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Cooperation, Compliance and Coalitions within the EU Commission's Expert Groups.

Mark Field.

ABSTRACT This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyse the role of the European Commission's expert groups (EG) in the policy process. Whilst a number of scholars have investigated preference-shifting amongst senior Commission officials and European political elites (Checkel, 2005; Hooghe, 2005; Trondal, 2001), little work has been undertaken of such processes within the groups offering expert advice to policy makers. Yet, by advising at all stages of the policy process, these groups have an important role in European Union (EU) governance.

Borrowing from the fields of constructivism and social psychology, the paper investigates how argumentative persuasion results in preference shifts amongst those actors responsible for advising policy-makers and argues that, within each EG, certain individuals are 'cognitively central' to the group (Kameda, 1997). These key actors, the paper argues, are able to forge coalitions and so disproportionately influence the recommendations made to policy makers. Finally, the paper proposes a number of hypotheses that will test alternative bases for this influence and so assist in developing our understanding of the role of policy experts in EU governance.

INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the role of the European Commission expert groups (EGs) in the policy making process. Although considerable research has been undertaken into the work of Comitology committees (Wessels, 1998; Egeberg, Schaefer & Trondal, 2003; Blom-Hansen & Brandsma, 2009), far less analysis of the work of the EGs has been undertaken. Yet understanding how the important role they play is affected by the composition of the groups would seem essential in developing our understanding of the European Union (EU) policy process and, indeed, in broader questions of EU governance. The importance of the EGs certainly appears not to have been lost on lobbyists and other interest groups as evidenced by the promotional material on the website of the lobbyists training centre 'Brussels Academy' (2011), which states:

If you do not know about the 1,500 committees and groups assisting the EU in its decision-making process, then you are depriving yourself of a major lobbying tool... in other words, you are severely restricting your parameters of influence.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first section focuses on the disparate nature of the EGs - their numbers, composition and the varying roles they undertake within different Directorates General (DGs) - and argues that the locus of influence within advisory groups has, to date, been a neglected area of research. The next section borrows ideas from elsewhere in the social sciences as a means of identifying and measuring this locus of influence. Finally, the paper proposes a series of hypotheses and discusses how these are to be tested in future empirical research.

Defining an Expert Group.

A number of scholars have noted that, within the EU, the overlap between European advisory groups, committees, working groups and working parties creates a situation where identifying an expert group is far from easy (Larsson, 2003; Egeberg, Schaefer & Trondal, 2003). It could be argued that this confusion is an inevitable feature of the EU's '...world of committees' (Larsson, 2003, p.27) which employs the term to describe entities as different as a temporary and informal *ad hoc* advisory group and the rather more permanent Committee of the Regions. Further, the Commission may apply different labels to describe similar bodies creating a plethora of taskforces, high-level groups, working groups, working parties and so forth. Nugent (2001, p.243-246) sought to create a classification system through which advisory committees were distinguished by role: consultative, expert and 'others'. Whilst this is a useful delineation for looking at the broad role of committees in the policy process, when applied to the EGs advising the Commission its scope appears somewhat limited - some groups act solely in an advisory capacity whilst others are involved in implementation and monitoring. It may be of some use, therefore, to determine how an EG *formally* differs from a Comitology committee both in the manner in which it is established and its role.

Article 202 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC) provided for the Council to 'impose certain requirements' when delegating implementing powers to the Commission. The Comitology committee system is one means through which this is achieved. Members are appointed by the MSs and, as such, the Comitology committees are mandated to represent the interests of those MSs (Blom-Hansen & Brandsma, 2009, p721). In terms solely of its formal remit, then, a Comitology committee can be characterised as the means through which the Council scrutinises the Commission's exercise of its delegated powers. Its principal role is to offer formal opinions on the Commission's proposed legislation and, whilst it has no authority to amend or reject such proposals, article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides the authority for it to refer such proposals to Council which may, in turn, opt to revoke the delegation (Europa, 2011a).

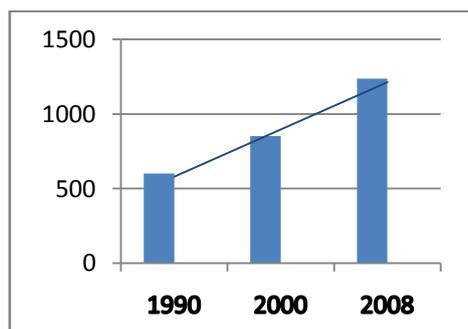
EGs, by contrast, are Commission entities. Defined by the Commission as a body established to provide it with advice and expertise consisting of at least six public and/or private sector members and meeting more than once (Europa, 2011b), these groups are of two types.

