

Ambivalence in environmental representation

A theoretical contribution

Abstract

In this paper, we examine the phenomenon of representation through the theoretical lens of ambivalence, concentrating on the people involved in representation: representatives. We argue that the theoretical concept of ambivalence can be helpful in analysing and understanding the various tensions environmental and other representatives encounter in their practice. Based on the concepts of “sociological ambivalence”, “ideological dilemma”, and “the organizational centaur”, as well as on insights from social studies of science and sustainability studies, the paper develops a typology of three potential sources of ambivalence: role conflicts, value conflicts, and conflicts between goals and means. In addition, the paper identifies various ways of coping with ambivalence, including the construction of meta-norms, organizational and network support, pragmatism, drawing boundaries for reasonable and acceptable actions, rule bending and discursive negotiation. The paper concludes that the concept of ambivalence adds crucial insights to the positions, practices, and challenges of environmental representatives and notes that ambivalence is not only a matter of tensions and conflicts but can be a source of reflexivity, learning, and agency.

Keywords: representatives, coping, environment, organization, dilemma, sustainability, uncertainty, tension

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the tensions and ambiguities that representatives encounter in their practices as well as coping strategies to deal with these complications. For all sorts of societal problems, there is a need for representatives who speak and act to address those problems and their treatments. In contemporary society, almost every aspect of life is open to deliberation, implying that risk assessments and decision-making are ever-present in everyday practices (Höjjer et al. 2006). At the same time, the certainties of modernity are dissolving, and the notion of science as an unproblematic basis for decision-making has been increasingly questioned (see, e.g., Jasanoff 2006; Yearley 2005). Given the many “wicked problems” in the contemporary world – such as environmental problems – there are many reasons to believe that the role and task of representing will become increasingly challenging.

In this paper, we examine the phenomenon of representation through the theoretical

lens of ambivalence.¹ Special attention is paid to environmental representatives. The reason for this focus on environmental representatives is the understanding that their practices are imbued with certain strains and frictions. First, there may be tensions between personal environmental engagement and the constraints and/or norms derived from their core organizational affiliation (e.g., Berglez 2011; Olsson & Hysing 2012). Second, environmental representation is embedded in the discourse of sustainable development. On a general level, it can be easy for various actors to agree on the notion of sustainable development in terms of balancing social, economic and ecological dimensions in policy and practice. Implementing environmental goals, however, requires concretization, which tends to expose conflicting understandings and interests overlooked or concealed in more general discussions. Third, environmental representation tends to concern global, complex, and abstract issues, making our understanding of the environment highly dependent on science (Lidskog 2014; Pellizzoni 2011; Yearley 1992). Thus, policy-makers and others engaged in environmental management are often caught between acknowledging scientific uncertainty and desiring scientific guidance and advice (Bijker, Bal & Hendriks 2009).

We argue that the theoretical concept of ambivalence can be helpful in analysing and understanding the various tensions environmental representatives encounter in their practice. Despite the specific features of environmental representation, the theoretical framework and discussions presented here are of more general interest to the conceptualization of ambivalence in representative practices. Understanding the conditions of representative practices is also of more general relevance to the civil, political, and professional domains.

Following this introduction, the next section of the paper gives a brief account of the concept of environmental representation and of certain related tensions and ambiguities. Thereafter follows a theoretical elaboration and presentation of a typology of three potential sources of ambivalence: role conflicts, value conflicts, and conflicts between goals and means. The theoretical elaboration primarily draws on the concepts of “sociological ambivalence” (Merton & Barber 1976), “ideological dilemma” (Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. 1988), and “the organizational centaur” (Ahrne 1994) but also on insights from social studies of science. The different sources of ambivalence are discussed and detailed using examples from environmental representation. The next section then identifies various ways of coping with ambivalence, including pragmatism,

1 The term “ambivalence” is often loosely used in ordinary parlance to denote various situations of uneasiness and indeterminacy, whereas the term “dilemma” usually alludes to situations of difficult choice between two equally desired or undesired alternatives. This distinction is not always applied in social research. For example, Merton and Barber (1976) use ambivalence as a generic concept capturing various tensions and ambiguities emanating from the structure of certain statuses, positions, and roles. It is also in such a generic sense that we use the concept here. We do not distinguish between ambivalence and dilemma by referring the former to inner feelings and the latter to situations of choice; instead, we use ambivalence to refer to the various tensions and ambiguities environmental representatives encounter in their practice. When citing specific scholars, we use the same concept as used in the cited source.

constructing meta-norms, utilizing organizational support and support from allies, drawing boundaries for what is acceptable, rule bending and discursive negotiation. The concluding section discusses the contradictoriness of both ambivalence and organizational affiliation. Although ambivalence may cause difficulties for environmental representatives, it may also be a source of learning and change. The representatives' organizational affiliation may give rise to ambivalence while simultaneously providing resources and support that help people cope with ambivalence.

