CHAPTER 5

Leadership of organisations: Theory and evidence from the development of Norwegian scenic routes

Charlotte Kiland and Zuzana Murdoch

ABSTRACT

While much academic attention has been devoted to leadership inside organisations, less is known about the leadership of organisations. In this chapter, we argue that leaders of organisations have three key functions: i) introduce and develop new mental models of the organisation, ii) cultivate external supporting mechanisms that buttress legitimacy, iii) defend against the death of the organisation. We assess these ideas empirically by examining the case of Norwegian Scenic Routes (Nasjonale Turistveger) – a new policy programme by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, which has been continuously expanded since the mid-1990s. Building on documentary evidence as well as interviews, we find considerable support for our theoretical arguments. Our findings contribute to the understanding of how leaders create and maintain institutions in a new and divergent field, which links our analysis to research on institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work. Furthermore, since our case involves a large number of stakeholders across three levels of government, it also allows extracting new lessons for the literature on multi-level and collaborative governance.

Keywords: leadership, institutional change, institutional work, institutional entrepreneurs, public administration.

PHILIP SELZNICK AND THE "LEADER-STATESMAN" IN A NORWEGIAN PUBLIC ORGANISATION

Philip Selznic's (1957) seminal work "Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation" has been highly influential in shaping our view of institutions as "organisations infused with values". Yet, despite the title of the book, his conception of leadership has not been equally prominent in subsequent studies. This is surprising given Selznick's strong focus on the role of leadership "for the development, legitimacy and survival of organisations and their core values" (Murdoch, 2015, p. 1685). Leadership in his view consists of "far more than the capacity to mobilize personal support; it is more than the maintenance of equilibrium through routine solution of everyday problems" (Selznick, 1957, p. 37). This line of argument effectively distinguishes between leaders as "managers" and leaders as "statesmen" (Selznick, 1957, p. 4). While leader-managers are at the heart of management and business scholarship, academics have largely ignored the statesman aspect of leadership for decades (Kraatz & Moore, 2002, p. 122). Consistent with the intention of this book, and in light of several contributions by Dag Ingvar Jacobsen to our

understanding of leadership in public and private organisations (Jacobsen, 2015, 2018 & 2019), this chapter brings the leader-statesman back to the forefront of institutional analysis by examining the leadership *of* organisations. Specifically, our central research question focuses on the role of leadership for both institutional continuity and change: What are the tasks of leaders of organisations to create and maintain institutions in a new and divergent field? This highlights our focus on leaders' "institutional work" (Kraatz, 2009), which has been conceptualized as the "purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215).

Our theoretical argument draws attention to the "agency with which individuals interact with institutional scripts and roles" (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 54; see also Garud et al., 2007). We argue that this institutional work is where leaders *of* organisations play a critical role (Kraatz, 2009) to develop and maintain the status and legitimacy of the organisation (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Specifically, building on Kraatz and Moore (2002) and Washington et al. (2008), we contend that leaders *of* organisations have to perform three key tasks: *i)* exploit strategic inflection points to move their organisation in a new direction, *ii)* cultivate internal and external supporting mechanisms to buttress legitimacy, and *iii)* defend against the death of their organisation.

We empirically assess these ideas by examining the practices of leaders in the development and institutionalisation of a new policy programme by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration (NPRA) – i.e., "*Norwegian Scenic Routes*" (NSR; *Nasjonale Turistveger*) – since its inception in 1994. Our data derive from official documents and media stories related to the NSR programme as well as 13 elite interviews with 15 key civil servants in NPRA, ministers of transport, members of the Norwegian Parliament's Transport Committee, external auditors, and so on. Using qualitative content analysis based on predominantly deductive (theory-based) coding, our empirical methodology follows Selznick's (1957, p. 141) suggestion to study institutions via a "developmental" approach emphasizing historical origins and growth stages (known today as process tracing; Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). Our main findings indicate that leaders create and maintain institutions by introducing new mental models and practices infused by their personal experiences. They then bolster legitimacy through storytelling as well as stimulating support from a broad diversity of stakeholders. Finally, leaders overcome threats to their organisation through workforce stability, internal and external anchorage, as well as structural decoupling (which increases decision-making autonomy by keeping parent structures "at arm's length" (Egeberg & Trondal, 2009a; Elston, 2014).