Formal EGs are established directly by the Commission but the majority - those established by a department of the Commission - are informal. Significantly, the Commission selects the individual members and thus determine the composition of the EGs, although discussion elsewhere in this paper will suggest that the Commission's autonomy in this area may be reduced as a result of guidance introduced following the Lisbon Treaty.

Numbers of EGs.

Although there is limited scholarship in this area, over time a number of academics have sought to determine the number of EGs and to quantify the source of expertise within a given group or parent DG (Wessels, 1998; Larsson, 2003, Gornitzka and Sverdrup, 2008; 2011). Although it is recognised that comparing statistical data drawn from differing sources has its flaws, it seems clear that the numbers of EG has increased significantly over time. Wessels (1998) found that, in 1990, there were 602 EGs, a number that grew to 851 by 2000 (Larson, 2003). In 2005, the Commission undertook to increase the transparency of the EGs through the publication of a Register of Expert Groups (Europa, 2005) which, when published in 2007, contained entries for 1237 EGs (Gornitzka and Sverdrup, 2008, p.733). Whilst again acknowledging the potential margin of error, the growth in the number of EGs can be represented at *figure 1* below.

Figure 1: Estimate of increase in Expert Groups 1990-2007.



Sources: Wessels, 1998; Larson, 2003; Gornitzka and Sverdrup, 2008.

Rationale for the establishment of an EG.

In their 2008 study, Gornitzka and Sverdrup analysed the distribution of EGs across the various DGs in order to establish whether they acted as loose networks of individuals sharing a common area of expertise or as well established consultative bodies with clear and common

procedures. In order to analyse the distribution of EGs across the various Directorates, they tested a series of hypotheses to establish a relationship between the incidence of EGs and variables such as policy competence or a DGs size and budget.

Gornitzka and Sverdrup interrogated the Commission's Register of Expert Groups to create a database which classified the groups into policy areas and the participants within the groups into professional categories (representatives of NGOs; members of the academic community and so forth). Whilst the authors state that the Commission's register is a fairly reliable source of information '...underpinned by the formal rules of the register' (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2008, p.732), others have been less convinced. Alter-eu, a group campaigning for increased transparency in this area, complain that the register - which was drawn up as a result of the 2004 commitment of Commission President Barroso - is not complete as it does not provide details of sub-groups nor complete membership details (Vassalos, 2010, p.76). However, recent (post Lisbon) changes to the rules governing the register appear to provide for it to contain improved (although still incomplete) information concerning the EGs. This is discussed in more detail below.

Gornitzka and Sverdrup's work found both an uneven distribution of EGs across policy sectors and differing procedures used by EGs operating within different sectors. In identifying this high degree of 'sectoral differentiation', their findings support earlier work that had identified a high degree of functional specialisation operating at the Council level resulted in working party members relating to colleagues based on professional, rather than national, background (Egeberg, Schaefer & Trondal, 2003, p.31). Interestingly, the findings of this study differs from that of Beyers and Dierickx (1998), whose research into the Working Groups of the Council identified a series of alliances and 'cliques' based on national lines. It is, however, in their contention that this 'sectoral differentiation' is not solely a result of variation within the policy fields, but also a consequence of the development of different working practices, norms and routines amongst the DGs, that Gornitzka and Sverdrup's study has direct relevance for this paper

Composition of the EGs.

The most detailed study of EGs to date appears to be Larsson's 2003 study undertaken on behalf of the *Expertgruppen för studier i offentlig ekonomi* (ESO) - an independent body of

researchers established by - and reporting to - the Swedish Ministry of Finance. Larsson addressed three central questions in his study:

- To what extent does the Commission establish EGs and of what type?
- How does the Commission control the work of the EGs?
- Why are they established and how do they affect the decision-making structure of the EU?