Environmental representation

Representation and representatives

Representation means to make someone or something absent present again (Pitkin 1967). This *representing* can be done by representatives acting for others (e.g., acting on behalf of a constituency or for a group unable to speak for itself), an entity (e.g., nature or threatened species), or an idea (e.g., equality or justice). The concept of representation can also refer to artefacts (e.g., models and blueprints) and symbols (e.g., flags or colours) standing for – that is, mapping, describing, or symbolizing – something.

Recent scholarship on political representation has emphasized the dynamic and performative aspect of representation. Saward (2006) argued that the “representative claim” is the crucial aspect of representation. From this perspective, representatives make claims and actively take part in constructing both their own roles and who or what they represent (i.e., their constituencies), doing this in relation to an audience that may accept or reject their claims. However, as the phrases “speaking on behalf of future generations” and “speaking on behalf of the environment” suggest, the entity represented need not exist before the representative (Bray 2011; O’Neill 2001; Saward 2006) or have the capacity to authorize the representative (cf. Rehfeld 2006; Tanasescu 2014). This implies a dynamic, contextual, and performative perspective on the scope, roles, and practices of representatives.

Environmental representatives

Previous studies of environmental representation have mainly considered the challenges of representative democracy connected to the nation-state at the macro level, with a primary focus on the procedures and principles of representation (e.g., Carolan 2006; Eckersley 1999; O’Neill 2001; Thompson 2010). However, there has been scant focus on the people involved in environmental representation in various organizational contexts, and further research into these actors is warranted (cf. Lippert, Krause & Hartmann 2015).

In this article, we attend to the tensions and ambiguities that environmental representatives encounter in their practices. By the concept “environmental representatives”, we mean individual actors that act and speak for the environment. Any persons or collective actors can call themselves the representatives of certain groups or entities (Saward 2008). In this article, we focus on the large number of environmental represen-

tatives in contemporary societies that are affiliated with organizations. Environmental representatives can be found not only among environmental activists and green politicians but also among a broad range of organizational contexts (e.g., the news media, industry, the research community, and public administration), and this involves various ways of raising awareness of environmental degradation and its consequences. Environmental representation, for example, may occur when journalists report in the news media, researchers publicize their results, and public officials negotiate in the EU.

Tensions and ambiguities in environmental representation

As noted in the introduction of this paper, environmental representation is imbued with certain tensions. First, there are potential tensions between personal environmental engagement and the constraints and/or norms derived from one's core organizational affiliation (e.g., Berglez 2011; Olsson & Hysing 2012). One complication is that environmental representatives are also likely to have several layers of affiliation and engagement outside one's core organizational affiliation. A core reason for this is related to the fact that no one can claim direct representation of the environment. From the perspective of the organization, the 'natural environment' is something 'external' to it, affecting and affected by the organization. Accordingly, the very role of the environmental representative is somewhat of a hybrid one, representing both internal (the organization) and external (the environment) categories (Boström & Uggla 2016). The environment cannot, however, speak for itself, and neither can it formally authorize a representative. Instead, the environment must be represented by proxy (Dobson 1996; Eckersley 1999) and the representative must fulfil his/her task via different references, for example, an organization, profession, expertise, or certain value statements.² Our focus on environmental representatives affiliated with organizations implies that the goals, policies, rules, and norms of a representative's organization will outline the implicit or explicit mandate and scope of her/his environmental representation. Similarly, affiliation with a profession may entail certain norms, values, and standards. Previous research confirms that several tensions and ambiguities emanate from environmental representatives' multiple layers of affiliations and engagement; for example, aside from representing an organization, a representative may simultaneously represent a profession, certain values, and a social category, for example young people or women (Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018).