The next section sets out our theoretical framework and propositions. Then, we present our empirical case, data, and empirical methodology before summarizing our main findings. In the final section, we offer a concluding discussion that, given the nature of our case, also reviews insights with respect to the role of leaders for multi-level and collaborative governance more generally.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

How are institutions created and maintained? How do new institutions compete for primacy in an established institutional field? In this chapter, we have taken inspiration from the work of Philip Selznick (1957), who was interested in how organisations – defined as "entities formally established for the explicit purpose of achieving certain goals" (Blau & Scott, 1962, p. 5) – evolve into institutions over time. In recent decades, scholarship addressing this question has relied heavily on the notions of institutional entrepreneurship (Di Maggio, 1988; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Weik, 2011) and institutional work (Kraatz, 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Yet, few of these studies focus on the agency of those in leadership positions, and the "processes by which leaders lead organizations" (Washington et al., 2008, p. 731). We contribute to this literature by drawing attention to the practices of institutional leaders for *both* creating *and* maintaining value-infused, taken-for-granted practices. We henceforth refer to such practices as "institutional leadership", and to the leaders engaging in them as "institutional leaders". Following Selznick (1957), we thus argue that leaders are more than "just" leaders of organisations. They must rely on political skills to impose desired changes, infuse organisations with value, and "maintain the legitimacy and survival of their institution" (Washington et al., 2008, p. 724). Building on and extending the work of Selznick (1957), Kraatz and Moore (2002) and Washington et al. (2008), we take the first step towards setting out the key tasks institutional leaders must engage in to achieve their aims. In this section, we further develop these arguments and thereby derive a number of propositions.

Task 1: Introducing new mental models to develop the vision and mission of the organisation

Selznick (1957) argued that leaders must maintain internal commitment to the values and mission of the organisation. One way to do this is via "the elaboration of socially integrating myths", which help "infuse day-to-day behavior with long-run meaning and purpose" (Selznick, 1957, p. 151). Organisational

visions give rise to the telling and exchange of stories (or "myths") to reinforce key values and advance a coherent picture of the organisation's identity. Such an exchange allows those involved to develop a "collective story" (Washington et al., 2008), which is critical to the maintenance of the internal consistency of the organisation (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In creating this "descriptive mental model of the organization", leaders build on their own experiences and weave an autobiographical pattern of historical accounts into the "individual and institutional story creation process" (Washington et al., 2008, p. 726). This not only provides an opportunity for the leader to impart "much of their own meaning and sense-making onto the organization", but also helps to maintain individual-organisation coherence and to cement the leader as a legitimate part of the organisation's identity (Washington et al., 2008, p. 727). A leader's functional background or past experiences can thus impart new and different conceptions of what is reasonable or preferable, which can help overcome the limiting assumptions of institutional natives" (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

Developing a new "mental model" within an inherently political and highly institutionalised setting is not an easy task. To achieve substantive changes that conflict with the institutionalised setting, we expect that institutional leaders exploit "strategic inflection points" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000, p. 520; Grove 1997). These can be defined as fundamental shifts in environmental conditions and constraints (e.g., technological innovations, changes of government, or socio-economic disruptions). While such inflection points may in general be very hard to detect a priori, they make change feasible as well as functionally attractive (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). As such, they create opportunities for leaders to disrupt the institutional status quo and (re)frame expectations and impressions.

Proposition 1:   Institutional leaders exploit strategic inflection points to create and maintain organisational visions infused by their own experiences.

Task 2: Develop supporting mechanisms to increase legitimacy of the organisation

Legitimacy – understood as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574) – is critical to the survival of any organisation or practice. Consequently, it is of fundamental importance for leaders to ensure that "an organization is endorsed and supported by a segment of society large enough to ensure its effectiveness and survival" (Washington et al., 2008, p. 728). A second key

task of institutional leaders thus relates to the development of internal and external supporting mechanisms that help sustain the social acceptance of their organisation and/or practice (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2004).

Since extant literature suggests "a central position for rhetorical, discursive and technical struggles over what is legitimate" (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 68), we assert that this task can be accomplished via the use of communication strategies aimed at "selling" the organisation or practice as legitimate. Leaders thereby put forward strategically chosen verbal and non-verbal accounts as a form of impression management (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Goffman, 1959). Such strategic communications may take distinct forms. One example could relate to building a (personal) reputation for strong adherence to a set of principles that drive the actions of the organisation. Strategic communications may also target a variety of audiences, such as social and political networks as well as interest groups. Selznick (1957, p. 16) indeed argued that a diversity of forces standing behind an organisation or practice will have a unifying effect by defining the "commitments to the organization".

Proposition 2: Institutional leaders bolster legitimacy through strategic communication practices and impression management.

Task 3: Defend against threats and overcome internal/external enemies

Institutions never exist in a vacuum. Multiple institutions with diverging sources of interest and identities may vie for dominance in any given setting. Even if no competing practices are present today, these might develop in the future. Any practice thus can come under attack whenever actors invest in competing practices and work to de-institutionalise the initial practice. This competition creates a third important task for institutional leadership: i.e., defending against threats and overcoming internal/external enemies.