Given the difficulty in distinguishing an EG from a working group or steering committee Larsson approached the problem by identifying a number of the features he expected to find in an EG. He shows that, although those EGs established by the Commission as a result of treaty changes or directives are generally referred to as ‘committees’, and less official bodies are usually termed ‘expert groups’, this terminology is far from consistent. Given this lack of consistency, Larsson started from the position that EGs consist of individuals with a common specialism (i.e. ‘experts’) rather than individuals representing national interests. However he found that, in many cases, ‘...the “experts” in question are in fact officials sent out from ministries and government agencies of the Member States’ (Larsson, 2003, p.57). Although Larsson’s data is some years old, Gornitzka and Sverdrup’s more recent work supports this proposition - they found that over 80 per cent of EGs include national administration officials amongst the membership and that:

...if you happen to open a door at any randomly selected expert group meeting, there is about a 50 per cent chance that you will find *only* national officials seated around the table (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011, p.54 - emphasis added).

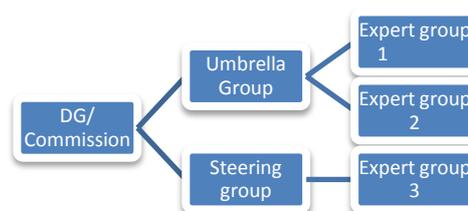
It appears that this tendency towards including a high proportion of national officials within the EGs continues. Use of the Commission’s expert group register to undertake a cursory search of those EGs serving the DG Education and Culture reveals a high incidence of individuals representing both national education ministries and administrations.

Sectoral differentiation and the EGs.

Having become somewhat embroiled in the definitional challenge of identifying an EG, Larsson considered ordering them with reference to the Commission’s own data. The available information proved to be far from complete, however, as the ‘shape’ of the EG structure varied between policy areas and DGs - a finding that predates but reinforces the

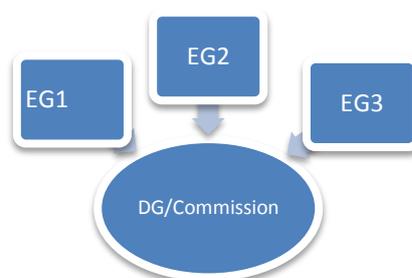
‘sectoral differentiation’ identified by Gornitzka and Sverdrup (2008). He found, for example, groups of senior officials may be classified either as a ‘high level group’ or ‘senior expert group’, depending on the DG involved. Similarly, Larsson noted that some DGs use the term ‘umbrella groups’ to describe an arrangement where a number of MSs have a particular interest in a given policy area and therefore ensure high level representation which, in turn, leads to the establishment of a number of ‘sub groups’ reporting to the umbrella group. Confusingly, he found that the membership of these often overlaps - a member of the umbrella group may also belong to one or more of the sub-groups. Neither is this confined to individuals - Larsson found examples of sets of people appearing in different configurations and of old groups retaining their functions but being given a new name. More confusingly still, sub-groups are employed by other DGs as working groups to assist a regular EG and also with overlapping membership. Whilst the inclusion of such minutiae may appear of little direct consequence to developing an understanding of EGs as part of the policy process, it is included here in order to illustrate how lines of authority may be blurred and hierarchical relationships rendered indistinct. Diagrammatic representations demonstrating two possible relationships between the Commission and its EGs are at *figures 2 and 3*, although numerous other permutations are possible:

Figure 2 – Policy ‘umbrella’ group with subordinate expert groups.



Note: In some DGs, the term ‘sub groups’ may be substituted with ‘expert group’ or ‘working group’.

Figure 3 – A number of (autonomous) expert groups in one policy area.



Note: In some DGs, the term ‘expert group’ may be substituted with ‘sub group’ or ‘working group’.

Faced with a kind of causation quagmire caused by the substantial variation in the use of EGs within different DGs, Larsson chose to concentrate his study on an analysis of the use of EGs in one DG alone: DG Enterprise. In doing so, he implicitly acknowledges that, as working practices differ substantially between DGs, the numbers of potential variables are such that it is not possible to generalize findings across policy areas.

Commission's control of EGs.

It is difficult to address the question of how the Commission controls the work of the EGs, without first exploring the motives behind a decision to establish such a group. Given that the remit of an EG is to provide expertise and advice to the Commission, this may seem a somewhat redundant question but Larsson identifies four purposes of an EG (2002, pp. 20-23). Firstly, a group may set the agenda by agreeing that a particular issue requires a common European response. Secondly, an EG may be used to 'de-politicize' an issue by transforming it from the political to the legal or technical one. Thirdly, it may be a means of building or mobilising support for a particular policy issue. Here interested parties become involved in the policy process through their involvement in an expert group which, in reality, is simply a means through which 'pre-negotiation' is conducted ensuring that the selection of a particular policy is a mere formality. Finally, Larsson suggests, EGs are formed to reduce the pressure for action on a particular issue by creating an *impression* of activity - a process he characterises as the EG as a fig-leaf.

