Blind spots: organizational and institutional biases in intra- and inter-organizational contexts

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Introduction

Researching blind spots may be done based on a framework combining different theories from organization theory, which offers different takes on this phenomenon (Christensen et al. 2007). The purpose of this chapter is to systematically use three such theories on blind spots: an instrumental theory based on bounded rationality (Simon 1957), a cultural theory starting from Selznick's (1957) seminal work, and a neo-institutional theory focusing on myths and symbols (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Adding to this, examples will be outlined and discussed to show the relevance of these theories for studying blind spots. The term 'blind spots' is in this chapter used in a broad metaphorical sense, covering most of Table X.1 in the introductory chapter but mainly focusing on attention biases.

First discussed is how blind spots are related to internal 'organization is the mobilization of bias' factors (Schattschneider 1960 p. 71) and how different mechanisms sustain or undermine those factors. This means that something and someone will formally be organized in (and others, organized out), leaving many blind spots in terms of capacity, attention, problems, and solutions (March 1981). But blind spots are also related to inter-organizational features and how different mechanisms may sustain or undermine them. When public organizations are dealing with other national or international organizations, they will not only act according to their own structures but will also have to adapt to comparable but different features in the environment, which may cause blind spots. Related to both internal and external structural

conditions, both problems of underlap, where issues or tasks are defocused by many actors and negative coordination prevails, and overlap, where different units and actors are working on the same tasks, will be discussed. Increasing complexity and hybridity may also lead to blind spots (Christensen and Lægreid 2011).

Blind spots may also be related to the dynamics of cultural development in public organizations, both inside those organizations and in their dynamic relationships to the environment (Selznick 1957). The process of institutionalization selects certain aspects of internal and external pressure in creating a unique culture while others are defocused, meaning that there are potentially other underlying cultures or subcultures. Cultural complexity, that is, the result of public organizations combining different types of culture, may also lead to blind spots. Adding to this, a focus on external complexity and hybridity and the use of myths and symbols (reputation management) may potentially amplify or modify blind spots (Wæraas and Maor 2015). The three sets of independent factors—structural, cultural, and symbolic—may also come together in creating, sustaining, or modifying blind spots. An example of this is the dynamic between conscious efforts, cultural compatibility, and symbols in attempts at modern reform efforts (Christensen and Lægreid 2001).

Organization is mobilization of bias: some structural elaborations

Schattschneider (1960, p. 71) in his seminal book *Semisovereign People* formulates the following famous insight: 'All forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out.'

If we generalize this statement, connecting it to any public organization, and see it from an instrumental-structural point of view (Christensen et al. 2007), what does this statement really mean? One starting point could be Simon's (1957) theory of bounded rationality and administrative behaviour. Actors in (public) organizations will overall have limitations on their knowledge, capacity, and attention, something that the structural design of a formal organization can help them to cope with and modify. The different principles of specialization and coordination, whether vertical or horizontal (Gulick 1937), help in defining the formal roles of the different actors, thereby also easing their rationality limitations. Formal roles mean that an actor will focus on certain policies, issues, expertise, aspects, et cetera seen from a certain hierarchical level, but will therefore also not focus others (Scott and Davis 2007).

So the basic idea of formal organization is connected with different types of biases. For the single organizational member or actor, the bias is defined in the role, i.e. some type of knowledge, issues, and policies get attention, while others are organized out (March 1994). Looking at the public organization as a whole, the overall structural design implies that certain types of knowledge and expertise, goals, policies, issues, et cetera are organized into the structure while others are organized out or get less attention.

Seen from such a perspective, how can this provide insight into blind spots? Overall, one can say that structural design, implying organization of bias, creates potential blind spots, which have both intra- and inter-organizational aspects. First, if leaders in a public organization systematically design its structure through defining certain goals and measures, which may reflect law-making and political alliances that focus some matters and defocus others, this will inevitably create some blind spots, because some issues and problems will not receive much attention. Second, if the leadership decides that the organization does not have the resources to

follow up on all of its goals fully, they can either modify their ambitions, or, something that is more common, they have to prioritize certain parts of goals to focus and follow up on (March and Simon 1958). In doing this, they will defocus certain parts of the goals, certain actors, certain types of expertise, certain policies or issues, et cetera, i relative to central features of their domain (Thompson 1967), which can be seen as blind spots. This means that blind spots are primarily the result of conscious actions by the leadership, including lack of knowledge behind the design of organizational structure. Internally, these blind spots are connected not only to the overall design, but also to organizational roles, or the compositions of organizational roles of the single members of the organizations.

