

The Production of Green Identities in Garbage Can Decision-making Processes

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**The Production of Green Identities
in Garbage Can Decision-making Processes**

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**The Production of Green Organisational Identities
in Garbage Can Decision-making Processes**

Submitted to the Academy of Management 2004 Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Division: Organizations & the Natural Environment

Submission identification number: 12732

Written by Lise Backer, Assistant professor

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the multinational oil-company Shell's decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables. Theoretically the analysis contributes to developing the garbage can decision-making model developed originally by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) by adding the production of organisational identities to the model. Within the scientific field of business and the environment the article contributes to a new understanding of the relationship between decision-making, green organisational identities and the process of social construction of business opportunities. This relationship can be of a sort, where the corporations' greener organisational identities are the product of random organisational garbage can decision-making processes. In such processes the rationale that the protection of the natural environment can be viewed as a business opportunity gets into focus not before, but *after* the decision has happened. Thus, in the process of accounting for their decision the corporations are not just accounting for a particular decision, but also in a general sense contributing to socially constructing anew what can be considered a business opportunity – also for other corporations. In this process of socially constructing new business opportunities the corporations are drawing on cultural sources not just from the field of rhetoric of economics, but also from other cultural sources within the business sector and the society as such.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key questions for the prospects of achieving sustainable development is whether the protection of the natural environment is a problem or an opportunity for business corporations. In addressing that discussion it seems to be relevant to draw attention to a little game that most people know. This is the game where one at first when looking at a drawing sees a vase. Later on it turns out that one can also see the drawing as two faces looking at each other. This little game illustrates that what we as human beings sense are dependent on the context in which we sense. Observations are theory dependent it can be argued. 'That is also Thomas Kuhn's point, when he discusses theoretical paradigms. Paradigms are those frames, within which the sensing necessarily must take place (Wenneberg, 2000, p. 35)'. Following from this reflection if one was to answer whether the protection of the natural environment was a problem or an opportunity for business corporations this very answer would necessarily be that it would depend on the paradigm within which one's sensing took place.

Within the realist paradigm the traditional rational model of decision-making developed by economists would in general tend to describe the protection of the natural environment as a problem and not as an opportunity for business corporations. Within this model what is to be considered a business opportunity for corporations in terms of protecting the natural environment can be calculated and established as economic facts. In these calculations the protection of the natural environment tends mostly to be appearing as constraints for the corporations' prospects of adhering to an overall economic rationality – a key aspect in the economists' rational decision-making model.

Within the social constructionist paradigm what is to be considered an opportunity for corporations in terms of protecting the natural environment gets somewhat more complex to define. First of all nature and environmental problems are social constructions (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). Secondly, economics are viewed as rhetoric of economics and not as being able to produce hard 'facts' (McCloskey, 1998). Thirdly, organisations in the social constructionist perspective are not black boxed and viewed - like the economists do in the rational decision-making model - as one big rational actor guided in their decision-making by one common overall agreed to economic rationality. Organisations in the social constructionist perspective are full of people of flesh and blood and such people tend to have many different local rationalities (Garfinkel, 1967) guiding them when participating in organisational decision-making processes. As a result of all this it can be claimed that in the social constructionist paradigm business opportunities for corporations in terms of protecting the natural environment are not stable 'facts', but dynamic and ever evolving social constructions.

In this article it is argued that looking into the process of organisational decision-making will provide interesting process descriptions of how the social construction of business opportunities in terms of protecting the natural environment can evolve. In this context it should be noted that social constructionist organisational theorists have emphasised that real life empirical observations in business companies and other kinds of organisations clearly indicates that organisational decision-making is often a more complex affair than what appears to be promised by the rational decision-making model. Sometimes decision-making can be described as following the rational decision-making model. At other times decision-making in organisations can be better described as following other models of decision making. And in fact, in many cases actual decision-making can be best described as following decision-making models, where goals and decision rationalities are not as clear and shared as anticipated in the rational decision-making model (March, 1994). Examples of such decision-making models, developed by organisational theorist as a supplement to the economists' rational decision-making model, are the coalition model and the garbage can model, the latter being the focus for attention in this article.

In garbage can decision-making processes goals – including environmental goals - are as already noted not clear points of departure for the decision-making process. Goals are unclear until they have been produced out of the random process of garbage can decision-making. In a garbage can decision-making process independent streams of problems, solutions, choice opportunities and decision-makers attach to each other only as a consequence of timing – that is of being in the garbage can (the organisation) at the same time (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). With the production of organisational goals it can be argued that organisational identities are also produced anew (Whetten and Albert, 1985). In this context the research question to be addressed in this article is: ***How are green organisational identities produced***

in garbage can decision-making processes and how are these new organisational identities thereafter accounted for by the corporation while contributing to socially constructing new business opportunities.

To answer this question the article will analyse the multinational oil company Shell's decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables thereby adding green renewable energies as a fifth core business to Shell's business portfolio. Theoretically this analysis will contribute to developing the garbage can decision-making model developed originally by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) by adding the production of organisational identities to the model. Within the scientific field of business and the environment the article will following from that be able to contribute to a new understanding of the relationship between decision-making, green organisational identities and the process of social construction of business opportunities. This relationship can be of a sort, where the corporations' greener organisational identities are the product of random organisational garbage can decision-making processes. In such processes the rationale that the protection of the natural environment can be viewed as a business opportunity gets into focus not before but *after* the decision has happened. Thus, in the process of accounting for their decision the corporations are not just accounting for a particular decision, but also in a general sense contributing to socially constructing anew what can be considered a business opportunity – also for other corporations. In this process of socially constructing new business opportunities the corporations are drawing on cultural sources not just from the field of rhetoric of economics, but also from other cultural sources within the business sector and the society as such (Hoffman, 2001).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1978 in the article *Bounded Rationality, Ambiguity, and the Engineering of Choice* James G. March was making a status over the field of organisational decision-making. He was concluding:

‘Over the past 20 years, the contradiction between the search for sense in behaviour and the search for improvement in behaviour has focused on our interpretation of the way information about our future consequences is gathered and processed. The effort built considerably on the idea of bounded rationality and a conception of human decision-making as limited by the cognitive capabilities of human beings. Over the next 20 years, I suspect the contradiction will be increasingly concerned with an interpretation of how beliefs about future preferences are generated and utilized (p. 288).’

What March is indicating here in 1978 is that models such as the coalition model and the garbage can model that produce goals and identities as an outcome of the decision-making process will be the models that increasingly will come to dominate decision-making research. This prophecy seems by now to have come true within the field of organisational theory (March, 1994). The present article is adding to the realisation of this prophecy by looking into how the production of organisational identities can be added to the garbage can model. In the following I will first describe the thinking within the garbage can model. Thereafter I will undertake a discussion of the concept of organisational identity. Following these two discussions I will look into how the production of organisational identities can be theorised within the garbage can model.