Although the regulatory framework through which the Commission controls the work of the EGs has been subject to a number of recent - post-Lisbon - changes, it remains lightly regulated with few formal rules governing the process. In Larsson's study, he remarked on the Commission's '...unlimited possibilities to...influence the outcome of the committee...' (2002, p.75) and it remains the case that the Commission exercises control through its capacity to establish or abolish a particular group, through choosing to invite certain participants over others, and in exercising its privilege to appoint a group chair. Furthermore, the Commission typically approve an EG meeting agenda and provide both the premises and secretariat to facilitate this meeting, a feature Larsson amplified by observing that '...the one holding the pen has far more influence than most other members of a committee' (2002, p.74). More recently, Gornitzka and Sverdrup also remarked on the Commission committee structure's lack of '...a well-articulated set of rules to regulate its operations' (2008, p.728).

That notwithstanding, following the adoption of the 2010 framework agreement between the Parliament and Commission which was introduced after ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, *some* regulation of EGs has been introduced - article 3a of this agreement states that:

...the Commission will apply the basic principle of equal treatment for Parliament and the Council, especially as regards access to meetings and the provision of contributions or other information, in particular on legislative and budgetary matters.

In late 2010, a communication from the President to the Commission established a set of rules governing the EGs. This document contained provisions on the creation and scope of an EG, together with guidance on ensuring a balance of gender and geographical representation, together with a commitment to adopt an open call for applications where practicable (Europa, 2011b). It appears, then, that since Gornitzka and Sverdrup's 2008 study, some guidance concerning the EGs have been introduced, although - to date - no analysis of its effectiveness appears to have been made.

EGs and decision making.

This paper now considers the formal role of the Commission EGs in the policy-making process and suggests that, although EGs are formally involved chiefly in policy development phase and other groups elsewhere, in reality the individual actors within an EG sometimes have a role throughout the policy cycle.

As previously discussed, the Commission may elect to establish an EG to provide it with expertise where none exists 'in house'. It follows that an EG may be set up to assist with the drafting of the text of a proposition before it is submitted to Council, a process noted by Gornitzka and Sverdrup who observed that '...different DGs might use expert groups as a way of outsourcing tasks, to compensate for its own limited administrative capacity' (2011, p.59).

In a formal arrangement, joint committees operate simultaneously as both a Commission EG and a Council working party whilst an informal arrangement presents a *de facto* joint system where '...basically the same constellation of people [are used]...throughout the entire process...' (Larsson, 2002, p.93). He found that this duplicate composition process was particularly prevalent in groups operating in highly specialised policy areas, citing the example of two thirds of the individuals that composed a particular Comitology committee

also operating as the EG in the same policy area¹ (2002, p.109). The individuals sometimes met twice in one day - firstly as an EG then later as a Comitology committee. Similarly, those individuals that served on an *ad hoc* group served also on both the Comitology and expert committees operating in this area².

Whilst this practice may be cost effective, it underlines the fragility of depicting EU policy as operating through a mechanistic ‘stagist’ process. In reality, it seems, the role of the institutions may be less significant than their formal remits imply. Rather, the recommendations of an individual EG are crucial to understanding the EU policy process. However, the role of individual actors within these groups has, to date, been overlooked - a point reinforced in a recent study:

‘Our data do not allow us to examine the *dynamics within* these groups, the frequency of meetings, or the *relative influence* of the advice provided by the expert groups on policy-making and implementation (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011, p.51 - emphasis added).

It is, of course, acknowledged that, for the political scientist, the methodological challenges of capturing and measuring such abstractions as ‘relative influence’ and ‘dynamics’ are manifold. Here, ideas borrowed from elsewhere in the social sciences may assist and allow us to better understand this - to date - neglected area of research: the locus of influence within the groups advising European policy makers.

The scope of interdisciplinary research in identifying influence in the EGs.