As argued by Oliver (1992), "threats to the persistence of an institutionalized practice" (p. 581) may arise from a number of directions including political (e.g., legal and regulatory changes), technical (e.g., technological innovations) and social (e.g., reduced cultural consensus about the practice) pressures. Leaders must therefore develop a range of distinct responses depending on prevailing circumstances and the nature of the threat. For instance, securing explicit support from powerful actors, or embedding the practice in long-term legal frameworks may provide political resilience and anchorage. Relatedly, structural decoupling from parent organisations may buttress the autonomy of

decision-making, and thereby offers power and leverage relative to competing practices (Egeberg & Trondal, 2009b). Finally, maximizing workforce stability and stimulating the socialisation of organisation members may counteract social pressures arising from the fragmentation of the population that originally institutionalised the practice. Previous research indeed illustrates that institutions are stronger and more threat-resistant when organisation members (including leaders) have been socialised over a long period of time to share common values (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Selznick, 1957).

Proposition 3:   Institutional leaders address (internal and external) threats through workforce stability, anchorage, and structural decoupling.

CONTEXT AND CASE SELECTION: NORWEGIAN SCENIC ROUTES

The Norwegian Public Roads Administration (NPRA) is a government agency subordinate to the Ministry of Transport and Communications. With topographic conditions presenting a major challenge for infrastructure development in Norway, the NPRA's main task is to ensure a safe, sustainable, and efficient road transport system in Norway. This predominantly includes planning, construction, operation, and maintenance of national and county public roads. *Norwegian Scenic Routes* (NSR) was a new policy programme initiated in 1994 by the NPRA to identify key scenic roads in Norway and develop them with architectural viewpoints and picnic areas. Although initially this was a pilot project involving four routes financed by the NPRA, in 1998 the NPRA was tasked by the Norwegian parliament to extend and broaden the programme using central government budgets from the Ministry of Transport and Communications. At the same time, NSR was embedded into Norway's first National Transport Plan (1998–2008). The National Transport Plan was at that time a ten-year investment plan for all modes of transport in Norway. It must be approved by Parliament every four years, and the current plan runs from 2018 to 2029. Today, the NSR programme is developing 18 routes (selected from 52 options). Upon completion in 2023, the programme will have produced 250 attractions along these 18 routes and is estimated to cost NOK 3.5 billion (approximately €330 million).

The NSR case is of particular interest for our research objectives due to three key characteristics. First, NSR represents the transformation of a legitimized practice, promoting change that conflicts with the prevailing institution within highly institutionalised settings. NSR indeed represents a completely new practice within the NPRA, taking it from engineering "nuts and bolts" (i.e., gravel and asphalt) to architectural scenic routes.

Second, NSR represents a multidimensional space including three levels of government (i.e., national, regional, and municipal), as well as private actors including the local business community and affected landowners. Thereby, NSR's leadership must engage in horizontal as well as vertical co-ordination with five ministries, seven counties, 57 municipalities, private firms (architecture and engineering firms, consultants), and local stakeholders. The role of the counties increased in 2010 when the Norwegian Administration Reform (*forvaltningsreformen*) reclassified many state roads as county roads. Since then, the NSR leadership has had to engage regional governments more directly through cooperation and collaboration. Moreover, to assist in developing these routes', the programme established an Architecture Council (to ensure high visual quality of all attractions), a Quality Council (to advise on professional guidelines), and an arts curator (to incorporate internationally valuable art). Hence, a very substantial number of actors have been involved in this multilevel and collaborative governance.

Third, a prevalent political consensus has considered transport and infrastructure development an important part of the regional policy in Norway. Policy decisions within the transport and infrastructure field are viewed by politicians, academics as well as commentators as political means to secure regional socio-economic development (e.g., employment, local economic growth, and population settlement). This approach is commonly referred to as the "broad" regional policy approach, which considers multi-sectoral state activities (i.e., transport, agriculture, energy, culture) as being important stimuli to regional economies (Bachtler & Yuill, 2001). Characterised by strong local cultures and traditions, the periphery has thereby traditionally been a substantial influence and has managed to impress its wishes on the Norwegian polity. This is important since these contextual constraints work to circumscribe the potential influence and actions of institutional leaders in our case (Johns, 2006).

DATA AND METHODS

DATA SOURCES

We utilised information from two main sources. First, we collected official documents related to the NSR programme. These include brochures and annual reports about the 18 routes, National Transport Plans, transcripts of relevant meetings of the Norwegian Parliament's Transport Committee, and minutes NSR's Quality and Architecture Council meetings. This has been complemented with information about the programme from national and local media sources using the Atekst database. Second, to obtain more direct insights into actors'

motivations and (inter)actions, both authors conducted 13 in-depth interviews in 2016–2018 with 15 elite informants. These interviewees included NSR project management (5), NPRA leadership (2), members of the Quality and Architecture Councils (3), relevant ministers of transport and communications (2) and their political advisors (1), as well as members of the Norwegian Parliament's Transport Committee (2).

