1999) have famously described as organizational "pathologies." Our understanding of the expert role of IOs thus parallels our conceptual grasp of its potential limits: the sources of either are found solely inside an organization.

In this article, I qualify the standard view by arguing that many contemporary IOs cogovern so regularly that pathologies may arise not only *within* but also *between* them. Interactions between IOs can, in fact, breed interorganizational dysfunctions, on which the literature still has little to say. This oversight is partly due to the exceptional take-up of Barnett and Finnemore's (1999) article "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." Since its publication, IO scholarship has made considerable but uneven progress. Progress has been considerable because researchers, especially those working from principal–agent (PA) and constructivist perspectives, have further opened what was once the proverbial IO "black box." They have, in particular, specified the conditions under which IO bureaucrats enjoy autonomy from member states, as well as the ways in which they use it (Koch 2009; Graham 2014; Johnson 2014). At the same time, progress has been uneven because scholars have largely continued to black-box interactions between IOs. The analytical bias toward interorganizational dynamics obscures processes through which interactions between IOs create, rather than remove, obstacles to interstate cooperation. These unexplored pathologies can further entrench global governance "gridlock" (Hale, Held, and Young 2013).

The article's chief contribution is to clarify the dynamics surrounding inter-IO pathologies. To this end, I develop a common conceptual vocabulary for work that points to coordination and cooperation problems in dyadic IO relationships (Lütz and Kranke 2014; Van de Graaf 2017; Mele and Cappellaro 2018; Daidouji 2019). For illustration, I turn to the relationship between the International Monetary Fund (IMF or Fund) and the World Bank (or Bank) in what is a unique dyadic setting: the organizations share a liberal worldview, have a long history of institutionalized cooperation, and are headquartered in the same district of Washington, DC. Utilizing insights from expert interviews, as well as official documents, I show that IMF and the World Bank officials liaise with each other across organizational boundaries following an established set of formal and informal rules. These routines, however, do not necessarily keep IMF–World Bank interactions from turning dysfunctional. In developing this argument, I transplant the concept of organizational "pathologies" into an "open system" framework, which enjoys growing popularity among IO scholars (e.g., Koch 2009; Béland and Orenstein 2013; Hanrieder 2014; Seabrooke and Sending 2015). An open system perspective accounts for IOs' embeddedness in their institutional environments, in which various interorganizational activities take place.

The empirical analysis focuses on "insulation" as a distinct interorganizational pathology. Insulation, already conceptualized by Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 722–24) for the intraorganizational realm, generally refers to the relative lack of exposure or openness to critical external voices. The data for this research demonstrate that two opposing types of epistemic insulation have prevailed in Fund–Bank interactions: (1) *interorganizational groupthink* as an instance of sustained intellectual decoupling by the two IOs from the outside world and (2) *interorganizational silence* as an instance of (temporary) communicative disruption between them. While the political and spatial proximity of the two IOs makes groupthink a "most-likely" interorganizational pathology, silence is a "least-likely" one for the same reason. In other words, more groupthink should mean less silence, and vice versa. Yet the empirical evidence on Fund–Bank interactions indicates that groupthink and silence can simultaneously strain interactions between IOs. This novel perspective adds an interorganizational dimension to scholarship that identifies bureaucratic culture as a source of IO pathologies (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Weaver 2008). My account also differs from analyses that trace dysfunctions primarily back to the actions of member states (Sobol 2016; Hofmann 2019). The article is thus situated between traditional IO scholarship focused on interactions between secretariats and member states, and more recent global governance research on regime complexity and transnational networks.

The article is organized into five sections. The first section makes a case for conceiving of contemporary IOs as expert cogovernors with regular interactions, as covered to some extent by the literatures on regime complexity and transnational networks. The second section categorizes different strands of intra- and interorganizational scholarship on IO pathologies; it problematizes intraorganizational approaches on the one hand and state-centric interorganizational approaches on the other to introduce a less state-centric interorganizational lens as an alternative. The third section specifies the research design. The final two sections delve into concrete, albeit contrasting, manifestations of pathological insulation in Fund–Bank interactions. While the fourth section discusses the use of lending conditionality as an example of interorganizational groupthink, the fifth section illustrates interorganizational silence with reference to recent changes to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The conclusion summarizes the findings and connects the pathologies of the IMF–World Bank dyad to larger issues in contemporary global governance.

Cogovernance by International Organizations

International organizations are said to govern by expertise. Much IO research attributes the production of expert knowledge mainly to factors internal to a given organization, especially the capacity of its staff (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Xu and Weller 2008; Baker 2012; Gray 2018). In this popular logic, an individual IO's secretariat constitutes "the 'engine room' of ideas," as André Broome and Leonard Seabrooke (2012, 1) put it. However, a large part of the literature ignores that these "engine rooms" frequently interact with one another by exchanging information, undertaking joint analyses, coauthoring reports, coordinating or even codesigning policies, and jointly advising national authorities and monitoring policy implementation. As the analysis of Fund–Bank interactions in this article suggests, cogovernance by IOs can be both extensive (covering numerous issue areas) and intensive (involving regular engagement).