The purpose of this section is to consider what tools sociology and social psychology offer in understanding the influence of individuals on a group - an issue of particular relevance for this paper’s interdisciplinary analysis of the decision-making process of individual EGs. However, although scholarship seeking to distinguish ‘influence’ and its more (explicitly) assertive sibling ‘power’ fills library bookshelves, this paper confines itself to a brief (and necessarily limited) discussion of this distinction.

In Bachrach and Baratz’s (1970) work, they reject the suggestion advanced by scholars such as Laswell and Kaplan (1950) who argued that power is simply a possession held by an individual or group for the purposes of achieving particular desires - put simply, that the greater the number of desires achieved, the greater the power. Developing the

¹ Two thirds of those individuals that served on the Comitology committee responsible for the regulation of cereal products also served on the EG on cereal products (Larsson, 2002, p.108).

² The *ad hoc* group established to prepare and coordinate the EU position on the Montreal ozone protocol.

characterisation of power as ‘...the production of intended effects’ (Russel, 2004), they argue that it only exists in relation to others and, importantly, that

...the successful exercise of power is dependent upon the relative importance of conflicting values *in the mind of the recipient* in the power relationship (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, p.19) (emphasis in original).

Here Bachrach and Baratz are suggesting that power is something quite distinct from authority. Using the example of a military mutiny, they reject a definition of authority which frames it as ‘formal power’ asking, rhetorically, where the authority lies in a situation where the agent of formal power is actually impotent (1970, p.33). Instead they argue that authority - like power - is relational: it operates only insofar as those upon whom it operates recognise it. Whilst a detailed discussion of the extent to which power is exercised where it reflects the general will is outside the remit of this project, it is the implications of the distinction identified by Bachrach and Baratz that are relevant to the thesis.

For Bachrach and Baratz, it is the existence of an individual’s capacity to apply sanctions that determines whether he or she can be said to exercise power. Thus the use of sanctions to modify behaviour corresponds to overt power but where such behavioural change is caused *a priori* - perhaps through recognition of the capacity of an individual to apply sanctions - Bachrach and Baratz argue that the individual sanction holder is exercising potential power.

Having proposed that sanction capacity is a pre-condition for the exercise of power, Bachrach and Baratz further refine this by differentiating between the power discussed above - exercised either overtly or potentially - and latent power. Here they refer to power emanating from the resource capacity of an individual or group rather than directly from the sanctions that may be applied. Through ‘...the resources at his disposal...others in the locality may regularly defer to his (real or imagined) preferences’ (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, p.27). Despite the lack of explicit or implicit sanctions in this ‘latent power’, Bachrach and Baratz clearly distinguish it from ‘influence’. Latent power, they argue, modifies behaviour despite the conscious choice of the power holder to abstain from applying sanctions. But, again, the *capacity* of the power holder to apply sanctions is the agent of behaviour change rather than the (actual or potential) sanctions themselves.

In making this rather nuanced distinction between potential and latent power, Bachrach and Baratz identify a useful common factor - sanctions - that allows them to delineate between the exercise of power and that of influence. Thus, they define influence as the ‘...capacity to

modify the behaviour of others *without resort to a tacit or overt threat of deprivation*' (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970 - emphasis added), or, more simply, the scope to modify another's preferences without the application, or even threat, of sanction.

Bachrach and Baratz's work provides an example of political science drawing a clear distinction between power and influence. However, whilst a number of scholars within this discipline have developed techniques for identifying and measuring the former (Dahl, 1961; Lukes, 1974), there appears to be less focus on applying such processes to the causal relationship between the power and influence - a lacuna perhaps reflected in Dahl's observation that '...if social scientists tried to solve the unsolved problems of philosophy they would never get around to the problems of the social sciences' (in Lukes, 1986, p.47). Here other branches of the social sciences - in particular sociology and social psychology - offer a significant body of scholarship. It is not, however, within the scope of this paper to arbitrate between academic disciplines in order to reach a workable understanding of the abstract idea of influence as a term, rather to consider it only as it applies within the (comparatively) real world setting of a Commission EG.

As such, although Moscovici's seminal work on minority influence - where he argues that influence is exerted in order to produce conformity as a means of conflict resolution or avoidance - is both interesting and important, it presupposes the existence of a level of conflict (Ng, 1980, p.165) and so does not obviously appear to apply to the EGs. However, such conflict need not necessarily be explicit (and may perhaps even be subconscious) for, as Moscovici and Doise argue, the '...dynamics of conflict and influence can be easily observed in any committee, jury, working group or gathering that meets to discuss' (Moscovici & Doise, 1994, p.55).