Externally, blind spots may result from internal designs that are similar, i.e. different public organizations design their structures in similar and biased ways, so their interactions will systematically leave some aspects, issues, or policies to the side (March 1981). This may be one explanation for the phenomenon of underlap, which 'refers to situations when a policy issue falls between the remits of different organizations so that no organization feels responsible' (Lægreid et al. 2015, p. 931). Underlap implies that a system of public organizations systematically leaves blind spots because their built-in organizational biases are pretty much the same, for example, defocusing weak clients, women's rights, environmental concerns, economic crises, et cetera.

A rather common feature of modern political-administrative systems is that they are structurally complex, meaning that they combine strong vertical and horizontal specialization, often labelled fragmentation, which is rather common for systems inspired by the New Public Management (NPM) reform wave that started in the early 1980s (Christensen and Lægreid 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). Very serious fragmentation in non-overlapping public

organizations, resulting from increased specialization in NPM-inspired reforms, has the potential for blind spots, underlap, and negative coordination, because attention is biased, defocusing actors, problems, and solutions (Scharpf 1999). Another type of complexity has been inspired by the post-NPM reform wave, which started in the late 1990s, implying more efforts towards centralization and coordination (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). This potentially creates problems of overlap but also of blind spots, since actors, knowledge, and issues that do not overlap with other organizations (because they often get less resources and attention of competitive reasons) may in fact be blind spots.

Structural hybridity is complexity combined with inconsistency, meaning that a public organization internally or a set of public organizations follow different structural principles at the same time (Christensen and Lægreid 2011). Vertical specialization and de-specialization can be combined at the same time, like centralization and decentralization, or horizontal specialization and de-specialization. This can give the leadership flexibility (the fox hole syndrome of always having at least two exits), because leaders can please different actors without actually committing to actions, which leaves potential blind spots in the wake of convincing rhetoric. The downside of hybrid reforms and government is potential chaos, uncertainty, and ambiguity, because actors may be confused regarding the definition of problems and solutions, not to mention how decision-making processes should be organized. This latter phenomenon may also leave blind spots, more as a side effect of large challenges of structural design.

Bachrach and Baratz (1970), in their important work on non-decisions, in many ways followed up on the idea of mobilization of bias and in particular offered an insight into how the status quo can be kept in place, which may mean sustaining blind spots. They point to the fact that

many traditional theories of politics and administration are about power struggles and 'who gets what, when, how' (Lasswell 1936). They point, however, to the fact that some issues and considerations are systematically suppressed in some organizations and never reach the surface, meaning politics and policies are restricted, also implying avoiding bringing new issues onto the agenda. This indirect use of power, for example, systematically keeping some actors and issues away from decisions, may be upheld through sanctions. Non-decisions may be a powerful instrument for the leadership to keep dominant structures with built-in biases in place, resulting in systematic blind spots.

A supplementary angle is to use Gulick (1937), who points out that there is a relationship between public goals, choice of structural design, and effects. Deciding on a public goal may lead to choosing specific structures to achieve the wanted effects or results, built on theoretical and practical insights. Not all types of structures can achieve certain goals or policies, so the leadership builds in structural biases in the design of a public organization in order to achieve those goals. In this they have some discretion, since more than one type of structure can achieve a particular goal, a view pretty different from the modern slogan of reform, that 'one size fits all' (Christensen and Lægreid 2001).

Gulick (1937) proposed four principles of horizontal specialization: purpose, process, clientele, and geography. Each of these principles implies biases or potential blind spots, because certain purposes, types of knowledge, clientele, and geographical areas are organized in, and certain others out. What is not self-evident is what purposes a civil service organization should be structured according to, i.e. this is done according to the decisions of the leadership, and different designs are possible. Process specialization may happen for some professional groups, like economists or lawyers, while others are organized with a heterogeneous expertise basis,

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which creates expertise biases. Some clientele groups are singled out, often after tug-of-wars, for example, in the health care system, giving them more attention, while others are too weak or have less powerful allies. Or, there are many different ways to organize specialization between government levels or between geographical units at the same level, giving some levels and units more attention than others.