To theorize interactions between IOs as cogovernors, I draw on the open system tradition in the field of organization studies. Underpinning this tradition is a relational understanding of organizations as collective actors that interact with and adapt to their environments (Scott 2003, 29). The notion of an "open system" implies that an organization exists in a give-and-take relationship with other actors in its environment. The organization absorbs resources needed for its own survival while also providing material and ideational resources critical to the maintenance of the system in which it is embedded. That is, organizations and their environments coevolve. Interactions between organizations populating intersecting fields are thus of paramount analytical interest (Scott 2003, 89–91).

Much global governance scholarship is informed by an open system stance. For example, Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell (2010, 2) regard "relationships among governors" as equally constitutive to global governance arrangements as "relationships between governors and the governed." More specifically, they argue:

> Governance is not a solo act, and governors can rarely accomplish ends alone. They divide labor, delegate, compete, and cooperate with one another in many ways to produce the outcomes we observe. Almost all governing in contemporary global politics seems to be the result of governor *inter*actions of various kinds (Avant, Finnemore, and Sell 2010, 2, original emphasis).

Open system thinking emphasizes the links between IOs and their environments. Not only do other actors offer essential resources to or withhold them from an IO, they also (de)legitimize its routines and operations (Littoz-Monnet 2017b, 6). Macro-level trends accordingly set broad directions for IO policymaking (Béland and Orenstein 2013; Chorev 2013). Despite acknowledging institutional embeddedness, IO scholars have been timid to explicitly apply an open system lens to inter-IO constellations. Much research still does not look beyond the indirect effects of IO coexistence and interplay. One strand explores similarities between IOs in global policy domains as diverse as climate change (Meckling and Allan 2020), health (Holzscheiter 2017), and poverty reduction (Blackmon 2008). Related work analyzes how existing institutions circumscribe the operational scope of potentially new IOs (Clarke 2014; Borowy 2019, 104). There are, however, two bodies of work in the open system tradition that more systemically scrutinize not only how IOs interact, but also how they cogovern areas of overlapping responsibilities.

The first body of work foregrounds the sources and consequences of institutional interplay in world politics under the unifying concept of "regime complexity." A regime complex is defined as "an array of partially overlapping and nonhierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area" (Raustiala and Victor 2004, 279). The regime complexity approach assumes that international institutions coexist in ecosystems with contingent and evolving boundaries, which fosters interactions between them (Gehring and Oberthür 2009). Political issues are rarely perceived to fall within the exclusive purview of one institution even when actors negotiate a certain allocation of responsibilities (Gehring and Faude 2014). Institutional mandates thus remain relatively fuzzy and open to revisions. Given their scope for independent action, IOs are typically influential players in regime complexes, where they not only shape the conditions for cooperation for various other actors (Gómez-Mera 2016) but also cooperate and compete with one another (Holzscheiter 2017). In short, an IO's autonomy can be constrained by the activities of a range of actors beyond its own membership, and these actors include other IOs.

The second body of work takes the open system logic yet one step further by examining the mobility of experts in networks that transcend national, organizational, professional, and other boundaries. The idea that actors do not consistently operate in clearly demarcated fields has inspired work on "government networks" (Slaughter 2004) and networks with limited or without direct government involvement (Stone 2004; Kim 2020). Within such networks, IOs often occupy central epistemic positions, which allow them to enroll other actors for their activities (Stone 2013; Bueger 2015; Kluczewska 2020). The sociology of transnational professions further relaxes the role played by governmental actors, showing how actors dispersed across organizational sites but bound by shared standards of conduct vie with other professional groups for epistemic primacy. Networks and organizations whose readings of problems and proposals for solutions come to be widely adopted enjoy "issue control" (Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017, 5). Recent research has documented professional battles for issue control within, across, and beyond IOs in key transnational policy domains, such as finance (Ban, Seabrooke, and Freitas 2016) or health (Hasselbalch 2016). Even more than the regime complexity literature, the sociology of professions decenters individual IOs yet without downplaying their relevance as experts in global governance.

Both these strands underline that interactions between IOs are common in areas in which mandates are overlapping and issues interlinked. Many transboundary problems, such as climate change or pandemics, are perceived to cut across formal organizational mandates. As a result, cooperation between IOs has become a prevalent, albeit sometimes hidden, practice for handling complex issues (Biermann and Koops 2017a, 12–17; Mele and Cappellaro 2018; Kranke 2020a). While traditional IO scholarship often stops at presumed organizational boundaries, the regime complexity and transnational network literatures zoom out too much from interorganizational interactions. This article bridges these scales by investigating pathologies of cogovernance involving two IOs. The next section lays the conceptual foundations for such an analysis.

Pathologies within and between IOs

We can review the literature on IO pathologies through a mapping exercise. As displayed in figure 1, I divide the literature along two major axes: (1) levels of activities and (2) main actors. The resulting illustration heuristically categorizes the focal points of five broad analytical approaches to IO pathologies, with one representative contribution for each cited in parentheses. After reviewing four existing strands, I propose a complementary perspective.