Moscovici and Doise's devised a series of experiments to investigate what they describe as the 'climate of groups' in which they distinguished between 'warm' and 'cold' communication (1994, pp.124-149). Complementing earlier work in this area (Lemaine, 1975; Burnstein, 1969), they initially conducted a series of experiments in which they manipulated fairly simple factors such as seating arrangements and the shape of office furniture in order to analyse variance in group polarization. It is, however, in their later development of this work that a number of Moscovici and Doise's findings appear to have particular significance and relevance for understanding influence in the EGs.

Mobilising earlier work by Forgas (1981) which had found that informal discussions tend to result in 'bolder' solutions than those arrived at in a formal environment, Moscovici and Doise analysed the respective roles of individuals and groups in the decision-making process. Broadly, they found that, in a formal setting, groups tended to reach more extreme decisions than any one individual but that in an informal setting the group tends toward compromise and moderation (Moscovici & Doise, 1994, p.132).

Moscovici and Doise's findings appear to offer strong evidence to support the intuitive view that the role of the individual is an important variable in group decision making. For the EG workings, then, this variable should be factored in when considering the contribution an individual makes to the development of an EG's recommendations. Adapting Moscovici and Doise's work for the purposes of this paper, the individual member of an EG is characterised as an 'information container' in order to analyse the nature of the dissemination of that information to the wider group. When coupled with considerable evidence that unshared information becomes more prevalent in group discussion over time (Stasser & Titus, 1985; Gigone & Hastie, 1996; Kameda & Tindale, 2000), the question is raised as to whether, within the EG, there is a correlation between the amount of information an individual holds (or is perceived to hold) and his or her degree of influence within the group. However, determining the 'direction of travel' through which any such correlation operates is something of a challenge: should an individual's degree of influence within the group be considered the independent variable or should it be the perception of that individual by the group? Simply put, how do we identify whether an individual is influential because he or she is perceived to possess superior information, or is perceived to possess superior information because they are influential?

Stasser and Titus' (1985) study found that groups are reluctant to accept information that is not widely shared. In applying this to the EGs, Stasser and Titus's study would seem to indicate that unshared information is more likely to be discussed where group members are established or where new members are pre-known. In certain policy fields, then, it seems likely that this may privilege individuals representing particular MSs.

This raises the question as to whether this is because certain individuals are (or appear) more knowledgeable and are thus more able to effectively establish their credentials when sharing information that others already know - that once established as a *bone fide* expert, unshared information becomes the currency of leverage. This is consistent with Kameda's (1997) work

on the influence of an individual being a function of how much information they share with others. Kameda describes the most information-sharing individual as ‘cognitively central’ to the group. Applying this concept of ‘cognitive centrality’ to the case of the EGs is not, however, straightforward as such centrality may vary both temporally and functionally. In the case of the EGs, for example, a level of ‘deep’ expertise in a specific area may well provide the means for an individual generally on the periphery of the group to move to the ‘cognitively central’ role where that individual’s particular expertise is deemed valuable. This situation appears consistent with the work of Sargis and Larson (2002) who, in refining Kameda’s earlier research, found that those on the periphery of the group could become influential where their information in a specific field was regarded as important for the completion of a particular task.

Kameda’s work on cognitive centrality implies that the cognitively central members of a group exert greater social influence on group consensus compared with cognitively peripheral members. For the particular case of the Commissions EGs, this cognitive centrality is considered to act as a proxy for influence. However, it is not immediately apparent that the ‘information container’ characterisation discussed satisfactorily explains the basis for this influence - that the individual perceived to have the greatest information, is always the most influential in the group. In the final section, this paper considers a number of alternative sources of individual influence in the EGs and proposes a series of hypotheses to be tested in future research.

Identifying influence in the EGs.

Given the *sui generis* nature of the EU, there appears limited scope for adapting existing work in order to construct a series of falsifiable hypotheses to identify the locus of influence within an EG. It is considered, however, that any hypothesis should reflect the particular nature of the EGs and, arguably, the inherent tension in their composition - individuals representing different national administrations but with similar areas of professional expertise.