If we look at the relationship between the horizontal specialization principles, there is even more evidence of blind spots (cf. Egeberg 2012). Organizing primarily according to purpose, which is often the case in civil service, may create blind spots related to both defocusing some sectors or sub-sectors as well as splitting up expertise (similar expertise in different sectors), client groups (same problems for clients in different sectors), or geographical areas (geographical variety in sector problems). Organizing according to process, for example, gathering certain professional groups in one unit, may create blind spots regarding profession knowledge in decisions but could also cut across purposes, clientele groups, and geographical areas. Or organizing according to certain client groups may create blind spots regarding purpose or expertise. Focus on geographical structures may impose negative side effects on purposes, expertise, and clientele groups.

Culturally generated blind spots

Philip Selznick (1957) emphasizes in his seminal book *Leadership in Administration* that public organizations are not easy to design instrumentally because they also develop according to a type of logic other than the instrumental one. Through processes of institutionalization, where a formal organization adapts to internal and external pressures (from the task environment), there are unique informal norms and values developed that add to the formal

features. These, often labelled cultures or identities, will differ for every institution, since the mix of internal and external pressures is varied.

Two basic concepts are particularly important in this theory. *Path dependency* means that 'roots determine routes', i.e. there are certain important informal norms and values that are dominant when an organization is established, and these dominate the path further taken (Krasner 1988). Said more simply, cultural traditions are important. *The logic of appropriateness* overall deals with the importance of cultural constraints, meaning that for actors in an institution to follow the cultural traditions, they have to act appropriately, which may imply different types of logics in different situations. When acting appropriately actors conduct what March (1994) labels *matching*, meaning that they have to connect identity, situation, and decision rules, posing the overall question of 'what kind of decision rule am I, as an actor, supposed to use in this situation based on the cultural identity of my institution?'

The basic reasoning in this type of theory has, like in structural theory, to do with biases and potential blind spots. The mutual adaptation to internal a nd external pressures indicates an instrumental element, because Selznick (1957) focuses on the concept of *policy decisions*, which are crucial for the development of uniqueness, different from *routine decisions*. Even though an institutional leader is culturally constrained by the 'necessities of history' (Brunsson and Olsen 1993), this must mean that a leader can to some degree chose in two regards. First, out of all the actors, their interests, and informal norms and values, reflected in internal discourses, the leader may decide to attend to some but not others, which potentially leaves some blind spots, which, for example, may be related to professional values or tasks being focused. Concerning adaption to external pressure, the leadership has potentially some leeway in choosing some parts of the environment and not others. Selznick (1949) in his book on the

Tennessee Valley Authority stresses that co-opting certain critical business interests was a strategic choice with certain implications, leaving blind spots of other actors, norms, and values out of the equation, for example, what we today would label environmental issues related to the development of the Mississippi River. So overall, if one does not believe in complete historical determinism, there will be some leeway for leaders to choose the elements of internal and external pressure, and therefore the unique combination of the two factors, leaving in principle many other combinations behind, potentially representing blind spots.

Another take on this would be to start from the concept of path dependency. The point of departure here is that some informal norms and values are dominant at the birth of a public organization. But what decides that some informal norms and values are selected to lead the way for cultural traditions later on? One can argue that this is either a conscious choice by leaders or a natural selection process (Scott and Davis 2007). Either way, this also implies that some informal norms and values existing during the formative years would not be brought forward or are at a disadvantage later on, which may represent blind spots. Furthermore, when an institution is starting down the path to the future, what mechanisms are keeping the unique cultural part dominant, despite changing environmental preconditions? Selznick (1957) indicates that the institutional leadership ('statesmanship'), through policy decisions, is continuously and incrementally adjusting the course, both leaving behind blind spots and not choosing some along the path forward.