In the upper left-hand cell of figure 1, we find Barnett and Finnemore's (1999) influential *International Organization* article "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." The article has massively influenced the study of IO behavior, as evidenced by more than 2,800 citations according to Google Scholar (as of July 5, 2021). Not only did it lead other researchers to dissect the cultural foundations of IO expertise, but it also encouraged them to treat IOs as self-contained bureaucracies that rarely interact with one another. From this intraorganizational perspective, expert knowledge emerges from and consolidates through internal processes, as do dysfunctions; IOs are potentially pathological from within. As Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 718) themselves explain: "... organizations frequently develop distinctive internal cultures that can promote dysfunctional behavior, behavior that we call 'pathological.'" Much subsequent scholarship has built on this insight to identify internally rooted dysfunctions across the spectrum of contemporary IOs (Lipson 2007, 13–18; Momani 2007; Weaver 2008; Eccleston and Woodward 2014) or to argue more broadly that IOs tend to follow their own narrow priorities (Chorev 2013; Broome, Homolar, and Kranke 2018). Cognate work explains problems of interorganizational

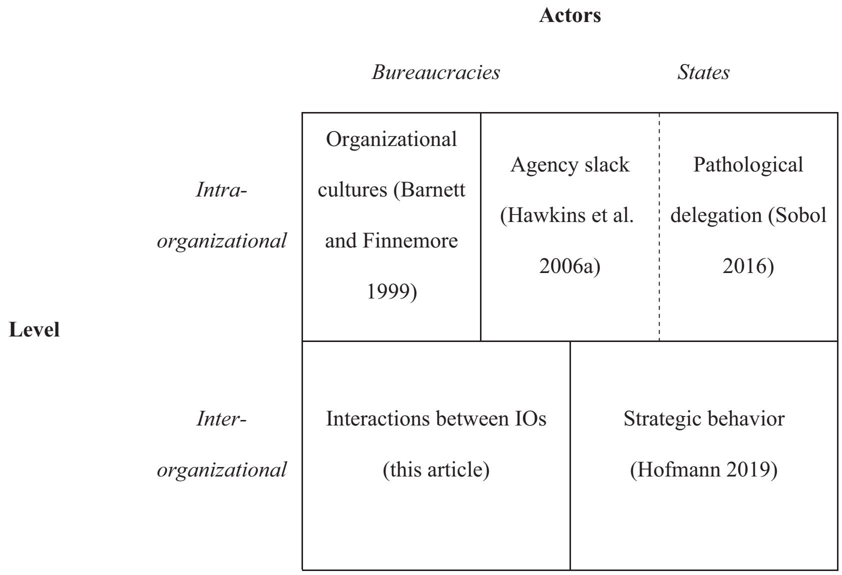

Figure 1. Sources of IO dysfunctions
Source: Author.
Notes: This representation bears some resemblance to Barnett and Finnemore's (1999, 716, Fig. 1) classification of the literature on IO dysfunctions, whereby the "Bureaucracies" and "States" columns here correspond roughly to their "Internal" and "External" columns, respectively.

cooperation with incompatible bureaucratic cultures (Momani and Hibben 2015) or concerns about "reputational uniqueness" (Busuioc 2016). However, this literature overlooks the possibility that pathologies take shape as IOs interact.

The stretched upper right-hand cell contains another large body of IO scholarship with an intraorganizational thrust, the PA approach. Viewing bureaucracies and states as more equally contributing to pathologies, it comes in two main variants relevant to the study of IO pathologies, as indicated by the dashed line. The first variant is the "agency slack" view, which elaborates how bureaucrats manage to manipulate their delegation relationship with states by trying less hard ("shirking") or pursuing different ends from those originally agreed ("slippage"). In either case, the delegation process becomes ineffective or requires additional control to ensure effectiveness (Hawkins et al. 2006b, 8–9). Whether principals' control efforts succeed is determined by various institutional factors (Heldt 2017). The second variant is the less common "pathological delegation" angle, which turns the agency slack logic on its head. The focus here lies not on agents who evade delegated tasks, but on principals who are disinterested in task completion. As Mor Sobol (2016, 339, original emphasis) summarizes, pathological delegation results from "perverse incentives for *the principals* to behave in ways inimical to the delegation act and thus hinder the agent's work." Despite their differences, both perspectives focus on dysfunctions along the delegation chain. However, the most important delegation acts occur between formally recognized organizational stakeholders, typically from national governments to their appointed representatives to professional bureaucrats (Nielson and Tierney 2003, 249–51). Interactions between IOs are not commonly subject to a logic of delegation. In the case of the Fund and the Bank, neither organization acts as the principal of the other.

The lower right-hand cell includes state-driven interorganizational pathologies as recently specified by Stephanie C. Hofmann (2019). This perspective holds that states resort to certain strategies of managing interorganizational links in line with their IO membership profiles and dominant preferences: "… organizational overlap variably changes member-states' strategic options" (Hofmann 2019, 884). A related line of inquiry highlights that states can hamper intra- and interorganizational processes in various ways (Biermann 2015, 49–50). While this strand moves beyond individual IOs, interactions between them are reduced to sideshows in which states remain the principal actors. The empirical applicability of this perspective ultimately depends on which IOs are concerned. Given the considerable bureaucratic autonomy enjoyed by both World Bank and IMF staff (Bauer and Ege 2016, 1031–32), we may expect some pathologies to be neither endogenously made nor induced by states. Especially when states have weak substantial or procedural preferences, interactions between relatively autonomous IO secretariats may instead beget their very own dysfunctions.