Second, in addition to the difficulties resulting from the internal and external organizational context as well as multiple affiliations, environmental representation involves awkward prioritizations between sometime equally desired goals. For several decades, sustainable development has been a hegemonic discourse in global environmental debate. It is a discourse that makes it possible to create coalitions in environmental politics (Hajer 1997:14). The idea of balancing social, economic and ecological factors to achieve sustainability may intuitively appear appealing. For example, in discus-

2 Obviously, the necessity of multiple layers of engagement and affiliations may also hold true for representatives in other areas, such as animal rights and dementia rights.

sions and research of corporate sustainability, the mainstream win-win paradigm has dominated (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse et al. 2010). However, pursuing and implementing environmental protection often include clashes and trade-offs between divergent ecological, economic, and social sustainability goals and values (Boström 2012; Fitzpatrick 2011; Kreuger & Gibbs 2007). In corporate management and performance, trade-offs and conflicts between these goals and values represent “the rule rather than the exception” (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse et al. 2010:218).

Third, the understanding of the environment – both the definition and management of environmental problems – is highly dependent on science and expertise (Pellizzoni 2011; Lidskog 2014). Many environmental issues are global, abstract and involve uncertainty. This uncertainty may concern a lack of knowledge that can be remedied but also includes the inability to know (Gross 2007). Social studies of science foster an important understanding of the challenges encountered in the practical use of science. This field of research elucidates the central and yet contested role of science in society (e.g., Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons 2001; Yearley 2005; Jasanoff 2006).

Studies suggest that the increased acknowledgement of scientific uncertainty and controversies makes science cumbersome as a basis for decision (van Asselt & Vos 2008). While there is general consensus about the urgency of addressing problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss and chemical pollution, our knowledge of the complexities involved will inevitably be uncertain and incomplete. In this sense, many environmental problems can be seen as “wicked problems”, that is, problems that are characterized by dynamic complexity and which are difficult to define and separate from other problems (Wexler 2009:534). Alford and Head (2017) stress that the complexity of wicked problems concerns both cognitive complexity and political and institutional complexity. The first dimension refers to the complexity of the problem itself, where both the nature of the problem and its solution is difficult to define or unknowable. The second dimension refers to knowledge fragmentation and interest-differentiation among stakeholders. In dealing with wicked problems, these two dimensions may interact in various ways.

Thus, while environmental representatives face these new types of global environmental risks and may be highly concerned about them, they often find themselves in situations in which they lack definite knowledge and clear guidance. Accordingly, they will often be caught between the urge and urgency to take action and the complexity, uncertainty, and conflicting goals and values that characterize many environmental problems. We now turn to our theoretical conceptualization of ambivalence, which offers analytical tools for the study and understanding of the types of challenges that (environmental) representatives face.

Theoretical conceptualizations of ambivalence

The common psychological definition of ambivalence is that it refers to “the simultaneous existence of attraction and repulsion, of love and hate” (Smelser 1998:5). The concept has also been broadened to denote different types of ambivalence: emotional (the same object raises opposing feelings), voluntary (conflicting wishes make it difficult or impossible to make a decision), and cognitive (simultaneously holding different ideas) (Bleuler, cited in Merton & Barber 1976:3).

Smelser (1998) suggests that the concept of ambivalence constitutes a helpful complement to rational-choice explanations of human agency, by drawing attention to opposing feelings that individuals can simultaneously hold towards people, objects, or symbols. With their concept of sociological ambivalence, Merton and Barber (1976) complement psychological inquiries by stressing that ambivalence is inherent in the structure of certain statuses, positions, and roles. According to them, sociological inquiry ought to focus on the structural sources of ambivalence.

Merton and Barber (1976) identified six sources of sociological ambivalence, which can emanate from (1) contradictory demands on a particular role, entailing an oscillation of behaviours since the opposing norms cannot be simultaneously expressed (e.g., compassion vs. impartiality); (2) the conflict of interest or values that follows when a person occupies roles in different spheres (e.g., conflict between work and family roles or between public and private roles), resulting in mixed feelings or compromises; (3) conflicts between different roles associated with a given status (e.g., a public official who must perform both control and advisory functions); (4) cultural conflict in which contradictory values are simultaneously held by members of society; (5) tensions when socially structured constraints hinder culturally prescribed aspirations; and (6) clashes between norms and values among people who have lived in two or more societies (Merton & Barber 1976:8ff.; see also Donati 1998:105–106).

Drawing on Merton and Barber (1976), we can assume that ambivalence constitutes a precondition for human agency and environmental representatives' situated practices. This conceptualization indicates that the experience of ambivalence does not emanate from inner psychological processes. Instead, we can understand ambivalence as something inherent – a potentiality – in structure and culture.