Interviews were semi-structured to enhance information retrieval and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. They covered the following three main topics: i) the NSR programme formulation phase (i.e., origins of and driving forces behind the establishment of NSR), ii) project partners (i.e., form and nature of involvement, interaction, and coordination with local and (inter)national actors throughout the project), and iii) financing and organisation (i.e., the legal, structural, and operational framework of NSR). All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

ANALYSIS STRATEGY: PROCESS TRACING

We followed Selznick's (1957, p. 141) suggestion to implement a "developmental approach" to study institutions' historical origins and growth stages. In today's terminology, this implies we adopted a qualitative process tracing approach (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). Therefore, we found it beneficial to start with a narrative and timeline listing sequences of events (see Table 5.1). In this way, we explored available narratives and considered the various sources of evidence (dis)confirming the ideas embedded in these narratives (Collier, 2011, pp. 828–829). Subsequently, we engaged in a deductive, theory-driven process, in which data were coded according to predefined categories derived from the theoretical framework. This was done independently by both authors to increase reliability. Throughout the analysis, we also returned to previously analysed sources and re-examined them in light of newly gained insights. Thus, we gained flexibility for incorporating emerging themes and adjusted our inferences accordingly.

Before turning to our main findings, we should briefly discuss potential concerns regarding interviewees' post-hoc rationalization and biased self-representation as well as confirmation bias, arising from our iterative empirical approach. Regarding the former, we mitigated such concerns by asking respondents not only about themselves and their own organisation, but also about other actors involved in NSR. We furthermore cross-validated information from interviews using official documents and media sources, which increased internal validity. With respect to our iterative empirical approach, we addressed potential concerns over confirmation bias by discussing our findings and supporting

evidence with an independent researcher *uninformed* about the development of our theoretical ideas. This "peer debriefer" (Novell et al., 2017; Spall, 1998) – and the fact that we independently coded all transcripts and documents (see above) – forced us to keep an open mind at all times.

TABLE 5.1:   Timeline and critical junctures

Timeline	Critical junctures
1985	Study trip to the US by long-term NPRA staff member, later headhunted as project leader in the pilot project called "Reiselivsprosjektet" [Tourism project].
1992	First initiative from a regional director of NPRA to invest in tourism, architecture, and art. Informal discussions in NPRA and with political representatives in the Norwegian Parliament.
1993–1997	NPRA's pilot project "Reiselivsprosjektet" is established and carried out.
1994	NSR is established as a project in NPRA. A new project organisation established.
1997	Change of Norwegian government, with the Centre Party entering the government.
1998	NPRA asked by the Norwegian Parliament to extend the pilot project by providing formal approval to the NSR programme. NSR programme is anchored into the first National Transport Plan (10-year plan 1998–2008). The four first routes are developed.
1998	New manager appointed for the NSR programme. Hiring of a communication advisor. The project organisation is located physically outside the main NPRA headquarters.
1998–2000	Several crises and major investment projects related to the "Gardermoen" airport project.
2004	The first project directive for the NSR programme signed by the Director General of the NPRA emphasises NPRA's commitment to NSR.
2004	NSR section established as a formal and separate organisational unit in NPRA, still physically located outside the main NPRA headquarters.
2004	"Open invitation" sent to all regions and municipalities for suggestions about potential routes. Establishment of coordination groups.
2005	NPRA chooses 18 routes to be developed as NSR routes.
2005–2013	The Centre Party controls the transport ministry.
2009–2018	NSR programme is anchored into the second National Transport Plan, which states that the routes are to be marketed jointly as one tourism product from 2012 onwards.
2010	The Norwegian Administration Reform ("forvaltningsreformen"), which involves a reclassification of state roads to country roads.
2010	NSR is presented at the World Exhibition at Expo Shanghai.
2019–2029	NSR programme is anchored into the third National Transport Plan (10-year plan).

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THE THREE TASKS OF INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

We structured our empirical analysis along the three tasks of institutional leaders set out in our theoretical framework. Direct citations from our interviews and documentary evidence are italicised (translated from Norwegian original), and interviews were numbered (1–13) to maintain confidentiality.

Task 1: Introducing new mental models to develop the vision and mission of the organisation

Proposition 1 states that institutional leaders exploit inflection points to create and maintain organisational visions infused by their own experiences. In our setting, three such points came prominently to the fore during the analysis. The first of these was ideational and relates to a study trip by a long-term NPRA staff member in 1985 to the US, which "impressed [upon me] how good they were over there at using their logo with a camera (…) and informing about what we saw" (Interview 8). This personal experience "inspired" a newspaper article arguing that NPRA "should make an effort to market our tourist routes", which "was very well received" by several regional NPRA managers (Interview 8). Our informant added that "I believe this was the starting point" for a pilot project (*Reiselivsprosjekt*) she initiated – shortly after being promoted to a leadership position in 1990 – with the explicit support of one of these regional NPRA managers (Interviews 4, 8).