The Garbage Can Model

In the garbage can model there is disagreement about goals as well as methods for making decisions. Cohen, March and Olsen (1972), who developed the model, used computer simulations to describe the garbage can decision-making processes. What they found out was that garbage can decision-making processes can be described as ‘choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be an answer, and decision-makers looking for work (p. 1).’

Thompson (1967) notes on this decision-making model that ‘where there is uncertainty on both dimensions, we will speak of the *inspirational strategy* for decision making, if indeed any decision is forthcoming (p. 135).’ This last remark by Thompson (1967) indicates some of the results that Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) found when they analysed the garbage can decision-making processes. One of the results was namely that in a garbage can decision-making process decisions are not always coming forth. ‘March and his colleagues describe the garbage can decision-making process as random streams of events that intertwine, allowing some solutions to attach themselves to problems in the presence of a random set of individuals at a random point of time. In the garbage can model, problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities are independent streams of events that flow into and through organisations, much like a random selection of wastes gets mixed together in a garbage can. Whenever solutions, participants, and choice opportunities connect, a problem may be identified or solved. Because of the randomness of the process, however, choices may be made without solving a problem, some problems are never solved, and solutions may be proposed where no problem exists (Hatch, 1997, p. 278).’

As can be seen from the quote above the order in the garbage can is related to that of time. There need not be any logical connection between problems and solutions that get attached to each other than that of their simultaneous presence in the organisational garbage can. This also indicates that goals – and one should add identities (Whetten and Albert, 1985) – in the garbage can are discovered through actions more than acted on in the first place (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Thus, as one can see ‘the garbage can contrasts sharply with assumptions of the rational model of decision-making. It argues against the assumption that goals can be clearly defined and that alternatives to achieving them are known in advance and can be evaluated according to whichever criteria are deemed most relevant...Instead, it proposes that decision making presents an arena within which organizational members act out their conflicts and differences. This view downplays the instrumentality of decision making and presents it instead as an organizational drama within which decisions are social constructions of reality (Hatch, 1997, p. 278-9).’

The garbage can model is a social constructionist theory as indicated in the quote above. Thus, Scott (1992, p. 110) places the garbage can model in the natural open system category. It should be noted in that context that the open system perspective is emphasised, in particular, by the way Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) describes the flows of problems in the organisational garbage can. They explain that ‘problems are the concern of people inside and outside the organization. They might arise over issues of lifestyle; family, frustrations of work; careers; group relations within the organization; distribution of status, jobs, and money; ideology; or current crisis of mankind as interpreted by the mass media or the nextdoor neighbor. All of these require attention (p. 3).’ As can be seen, in the garbage can model

problems are not just defined by the organisation they also enter the organisation from the environment, including from the media and the next-door neighbour.

While, the garbage can model is describing decision making in organised anarchies Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) argues that a theory of organised anarchy will describe a portion of almost any organisation's activities, but will not describe all of them. Thus, the garbage can decision-making processes can happen in all organisations – but not all of the time.

Having by now undertaken a discussion of the garbage can model as developed originally by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) I will proceed to a discussion of the concept of organisational identity. The aim of the following discussion is to look into how the production of organisational identities can be theorised within in the garbage can model.

Organisational Identities – Precursors and Products of Decision-making

As noted already above empirical observations of real life in organisations indicate that decision-making processes can be described drawing on a range of different decision-making models. All organisations have each and every one of them their fair share of the different decision-making processes described within the field of decision-making theory (March, 1994). In that sense the relationship between decision-making and organisational identities are of a sort where identities interchangeably can be viewed as *precursors or products* of decision-making. In the rational decision-making model goals and with them organisational identities are known in advance before the decision is made. In other words organisational identities are *precursors* for decision-making. In contrast, in the garbage can decision-making model goals and with them identities are not clear and agreed to in advanced, but rather produced as a consequence of the decision that is made when solutions and problems get

attached to each other. In other words in the garbage can process organisational identities are *products* of decision-making. This relationship between decision-making and organisational identities indicates that identities cannot be seen as unchangeable over time. This is so since part of the time in all organisations identities are products and not precursors of decision-making.

When one looks to the range of different conceptualisations of organisational identities within the field of organisational identity research it turns out - in line with the above reflections - that organisational identities are, in fact, in general conceptualised as changeable. Whetten and Albert's (1985) influential definition of organisational identities as that which is central, distinctive and enduring is perhaps the one definition of organisational identities that is signalling the most unchangeable conceptualisation of organisational identities. Meanwhile, even this definition of organisational identities are quite dynamic if one is looking a little closer on the arguments launched by Whetten and Albert in their influential article from 1985. Furthermore, Whetten and Albert's (1985) definition of organisational identities has been the point of departure for the development of the contemporary field of organisational identity research. In this development the enduring characteristic has, in particular, been challenged to take more into account the increasingly dynamic social environments within which organisational identities are embedded in contemporary times. To this end not least social constructionist researchers (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Schultz and Hatch, 1997, 1999, 2002; Gioia et al, 2000) are trying to conceptualise organisational identity as an increasingly dynamic concept. Within the group of social constructionist researchers, in particular, post modernistic researchers (Baudrillard, 1988; Gergen, 2000; Hall, 1996) are accentuating this trend arguing that identities are not central, distinctive and enduring, but instead fragmented and fluctuating.

Summing up on the above discussion it can be argued that the field of organisational identity research is conceptualising organisational identities as an increasingly dynamic concept. In that sense it appears to be within reach for this article to be able to theorise how organisational identities at particular times in organisations can be viewed as produced anew out of random garbage can decision-making processes. How in detail this article will seek to theorise the production of organisational identities in garbage can processes will be discussed further below.