The sources of sociological ambivalence identified by Merton and Barber relate to functional role theory. In this approach, roles are associated with a certain behaviour of “persons who occupy social positions within a stable system” and understood as “the shared, normative expectations that prescribe and explain these behaviours” (Biddle 1986:70). Each actor that has been successfully socialized and has the necessary means can be expected to conform to the normative expectations, implying experiences of role-conflicts in situations where “others do *not* hold consensual expectations for a person's behaviour” (Biddle 1986:82). Based on this understanding we identify different types of role conflicts in Merton and Barber's typology (types 1, 2, 3 and 6; see Table 1). The two other sources of ambivalence identified by Merton and Barber we refer to as value conflicts (4) and conflicts between goals

and means (5) (see Table 1). The following sections elaborate these different sources of ambivalence.

Role conflicts

The concept of *intra-role conflicts*, which corresponds with the first source of ambivalence in Merton and Barber's typology, denotes conflicts between contradictory demands on a role. For example, a situation with conflicting demands on the environmental representative to be both engaged (taking environmentally friendly initiatives) and neutral (e.g., not advocating a certain course of action or a specific technique) may be linked to his/her position within a specific organization or belonging to a specific profession. To be taken seriously, in his/her role as journalist, public official or scientist, the representative must appear objective, factual, and well informed. At the same time, he/she can feel expectations from others to be passionate about the issue and environmentally engaged (Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018). Another type of intra-role conflict is related to the contradictory demands on environmental representatives emanating from the sometimes inconsistent objectives and values within the discourse of sustainable development. For example, environmental representatives from the business sector must struggle to make sense of the demands on them both to promote environmental issues and to contribute to profitability,

Environmental representatives may also experience *inter-role conflicts*, corresponding to the second, third and sixth sources of ambivalence in the typology of Merton and Barber. First, there can be a *conflict between different roles associated with a status*. Such conflicts may, for example, be expressed by public officials who must shift between an advisory role in environmental matters and the role of supervisor and controller, roles based on different logics of being either supportive or repressive (Löfmarck, Uggla & Lidskog 2017). Another example of such inter-role conflicts is the multiple roles a researcher must fulfil (doing research, teaching, publishing, etc.). These obligations are not only competing in terms of time and energy, but they are also based on incompatible logics or values (Merton & Barber 1976:10). For environmental researchers, representation may mean publicizing research findings or being interviewed in the news media, either by reporting their own results or representing environmental science more broadly (Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018). This activity, entailing a conflict between the roles of researcher and of knowledge broker publicly disseminating environmental research, may raise tensions and ambiguities among the researchers since they raise incompatible demands (Pielke 2007). The role of researcher requires accuracy and integrity, whereas the role of popular public communicator requires openness and simplification. What is appropriate in the mass media is not necessarily appropriate and meritorious in academia.

A second type of inter-role conflict concerns *conflicts between roles in different spheres*. One such often-cited conflict between the public and private sphere is the family-work conflict experienced (not least) by women. For the environmental representatives, *conflicts between the public and private spheres* may emanate from others' expectations on the representative to meet high environmental standards in his/her private life, "walk

the walk” and lead an eco-friendly life (Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018), while the private life involves structural constraints as well as commitments and considerations that may hinder such a lifestyle (Connolly & Prothero 2008; Cherrier 2009).

The above outlined types of ambivalence concern tensions in representation that relate to the representative’s immediate organizational affiliation. However, the environmental representative is involved in *additional layers of representation* that may themselves cause tensions (Boström & Uggla 2016; Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018). An environmental representative obviously speaks on behalf of the environment and his/her affiliated organization, but may at the same time claim to represent a country or region, a scientific or expert community, a profession, a vulnerable group, and/or future generations. For some environmental representatives, these multiple layers of representation may be quite explicit; for example, public officials and representatives of environmental and business organizations explicitly representing an organization while also representing a profession, body of knowledge, and/or a broader social category. There can be both core affiliations and broader, more diffuse affiliations and constituencies, including social categories, values, and knowledge. Such complex layers of representation can allow room for flexibility in certain situations but can also entail ambivalence.

Inter-role conflicts may also refer to the fact that environmental representatives sometimes *change organizational affiliation* and, like migrants, experience a clash of cultures. For example, moving from environmental activism to research or journalism, or moving from research to business or the public sector tends to entail both opportunities and frictions. A person who makes this type of ‘migration’ will have to cope with the different logics of research, journalism, business, activism, and administration. The person needs to adjust to the new organizational context, which may entail difficulties. Clashes may appear because the person has been socialized into particular ways of thinking and doing, and must enter a process of ‘unlearning’. Another problem appears if the previous role gave the person a public face and reputation of a particular kind. A significant audience may associate the person with that previous role and thus expect certain actions and value statements to remain the same. All this shapes the conditions for the exercising of the new role (Boström, Uggla & Hansson 2018).