A second inflection point was political in nature. Several of our informants indicated that a change of government in 1997, as well as changes in partisan control over the transport ministry in subsequent years, were critical for the early development and expansion of the NSR project (Interviews 1, 4, 5, 10, 12). When the Centre Party (*Senterpartiet*) became part of the national government in 1997, and particularly when that party ran the transport ministry between 2005 and 2013, the NSR project received a substantial "budgetary boost" (Interviews 1, 5). It was during one such period that NSR was "lifted into" the first National Transport Plan in 1998 (see also below). The NSR leadership thereby appears to have exploited this party's strong interest in promoting "the local business community, which is their main political base" (Interview 5). This represented "a good fit" with the mission of NSR, thereby allowing the project to "pick up speed" (Interviews 1, 12) and obtain larger budget allocations.

The third inflection point was of contextual character and provided by a set of "major political issues that dominated the political agenda" within the transport ministry in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Interviews 10, 11, 12). Several crisis events and major investment projects related to the development of a new

main airport and high-speed rail line, the Gardermoen project (NOU, 1999), meant that the minister of transport and NPRA directors were "preoccupied with greater things" (Interviews 2, 11). The NSR leadership exploited these events to position NSR as a "small sweet in the candy box" (Interview 2). The success of this strategy is confirmed by politicians referring to the project as "the icing on the cake" (Minister of Transport and Communications Liv Signe Navarsete, Parliamentary question 3, 2007–2008) and "spices" (Interview 10).

Throughout each of these inflection points, the NSR leadership made extensive use of both verbal and visual accounts to develop its organisational stories and myths. Several informants explained how NSR leadership was very active in developing "a process to explain what we are trying to achieve" (Interview 4, also interviews 1, 7, 8). This myth development process included numerous town-hall meetings and workshops as well as large-scale opening ceremonies and the development of an extensive picture depository (Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8). The latter has been central to managing NSR's online and offline presence (including a worldwide travelling exhibition). Our evidence indicates that the visual aspect was particularly important for NSR leaders in developing the project's "collective story". In fact, its 16-strong staff in 2016 – which is small within the 6500-strong NPRA – included at least six positions related to photography/films, maps, and brochures, (online) media and profiling, and news dissemination (Interview 1). We return to NSR's internal and external communication strategy below.

Finally, and consistent with Proposition 1, many of our informants made explicit references to how leaders' characteristics informed the mental model of the organisation. This relates first of all to their professional background as architects or engineers, which might be expected given the nature of the NSR project (Interviews 4, 13). However, it also included references to leaders' hobbies and personal interests, such as being a "jazz musician", a "nature lover", or "caring about other things than just asphalt" (Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 8). It should be observed here, however, that not all leaders within NSR stood out as institutional leaders. Based on our interview data, two individuals can be singled out as institutional leaders, due to their connection with the creation of the new practice and the development of supporting mechanisms to increase its legitimacy: i.e., the initiator for NSR's pilot project, and her successor as manager of the NSR programme.

Task 2: Develop supporting mechanisms to increase legitimacy of the organisation

Proposition 2 maintains that institutional leaders bolster the legitimacy of their organisation or practice through strategic communication and impression management. Consistent with this proposition, our data show that internal and external communication strategies have been a key aspect of the NSR project since its formal approval by the Norwegian government in 1997–98. One of our informants stated, for instance, that "in the period I stepped down and he took over [in 1998 the authors], he told me 'I need people who can communicate this' and asked me to arrange a communication advisor" (Interview 4). Hence, already at the very start of the project, NSR leadership made the conscious decision to hire a communication advisor to "sell" the idea (Interviews 1, 4, 5, 8, 13). Our interviews furthermore indicate that NSR leaders took a broad approach in their communication strategy by targeting audiences "within NPRA (…) and at external collaboration partners, municipalities and politicians" (Interview 2).

Interestingly, given the wide variety of framing within the project – i.e., broadly classified by our informants as "district politics", "cultural politics" and "tourism" – the exact messages appear to have been tailor-made to the audience at hand. In communications to NPRA and the ministry of transport, "increased activity, tourism, experience (…) was part of the argument around this" (Interview 12). One informant stated that "we were never modest (…) and put forward that this here means something" (Interview 5), while another stressed NSR leader explained "why this actually yields gains in the long run" (Interview 8). This was deemed important in order to "sell this to the top of the NPRA and in the [Norwegian Parliament's] transport committee" (Interview 13). In contrast, communications to collaboration partners in regional and municipal governments were more about explanation: "So then we had to go in to present the idea and explain. (…) We have spent considerable time explaining" (Interview 1, also Interview 4). The strategically chosen content of these verbal and non-verbal accounts was explicitly noted by several informants. One stated: "They still *call it* tourism without it having had [any tested effects]" (Interview 13; our italics). Another informant added that "the challenge is when you do something within the transport sector that was not a top priority in the regular budgets. Then you could *fit it in via other things*" (Interview 12; our italics).