A third take on this would be to elaborate on the logic of appropriateness and matching. March (1994) says that there are two processes going on. One is a historical development process, alluding to path dependency, that results in some dominant cultural norms and values in an organization, and one is where this process and dominant values are made relevant in decision

situations, i.e. the real matching. This reasoning can be elaborated in at least three ways (Christensen and Røvik 1999). First, it cannot be taken for granted that the historical path will bring forward a homogeneous and consistent cultural identity, because there may exist tensions and subcultures. Second, there is no guarantee that situations are easy to define as a basis for matching, i.e. the leadership and organization members may have different views on this. Third, decision rules may be many and partly ambiguous. According to this elaboration, matching could be rather problematic and not a one-to-one thing, potentially leaving blind spots related both to the historical path and to resulting identities, definition of situation, and choice of decision rules. The more ambiguity and heterogeneity, the potentially greater enhancement of blind spots—or the opposite, the more homogeneity and less ambiguity, the lower the potential for blind spots. This means that leaders may try to limit variety in definitions of situations and identities in order to focus on a narrower set of decision rules, thereby limiting biases.

The topic of cultural compatibility is rather central in the reform literature (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). The main reasoning is that when a reform wave, like NPM or post-NPM, or single reform efforts are happening, the success of these reforms depends on the compatibility between cultural traditions and the cultural content of the reform proposal (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). Further, if there is compatibility, reforms will rather easily be decided on and implemented. If there is complete lack of compatibility, conflicts may erupt, and the probability of acceptance and implementation is rather low. The most interesting cases, however, are when the reform is partially compatible, which often means that some elements are accepted while others receive pushback. This may open up much more room for blind spots, partly because some reform elements will be chosen and others not but also because some internal cultural elements will be kept while others will be adjusted or changed. Again, this may be decided by

cultural determinism but also through the policy decisions of the leadership. More blind spots might be related to a sharper cultural profile decided by the leadership or blind spots might be modified by making the profile broader and more encompassing.

A more elaborate version of this cultural interpretation, where rational and cultural thinking are combined, is found in the works of Kathleen Thelen. Streeck and Thelen (2005) make a distinction between the change process, which can be both incremental and abrupt, and the result of the change process, which may be characterized by either continuity or discontinuity. This permits four possible combinations of process and result, of which one is of special relevance here, i.e. 'breakdown' and replacement', which is the concept used for a combination of abrupt change and discontinuity of result. To understand this potential removal of blind spots and continuation on another path, with a lot of continuity, one must understand the mechanisms that are behind the opening of the window and the keeping of it open for some time so that the new path is established. The mechanisms may be based in policy or reform entrepreneurships but also in the fact that a system has come to the end of the road' and is culturally breaking down (Aberbach and Christensen 2001).

Blind spots generated by myths and reputation management

According to a myth perspective, public organizations will use myths and symbols systematically to further their goals (Christensen et al. 2007). The leadership will engage in double talk and hypocrisy, meaning that they will talk in one way and act in another (Brunsson 1989). They hope to achieve higher legitimacy and more support through this, because it gives them more flexibility and is not that easy for other public actors or citizens in general to make a distinction between talk and action. We may say that talk and action is loosely coupled,

alluding to a lot of image building and window dressing going on. It is the same that Erving Goffman (1990) talks about in his distinction between 'front stage' and 'back stage', where the front stage represents the social construction of reality and the back stage action in real time (Berger and Luckman 1967).

Double talk may imply different things. First, it may represent meaning making (March 1994), i.e. reality is difficult to grasp and there may be different understandings and views. The leadership is therefore important for defining for other internal actors or stakeholders in the environment how one can understand reality, including public problems and solutions. Second, it can imply a more systematic distortion and exaggeration of reality, i.e. it is claimed that a public organization may achieve goals and act in ways that are highly unlikely to happen. Either way, there will potentially be blind spots. Of the many possible definitions of situations, problems, and solution, only a few will be lifted up for exposure, while many will be left behind, often for few obvious reasons. Eventually, leading people astray will make reality obscure, also leaving a lot of potential blind spots.