The lower left-hand cell of figure 1 represents the perspective advanced in this article, which seriously considers pathologies of interorganizational origin and character. The explicit focus on interactions between IOs, which transcends both regime complexity and transnational networks scholarship, resonates with a prominent stream in organization studies. The open system perspective has infused researchers with a principal skepticism toward the isolated treatment of single organizations (Winter et al. 2014), which, in turn, feeds interest in interorganizational dynamics (e.g., Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips 2002). As discussed above, many analytical and operational tasks undertaken by IO bureaucrats similarly involve interactions beyond their own organization at some point. They can coordinate mundane activities (Mele and Cappellaro 2018), sway each other's decisions (Margulis 2021), and create entirely new organizations (Johnson 2014) with little or even without state interference. As IOs cogovern a panoply of transnational issues, interorganizational pathologies are more likely than conventional accounts imply. Before corroborating this claim, I describe, in the next section, the research design for this study of interactions between the IMF and the World Bank.

Studying Interorganizational Practices in Global Governance

The material for this qualitative study of interorganizational pathologies forms part of a multi-year research project on IMF–World Bank cooperation in three major issue areas: crisis lending, financial sector surveillance, and concessional lending and debt relief. In this context, I have collected qualitative data through extensive multi-sited research during two stays in Washington, which amounted to a total of four months (April–July 2015 and February–March 2017), and complementary desk research. The principal sources for the project and, hence, this article are onsite and remote expert interviews, background conversations, and documents by the two organizations on matters of interorganizational cooperation.

The findings presented here derive mainly from a total of ninety-eight semi-structured interviews with IMF and World Bank Group officials (both current and former), civil society representatives (only current), and government officials (both current and former) in 2015–20. The overall count includes seven follow-up interviews with six individuals: three IMF staff members and two World Bank officials, all of whom I interviewed twice (in 2015 and 2017); and one individual whom I interviewed three times (with that person being an IMF staff member in 2015 and 2017, and a former IMF staff member in 2020). Among the sixty-seven current and former staff members, managers, and consultants, fourteen (or over one-fifth) had previously occupied a position in the other organization. Cross-organizational experiences seem to be less common among state delegates (i.e., Executive Directors, Alternates, and advisors), many of whom come from and later return to national ministries. In this article, I actively use twenty of these interviews, including two follow-ups (see supplementary appendix for details), to substantiate and illustrate my claims. The length of the cited interviews varied considerably, ranging from less than thirty to over one-hundred minutes.

I relied on snowballing, referrals, and desk research to identify and select suitable interviewees. Snowballing was also instrumental in indicating a sufficient level of saturation in my sample as over time recommendations for additional contacts included increasingly more people whom I had already interviewed. I conducted most interviews in person and a smaller number remotely (by telephone, Skype, and Zoom). At the beginning of each interview, I secured informed consent from the interviewee(s), which also involved negotiating a non-identifying label for anonymous attribution (unless interviewees offered to go on record by name) and asking for permission to record the conversation (which interviewees could deny). While I used a guide with predominantly open-ended questions about various aspects of Fund–Bank cooperation for orientation, interviewees were free to recount personal experiences through anecdotes.

The analysis is informed by notes that I took during and after each interview, and by short memos that I wrote later after listening to the recordings or revisiting the notes (where no tape existed). I use quotes from some of the interviews as illustrations of more general points emerging from the data; to improve readability, I have corrected small linguistic errors and, where interviewees immediately corrected themselves, left out their initial words. The interpretation of the interview data was aided by insights gained from the following additional activities: short-term participant observation at the IMF–World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington in April 2015; nine informal background conversations also in Washington in 2015; and feedback from six IMF staff members on a research presentation that I delivered at IMF Headquarters on March 10, 2017.

The empirical material points to pathologies that are *not* confined to one of the two IOs. Specifically, the interview data indicate the prevalence of interorganizational insulation. In the classic understanding of Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 722), "insulation" occurs "when parochial classification and categorization schemes come to define reality—how bureaucrats understand the world—such that they routinely ignore information that is essential to the accomplishment of their goals." Insulation is relational. The concept can be applied to interactions between an IO and any other actor in its environment, including another IO. To detect patterns of interorganizational insulation, I sought to abstract from the miscellaneous episodes reported by individual interviewees.

The observed instances boil down to two main opposing types of insulation, as summarized in table 1. The first type is *interorganizational groupthink*, which I define as insulation *by* IOs through intellectual decoupling from the outside world so that alternative bodies of knowledge are not incorporated into operations. The second type is *interorganizational silence*, which means insulation *between* IOs through communicative disruption so that relevant information does not travel as foreseen for at least some time. Groupthink means excessive cogovernance while silence means too little. Groupthink and silence would appear to be inversely related because insulation against the outside world (groupthink) should serve to protect the organizations from insulation against each other (silence). As a consequence, we would hold diverging expectations about interorganizational groupthink as compared to interorganizational silence: the more groupthink persists, the less comprehensive silence should be, and vice versa.