Organisational Identity - a Self-reflexive Question

In further theorising the production of organisational identities in garbage can processes this article will, in particular, draw on Whetten and Albert (1985). In their 1985 article they take an interest in developing the 'concept of organizational identity and the related concepts of dual and multiple identity (p. 263).' In the article they follow up on that interest and devote most of the article to analysing the concept of dual identity. As the overall result of the analysis of dual and multiple organisational identities in the 1985 article Whetten and Albert (1985) is anyway appearing to launch a definition of organisational identity in that article as that which is central, distinctive and enduring about the organisation. Thus, according to Gioia (1998, p.24) Whetten and Albert in their 1985 article found 'themselves in a somewhat gymnastic position of arguing that durability was a key attribute of organizational identity, yet they presented organizations as shifting between normative and utilitarian identities over time'. On the one hand this appears to be a fair critique of Whetten and Albert (1985). On the other hand, one could argue that Whetten and Albert (1985) is, in fact, not placing themselves in what can be considered an untenable gymnastic position. If one as argued above looks in detail on the wording of Whetten and Albert's (1985) definition of organisational identities it

appears that they do not say directly that organisational identities are central, distinctive and enduring. What they say is that:

‘When the question of identity triggers a search for answers...we propose, by way of a preliminary definition, that an adequate statement of organisational identity satisfies the following criteria: 1. The answer points to features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organisation: *the criterion of claimed central character*. 2. The answer points to features that distinguish the organisation from others with which it may be compared: *the criterion of claimed distinctiveness*. 3. The answer points to features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time: *the criterion of claimed temporal continuity* (p. 265)’

As it appears Whetten and Albert (1985) explain that questions of identity triggers search for answers and these answers will contain some statements of *claimed* central, distinctive and enduring character. In that sense it could be argued that there is no contradiction between Whetten and Albert’s (1985) analysis of dual organisational identities and their definition of organisational identities. This is so since one can in principle have a dual identity shifting over time and still seek to describe it as central, distinctive and enduring. Gioia et al (2000) are in the article *Organisational Identity, Image and Adaptive Instability* in a way discussing this very phenomenon, when they say that organisations can use enduring labels such as *The HP way*, for example, in the descriptions of their identities. While these labels are enduring the content of the labels may be interpreted differently by different groups in the organisations and these interpretations might perhaps furthermore shift over time.

In Whetten and Godfrey’s (eds) (1998) book *Identities in Organizations – Building Theory Through Conversation* Albert (1998) is making a status and in the introduction recognising

that the field of organisational identity have had and still has problems of coming up with a clear scientific definition of what, in fact, organisational identity is. He is explaining:

‘When we ask what identification and organizational identity are and how these concepts can be treated scientifically, we are tempted to think in terms of constructs. But the appeal of the term *construct*, a fabrication that rests on a spatial metaphor, may not only be illusory, but also damaging. If one considers identity or identification as constructs, the next questions that are inevitably asked are: How can each be measured? What is its relationship to other constructs? When there are no clear answers, the construct is dismissed as vague, ambiguous, or ill-defined; for scientific purposes it is useless. But an idea that is vague, hard to pin down, elusive, or multifaceted may not be useless at all. An idea may have value not because it can be weighed and measured, not because it conforms to the hidden criteria of an optical metaphor – that of the visible, distinguishable object, which achieves its status as a scientific criterion in part by preying on our fear of the dark – but because it is a question (p. 2-3)’.

As happens probably with most researchers Albert and Whetten’s position has developed somewhat over the years, but also stayed the same to some extent. Already in their 1985 article they in practical terms defined identity as a self-reflective question in parallel with their struggle also to come up with a scientific definition of organisational identity ‘to make the term “organizational identity” scientifically tractable (1985, p. 264)’. In the 1985 article Whetten and Albert explained:

‘Organizational identity as a concept has two uses. First, it is employed by scientists to define and characterize certain aspects of organizations – the scientific concept of organizational identity; secondly, it is a concept that organizations use to characterize aspects of themselves

(i.e., identity as a self-reflective question). Our goal in the following discussion is to address both uses, to contribute to the development of identity as a scientific concept, and to examine how organizational members use the concept of self-identity (p. 264).’

What should be noticed, in comparing this quote with Albert’s more recent quote above, is the shift in position towards defining also the *scientific concept* of organisational identity as a question.

Summing up on the above reflections this article defines organisational identity as a self-reflexive question. Something that must be accounted for, where this accounting will tend to account for the organisational identity as being central, distinctive and enduring.

Relational Organisational Identities

Before finalising the above theoretical discussion of the concept of organisational identity I will add a discussion of organisational identities viewed as relational. I will do that to illustrate that when one defines organisational identity as a self-reflexive question within the context of the garbage can model the answers might come from both internal and external sources. This is so since the garbage can model assumes highly blurred boundaries between the corporations and the society (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972).

In *Principles of Psychology* (vol 1), which is representing some of the groundwork on which the field of organisational identity theory builds, W. James (1918) was claiming that ‘A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him (p. 294).’ Identities are according to James (1918) not just multiple, but also relational. The same position is found in Whetten and Albert’s 1985 article as well as it is found to a even larger extend in Weick’s

(1995) writings on sense-making – a field closely related to the field of organisational identity. Weick (1995) is saying: ‘Sensemaking begins with a sensemaker. “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” has four pronouns, all four of which point to the person doing the sensemaking. Obvious as that assertion may seem, it contains a trap. The trap is that the sensemaker is singular and no individual ever acts like a single sensemaker. Instead, any one sensemaker is, in Mead’s words, “a parliament of selves”...To shift among interaction is to shift among definitions of selves (p. 19-20).’ In line with this thinking it could be argued that in a sense-making perspective ‘an organization’s identity is the aspect of culturally embedded sense-making that is self-focused (Fiol, Hatch & Golden-Biddle, 1998, p. 56)’. In this sense-making perspective on the concept of organisational identity the above definition of organisational identity as a self-reflexive question can be recognised. A particular action is happening such as, for example, a solution is getting attached to a problem in the garbage can. That triggers a self-reflexive question: Who are we as an organisation after the garbage can decision has been ‘taken’. In answering this question a process of self-focused sense-making and public accounting is undertaken by the organisation resulting in the production of a new organisational identity. In this sense-making process there is a constant tension between intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity - that is between innovation and control - as described by Weick (1995). This is in principle the same tension that was observed above, where it was argued that when organisations account for a new identity (innovation) they will struggle to be able to describe it as central, distinctive and enduring – that is, as being the same identity (control) as before.

The contemporary trend towards more dynamic social environments in which all organisational identities are embedded is working against this option of staying the same (control) and avoiding innovation in organisational identities. In dynamic social environments

the boundaries between corporations and the society will tend to be increasingly blurred working to the advantage of (societal) innovation of corporation's organisational identities. Hatch and Schultz (2002) are explaining:

'we would say that at any moment identity is the immediate result of conversation between organizational (cultural) self-expressions and mirrored stakeholder images, recognizing, however, that whatever is claimed by members or other stakeholders about an organizational identity will soon be taken up by processes of impressing and reflecting which feed back into further mirroring and expressing processes. This is how organizational identity is continually created, sustained and changed. It is also why we insist that organizational identity is dynamic – the processes of identity do not end but keep moving in a dance between various constructions of the organizational self (both the organizational 'I' and the organizational 'me') and the uses to which they are put. This help us to see that organizational identity is not an aggregation of perceptions of an organization resting in peoples' heads, it is a dynamic set of processes by which an organization's self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organization offered by all organizational stakeholders who join in the dance (p. 1004).'