A recent and more elaborated strand of literature related to myths and symbols deals with reputation management or branding of public organizations (Wæraas and Maor 2015). Carpenter (2010, p. 33) defines organizational *reputation* as 'a set of beliefs about an organization's capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences'. Reputation management is when these beliefs, ideas, or symbols are used in a systematic way to appeal to diverse audiences in order to build a reputation. Potential effects of reputation management include achieving more general support, building goodwill and slack in general (Cyert and March 1963), but also more specific support leading to the provision of more resources (Easton 1965). The reputation profile could either be broad, which

may have a bridging effect (Røvik 2002), but this may also imply lacking sharpness and appeal (van Riel and Fombrun 2007). A more specific and narrow profile may have more appeal but may create more internal conflicts (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009).

Carpenter (2010, p. 45-46) makes a distinction between four dimensions of reputation of public organizations. First, through the *performative* dimension, various stakeholders get the impression that an organization is delivering instrumentally on outputs and outcomes according to core goals (Chapleo et al. 2011). Second, the *moral* dimension deals with whether a public organization is emotionally appealing and follows high standards, i.e. whether it's perceived as 'compassionate, flexible and honest' (Carpenter and Krause 2012, p. 27). Third, the *technical/professional* dimension focuses on creating an image of a public organization that is scoring high on professional capacity and competence, which is a very crucial aspect of the activities of civil service on different levels (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot 2012). Fourth, according to the *procedural* dimension, a public organization creates the impression that it follows appropriate procedural and legal requirements in decision-making, which both relates to internal activities and to dealing with users and the public in general. The reputation management studies are in many ways elaborating on the myth perspective, in particular related to Carpenter's (2010) dimensions.

Reputation management implies systematic biases and therefore potential blind spots. The whole point is to focus on some aspects of the activities of a public organization and make them sound fantastic, whether this is done as some kind of reporting on what has been done or whether the reporting is more aspirational, i.e. about what could be done—often an ambiguous distinction to the receivers of image-building (Christensen and Lodge 2016). This is very evident in the case of a narrower profile, where many activities are defocused and as such

function as blind spots. Based on Carpenter's (2010) dimensions, an organization's leadership can brag about the performance of its public organization without mentioning the professional, moral, or procedures aspects. Or certain types of activities related to one dimension will be mentioned, but not others. For example, a university bragging about Nobel Prize winners or centres of excellence defocuses all other research activities that could be of good quality. Or universities with the aspiration of scoring high on diversity or having an international orientation may obscure that not much is actually happening in these fields. Even when a public organization choses to further a broad reputation profile, very seldom nuances are possible, meaning that they exaggerate and abstract certain factors of the dimensions while others are not much mentioned, leaving blind spots (Christensen and Gornitzka 2016).

Examples of blind spots

Structurally generated blind spots

One of the most famous studies in Public Administration is the study by Allison (1971) of the Cuban missile crisis. Two examples of blind spots in this study originate from what we can label local rationality and standard operating procedures (SOPs). It is rather important in an international crisis that the different political-administrative decision-making bodies and actors—not to mention, different parts of the security and military apparatuses—interact and coordinate closely, but that was only partly true in this case. During the Cuban missile crisis, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) controlled the flight paths of U-2 spying planes according to earlier experiences and crises. This meant that a lot of areas were geographical blind spots because of structural search biases, while others were well covered. When the crisis started, some member of CIA came up with the idea that it was necessary to change the flight

paths, but this suggestion was not implemented right away because the director of the CIA was on honeymoon. When the director returned and changed the path, the Soviet missiles were detected, and the conflict escalated.

Later on in the crisis, president decided on a Marine Corps blockade. Again, SOPs dominated and distorted. The leadership of the Marines agreed with the president to establish the blockade close to Cuba in order to have more time to negotiate with the Soviet Union if their ships should sail towards Cuba. In reality, and according to Marines SOPs, they put the blockade further out, creating a blind spot, again geographically, between the two blockade points (the chosen and the actual) that could have been potentially crucial and dangerous in a climate nearly leading to a third world war.