As far as the Fund–Bank relationship is concerned, there are three basic reasons that would prompt us to regard groupthink as an expected, or most-likely, pathology and silence as an unexpected, or least-likely, one. First, the organizations pursue the same broad goal: market-led global economic integration (Woods 2006). Second, their interactions date back to their founding days and have, as a general trend, become more institutionalized across several issue areas (Kranke 2020b). Third, their "formal" and "informal connectivity" creates favorable conditions for interorganizational diffusion (Sommerer and Tallberg 2019, 405–07). The organizations are formally connected through almost identical memberships (with membership in the World Bank tied to membership in the IMF) while numerous initiatives for routine cooperation exist to this day. They are more informally connected through operations in the same broad issue area (economic policy with respective specializations) and through their role as global organizations based in the same city (Washington). A tunnel underneath 19th Street even physically connects their headquarters (Woods 2006, 6). These factors combined should intensify thinking about problems and solutions along similar lines, and encourage a continuous flow of information between the staffs. Under such conditions, groupthink is a most-likely but silence a least-likely interorganizational pathology.

There is, however, one factor that makes the prevalence of silence somewhat plausible. Fund–Bank interactions unfold in a context that combines high bureaucratic

Table 1. Insulation as interorganizational pathology

	Groupthink	*Silence*
Definition	Intellectual decoupling by IOs from the outside world	Communicative disruption between IOs
Function	Facilitation of cooperation based on shared worldviews	Increased autonomy for intraorganizational decision-making
Effects	Decreased epistemic diversity, potential loss of legitimacy	Weaker policy coherence, higher transaction costs
Example	IMF and World Bank officials wedded to economic liberalization and conditionality	World Bank officials failing to inform IMF counterparts about planned PRSP reform

Source: Author.

autonomy from member state interference at the intraorganizational level with extensive institutional overlap at the interorganizational level. The two organizations have complementary mandates, as is widely acknowledged, and their staffs exercise relative discretion in designing and delivering cooperative activities. Executive Directors, as well as their Alternates and Advisors, in both organizations exercise rather broad oversight, which gives them little insight into interorganizational routines (Interviews 028, 031, 064). Thus, they cannot systematically scrutinize activities involving the other organization. This situation provides fertile ground for bureaucracy-driven interorganizational pathologies despite shared worldviews, regular interactions, and deep connectivity. Yet before we move on to the empirical analysis, two caveats are in order.

First, I do not take a normative stance on the desirability of inter-IO cooperation in general or Fund–Bank cooperation in particular. Instead, I follow Barnett and Finnemore (2004, 36, original emphasis), who note on this point: "Behavior is dysfunctional only *for* something or someone; behavior by itself is neither functional nor dysfunctional." Value judgements about proper organizational conduct, thus, reflect contingent relational standards. In fact, insulation is not pathological per se. Tana Johnson's (2014) explanation of how bureaucrats contribute to endowing new IOs with sufficient autonomy from state control shows that insulation may also be regarded as a positive attribute. However, insulation becomes pathological when it is perceived as excessive by key stakeholders. In this spirit, my analysis starts from the self-referential expectations of the relevant practitioners to hold the organizations to their own standards. As current and former officials overwhelmingly stated, Fund–Bank cooperation is deemed successful when it decreases operational costs (such as by avoiding a "duplication of efforts"), enhances knowledge for macroeconomic policymaking, and ensures policy "complementarity." When these goals are systemically missed, interorganizational engagement can be considered pathological.

Second and relatedly, the article proceeds inductively by inferring specific interorganizational pathologies in a specific interorganizational context from a given set of data. As a consequence, I do not cover all potential forms of interorganizational pathologies nor develop a comprehensive typology of them. While there are surely interorganizational dysfunctions other than insulation in Fund–Bank interactions and beyond, my ambition here is to provide an empirically grounded account of two predominant pathologies in IMF–World Bank interactions based on extensive field and desk research. In this respect, groupthink and silence are by no means the only interorganizational pathologies in global governance, but they are pertinent illustrative examples of how disparate dysfunctions can trouble interactions between IOs.

Interorganizational Groupthink

Interorganizational groupthink devalues knowledge that contradicts views shared by two or more organizations. While conformity can increase efficiency, policymaking may become too narrow when IOs are impervious to external criticism. Groupthink is conventionally discussed as a lack of epistemic diversity within organizations (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 722–23; Kelman, Sanders, and Pandit 2017). Groupthink may similarly prevail in interorganizational settings, where it can strengthen cross-organizational identities around a common endeavor (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant 2005, 62–63). Thus, other objectives and contradicting views on specific issues remain outside or at the margins of interorganizational discourses.