NSR leadership also adopted a second approach to gaining legitimacy. In line with Selznick's (1957) notion that support from a diversity of forces creates a unifying effect, the NSR team took steps to stimulate interest as well as a broad feeling of co-ownership among local governments. On the one hand,

an "open invitation" was sent to all regions and municipalities for suggestions about potential routes (Interviews 1, 4, 5). On the other hand, "coordination groups were established for each scenic route" (Interview 1). These provided a formal venue for regular "contacts and dialogue with collaboration partners" within the regions, municipalities, and the tourism sector (Interview 2, also Interviews 1, 7). Yet, both elements were – at least in part – only strategies to increase the legitimacy of the newly institutionalised practice. Indeed, the final decision about each scenic route lay firmly and exclusively with NSR leadership (Interviews 1, 4, 7, 9, 12), while the "coordination groups" were in practice more about information-provision than input-solicitation (Interview 4, 7).

Task 3: Defend against threats and overcome external enemies

Our third proposition holds that institutional leaders defend against the death of their organisation through anchorage, structural decoupling, and workforce stability. The first of these strategies was particularly aimed at securing financial resources. This is critical for any long-term project, and for NSR it required inclusion into Norway's National Transport Plans (Interviews 1, 12). The "National Transport Plan is extremely important to achieve progress and a long-term perspective on projects" (Interview 10, also Interview 11). With the explicit support of "the top manager who managed it here with NPRA" (Interview 1; also Interviews 4, 5), NSR leadership already achieved this in the late 1990s – while political leaders were preoccupied with several larger projects and crises (see above) (Interviews 10, 11, 12). As most political debates concerning later iterations of the transport plan "are about getting in new projects" (Interview 10) rather than the persistence of ongoing ones, this provided a firm mooring for the NSR project.

Decision–making autonomy is important to obtain power and leverage relative to competing organisations and practices. Our findings suggest that the National Transport Plans played an important role also in this respect, since it explicitly awarded NPRA the "full authority to develop a project with national tourist routes" (Minister of Transport, Dokument nr. 15:935 (2003–2004)). Furthermore, it allowed the NSR project to set up "its own board that makes its own decisions within certain limits" (Minister of Transport, response to parliamentary question (2007–2008)). Yet, the NSR leadership made a set of decisions that bolstered its autonomy also *within* the NPRA. They not only deliberately chose to operate "a little on the side-lines of the rest of the NPRA" (Interview 7), but also "saw it as natural that [the group developing NSR] should not be part of the NPRA headquarters in Oslo" (Interview 5). The NSR was structurally decoupled from the NPRA and located at a substantially physical

distance from the mother organisation (roughly 200 kilometres). Furthermore, the NSR leadership maintained a strict policy of in-house production to gain control over *all* aspects of its decision-making process. As one informant put it, the "organisation deals with everything from screws and bolts to reports to the Norwegian Parliament" (Interview 1).

Finally, the NSR project is characterised by a very high level of stability among its staff. The current managing director has been in this position since 1998. Many of his closest collaborators were not only "hand-picked" (Interview 5, also Interviews 1, 4), but have likewise been part of the project for much more than a decade. Furthermore, members of the project's advisory boards are often personally selected by NSR leadership (Interview 1) and remain in their positions for many years.

KEY LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP IN UNSETTLED CONTEXT AND UNDER PUBLIC-PRIVATE HYBRIDITY

By examining the leadership *of* organisations, our study aimed to bring Selznick's (1957) conception of the leader-statesman back to the forefront of institutional analysis. Doing so provides an important contribution to the literature on institutional entrepreneurship (Di Maggio, 1988; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Weik 2011) and institutional work (Kraatz, 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Our main findings more specifically reveal how the key tasks of institutional leaders are integral to both institutional continuity and change even within a highly institutionalised setting.

Firstly, we show that institutional leaders exploit strategic inflection points as windows of opportunity (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Grove, 1997) to create institutional *change* (in the form of the NSR programme). Two of the strategic inflection points uncovered thereby relate to changes in the political environment, which highlights the important interaction and relationship between politics and public administrations uncovered in previous work (e.g., Jacobsen, 1964; Jacobsen, 2006 & 2018). We also show, however, that leaders exploit these inflection points by communicating their new organisational visions through organisational stories and myths (Meyer & Rowan 1977). These accounts are thereby infused with leaders' own personal experiences – particularly by the two leaders acting as strong "evangelists" (in the sense of Patterson, 2007) – as a way to impart "their own meaning and sense-making onto the organization" (Washington et al., 2008, p. 727). NSR was in these accounts often framed as "the goody bag" that could be promoted internationally as a means of soft diplomacy and reputation building. Myth-building thus allowed gaining external legitimacy for this new and divergent practice within an otherwise traditional

and conservative transport sector. These findings are consistent with a "strategic perspective emphasizing how legitimacy can be managed" (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 52; see also Suchman, 1995), and corroborate that "subjects of legitimation" "may be active in creating legitimacy" rather than remaining passive bystanders in this process (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 54). Moreover, they highlight that institutional leaders often utilise socially acceptable procedures to conduct potentially controversial activities – such as introducing a new and divergent practice – and manage the impression that it is legitimate (Washington et al., 2008, p. 728).