Culturally generated blind spots

In her seminal work *Imitation and Innovation*, Eleanor Westney (1987) analyses how Japan in the Meiji period (1859–1912) systematically imitated the West, mostly western Europe, in order to change a number of its public and private organizations. The part of the story fitting into a cultural interpretation is related to the cultural preconditions of imitation. The overall idea was that understanding the cultural context of the countries they imitated would help the Japanese actors to understand the cultural contextual preconditions in their own country. But this was a big challenge in several ways. The delegations sent abroad had not enough expertise to grasp or imagine the cultural context they imitated, partly because their own culture was so different and also partly because of the evolution of and changes within the cultural solutions they imitated. These two factors are connected to blind spots. First, Japan only imitated parts of the underlying culture, for example, professional cultures in European systems such as postal

services, police organizations, and newspaper businesses. This meant that they did not culturally grasp the full picture of their imitation, leaving blind spots that could be important. Second, when they returned home to adapt the imitated solutions they had brought to Japanese administrative and business culture, this became challenging and left blind spots because they had received a distorted picture of the cultural context in the West and also faced problems of determining which part of their own culture should be adapted or kept. So they had difficulties adding to the normal challenges of cultural compatibility.

Symbols and blind spots

In their article titled 'Information in Organizations as Signal and Symbol', Feldman and March (1981) start from some kind of an economic man point of view regarding information and decisions. Information is a vital part of decisions and is therefore sought through seemingly rational processes to be used to evaluate alternatives and consequences. On the other hand, the authors refer to several studies showing that empirical reality is often far from this idealized picture, i.e. information may relate to symbols. Rather often, enough information has been gathered, but still leaders and stakeholders in the environment ask for more. So information as signal and symbols, as a social construction of reality, trumps the instrumental use of existing information. It is often easier for leaders to ask for more information, because saying that they have enough makes them vulnerable to criticism.

The potential effects of this division between the symbols of information and information efficiency/rationality are diverse. One is that making decisions could be overall more difficult because of information overload and rationality challenges, which in reality potentially leave a lot of information at the fringes, i.e. blind spots. Another is that the information that is easy to

find and transform to symbols will probably get the most attention, again leaving potential blind spots.

Blind spots combining perspectives

The case discussed here is a slightly modified version of the analysis made by Aberbach and Christensen (2001) of the big NPM reform leap in New Zealand in 1984. The 1970s was economically problematic for New Zealand in many ways. The country's narrow food-oriented export industry experienced problems and had to reorient after the United Kingdom became member of the European Union in 1972; a world recession happened in 1974; oil price shocks occurred in 1973 and 1979; and there was a fiscal deficit and a slow growth rate (Massey 1995). So New Zealand faced a crisis, and many actors thought that it was time to leave the historical path. But not much happened in the years after Muldoon came into power as prime minister for the National Party in 1975.

So what happened in the shadow of the crisis, and what can be seen as potential blind spots, i.e. the roads so far not taken? The main answer was that economic actors in the treasury and the business community, claiming support from international organizations, worked for years on only one alternative solution: a broad program of market liberalization and macro-economical disinflation, inspired by the New Right, as an alternative to Keynes, used by the social democrats (Goldfinch 1997). The problem for this coalition was that they had had for some years a solution but no main political actor connecting it to the central problem of economic crisis (cf. Cohen et al. 1972). This was changed by Roger Douglas, the incoming minister of finance from the Labour Party, who rather surprisingly opened the window to reform after the snap election in 1984, implementing a radical NPM reform agenda (Aberbach

and Christensen 2001). The window was open for a short period of time, and the radical reforms enacted later led to a referendum ending in a new election system, having as a result a more fragmented party system.

So what is the core story of blind spots here, using our three main perspectives? First, the path dependency of the political-administrative system in New Zealand seemed to be very strong up to 1984, leaving a lot of possible alternative paths (blind spots) unused. This was paradoxical under a conservative prime minister and accumulated a lot of potential for change. Second, this potential for change was unleashed by Roger Douglas, with many symbols and a great deal of rhetorical overselling, which used a ready-made economic solution to crash through the window of opportunity that had been opened by a snap election in 1984. The solution chosen was very radical, rather unlikely, and left a lot of alternatives (blind spots) behind. It was made possible by the elective dictatorship system in Anglo-Saxon countries, i.e. the winner takes all. Third, after the radical reforms had been implemented, the empire was striking back, meaning that the actors, interests, and alternative economical solutions left behind (blind spots) managed to get implemented a new election system making such radical reforms less likely in the future due to modifying the party system and resulting in coalition governments more often (Aberbach and Christensen 2001).