Insiders are typically unaware or uncritical of groupthink. The Fund and the Bank have each been described as taking universalist economistic views on inherently political questions, which crowd out knowledge not in tune with mainstream economic theory (Best 2005; Momani 2005b; Rao and Woolcock 2007; Allan 2019). As became clear during the research, there is enough common ground for interorganizational groupthink to flourish, which is buttressed by a shared professional mindset. Bank officials engaging in interorganizational routines have similar professional backgrounds to their Fund counterparts: while virtually all IMF staff are trained macroeconomists, World Bankers without such training or corresponding work experiences tend not to be assigned tasks that involve regular contact with the Fund. As one World Banker observed:

> ... we're all using the same data, we all went to the same graduate schools, and it's basically the same [macro] model. I think there may be some differences. So it's unlikely that there will be a big discrepancy in the macro framework. So frankly, I think if there were cases where the Fund said "no" and we went ahead with it—and I said I don't know any in my time—chances are it was because there was some political game being played (Interview 018[2]).

Many Fund and Bank officials assume that their cooperation safeguards against groupthink, understanding it—in the traditional sense—as an intraorganizational problem. Through cooperation, the reasoning goes, each side learns from the other what it knows less well. The 2007 Report of the External Review Committee on Bank–Fund Collaboration, more commonly known as the "Malan Report" (after its chair, Pedro Malan), is indicative of this position. It invokes "the recognition of the complementary nature of the diverse skills and knowledge of all parties involved" (IMF and World Bank 2007b, 31). This formulation implies that while staff teams approach and handle overlapping issues differently, they can still integrate their viewpoints into a coherent whole. How much external input the organizations absorb, however, hinges on the definition of the term "all parties involved." Some stakeholders perceive Fund–Bank cooperation as a form of organized technocracy that does not serve the general public (Interview 040). As Fund and Bank officials clarified in the interviews, cooperation means bridging smaller differences between them, rather than incorporating genuinely alternative views from elsewhere.

One of the most taken-for-granted and resilient beliefs within both organizations is that conditionality is a necessary policy tool to induce commitment to political reform and to ensure timely loan repayment. The question then is not whether but how to apply conditionality. IMF and World Bank economists widely agree that a softening of loan conditionality would only serve to incentivize irresponsible borrowing. Nonetheless, officials have at times held opposing views on the desirability of exchange rate flexibility, the need for agricultural and oil subsidies, and the capacity for short-term expansions of foodstuff production (Interviews 018[1], 047, 056). Transnational civil society organizations may seize such opportunities to put public pressure on the IO with the more orthodox stance (Interview 007). However, these occasional interorganizational conflicts over the design and application of specific conditions have surfaced within the narrow confines of a consensus on the merits of global integration through liberalization (Interviews 022, 037, 040). Both organizations have traditionally been and remain outspoken supporters of the use of conditionality to this end.

Dissenting internal voices are rare. Economists who reject conditionality would probably not seek employment at the Fund or the Bank in the first place, or not be hired if they did and disclosed such a contrarian stance (on the IMF, Momani 2005a, 148; on the World Bank, Broad 2006). Among the several dozen Fund and Bank officials interviewed for this project, none made a strong case for unconditional lending. One IMF member state representative at least challenged the official line:

> And this is one of my favorite questions here: Do we condition so that we can lend? Or do we lend so that we can condition? … I think that here my perception is that we lend so that we can condition (Interview 037).

Outside the organizations, however, the use of conditionality has provoked more heated debates. Critics have repeatedly emphasized the contractionary economic effects and social repercussions of imposing austerity policies through conditionality. On the academic side, there is ample evidence that both organizations still routinely deploy loan conditions although the World Bank seems to be more adaptive in their design (Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King 2016; Cormier and Manger 2021). The literature provides robust evidence that conditionality misses its stated objectives more often than it meets them (Babb and Carruthers 2008, 21–23). The interviewed Fund and Bank economists, by contrast, typically saw conditionality as a necessary guarantee of "sound" economic policymaking. While they were not against prescribing fewer but better-targeted conditions, as envisaged in parallel "streamlining" efforts (Abdildina and Jaramillo-Vallejo 2005), almost all implied that unconditional lending was ineffective at best and damaging at worst. With the quoted exception, the counter-position was not actively entertained.

Interorganizational groupthink about conditionality makes prospective borrowers face high hurdles to forum-shopping for a sweeter deal. In its capacity as the leading authority on sovereign lending, the IMF provides expertise not only to the World Bank but also to various regional organizations, such as the European Union or the Inter-American Bank for Development (Interviews 006, 029[2]). Moreover, attaching conditions to loans is so ingrained in both organizations that even small deviations from standard operating procedures become conversation pieces. For example, Bank officials sensed "a change of roles" following the 2007–08 global financial crisis: suddenly their organization was more rigid than "'the new Fund' as we used to affectionately call it, where they were getting quite relaxed about the fiscal deficit" (Interview 018[1]). In some cases, Bank staff advised authorities, especially those in heavily indebted countries, to refrain from expanding their deficits (Interview 018[1]). This episode suggests that one IO may more actively protect a shared practice, such as imposing conditionality, when another displays a little less zeal. Interorganizational groupthink can be as resilient as internal intellectual monocultures.