Secondly, we find that institutional leaders reinforce the institutional *continuity* of the newly developed practice (i.e., the NSR programme) by developing internal and external supporting mechanisms and setting up defences against the end of this practice. This institutional work aims to ensure stability to institutionalise the new practice and compete for primacy in the institutional field (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Washington et al., 2008), and took three main forms in our setting. First, NSR leadership strategically and forcefully advocated the inclusion of NSR into the first National Transport Plan of 1998 in order to secure legitimisation and long-term predictability for the project. Second, NSR leaders established a separate organisational unit geographically located at a physical distance from the NPRA headquarters. As suggested in previous studies (Egeberg & Trondal, 2009a, b; Elston, 2014), this structural decoupling emphasised NSR's independence and secured decision-making autonomy that sustained the institutionalisation of the new practice. It also provided the opportunity for NSR's leadership to handle both continuity and change. Finally, a high degree of workforce stability within the NSR team was maintained, which benefits strong socialisation of organisation members (Murdoch et al., 2019; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Selznick, 1957). These three elements were very important for the institutionalisation of the new practice, and the concomitant deinstitutionalisation of previous practices (in the sense of Oliver, 1992). As such, they can be added to Oliver's (1992, p. 563) "set of organizational and environmental factors that (…) determine the likelihood that institutionalized organizational behaviours will be vulnerable to erosion or rejection over time". More specifically, our findings suggest that the political skills of institutional leaders – as reflected, in our setting, in different narratives targeted to distinct audiences, or adjustments made to accommodate the political situation in the Norwegian parliament – are particularly important in (de)institutionalisation processes. This observation directly reflects institutional leadership's inherently political nature (Selznick, 1957). It is suggestive not only of the tense balance of power between public administrations and politics, but also highlights that the administration can often be viewed as a political actor in its own right (Jacobsen, 1997).

Our case involved a very large number of public and private sector stakeholders. To achieve their aims, institutional leaders within NSR were thus required to engage in extensive collaborative governance efforts. Furthermore, these requirements grew over time. While the extension of the NSR programme in 1998 increased the number of involved stakeholders, the period of NPRA's reorganisation and decentralisation between 2003 and 2016 also increased the need for NSR leaders to engage in coordination with local and regional actors to explain the rationale of the programme. The Norwegian Administration Reform from 2010 likewise heightened the need for institutional leaders with political skills to engage in extensive coordination and anchorage, both within NPRA and with local government collaboration partners (municipalities and regions). Overall, these developments provide a backdrop that allows us to illustrate how institutional leaders make sense of their environment and how they operate within an unsettled and inherently political setting (Selznick, 1959), as well as how they tackle the more complex and diverse context of public-private collaborative hybrids (Jacobsen, 2015 & 2019).

Taken together, our findings stress that Selznick's conception of institutional leadership deserves more in-depth scholarly attention in future research. Building on Jacobsen's (2015 & 2019) work highlighting the importance of "publicness" as an antecedent of transformational leadership, one way forward could be to also focus more attention on this notion of publicness to institutional leadership. As institutional leaders operate in increasingly diverse and hybrid environments with characteristics of both the public and private sectors, one might indeed ask how degrees of "publicness" affect institutional work and the institutional leadership (i.e., is this type of leadership equally prevalent in public and private organisations? Why (not)?). Moreover, this relationship between publicness and institutional leadership need not be direct. It might well be mediated by important structural and demographic factors including bureaucratisation, professionalisation and gender composition (as illustrated in Transformational Leadership by Jacobsen, 2015). Addressing such questions in our view offers a fruitful avenue for further research and would provide important new insights about the leadership *of* organisations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bachtler, J. & Yuill, D. (2001). Policies and strategies for regional development: a shift in paradigm? *Regional and Industrial Policy Research Paper*, *46*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228396056_Policies_and_strategies_for_regional_development_a_shift_in_paradigm

Blau, P.M. & Scott, W.R. (1962/2003). *Formal organizations: A comparative approach*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Boal, K.B. & Hooijberg, R. (2000). Strategic leadership research: Moving on. *Leadership Quarterly*, *11*(4), 515–549.