Merton and Barber’s (1976) perspective points out the structural and normative constraints imposed by social relations, providing a theoretical basis for analyses of situated agency in organizational contexts. By identifying the simultaneous existence of norms and counter-norms, that is, contradictory values can be simultaneously held by members of society, Merton and Barber imply dynamism in social relations. However, for all its merits, the concept of sociological ambivalence must be complemented with theories that can account for actors’ creativity and reflexivity. As noted by Donati (1998), a shortcoming of the concept of sociological ambivalence is its starting point in a “highly structured” society, which all the same implies a rather static, functionalistic, and deterministic understanding of agency. To complement this perspective and capture the reflexivity and dynamics of human agency, in the following sections we turn to the concepts of ideological dilemma and the organizational centaur.

Value conflicts

In their typology, Merton and Barber (1976) identify contradictory cultural values simultaneously held by members of society as a source of ambivalence (the fourth source in their typology). “As long as these value premises are widely held and not organized into a set of norms for one or another role in particular, they can be regarded as a cultural conflict” (Merton & Barber 1976:10). This concept resonates with Billig, Condor, Edwards et al.’s (1988) concept of ideological dilemma, which drew attention to contrary themes within ideology, discourse, and everyday thinking.

Ideological dilemma refers to the fact that we find contrary values, images, and beliefs in ideology as well as in common-sense thinking, implying that each theme may also have its counter-theme. The authors emphasize that the individual exists within a social context “in which all dilemmas and oppositions cannot possibly have been worked out” (Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. 1988:19). With their concept of ideological dilemma, Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. (1988) emphasize individual thinking. According to this perspective, it is society that provides the basis of thinking, though we cannot ignore the thinking of individuals. The dilemmatic aspects of ideology and common sense provide food for thought. Instead of seeing ideologies as coherent systems and individuals as blindfolded by ideology, Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. (1988) stressed that it is precisely the contrary themes of ideology and common sense that enable us to think, deliberate, and argue.

In their conceptualization, Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. (1988:27 ff.) distinguished between “lived ideology” and “intellectual ideology”, the former referring to discourses of everyday life and common sense and the latter to an intellectual system of ideas.

Based on this conceptualization, it is possible to identify two potential sources of ambivalence. First, we can find *contrary themes within ideology* (whether lived or intellectual). For example, in contemporary Western capitalist societies, we live with the contradictory imperatives of keeping the economy going and being green by consuming less. As discussed above, sustainable development discourse entails obvious value conflicts for environmental representatives. The inherent and unsolvable tensions in this discourse are something environmental representatives encounter on a regular basis. Most obvious are the trade-offs in relation to corporate sustainability (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse et al. 2010), but environmental representatives in various contexts recurrently must address trade-offs between different, equally valued, environmental objectives, or between equally valued social and environmental goals, and the difficulties of prioritizing between them. For example, should business and consumers support free and fair trade to facilitate economies in developing country contexts, or is local production and consumption preferable because of the values of climate change mitigation?

Second, we can find pervasive *conflicts between lived ideology and intellectual ideology*, even the idealist leads an everyday life, and may well be accustomed to and content with many of society’s practices. For example, the environmental activist deeply engaged in climate change mitigation may find it both rewarding and important to frequently travel by air to participate in environmental conferences, policy meetings or campaign activities.

To better understand the conditions and agency of environmental representatives, who are situated in an organizational context, we complement the concepts of sociological ambivalence and ideological dilemma with Ahrne's (1994) concept of the "organizational centaur", which captures the duality of both organizations and individual actors. First, organizations can be seen as collective actors, but "when organizations do something it is always individuals who act" (Ahrne 1994:28). At the same time, even though an organization may provide order, resources, and ability that enable the individual to act with authority, it still constrains the individual's behaviour. The organizational centaur is part organization and part human, and "the tension between the organizational and the human is always there in all organizations and it is rarely resolved" (Ahrne 1994:37–38).

The individuals who act within an organization do so on behalf of both the organization and themselves. When the individual acts on behalf of the organization, that is, representing the organization, he/she also acts as a person. Drawing on Ahrne (1994), we can identify an additional category of value conflicts – the *conflicts between organizational demands and personal convictions*. Such conflicts may arise when, for example, flying is an almost inevitable part of the work, which goes against the person's principles. Similar to the inter-role conflict between public and private roles, being an environmental representative affiliated to a specific organization may conflict with specific private commitments. Representatives of environmental organizations or journalists may not be allowed to be outspoken about their political convictions. The importance of maintaining neutrality towards political interests may, for example, hinder engagement in particular civil society organizations (Boström, Ugglå & Hansson 2018).