Interorganizational Silence

Interorganizational silence thwarts information sharing, thus threatening policy coherence. In the longer run, it undermines the buildup of collective identities across organizational boundaries (Koschmann 2013). While silence can serve as a strategy for individual organizations against public criticism (Maor, Gilad, and Ben-Nun Bloom 2013), we know little about how it affects cogovernance arrangements between IOs, which depend on reciprocal information sharing (Biermann and Koops 2017a, 21). Silence can be especially detrimental when critical information cannot be extracted anywhere else.

Essentially, we would not expect silence to obstruct interactions in a context where groupthink prevails as demonstrated above. Moreover, the organizations have established protocols for mutual information exchange, which amount to a "no surprises" policy. As numerous officials in different positions across both organizations stressed, relevant information must be shared on an ongoing basis: staff from the corresponding units in each organization regularly consult with each other, as do counterparts at higher levels, such as IMF Directors and World Bank Vice Presidents; at the very top of the hierarchy, the IMF Managing Director and the World Bank President meet at least once every quarter to discuss overarching questions. Contentious issues are "escalated" up the chain of command if no resolution is reached at a lower level, as was again confirmed by interviewees from both organizations. These (unwritten) rules serve to close informational gaps and forestall uncoordinated action. Silence, therefore, represents a pathology by the organizations' own standards.

Relevant information can concern the economies of members (such as key macroeconomic data or specific policy plans), the activities of stakeholders (such as civil society actors or other IOs affected by specific policies), or the framework for cooperation itself. The 1989 "IMF–World Bank Concordat," a venerated memorandum of understanding, already emphasizes the operational benefits of "a more systematic exchange of information" (IMF and World Bank 1989, 703); the Malan Report reiterates the need for "open communication" (IMF and World Bank 2007b, 30); and the resulting Joint Management Action Plan (JMAP) specifies communication failures, recommending, among other things, the creation of web portals to ensure a continuous flow of information (IMF and World Bank 2007a, 15–18). The 2010 review of the JMAP again notes similar deficiencies (World Bank and IMF 2010, 26–27). While the use of web portals among staff teams working on the same countries has been poor (Interview 073), in other areas silence has hobbled effective cogovernance.

Interviews revealed that officials' perceptions diverged as to whether the World Bank had properly communicated its planned abolition of the PRSPs across 19th Street in 2014–15. Introduced in 1999 as a requirement for countries receiving multilateral debt relief under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, PRSPs had a distinctly interorganizational origin. Soon both organizations also utilized PRSPs to determine members' access to concessional lending, which culminated in the preparation of Joint Staff Assessments (JSAs; later renamed Joint Staff Advisory Notes, JSANs) to evaluate the submitted PRSPs. For the World Bank Group, PRSPs lost their significance from 2013 onward. The *World Bank Group Strategy*, released in October 2013, does not mention them at all, presenting Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCDs) and Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs) as new tools for engagement instead of Country Assistance Strategies (CASs; World Bank Group 2013, 25–26). With the release of an operational follow-up in April 2014, the World Bank Group (2014, 11–12) terminated the PRSP process, including the JSAN routine. As one senior World Bank official succinctly put it in mid-2015: "The PRSP is dead" (Interview 017).

Given the heavily institutionalized interactions around the PRSP, IMF officials should have known that the World Bank was about to phase it out. Yet few, if any, people at the IMF seem to have been kept abreast of this crucial plan. Even though the Executive Directors offices representing the same countries or constituencies liaise closely and regularly, one IMF representative remarked: "The Fund was left a little bit lost" (Interview 046). An official who had served in both organizations concurred while also looking at the bigger picture:

> … recently, the World Bank eliminated the PRSPs … They didn't bother to tell the Fund. I mean before Malan that could not have happened because there was a protocol on how things work. After Malan, it was supposed to be all about culture. … without rules, people don't bother cooperating because it takes more of your time and you want to go home.
>
> There was no negotiation. … The Fund was not involved really (Interview 077).

Despite a "no surprises" policy, the IMF was surprised by the World Bank's PRSP reform. While the instrument was "dead" at the Bank, the Fund was only slowly coming to terms with this unexpected change. The result was a curious interim period during which the World Bank, the global agenda-setter on poverty reduction, no longer upheld the PRSP requirement for concessional lending, but the IMF did. For those cases, Bank staff still coauthored JSANs with their Fund counterparts (Interview 088) (see also World Bank Group 2014, 12). This situation lasted for about a year until the IMF declared in May 2015 that countries would have to prepare Economic Development Documents (EDDs), instead of PRSPs, for any future concessional arrangements (IMF 2015). With this decision, the Fund also eventually followed the Bank in abolishing the use of JSANs except for the few countries still in the HIPC debt relief process, which would need to formulate PRSPs as before (IMF 2015, 21; World Bank Group 2014, 12).

Had the World Bank informed the IMF early on about its intention to scrap the PRSP, both organizations could have negotiated a reform package. Instead, the Fund had to devise a new framework when the Bank had already adopted its own, which made keeping the PRSP practically impossible. At that point, it was almost a foregone conclusion that no new joint instrument would be launched (Interview 046). Coordination did not unfold despite the widely recognized protocol for prompt information sharing on matters relevant to both organizations. Silence persisted especially between officials from Operations Policy and Country Services (OPCS), who were in charge of revising organizational directives for country engagement (World Bank Group 2014, 17–28), and their IMF counterparts in the Strategy, Policy, and Review (SPR) Department. As a consequence, the IMF's transition from the PRSPs became unnecessarily drawn out.