Bolman, L.G. & Deal, T.E. (2003). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Collier, D. (2011). Understanding process tracing. *Political Science and Politics*, *44*(4), 823–830

Deephouse, D. & Suchman, M. (2008). Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (pp. 49–77). London: Sage.

DiMaggio, P.J. (1988). Interest and agency in institutional theory. In L.G. Zucker (Ed.), *Institutional Patterns and Organizations* (pp. 3–22). Cambridge: Ballinger.

Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2009a). National agencies in the European administrative space: Government driven, commission driven or networked? *Public Administration*, *87*(4), 779–790.

Egeberg, M. & Trondal, J. (2009b.) Political leadership and bureaucratic autonomy: Effects of agencification. *Governance*, *22*(4), 673–688.

Elston, T. (2014). Not so "arm's length": Reinterpreting agencies in UK central government. *Public Administration*, *92*(2), 458–476.

Elsbach, K.D. & Sutton, R.I. (1992). Acquiring organizational legitimacy through illegitimate actions: A marriage of institutional and impression management theories. *Academy of Management Journal*, *35*(4), 699–738.

Garud, R., Hardy, C. & Maguire, S. (2007). Institutional entrepreneurship as embedded agency: An introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, *27*(7), 957–69.

George, A.L. & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Greenwood, R. & Hinings, C.R. (1996). Understanding radical organizational change: Bringing together the old and the new institutionalism. *Academy of Management Review*, *21*(4), 1022–1054.

Grove, A.S. (1997). Navigating strategic inflection points. *Business Strategy Review*, *8*(3), 11–18.

Jacobsen, D.I. (1997). *Administrasjonens makt: Om forholdet mellom politikk og administrasjon*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Jacobsen, D.I. (2006). The relationship between politics and administration: The importance of contingency factors, formal structure, demography, and time. *Governance*, *19*(2), 303–323.

Jacobsen, D.I. (2015). Publicness as an antecedent of transformational leadership: The case of Norway. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *83*(1), 23–42.

Jacobsen, D.I. (2018). *Organizational Change and Change Management*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Jacobsen, D.I. (2019). *Ledelse og den offentlige dimensjon. En sammenligning av ledere i offentlige og private organisasjoner*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Jacobsen, K.D. (1964). *Teknisk help og politisk struktur. En studie av norsk landbruksforvaltning 1874–1899*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.

Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(2), 386–408.

Kraatz, M.S. (2009). Leadership as institutional work: A bridge to the other side. In T.B. Lawrence, R. Suddaby & B. Leca (Eds.). *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations* (pp. 59–91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kraatz, M.S. & Moore, J.R. (2002). Executive Migration and Institutional Change. *Academy of Management Journal*, *45*(1), 120–143.

Lawrence, T.B. & Suddaby, R. (2006). lnstitutions and institutional work. In R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T.B. Lawrence & W.R. Nord (Eds.) *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 215–254). London: Sage.

Lawrence, T.B., Suddaby, R. & Leca, B. (2011). Institutional work: Refocusing institutional studies of organization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *20*(1), 52–58.

Meyer, J.W. & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutional organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, *83*(2), 340–63.

Murdoch, Z. (2015). Organization theory and the study of European Union institutions: lessons and opportunities. *Organization Studies*, *36*(12), 1675–1692.

Murdoch, Z., Connolly, S. Geys, B. & Kassim, H. (2019). Do international institutions matter? Socialization and international bureaucrats. *European Journal of International Relations*, *25*(3), 852–877.

NOU (1999:28). (1999). *Gardermoprosjektet. Evaluering av planlegging og gjennomføring*. Oslo: Samferdselsdepartementet.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 16*(1), 1–13.

Oliver, C. (1992). The antecedents of deinstitutionlization. *Organization Studies*, *13*(4), 563–588.

Patterson, K.D. (2007). *Creation and Evolution: The processes and strategies of institutional entrepreneurs in alternative medicine, 1896–2005* (Ph.D. Dissertation). Texas Tech University.

Saks, A.M. & Ashforth, B.E. (1997). Organizational socialization: Making sense of the past and present as a prologue for the future. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 51, 234–279.

Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*. New York: Harper and Row.

Spall, S. (1998). Peer debriefing in qualitative research: Emerging operational models. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *4*(2), 280–292.

Suchman, M.C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 571–610.

Suddaby, R. & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 50*(1), 35–67.

Washington, M. & Ventresca, M. (2004). How organizations change: The role of institutional support mechanisms in the incorporation of higher education visibility strategies 1874–1995. *Organization Science*, *15*(1), 82–97.

Washington, M., Boal, K.B. & Davis, J.N. (2008). Institutional leadership: Past, present, and future. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby & K. Sahlin (Eds.). *Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (pp. 721–735), Los Angeles: Sage.

Weik, E. (2011). Institutional entrepreneurship and agency. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *41*(4), 466–481.