The ways organizations circumscribe representation, for example, by socialization, formalization, and incentive structures (Ahrne, 1994) most likely differ between different contexts of environmental representation. Environmental managers in a business context are in a certain sense constrained by the need to merge the managerial discourse and the discourse of the "sustainable firm" (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse et. al. 2010). "Green insider activists" in the public sector need to carefully balance democratic accountability and political activism, tending to avoid open value conflicts (Olsson & Hysing, 2012).

Conflicts between goals and means

The above-mentioned conflicts between sustainability goals are aggravated by the uncertainty that characterizes many environmental problems. Weighing pros and cons without clear recommendations makes prioritizing between equally desired goals an awkward undertaking. This is especially so in dealing with urgent environmental problems, implying *conflicts between the urgency to take action and uncertainty*, which we in our typology identify as a category of *conflicts between goals and means* (Table 1). This type of conflict may apply to various situations where representatives must address complex problems. For environmental representatives, this is an almost inevitable complication in dealing with the most urgent environmental problems, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and chemical pollution.

Other conflicts of this type may emanate from the fifth source of ambivalence Merton and Barber described in their typology. Merton and Barber (1976:11) see this type of conflict as the “disjunction between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations”, or, in brief, as a “contradiction between the cultural and the social structure”. As applied to environmental representation, we suggest two additional potential sources of ambivalence that can be referred to the representative’s organizational and/or societal context: *demands for action and organizational constraints* and *demands for action and structural constraints* (Table 1).

The incompatibility between means and goals may result from internal organizational processes but also from broader societal and political factors. Sustainability goals are often ambitious, and a key obstacle to realizing such goals is lack of adequate knowledge and sound advice. In addition to the ambivalence that emanates from scientific uncertainty, ambivalence may result from the conflict between demands for action and organizational constraints (i.e., a lack of internal resources) and the organization’s inability to recognize and/or supply sound guidance. Although ambitious goals can be inspiring, the lack of strategies and/or resources for reaching them puts representatives in awkward situations.

In many situations, it is obvious that simply investing in and using more resources would not suffice. Because of the complexity of the matter, dependence on other actors, and/or the transnational scale, the goals tend to be unreachable by the organization acting alone, which resonates with the political and institutional dimension of ‘wicked problems’. In these cases, representatives encounter conflicts between demands for action and structural constraints. This may be the case in business organizations with a number of globally distributed subcontractors, but may also apply to public officials involved in negotiations within the EU and representatives of environmental organizations engaged at both the national and international levels.

Typology: potential sources of ambivalence

In the above theoretical account of ambivalence and environmental representation, we have identified several potential sources of ambivalence that we categorize in three types of conflicts: role conflicts, value conflicts, and conflicts between goals and means summarized in Table 1. The theoretical foundations that helped us formulate the sources of ambivalence are indicated in the table.

Table 1. Three types of potential sources of ambivalence: role conflicts, value conflicts, and conflicts between goals and means.

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF AMBIVALENCE	KEY THEORETICAL SOURCES
ROLE CONFLICTS	
<i>Intra-role conflicts</i> conflicts between contradictory demands on a role	Merton and Barber (1)
<i>Inter-role conflicts</i> conflicts between different roles associated with a status	Merton and Barber (3)
conflicts between roles in different spheres public versus private	Merton and Barber (2)
multiple layers of representation	Boström and Uggla, Boström et al.
change in organizational affiliation	Merton and Barber (6)
VALUE CONFLICTS	
conflicts within culture and ideology	Merton and Barber (4), Billig et al.
conflicts between intellectual ideology and lived ideology	Billig et al.
conflicts between individual convictions and organizational demands	Ahrne
CONFLICTS BETWEEN GOALS AND MEANS	
conflicts between urgency of taking action and uncertainty	Social studies of science (e.g., Bijker et al., Gross, Jasanoff)
conflicts between demands for action and organizational constraints	Merton and Barber (5), Ahrne
conflicts between demands for action and structural constraints	Merton and Barber (5)

Coping with ambivalence

The coping concept is mainly associated with psychology, where coping alludes to a person's way of dealing with stressors to reduce their harm. According to Snyder's (2001) definition, coping "*reflects thinking, feeling, or acting so as to preserve a satisfied psychological state when threatened*" (p. 4, italics in original). Psychological research focuses on individual coping strategies, or the "coping machine", that each person builds based on a set of characteristics he/she uses "for dealing with whatever stressors may be encountered" (Snyder 2001:5). In this section, we explore various ways to cope with ambivalent situations. In doing so, we do not take individual characteristics as a starting point, but discuss what options there may be for the individual representative to cope with or respond to various ambivalent situations. As the following explorative text suggests, coping may involve a dynamic mixture of strategies, including constructing meta-norms, pragmatism, defining boundaries for the acceptable, rule-bending, and discursive negotiation. Such coping strategies may be more or less (or not at all) supported by one's organization.