Here Hatch and Schultz (2002) is offering a truly dynamic conceptualisation of identity viewing organisational identity 'as a social process (p.1014)' – where social also includes external stakeholders. Thus, organisational identities are in contemporary times relational to such an extent, where they can be defined as an ongoing *social process of self-reflexive questions* that are driven forward by a continued interaction between internal and external stakeholders in the organisation. In this interaction organisational identities will still tend to be accounted for by the corporations as being central, distinctive and enduring, although the

tension between control and innovation might have increased to the advantage of innovation. In this situation the level of abstraction in the way corporations are describing their organisational identity might need to increase for the corporations still to be able to claim - at some abstract level - that they have stayed the same.

The Production of Green Organisational Identities in Garbage Can Decision-making Processes

Based on the above discussion the article will now proceed to developing the garbage can model (Cohen, Olsen and March, 1972) by adding the production of organisational identities to the garbage can decision-making process. The flow of organisational identities is to this end in the article conceptualised as a flow of multiple identities that are attached to the different solutions and problems present in the garbage can. Organisational identities are - it is argued here - produced anew when solutions and problems as a consequence of timing get attached to each other. In this conceptualisation the flow of identities is dependent on the flow of solutions and problems.

When this article chooses to view the flow of multiple identities as attached to the different solutions and problems present in the garbage can, then it is because identities in this article are viewed as relational (Weick, 1995). The way external stakeholders in this context can have an effect on the organisational identities that are produced in the garbage can decision-making are by contributing to producing particular solutions or particular problems that carry particular identity fragments. Thus, organisational identities are here viewed - in accordance with the above discussions of the concept of organisational identities - as social processes, where social is understood in broad terms involving also external stakeholders. This conceptualisation of the flow of identities in the garbage can is also in accordance with the

overall thinking within the original garbage can model. This is so since the boundaries between organisations and the society are as already noted above viewed as highly blurred within this model (Cohen, Olsen and March, 1972).

Whenever a solution is attached to a problem in the garbage can new identity fragments are merged with the existing organisational identity here viewed as an old identity fragment. That merger triggers a self-reflexive question. In Weick's (1995) wording one would ask: How can the organisation know who they are before they have seen what solutions are attached to what problems? Whatever outcome of this sense-making process the organisation will tend in the way they account for the new identity to describe it as in some way being central, distinctive and enduring. At a later point in time a new garbage can process might start and run through the same stages as described above. This is where this article conceptualises the production of organisational identities in the garbage can model as an ongoing social process of self-reflexive questions. In that context it should be noted that between the different garbage can processes that an organisation might experience one can imagine that the organisation experience other forms of decision-making processes. An organisation could, for example, experience a rational decision-making process, where a new organisational identity that might have just been produced by a particular garbage can process then suddenly in the rational decision-making process is functioning as a precursor. In principle that can be viewed as putting an end to the development of the organisational identity, but this will, of course, only be the case until a new garbage can (or coalition) decision-making process happens and drives the social process of self-reflexive questions forward.

In making a more detailed conceptualisation of production of green organisational identities in the garbage process one can again turn to Whetten and Albert (1985), who discuss at great

length utilitarian (business related) and normative (here environmental) dual identities. As Whetten and Albert (1985) do, it is argued here, that most organisations have both utilitarian and normative elements in their organisational identity and the weight between them can shift over the organisation's lifetime. Whetten and Albert (1985) spend a large part of their 1985 article analysing these shifts between utilitarian and normative identities. They exemplify the dual identities by analysing the university arguing that business-like and church-like identity elements are present in such organisations, where the shift has been from the latter towards the former in contemporary universities.

In this article I look at the opposite direction in the sense that greening of business identities indicate a shift towards normative (environmental) identities from utilitarian (business) identities. This shift it is argued here come through either solutions or problems that enter the organisational garbage can with new green identity fragments attached to them. External stakeholders might have produced these green identity loaded solutions or problems, or they might have been produced internally by particular internal stakeholders taking an interest in the natural environment.

Summing up, in this article the production of organisational identities in the garbage can decision-making process is conceptualised as a social process of self-reflexive questions. The process is viewed as social in a broad sense involving also external stakeholders. The new flow added to the garbage can model, is a flow of fragments of identities. This new flow in the garbage can is conceptualised here as dependent on the flow of solutions and problems. In our case the identity fragments in the new flow can be both environmental (normative) and utilitarian (business). When ever a solution and a problem get attached to each other in the garbage can decision-making process new and old identity fragments are merged into an

organisational identity that is then produced anew, made sense of and must be accounted for. In this process of accounting, the self-reflexive questions - that are triggered by the merging of identity fragments - are answered by the corporation claiming that the (produced) organisational identity is (still) central, distinctive and enduring.

Accounting for Green Organisational Identities in a Garbage Can Decision-making Process

The accounting for an organisational identity produced in a garbage can decision-making process can start at the particular choice opportunity that gets attached to the solutions and problems being combined in the garbage can. The first sense making and accounting is typically then done by the decision-makers that make up one of the four flows in the garbage can. Later on other organisational members can continue the accounting on behalf of the organisation in for example corporate communication of different sorts.

The identity and the decision is in a way produced simultaneously in the garbage can, but still one can argue that the decision comes first in the sense that it is the attachment of solutions and problems that drives the production of identities. Also the organisational identity must first be made sense of and accounted for before one can say that the production process is finalised. In that sense the decision also comes first. In Weick's (1995) wording one would ask: How can the organisation know who they are before they have seen what they say when they account for the garbage can decision?

METHOD

The research question to be addressed in this article is: *How are green organisational identities produced in garbage can decision-making processes and how are these new organisational identities thereafter accounted for by the corporation while contributing to socially constructing new business opportunities.* To answer this question the article will analyse the multinational oil company Shell's decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables thereby adding green renewable energies as a fifth core business to Shell's business portfolio.

When analysing Shell's decision to establish Shell International Renewables the article first analyses the decision situation surrounding the decision to establish Shell International Renewables. The article then analyses the particular problems that got attached to the solution of establishing Shell international Renewables. This analysis is also identifying the utilitarian and environmental identity fragments that were attached to the particular problems and solution. In the final part of the analysis the focus is upon how Shell has made sense of and accounted for their new greener organisational identity produced in the garbage can decision-making process. In this analysis the article seeks to describe how corporations such as Shell contribute to socially constructing new business opportunities, while they seek to establish the rationale behind particular garbage can decisions *after* these decision have, in fact, already occurred.