Conclusion

This chapter primarily used three organization theory perspectives to systematically show how blind spots can be connected to general attention biases and their outcomes, but it has also touched upon them as mechanisms (cf. Christensen et al. 2007). As is seen in Table X.1, according to an instrumental perspective, based on Simon's (1957) bounded rationality, blind

spots are related to organizational design, both inside and between public organizations, which influences the attention structures of the actors and results in blind spots. As Schattschneider (1960, p. 71) says, 'organization is the mobilization of bias' because some actors, problems, and solutions are organized in and some are organized out, i.e. the latter creating blind spots. Active and conscious design leads to blind spots but also to so-called 'non-decisions' (Bacharach and Baratz 1970), i.e. conscious efforts preventing actors, definition of problems, and solutions from being connected at all to choice opportunities, keeping them latent (Cohen et al. 1972). Gulick (1937) specifies some of the principles of formal design with his types of specialization and coordination, and these principles and their combination may be seen as mechanisms for creating blind spots. This is further exaggerated in hybrid public structures (Christensen and Lægreid 2011).

According to a cultural perspective, path dependency means that of the original cultural context in the founding years of an institution, some cultural norms and values are carried further, while others—blind spots—are left behind (Krasner 1988). The process creating cultural identity, the institutionalization process, is characterized by a mechanism called mutual adjustment, which is not that easy to grasp (Selznick 1957). It is quite easy to imagine that such a mechanism leaves behind blind spots related to internal informal norms and values and certain cultural norms in the task environment. Another mechanism is the matching of situations, identities, and decision rule that March (1994) emphasizes. But matching implies potential blind spots, because the overall thought is that there is only one right and homogeneous set of these elements, while there are very likely other possible combinations or matches, which fill the function of blind spots (Christensen and Røvik 1999). A third mechanism, the window-of-opportunity reasoning of Kingdon (1984), may result in questions such as why some windows

are open and not others, or why some actors, problems, and solutions jump through the window but not others, all of which may be related to potential blind spots.

Table X.1: Blind spots and organization theory perspectives: arguments and examples

	Arguments	Examples
Instrumental perspective	• Organization is the mobilization of bias • Structural design creates attention biases (both intra- and inter-organizational)—both degree and type of specialization • Both structural fragmentation and coordination leave biases • Structural hybridity creates biases • Non-decisions sustain attention biases	Allison (1971) on the Cuban missile crisis: geographical biases resulting from attention biases
Cultural perspective	• Biases related to mutual cultural adaptation • Path dependency leads to attention biases • Logic of appropriateness and matching; homogeneity creates biases • Efforts towards cultural compatibility create systematic biased attention	Westney (1987) on imitation of the West in the Meiji period: lack of cultural sensitivity when imitating and adapting leaves blind spots
Neo-institutional perspective	• Systematic symbolic attention bias and exaggerations create blind spots • Reputation profiles focus some internal aspects and some external stakeholders, which create biases • The balance of different types of reputation symbols leads to attention biases	Feldman and March (1981) on information as sign and symbols: biases related to lack of attention to information already gathered and the complexity of that information when the dominant norm is to ask for more information

Lastly, myths and symbols may lead to a systematic bias in the attention of certain public actors, leading to blind spots (cf. Meyer and Rowan 1977). The emerging reputation management

literature is a good example of this (Wæraas and Maor 2015). A reputation profile in a public organization may be broad and integrative but is also often very selective in what aspects are focused on, leaving many performative, professional, moral, and procedural reputation elements behind, which may function as blind spots.

Finally, in what ways might the structural and institutional biases and blind spots we have discussed be sustained or modified? First, they may be connected to laws and rules that have to be changed. Second, they are related to a power and influence structures, negotiations, and alliances between political and administrative actors, leading to a frozen structure, but these alliances could be renegotiated, which will potentially change the biases and blind spots. Third, leadership could systematically use an incentive system to keep a structure in place but also to change it. Fourth, external conditions, for example, crises or strong pressure, could change, which may have effects on internal structures and external collaboration but also cultural compatibility or reputation profiles. Fifth, history may be redefined, leading to different opinions on path dependency, identity, and matching, which again change dominant informal norms and values. Sixth, reputation profiles could be rebalanced and changed, creating new dynamics related to internal structure and cultures and to stakeholder relations in the environment.

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