Scholars have proposed that a person would choose among incompatible norms as some sort of role-conflict resolution. In doing so the person relies on others who, based on power or status, legitimate their choice. Others have elaborated on the steps a person can take to resolve role conflicts: if there is no option to choose among norms, the person may try to compromise, and if that is not possible the person may withdraw from the situation (Biddle 1986:83). Based on a study of how women experience role conflicts between work and family, Hall suggests three possible responses: negotiating with the other to change their expectations, altering one's own view, and adjusting one's behaviour (Hall, cited in Biddle 1986:83).

In their typology, Merton and Barber (1976) imply that certain types of ambivalence (what we have labelled role-conflicts) will entail oscillation of behaviour, or mixed feelings or compromises. The authors suggest that social roles can be seen as "*dynamic organizations of norms and counter-norms*" (Merton & Barber 1976:17, italics in original). This means that persons who experience ambivalence because of norms calling for contradictory behaviour will alternate between these norms. Accordingly, "potentially conflicting norms are built into the social definition of roles", which in turn constitutes the basis for "oscillation between differing role-requirements" (Merton & Barber 1967:19).

Merton and Barber's notion of compromise is in line with the notions of altering one's view and adjusting one's behaviour, which could be seen as a pragmatic attitude. For environmental representatives, such a pragmatic attitude is possible as long as they stay loyal to the organization, that is, as affiliated actors they accept organizational control over some of their actions. Ahrne (1994:90) described these as actions lying within a "zone of indifference" characterized by the things an employee is willing to accept. Authority and organizational control, then, depend on loyalty and acceptance. The environmental representative's willingness to adjust may have its limits. In situations in which it would no longer be possible for the representative to go against his/

her personal conviction and follow the organization's authority or to compromise – that is, actions outside their “zone of indifference” – there is always the option to vote with one's feet and exit from the organization. Exit is a way of drawing a boundary for what is reasonable and acceptable, and constitutes an important power resource for affiliates (Ahrne 1994:79).

For the environmental representative, one's core organizational affiliation may entail various forms of constraints, but the organization also provides formal authority to act and speak for the environment and resources that empower the representative to do so (Ahrne 1994:12 ff.; Boström & Ugglå 2016). Hence, the organization is also a vehicle for the person to become an environmental representative and make representative claims. Furthermore, in some situations, the organizational context provides the norms and values that help the environmental representative choose among norms or to construct a meta-norm, implying the definition of a primary obligation and responsibility. In this way, the organization not only restricts individual behaviour and constitutes a potential source of ambivalence and dilemma but also provides a framework that helps the environmental representative cope with tensions and ambiguities. Thereby, an organization's culture, social norms, and rules can help stabilize the environmental representative's identity and shape the process of sense-making (see Weick 1995). Thus, the representatives' performance and ways of coping with ambivalence can be seen as both shaped by and renegotiated within their organizational contexts.

Similarly, professional identity and affiliation may also be resources that help an environmental representative address conflicting norms, goals and values. A study of how public workers dealt with moral stress suggests that the officials' professional identity was important in terms of how they were coping with the situation. Based on a professional ideology or professional ethics, the public workers prioritized between tasks and thereby “bent” the rules of the organization and practised “civil disobedience” (Thunman 2016). The concept of moral stress alludes to conflicts between moral standards and available resources, which resemble what we in our typology called conflicts between demands to take action and organizational constraints (see Table 1). As applied to the case of environmental representatives, we may hypothesize that some professions foster a strong professional identity that facilitates this kind of “rule bending” or construction of meta-norms.

Other ways of coping with moral stress are voicing of opinion, focusing on change and building support networks (Thunman 2016), all of which are more active and creative ways to respond to organizational or structural constraints. For environmental representatives, social support from allies within the organization or from a professional network could be important in the processing and deliberation on conflicting norms, goals and values (Boström, Ugglå & Hansson 2018). For the environmentally engaged individual these more active responses may appear the first choice. However, as Olsson and Hysing's (2012) study showed, “green insider activists” in the public sector tended to avoid open value conflicts, indicating that compromises and pragmatism are more likely responses for affiliates in certain organizations than in others.