In undertaking the above analysis the article draws on qualitative written data from Shell's annual reports, Shell's reports to society and the internal global newsletter ShellWorld. Also newspaper articles from Financial Times about Shell have been drawn upon. The decision to

establish Shell International Renewables was made in 1997 and this article thus draws on the above data from a six years period surrounding the decision. The data covers this period in order to track what happened in the period leading up to the decision and how the decision as well as Shell's organisational identity was accounted for after the decision. In addition to this written material the article also draws on a television spot that was used extensively in global television channels in Shell's corporate identity campaign following the establishment of Shell International Renewables. This spot has been transcribed both covering the verbal and the visual tracks in the spot. The full transcription is enclosed in this article. The spot has been analysed in terms of illustrating how Shell accounts verbally and visually in global television for the decision to establish renewable energies as their fifth core business and what that has meant in terms of their organisational identity.

ANALYSING SHELL'S DECISION TO ESTABLISH SHELL INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLES

In the following I will analyse Shell's decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables. Doing that I will first analyse the decision situation surrounding the decision to establish Shell International Renewables. Based on this analysis I argue below that the particular decision situation present when Shell International Renewables was decided upon was of a sort, where a garbage can decision-making process was likely to occur.

The Decision Situation

According to Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) garbage can decision-making processes typically happen in 'situations which do not meet the conditions for more classical models of

decision-making in some or all of three important ways: preferences are problematic, technology is unclear, or participation is fluid (p. 16)'.

In analysing Shell's decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables it is as a first step relevant to have a closer look at these three elements. Concerning the first element it appears reasonable to describe Shell's goals on renewable energies as unclear. This situation is reflected in the following quote. In 1996 one year before the decision to establish Shell International Renewables John Jennings, Chairman of Shell Transport and Trading, explains *'Renewable energy technologies will penetrate further as their costs come down. The best way to bring those costs down is to encourage them, indeed force them, to compete in the market place. So what is the responsibility of a global company in an extractive industry? Should we simply meet the requirements of regulations, or seek to set an example? The answers are extremely difficult to find and we often find that the goal posts are shifting. These are serious questions and in the management we are doing our best to grapple with them. It is unlikely that we will ever be able to say that we have the complete answer (SW,Aug,1996:31).'*' This comment is made one year before the establishment of Shell International Renewables and, in fact, the comment appears still to be a valid description of Shell's position on renewable energies. The total amount of capital allocated to Shell Renewables is over their first 10 years \$1 -1.5bn. This is a quite small amount of capital allocated compared to Shell's annual investments of \$10-12bn in the traditional core businesses. Furthermore, that Shell's goals on renewable energies continue to be unclear is also indicated in Shell's 2001 Report to Society. In this report Shell has considerably reduced the estimated contribution to primary global energy consumption from renewable energy sources as compared to their estimations made when Shell International Renewables was

established in 1997. By now Shell estimates that renewables will contribute 30% instead of the earlier (in 1997) estimated 50% of global energy consumption by 2050 (RS, 2001:4).

The other two elements of unclear technologies and fluid participation in decision-making can also be argued to have been present in the decision situation leading to the establishment of Shell International Renewables. In 1995 two years prior to this decision Shell faced the defeat in the public debate surrounding Shell's decision to off shore dispose of Brent Spar - an old oil storage platform. Soon after this media storm on Shell's corporate decision-making another media storm on Shell took place over the company's decision to stay in Nigeria despite the undemocratic rule in this country. One of the outcomes of these events was that Shell became aware that they had to change their methods for making decisions, including their methods for involving external stakeholders in their decision making. In an article in ShellWorld in 1999 entitled 'Licence to Grow', Shell's Group Managing Director responsible for Shell Renewables, Jeroen van der Veer explains this shift in decision-making methods and participation:

'Whereas in maintaining our licence to operate we ourselves decided what products and services we would offer, we now face a situation where society starts saying, "we like your gasoline more because you are also in solar energy"...Acknowledging society's ability – and growing willingness – to influence the shape of Shell's portfolio will have ramifications for the way decisions are made and implemented across the Group (p.26).'

ShellWorld reports *'Shell's decision-making processes have, in the past, fitted the formula of Decide, Announce, Defend (DAD). Decisions were reached behind closed doors, announced, to employees and the world as complete packages and then, where necessary, defended sometimes quite vigorously, in terms of their logic: "We felt that was a natural*

process”, says Jeroen. Natural it may have been, but at the same time, lacking in the openness or involvement that stakeholders are now demanding. The new approach Jeroen is proposing, as a natural response to the emerging world, characterised by the ‘licence to grow’, sees dialogue with interested parties taking prominence in the process. The three-step model has dialogue preceding a decision and placing importance on subsequent delivery because expectations are raised: Dialogue, Decision, Delivery (DDD) (p.27). Jeroen van der Veer explains ‘DDD means that we don’t initially announce a decision, but that we begin by opening a dialogue with stakeholders. We must actively seek input from stakeholders particularly NGOs who might want to place a question mark, over an investment plan, for example (SW, April, 1999:27).’

As it can be seen decision-making methods in Shell are changing these years and can be described as unclear. Furthermore, participation is fluid, in particular, in relation to Shell’s decision-making on sustainable development issues, where external stakeholders are increasingly involved. This decision situation is currently present, as it was present in the years leading up to the decision to establish in 1997 to Shell International Renewables. As indicated above the Decide Announce and Defend decision-making method was defeated in the Brent Spar event in 1995.

Summing up, it can be argued that in relation to Shell’s decision-making on renewable energies Shell’s goals and methods are unclear and participation is fluid, in particular, in the sense that external stakeholders are increasingly involved. In such decision situations decisions are likely to happen through garbage can processes (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Based on this analysis it is argued here that the decision to establish Shell International Renewables came about in a garbage can process. Furthermore, other newer decisions on

renewable energies in Shell are likely also to have happened in garbage can decision-making processes, since the decision situation in Shell on renewable energies appears as having remained the same.

The Decision to Establish Shell International Renewables

Having now analysed the situation in which the decision on Shell International Renewables was made the article will proceed to analysing the actual garbage can decision. The decision came about in a garbage can decision-making process it is argued here, where flows of solutions, problems, choice opportunities, participants got attached to each other as a consequence of timing – that is of being in the organisational ‘garbage can’ at the same point of time.

The flows: Solutions, Problems, Choice Opportunities and Participants

Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) describe the first two flows of problems and solutions in the organisational garbage can in the following way:

‘Problems. Problems are the concern of people inside and outside the organization. They might arise over issues of lifestyle; family, frustrations of work; careers; group relations within the organization; distribution of status, jobs, and money; ideology; or current crisis of mankind as interpreted by the mass media or the nextdoor neighbor. All of these require attention.

‘Solutions. A solution is somebody’ product...It is an answer actively looking for a question...Despite the dictum that you cannot find the answer until you have formulated the

question well, you often do not know what the question is in organizational problem solving until you know the answer (p. 3).