Silence about the impending discontinuation of the PRSP manifestly violated the "no surprises" policy because the reform would inevitably have consequences for the IMF. Its staff had to play reform catch-up upon learning of the PRSP's fate at the World Bank. They could not have obtained this information from any other source than the Bank itself. Contrary to the organizations' own expectations about the efficient deployment of resources, transaction costs were thus increased, rather than decreased, through institutionalized cooperation. While none of the interviewed Fund officials complained about a disruption of the ongoing PRSP operations with the Bank, uncertainty abounded for low-income countries until the IMF decided to introduce the EDDs. Now, these members are confronted with two sets of procedural requirements instead of a unified framework. To once more quote from the Malan Report: "Uncoordinated activities can place unnecessary burdens on members in their dealings with the two institutions" (IMF and World Bank 2007b, 18).

How can we make sense of the surprising finding that silence persisted between two IOs otherwise prone to groupthink? Although this article has an exploratory, rather than explanatory, ambition, I wish to briefly reflect on two factors that seem to have produced favorable conditions for silence about the Bank's PRSP reform plan. First, the Bank underwent a massive internal restructuring over the 2014–15 financial year, during which "networks" were replaced by "global practices." The process also uprooted personal networks across the organizations. Many Fund staff wondered "whom to call" after their familiar counterparts had moved internally—a problem acknowledged at the Bank (Interviews 017, 029[1], 067[1]). Second, if we extend an insight from public administration research, it may become clearer why Bank officials did not—at the time or retrospectively—problematize the lack of communication with the Fund. Moshe Moar, Sharon Gilad, and Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom (2013) suggest that a regulator may more easily disregard public criticism if it has built a strong reputation in the relevant area. As the world's leading IO on poverty issues, the World Bank just saw little risk in moving ahead with the PRSP reform and telling the IMF later.

Conclusion

The mainstream literature still treats interorganizational practices as epiphenomenal to the study of IOs. Despite the growing prominence of regime complexity and transnational network approaches, our theories and concepts remain tailored to the analysis of what happens within, rather than between, IOs. This article has joined others in calling for a shift in perspective (Biermann and Koops 2017b). Revisiting Barnett and Finnemore's (1999) concept of organizational "pathologies" from an open system perspective, I have elaborated on the notion of bureaucracy-driven interorganizational pathologies. The analysis of two contrasting types of insulation in IMF–World Bank interactions—interorganizational groupthink and silence—has illustrated that not all dysfunctions are produced within IOs; some emerge from interactions between them. Whereas groupthink shielded IMF and World Bank officials from alternative views on loan conditionality, temporary silence hampered the flow of critical information between them on the Bank's PRSP reform notwithstanding established protocols for routine information sharing. Contrary to expectations, silence occurred despite groupthink.

An obvious question is how insights into dysfunctional interactions between the IMF and the World Bank travel to other dyadic IO contexts. Although the contingency of contextual factors surrounding two (or more) IOs impedes generalization, the analysis of this unique dyad suggests that interorganizational pathologies are more widespread than is commonly assumed. We may indeed expect to find that groupthink flourishes among two ideationally and operationally aligned IOs. Other closely cooperating IOs with compatible agendas are unlikely to fare much better in this regard. We should, however, be surprised to find that groupthink among IO officials may not necessarily prevent them from temporarily sliding into silence. The empirical record then raises a larger question that calls for more systematic study: What is the relationship between silence and groupthink? The analysis has not borne out the expected inverse relationship between these two pathologies for IMF–World Bank interactions. Other settings may have a sweet spot in which neither silence nor groupthink afflicts interorganizational life.

New research into interorganizational processes can complement and enrich our existing knowledge of IOs' internal workings. To comprehend the dearth of research on interorganizational dynamics in global governance, we need to recall that the IMF and the World Bank figure among the most prominent contemporary IOs and that few other dyads cooperate as closely. Yet our understanding of how even these two well-known exemplars interact remains limited as IO scholarship of the past two decades has narrowly concentrated on unveiling intraorganizational dynamics. We know a lot more about the scope conditions and effects of IOs' autonomy from member states than we do about the scope conditions and effects of autonomy of one IO from another. An unfortunate corollary is a lack of conceptual clarity and comparative empirical knowledge about inter-IO dynamics. It is time for researchers to reconcile their fascination for the dynamics within IOs with analytical attention to the dynamics between them.

The study of interorganizational pathologies bears broader lessons about global governing under conditions of institutional density. One important implication of the preceding analysis is that perfect isolation is infeasible. IOs may simply have to live with imperfect interactions. As they collaboratively classify intersecting problems, develop issue linkages, and devise potential solutions, new opportunities for cogovernance are accompanied by greater exposure to the vagaries of interorganizational pathologies. To make matters worse, one vice may not crowd out another. How interorganizational pathologies affect global governance in and across regime complexes and transnational networks remains an open question that deserves sustained scholarly engagement.

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Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *ISAGSQ* data archive.

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