Checkel (2001) suggests that a political environment is a barrier to successful argumentative persuasion and that this is more likely to succeed in a ‘closed’ setting. Certainly, an EG can be considered a ‘closed’ setting but, given that its work is chaired by the Commission, it is less clear whether argumentative persuasion can be easily ‘depoliticized’ where it takes place in a highly politicized space such as the EU. In an earlier work Checkel seems to raise this

point himself in suggesting that his findings - based on empirical examples from the Council of Europe - may not readily apply to the EU (Checkel, 1999, p.554). Within a dense political space accommodating a multitude of groups of differing shapes and sizes, experience and objectives differ widely and result in a plethora of - often conflicting - motives and loyalties. Identifying the locus of influence in such a space is, therefore, a complex task. The following hypotheses reflect this complexity by depicting 'influence' as the dependent variable and proposing a number of independent variables that reflect the interdisciplinary nature of this paper.

The first hypothesis is drawn directly from Kameda's work cited above and so relates to social psychology and its scholarship linking information to influence. Both Kameda (1997), and Sargis and Larson (2002) argue that there is a strong relationship between cognitive centrality and the degree of information sharing. Here the idea of an individual having cognitive centrality appears to be a refinement of Raven and Rubin's work on persuasion (1976) which argued that possession of information is the basis for social power but, importantly, that this social power is attributed by others. Illustrating the point with an example of the acceptance with which a doctor's recommendation for dealing with a medical condition is accepted, they argue that it is only by showing his or her expertise that the doctor's influence is confirmed - it is the demonstration of expertise that provides social validity to his or her position (Raven & Rubin, 1976, p.213). Applying this explanation for influence to the EGs, the first hypothesis broadly reflects the 'expert' element of the EGs and posits that a member's degree of cognitive centrality may be linked to his or her perceived expertise or reliability in the particular knowledge domain.

H1. That the greater the perceived knowledge of an individual member of the group, the greater his or her influence.

The second hypothesis derives from the question raised by in Trondal's work on representational roles in the Commission that suggests supranational identities are a factor of length and intensity of participation, a finding that contrasted with Hooghe's study which found that length of time was not a significant factor in forging supranationalism. Both Hooghe and Trondal's findings are relevant to this paper. The membership of certain EGs is 'fixed' - representatives of organisations are named and published in the EU's register of expert groups, whilst other groups comprise only of unnamed representatives of organisations. In the case of the 'fixed' membership, the same representatives attend each

meeting but in the 'variable' groups, different representatives may attend. Heard-Laureote's work into the agricultural committees identified a negative consequences of this 'variable' format - the reduction in socialization opportunities requires that participants constantly re-familiarise themselves with colleagues and that, as a result, there is an increased likelihood of repetition and overlap between meetings (Heard-Lauréote, 2008, p.586).

In applying this to the context of the EGs, the second hypothesis relates to how the dynamic of the group is altered where 'alternate' members attend. Checkel found that actors 'parachuted' into international organisations are less likely to adopt group norms (2005b, p.811); a finding that would appear to reinforce the 'parachuted' actor's reduced socialization opportunities identified by Heard-Lauréote. The view, therefore, that the time spent in a given role is an important factor in both socialization and capacity to persuade others is supported by a significant body of scholarship. The second hypothesis mobilises this support in order to propose that, where organisational representation varies between EG meetings, the individual member is less likely to be influential in the group than the permanent representative.

H2. That the longer an individual has attended EG meetings, the greater his or her influence.

The third hypothesis takes a more explicitly political perspective on the EGs and is intended to reflect the fact that the elements of the groups being studied represent national administrations exchanging ideas in a supranational setting. Cini suggests that members of EGs seldom act blatantly as representatives of national interests but concedes that they are '...extremely useful to the Commission, providing staff with valuable insight into relevant policy thinking at national levels' (Cini, 1996, p.148). This suggests that individual members of EGs are involved in operating at both the national and supranational levels - they are playing a 'two-level game' (Putnam, 1988, p.434). This raises the issue of whether national coalitions operate within the EGs and, in that sense, H3 nods towards both the Liberal Intergovernmentalist Framework of Analysis (Moravcsik, 1993, p.482) and, indeed, the broader intergovernmental/supranational debate. More specifically, H3 is informed by the Beyers and Dierickx (1998) study into the working groups of the Council which examined whether negotiation success was affected by affected by coalitions based, to some extent, on geographical factors - both regional alliances and size of MSs but also on a cleavage between 'old' and 'new' MSs. By plotting communication networks between different national