In the following it is argued that the solution to establish Shell International Renewables was somebody's product – in this case the product of external stakeholders. This solution got attached to two related key problems that were present in Shell's organisational 'garbage can' by the time it was decided to establish Shell International Renewables. The first problem is a general problem for the oil industry, which is that cheap oil is running out these years. The second problem was that BP just prior to Shell's decision on Shell International Renewables had announced their decision to substantially scale up their renewable energy business.

The Problem of Cheap Oil Running out

In the mid '90s Shell like other oil companies increasingly enters the very expensive deep-sea drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico and other places so as to be able to continue to add to their reserves of fossil fuel. As described by Financial Times: *'Deep water, where most of the world's big oil and gas fields are now being found, is another area where Mr. Watts wants Shell to secure industry leadership: 'It's a big game for the heavies and I would be ashamed if we don't win (FT, 23 Dec 1999).'*' The expensive deep-sea drilling projects are necessary because the most commercial fossil fuel fields are starting to run out. *'People should recognise the increasing marginality of the North Sea (FT, 28 March 1992)'*, says Chris Fay, Managing Director of Shell Exploration and Production. This problem has caused a range of mergers in the oil industry in the last decade for the companies to be able to be big and financially strong enough to involve themselves in the expensive and risky deep-sea oil exploration and production. Thus, Exxon has merged with Mobile and BP with Amoco, while

Shell has gone it alone while rationalising heavily internally to stay competitive in the transformed oil industry.

The Problem of BP Scaling up their Renewable Energy Business

The announcement of Shell International Renewables' establishment followed shortly after BP's announcement that it would significantly increase its renewable energy business. The Financial Times explains *'The Shell move follows a recent announcement by British Petroleum, which vowed to become a world leader in solar energy with a \$ 1 bn turnover target by 2010...Shell aims to capture at least ten per cent of the world market for the photovoltaic cells before 2005 (FT, 17 Oct 1997).'* Thus, the latent problem of cheap oil running out was not the only problem in Shell's organisational 'garbage can' at the time when Shell decided to establish Shell International Renewables. A related problem of BP scaling up their renewable energy business was also present in Shell's 'garbage can' at that particular point in time.

The Kyoto Summit Became the Choice Opportunity

Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) describe the last two flows of choice opportunities and participants in the organisational garbage can in the following way:

'Participants. Participants come and go. Since every entrance is an exit somewhere else, the distribution of "entrances" depends on the attributes of the choice being left as much as it does on the attributes of the new choice. Substantial variation in participation stems from other demands on the participants' time (rather from the features of the decision under study).

Choice opportunities. These are occasions when an organization is expected to produce behavior that can be called a decision. Opportunities arise regularly and any organization has ways of declaring an occasion for choice (p. 3).’

Shell chose the external global Kyoto summit on climate change as their choice opportunity. The problem of BP’s increased activities on renewable energies and Shell’s decision to close the gap can in this context also be seen as a respond on the global concern over climate change. This is indicated by the following quote from Financial Times: *It (Shell’s decision) also comes just two months before governments gather in Kyoto, Japan, to discuss legally binding targets to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (FT, 17 Oct 1997).*’ Choosing Kyoto as the choice opportunity is also indicating that participation was fluid in the sense that external political environmental decision-makers participating in the Kyoto summit in a sense were indirectly participating in Shell’s decision to establish Shell International Renewables. Solutions are somebody’s product as Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) argues.

Summing up, during the 1990ties the economic environment for oil companies got more and more rough as a result of the expenses related to deep sea drilling – the world last major oil reserve. Mergers between the oil companies were a necessity to have the money and the courage to go into ever-deeper waters drilling for oil. Thus, the latent problem – that cheap oil is running out - together with the problem of BP scaling up their renewable energy activities – in 1997 got attach to the solution – Shell International Renewables – at a choice opportunity declared in relation to the climate summit in Kyoto in 1997.

The Flow of Identity Fragments Attached to the Solution and the Problems

Shell International Renewable can be viewed as a solution to which new green identity fragments were attached. Environmental politicians - struggling at the Kyoto summit and other climate change summits with the abatement of global climate change problems - want oil companies to contribute to solving this environmental problem by scaling up their renewable energy activities. In that sense it can be argued that environmental politicians participated in the production of the identity loaded green solution of establishing Shell International Renewables. This is also reflected in the fact that the Kyoto summit became Shell's choice opportunity.

The problem of cheap oil running out is not necessarily loaded with green identity fragments. It could just as well be oil related utilitarian identity fragments that are attached to the problem of cheap oil running out. This is so since Shell could for example do as Exxon has done with Mobile. That is merge with another oil-company, ignore renewable energies and concentrate its efforts within deep sea drilling for fossil fuel – at least for a while. Meanwhile, the related problem of BP scaling up their renewable energy activities, it can be argued, are loaded with green identity fragments. Thus, the problem of BP scaling up their renewable energies in a sense was greening the other problem of cheap oil running out. That might not always be the case in Shell's future organisational garbage can decision-making processes. Whenever the problem of cheap oil is 'on its own' in the garbage can it can be viewed as potentially loaded with oil related utilitarian identity fragments and can be attached to deep sea drilling problems and solutions that are present in the garbage can. There need not be other connection between problems and solutions other than that of timing – of being in the garbage can at the same time (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). This conclusion on Shell's

renewable energy decision-making is also what was indicated in the above discussion of Shell's decision situation on renewable energies.

Shell's New Greener Organisational identity

The merging of Shell's utilitarian identity with the environmental identity fragments attached to the solution (Shell International Renewable) and the environmental identity fragments attached to the problems (cheap oil is running out and BP is scaling up their renewable energy activities) has in total produced a new greener organisational identity in Shell. The garbage can decision to establish Shell International Renewables has furthermore triggered a potential long-term change in Shell's organisational identity. Shell has publicly announced that they by now are a company entering a transition from being an oil company to becoming an energy company also selling and producing renewable energies. Meanwhile, the new greener organisational identity seems to be vulnerable as discussed above. This is also illustrated in the sense that when Shell International Renewables first five-year investment plan of US\$500m was renewed for the next five years up until 2007, it was only given US\$ 500m-1bn - a marginal amount compared to Shell's annual investments in deep water. Still though the garbage can decision to establish Shell International Renewables has to a certain extent produced a new greener organisational identity in Shell, it can be argued.

Accounting for a Greener Organisational Identity

When ever a solution and a problem get attached to each other in the garbage can decision-making process a number of identity fragments are merged with the existing identity viewed as an old identity fragment producing anew the organisational identity that then must be made sense of and accounted for. As argued above organisations will tend to describe their organisational identity as central, distinctive and enduring. This imply that the environmental

and utilitarian identity fragments that were merged in the decision on Shell International Renewables must be accounted for as fitting ‘naturally’ together *after* the garbage can decision has occurred.