Whereas balance theories suggest that people will escape internal disharmony and

feelings of discomfort by avoiding thinking, the concept of ideological dilemma points out the dilemmatic preconditions of everyday life. The individual is not blindly following ideological schemata or paralysed by ambivalence but is thinking and arguing within the constraints of ideology. Without the shared values, images, and beliefs and their counter-themes, “individuals could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor experience dilemmas. In addition, without this, so much thought would be impossible” (Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. 1988:2).

Indeed, sustainability is not a political programme, but rather “a ‘portal’, an entrance into a series of debates” (Fitzpatrick 2011:8). Instead of providing guidance for action, the notion of sustainable development opens up discursive negotiation of various goals and values against each other. This circumstance certainly entails tensions and ambiguities in environmental representation but also opens the possibility to reflexively consider and negotiate one’s own performance and responsibilities, deconstruct and reconstruct norms and/or identify or construct meta-norms. Such discursive negotiations have been found in various environmental studies focusing on how individuals perceived their own environmental responsibility (e.g., Bickerstaff, Simmons & Pidgeon, 2008; Connolly & Prothero 2008; Skill & Gyberg 2010; Ugglå 2018). As applied to environmental representatives, we can expect that they may discursively negotiate different goals and values as well as their own performance (circumscribed by organizational and structural constraints) in similar ways. Such ability to engage in discursive negotiations of performance and responsibilities is likely to be crucially important in relation to environmental issues characterized by complexity and uncertainty.

Conclusions

By focusing on the people involved in environmental representation, this paper contributes insights to a research field mainly centred on the institutions, procedures, and principles of representation. To better understand the limitations and possibilities of (environmental) politics, management, and deliberation in general, we argue that it is crucial to take into account the everyday messy reality that individual spokespersons face, regardless of whether they work in the public sector, business, or civil society. Our key argument is that the concept of ambivalence facilitates crucial insights into these representatives’ positions, practices, and challenges. The paper identifies several potential sources of ambivalence, all of which concern some sort of conflict: role conflicts, value conflicts, or conflicts between goals and means. The identification of various sources of ambivalence and the categorization of these sources into three types of conflicts is a theoretical construct. The agency of the environmental representative is embedded within organizational and wider societal contexts, and the sources of ambivalence may intersect in various ways. For example, value conflicts in culture may occasion or reinforce contradictory demands placed on a role. Such intersections between sources of ambivalence indicate the importance of considering the organizational context and social embeddedness of an environmental representative.

In this paper, we have also identified various ways of coping with ambivalence. In contrast to psychological research that focuses on individual characteristics and coping strategies, we discuss ways of coping with the ambivalent situation as a starting point. Environmental representatives may develop different ways of coping with ambivalence, including pragmatism, constructing meta-norms, utilizing organizational support and support from allies, drawing boundaries for what is acceptable, rule bending and discursive negotiation. These findings must be considered a tentative and non-exhaustive proposal for further research.

Although ambivalence may cause difficulties for environmental representatives, it may also, as argued by Billig, Condor, Edwards et al. (1988), be a source of learning and change. In situations of ambivalence, environmental representatives must reflect on their tasks, values, and personal limits; for example, what actions are inside or outside their “zone of indifference” and what is considered reasonable and possible given the circumstances. By building networks and alliances, environmental representatives create fora for dialogue and mutual learning that may benefit both themselves and their organizations.

The intertwining of organizations and humans is intricate. This implies that the organizational aspect could be a nuisance for people, giving rise to ambivalence while simultaneously providing resources and support that help people cope with ambivalence. It is also through affiliation with organizations that individuals can be empowered and become environmental representatives and make representative claims. Likewise, the human aspect can be a nuisance for organizations, as well as be a source of learning and change. However, it is important to note that how this intertwining between organization and human plays out may vary between organizational contexts. It is also important to note that not all ways of coping with ambivalence exemplify reflexivity, learning, and change; for example, relying on the organizational context or pragmatism can also be routinizing and unimaginative.

Why is this ultimately relevant? The answer relates to the fact that someone must address complex problems, which “the environmental case” no doubt represents. We argue that this study contributes important insights into the conditions of representatives who handle difficult problems in contemporary societies. Many escalating problems in our contemporary world could easily lead to paralysis, so it is crucial to learn how people can cope with, even embrace, ambivalence in order to foster both reflexivity and action capacity for important change-making processes.

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