representatives on the working groups, Beyers and Dierickx identified a number of such coalitions and ‘cliques’ within the groups. Analysis of these cliques suggested that, although geographical in nature, they were often a manifestation of other factors - the degree of prestige of an individual actor, for example. This implies that, whilst the nationality of an individual member of a working group affected his or her success in negotiations, this nationality was a proxy for other factors. The presence of national coalitions that Beyers and Dierickx identified may have been reasonably predicted given that their analysis took place within the Council working groups. However, the extent to which this applies within those elements of the Commission advisory groups *that represent national administrations* has not, to date, been tested. As a result, H3 reflects the degree to which individual nationality affects an individual’s degree of influence whilst not, at this stage, seeking to explain the specific factors that shape this.

H3 that there is a relationship between an individual member’s nationality and his/her degree of influence.

This ‘nationality as proxy’ finding identified by Beyers and Dierickx has particular relevance when applied to the case of the EGs. Each group inhabits a discrete policy area and it is intriguing to consider whether this acts as a proxy measure - that in certain policy areas particular national representation wields more influence than others. Future research to test this will involve a wide study examining expert groups from across a variety of policy sectors.

Strategies for Empirical Research.

In order to test the hypotheses presented above in empirical research, it is intended to analyse the process through which the EG reaches its recommendations by employing both process tracing and survey techniques. Bennett and George (2005) describe process tracing as a means ‘...to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable...and the outcome of the dependent variable’, an approach which would seem to be appropriate for testing the hypotheses above. Although later describing process tracing as having achieved ‘...near buzz-word status in certain circles’ (Checkel, 2005a, p.2), he suggests that it is an approach that has, at its core, the view that ‘...[e]ssentially, you need to read things and talk with people’ (Checkel, 1999, p.550). For the EGs, the process of reaching recommendations can be understood by building on interviews with individual EG members and analysing the relevant documentation.

It is recognised, however, this process-tracing has a number of established weaknesses as a research tool. Checkel (2005a) concedes that the amount of time and data involved creates a significant logistical challenge whilst Dur and Mateo (2010, p.688) acknowledge that documentation may be unavailable and individuals may not be honest or able to fully recollect details in interview. Certainly, for the EGs, documentation is somewhat limited - there are, quite simply, few 'things' to read. For example, although a formal agenda is circulated prior to most EG meetings, minutes of meetings are rarely published, the Commission instead producing a post-meeting memorandum and only where particular actions have been agreed. Furthermore, on the limited occasions where an EG meeting yields formal and accessible documentation, relying on this as a means to analyse the factors that affect the behaviour of individual group members is both insufficient - it would not include 'hidden' private correspondence such as e-mails between EG members - and inadequate because such formal documentation would not explain the *motives* of individual actors.

Neither would this limitation be overcome through participant observation - a method which was initially rejected for purely practical reasons as, unfortunately, EG meetings are rarely accessible to researchers. However, inviting participants to respond to standardized questions in a survey should yield results that are not visible through (the limited) official transcripts and which would not necessarily be captured through participant observation. Whilst it is recognised that surveys often have a poor response rate, by employing a 'snowball' technique to identify and then contact a target population advising in specific policy areas, it is intended that the survey is delivered only to those participants that have provisionally agreed to participate.

Conclusion.

This paper has proposed that an interdisciplinary approach will allow investigation of the locus of influence in the Commission EGs. By constructing a series of hypotheses to be empirically tested, the paper has argued that the basis for this influence can be understood through process tracing and surveys. It is recognised, however, that limiting the research to an analysis of EGs operating in only a few policy areas will not allow the findings to be generalized. Furthermore, selecting hypotheses basing influence only on temporal, geographic or epistemic factors confine any findings to these areas alone. Clearly, therefore, other variables that may affect the dynamics operating within the group - such as the age or gender of an EG member - are not being considered.

Future research should be prepared to take this further by relaxing such restrictions. The purpose of this current project into the somewhat opaque workings of the EGs is simply to understand whether the basis for Moscovici and Doise's (1994) '...dynamics of conflict and influence [that] can be easily observed in any committee...' can be identified and thus to demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach helps the researcher to develop clearer understanding of questions relating to the broader study of EU Governance.

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