Following the decision in 1997 to establish Shell International Renewables a global image campaign was launched by Shell in the late 90ties in which three global television ads called the ‘dreamer’, the ‘obsessive’ and the ‘romantic’ was extensively used. Below is a transcription of the ‘dreamer’, which is the one directly related to renewable energies. This television ad will be analysed below to get a picture of how Shell is seeking to account for their new greener organisational identity as being central, distinctive and enduring.

”Dreamer” (young man, UK), Shell TV commercials 1999

SOUND: Music (slow guitar)

PICTURE

<p>Dreamer: I have a great respect for the sun. I believe in the sun.</p>	<p>Close up on the dreamer talking, while standing out in the nature. Rocks and sand in the background.</p>
<p>Music (slow guitar)</p>	<p>The sun is shining into the camera, which moves past a collage of rocks mixed with pictures of the dreamer. Ends up in a close up of a fireplace with a meal being cooked.</p>
<p>Speaker (dialect): He also has a thing with threes.</p>	<p>Tall trees filmed from the ground and up. A collage of pictures of the dreamer and trees. Close up on the dreamer holding his arms around a tree. Ends up in a picture where the dreamer measure the diameter of a tree (looks as if he is</p>

	tiring him self to the tree).
Speaker: And in the amber of a wood running stove he sees the power plant in the future.	Close up on the hands of the dreamer touching the amber.
Dreamer: Fossil fuels on their own...	A highway with a car in the desert.
Dreamer: can't be the answer.	Close up on the dreamer's face.
Speaker: He believes that almost half of our energy could one day come from renewable sources.	Collage of pictures of the dreamer driving on a highway in the desert driving past the local population. The pictures are shifting from them to him driving. Ending up filming the dreamer talking to the population in a small farm.
Speaker: Like solar panels...	Close up on a stand-alone solar panel.
Speaker: and sustainable forests.	Filming a forest from above (plane flying).
Speaker: He has been called a dreamer...	The dreamer at a river side with his tent. The dreamer sleeping out in the nature at night.
Speaker: and a crank.	The dreamer measuring the sun height.
Dreamer: And I have been called a hippie.	Close up on the dreamer.
	A collage of pictures of the riverside - from night to the sun is rising. The dreamer wakes up lying on the earth outside his tent.
Speaker: And more recently a project manager for Shell.	The dreamer is packing his things and putting it into his car. Moving the focus toward the Shell logo on the door of the car.
Text on black background: Damian Miller works for Shell Renewables What was once just a small research project is	

now a major business. One day it could be our biggest business.	
Music	Close up on a natural seashell tipping down showing the Shell logo inside it.

A corporation's logo, it can be argued, is an important identity fragment in the organisational identity (Hatch, 1997). In that context the last visual sequence in the add tells what the whole add has been about: the merging of nature (natural seashell) with Shell (Shell logo). Drawing on Whetten and Albert (1985) and the analysis above the former is visualising the new normative (environmental) identity fragments coming from the garbage can process and the latter is visualising the utilitarian (business) identity fragment coming primarily from Shell's old organisational identity. As it appears these two identity fragments must be merged – made one – in Shell's accounting and self-focused sense-making (Fiol, Hatch & Golden-Biddle, 1998, p. 56). The way they are made one is by making Shell a (smaller) part of nature (the outer shell). In this merging there seems to be no contradiction between Shell and nature. After the garbage can decision to establish Shell International Renewables Shell is still the same – they have always been a smaller part of nature – that is inherent in their central, distinctive and enduring organisational identity.

This way of accounting for the merger between the environmental and utilitarian identity fragments is, as indicate above, the kind of accounting pursued in the entire add. The dreamer starts by saying: 'I have a great respect for the sun. I believe in the sun'. In parallel with this verbal statement a collage of pictures starts, where one sees the dreamer walking around in nature – first in the dessert with rocks and later on in the forest. Pictures of the dreamer and

nature shifts quickly making it difficult to differentiate between the two – the dreamer and nature are made one visually. Furthermore, the dreamer is part of nature in the sense that he is living there, sleeping there and working there. After the dreamer is made one with nature the add reveals that the dreamer is, in fact, a project manager for Shell. This leads on to the ultimate merging of the environmental and utilitarian identity fragments in the garbage can decision to establish Shell International Renewables. The add explains: ‘What was once just a small research project is now a major business. One day it could be our biggest business’. Shell’s new activities on renewable energy are commercial activities that are a major business by now and one day could become Shell’s biggest business. There is no contradiction between business and the protection of the natural environment in this accounting. This also indicates that in Shell’s accounting after the decision has occurred the environmental identity fragments in the garbage can analysed above are viewed as renewable energy related utilitarian identity fragments.

The same kind of accounting was also drawn upon in Shell’s first Report to the Society published in 1998 one year before the corporate identity campaign was launched. This report was titled ‘Profit and principles – does there have to be a choice?’, where Shell in the report was arguing that there need not be a choice between the two. Business identity fragments can in other words be coupled with environmental identity fragments without necessarily creating a (business or environmental) conflict. That is also the message in the dreamer add in the visual and verbal accounting, which describes Shell’s organisational identity in a way where it does not relate to environmental protection in the form of charity, but in the form of sustainable development seen as a business opportunity. This again paves the way for Shell to be able to claim that Shell’s new greener organisational identity is (still) central, distinctive and enduring – that is, the same business identity as before.

The Social Construction of New Business Opportunities

The accounting for the protection of the natural environment as a business opportunity following a garbage can decision-making process such as the one analysed in this article has two related specific aims, it can be argued. The first aim is to present the new (produced) greener organisational identity as having been a precursor for and not a random product of the decision-making – that is presenting it as being the same as the corporation's existing organisational identity viewed as central, distinctive and enduring (Whetten and Albert, 1985). The second related aim is to account for the random garbage can decision-making process as if it has been a rational decision-making process. In such processes the decision rationale is an overall economic rationality, which is known on beforehand and which guides the decision. In garbage can decision-making processes decision rationales are socially constructed after the decision has occurred. In this process of social construction of decision rationales - and of new business opportunities one should add - corporations are likely to draw not just on cultural sources from the field of rhetoric of economic, but also from cultural sources from the business sector in general and from the society (Hoffman, 2001).

The overall purpose of accounting for the protection of the natural environment as a business opportunity following a garbage can decision-making process, it can be argued, is to remain a cultural member of the 'myth structure of rationalized societies (Power, 1997, p.8)'. Within this myth structure business decisions must appear to be taken in a rational manner guided by an overall economic rationality. Business decisions and organisational identities cannot appear in the corporations' accounting as having, in fact, been produced in random processes.

Shell has contributed to socially constructing new business opportunities following their garbage can decision to establish Shell International Renewables. They have done that by arguing in accordance with the 'myth structure of the rationalized society (Power, 1997, p. 8) that Shell International Renewables was established in a rational process and for commercial reasons. In accounting for the rationale behind the decision they, in particular, appear to contribute to socially constructing the business opportunity to produce and sell new greener products to new and existing markets, while gaining a competitive advantage, including through getting a greener image. The potential new markets and customers are visualised and described in the story about the dreamer calling himself a hippie and obviously being a nature lover, while also being busy talking to local people. The new products are visualised by the pictures of solar panels in the local villages as well as pictures of sustainable forests. Ending the story about the dreamer adding that he is, in fact, also a project manager for Shell is projecting Shell's new image. Shell and nature is one, the rationale being that there is no contradiction between profit and principles - or between environmental and utilitarian identity fragments. In a sense-making perspective (Weick, 1995) this rationale could be viewed as having the potential of turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In an oil industry context that again will have the prospects of accentuating an oil industry driven development of the global renewable energy business. BP and other oil companies will be effected by Shell's contributions to socially construct renewable energy as a promising new business opportunity for oil companies like Shell was effected by BP's contribution in the first place.

DISCUSSION

Above it has been argued that the flow of identities is attached to solutions and problems in the garbage can model (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). In that sense it is argued that the flow of identities are dependent on the flow of solutions and problems. This is so since

identities are relational (Weick, 1995) and external parties thus influences who we as companies become. The way these external parties can have an effect on the production of organisational identities are by contributing to producing particular solutions or particular problems that carry particular identity fragments.

In the case of the decision to establish Shell International Renewables it could be argued that Shell's relation with BP had an effect on who Shell has become by now. And in case of both BP and Shell it can be argued that their relation with the European society has had an effect on who they have become by now. The social construction of the climate change problem are done in a more persistent way by the European societies as compared to the American society as also reflected in the US government's resistance toward the Kyoto protocol. As compared to American oil companies BP and Shell are therefore operating in a cultural context, where the socially constructed problem of global climate change is more likely to enter their organisational garbage than it is likely to enter American oil companies' garbage can. This is also reflected in the fact that American oil companies are by far taking the same interest in renewable energies as are done by BP and Shell.

Focusing here on the relational aspect in the case analysed in this article it could be argued that one of these companies (BP) seeks to contribute to solve the socially constructed climate change problem (by scaling up their renewable energy business). BP thereby produces a new problem for the other (Shell needs to close the gap) and in a sense BP also at the same time contribute to producing a solution (renewables as a solution to the latent problem of cheap oil running out) for the other (Shell) etc. As Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) explains, solutions are produced by somebody and problems – and solutions one should add - can be of concern both for people inside and outside the organisation. Thus, solutions and problems come from

internal as well as external sources and are not neutral, but loaded with potential identities. Depending on the timing and the way solutions and problems are coupled in the garbage can particular new organisational identities are randomly produced.

As indicated by the decision analysed in this article, normative (environmental) identity fragments can be merged with utility (business) identity fragments in garbage can decision-making processes producing organisational identities anew. These new organisational identities are then (still) accounted for as being central, distinctive and enduring (Whetten and Albert, 1985) – that is, as being the same as before. In garbage can processes decisions and identities are produced in a process, where the rationale for the decision must be developed after the decision has occurred. This rationale is what knits the different identity fragments together so as for the company to be able to account for the produced identity as being central, distinctive and enduring and for the decision-making process as having been rational. In the development of these rationales after the decision has occurred the company contribute to socially constructing new business opportunities.

Referring back to the discussion in the introduction to this article of the prospects of achieving sustainable development it can be argued in that context that the most important outcome of random organisational processes such as the garbage can process might be the social construction of new business opportunities. These new opportunities are constructed by corporations in their aim of translating random local rationalities and environmental outcomes into an overall economic rationality frame. That will over time broaden what can be seen as a business opportunity also from the perspective of other corporations and that might have positive implication for the prospects of achieving sustainable development. As described by Miller (1998) the ways of calculating economic ‘facts’ that can function as a basis for rational

decision-making is evolving drawing upon cultural sources other than those coming from the field of economics. Thus, the results of green garbage can processes and other processes (Hofmann, 2001) are these years feeding into the ways one is calculating economic 'facts'. By now, as described by Hoffman (2001), the protection of the natural environment can be viewed as an opportunity to enhance a company's market share as illustrated in this article. The protection of the natural environment can also, according to Hoffman (2001), be viewed as an opportunity to optimise operational efficiency (eco-efficiency) and increase workplace productivity (human resource management). Furthermore, it can be viewed as an opportunity to reduce cost associated with environmental risks (risk management) and an opportunity to reduce costs of capital investments in new sites (Hoffman, 2001).

Summing up, in the effort of accounting for their particular garbage can decisions as rational and their identity as central, distinctive and enduring the corporations are, referring to the discussion in the introduction, forced to see the drawing as two faces looking at each other instead of seeing the vase. Doing that what they get to see is that sustainable development can be viewed as an opportunity for business companies. As argued in the introduction, observations are context dependent. Following from this reflection if one was to answer whether the protection of the natural environment was a problem or an opportunity for business corporations this very answer would necessarily be, as argued in the introduction, that it would depend on the paradigm within which one's sensing took place. In this article we could add that whether the protection of the environment is seen as a problem or an opportunity might be dependent on whether companies are identifying their decision rationale before or after the particular decision has been made.

CONCLUSION

As Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) argued the 'garbage can model is a first step towards seeing the systematic interrelatedness of organisational phenomena which are familiar, even common, but which has been previously regarded as isolated and pathological (p. 17)'. In that sense the garbage can model is a contribution to the field of organisational decision-making. Within the field of business and the environment the garbage can model can also be viewed as a contribution, in particular, when extended with a flow of identities as done in this article. Doing that one is namely capable of describing how new decision rationales linking nature with business are produced in a way where corporations describe the protection of the environment as a business opportunity. This effort of seeking, after the decision has occurred, to translate the protection of the natural environment into an overall economic rationality frame broadens that very frame to also being able to encompass other cultural sources than those coming from the field of economics. Furthermore, this then contributes to socially construct new calculable environmental benign business opportunities. That finally has the effect that corporations also when they experience rational decision-making processes will be increasingly able to identify the protection of the environment as a business opportunity. As an overall conclusion in this article it can be argued that green garbage can processes are not to be viewed as pathological, but as having the potential of randomly accentuating the translation of the protection of the natural environment into the economic rhetoric (McCloskey, 1998) of business opportunities.

END

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