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# Routine Regulation: Balancing Conflicting Goals in Organizational Routines*

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**Abstract**

To examine how organizational routines serve as a source for balancing conflicting organizational goals, we use an inductive study of Alessi, an Italian design company, to trace how organizational members simultaneously achieved the conflicting organizational goals of design and efficiency in the new product development routine. Our analysis identified three types of regulatory actions (splicing, activating, and repressing) that participants took to flexibly enact these conflicting organizational goals through the same routine. We observed that the three regulatory actions facilitated new connections between new product development participants, allowing them to create a dynamic truce and accomplish the two conflicting goals in a new product's origination, evaluation, and development phases. Routine regulation shifts our focus away from the routine as a stable truce to the truce as process, highlighting the role of actions performed by individuals throughout the organizational hierarchy, and moves the conversation away from eliminating goal conflict to elaborating the ongoing actions that people take to manage conflicting organizational goals. Our findings and theoretical insights produce a deeper conceptualization of routines as generative systems by demonstrating how action taken to enact a routine also has the capacity to regulate conflicting organizational goals.

**Keywords:** routine dynamics, action, organizational goal conflict, routine as truce, new product development

Conflicting organizational goals have to be resolved or dealt with in some way for work in organizations to move ahead (Pondy, 1967, 1992). Organizational goal conflicts need to be managed because they ''handicap the firm in its competition for survival'' (Jensen, 2001: 12). While research on organizational dualities (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014), contested logics (Smets et al., 2015), hybrid organizations (Battilana and Lee, 2014), ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014), and paradox (Schad et al., 2016) has presented structural, cognitive, and

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temporal solutions for eliminating and managing competing demands, scholars have devoted much less attention to understanding how organization members can act flexibly to manage conflicting organizational goals dynamically (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The literature on routine dynamics can help to develop a better understanding.

Although organizational routines have traditionally been theorized as sources for eliminating rather than embracing organizational goal conflict (Nelson and Winter, 1982), emerging work on organizational routine dynamics offers a new perspective on how conflicting goals can become generative (Feldman, 2000; Canales, 2013; Bertels, Howard-Grenville, and Pek, 2016). Scholars working in this tradition argue that routines are a locus not only for accomplishing work but also for flexibly working out organizational goal conflict (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). In settings such as garbage collection (Turner and Rindova, 2012), engineering (D'Adderio, 2014), and reinsurance (Spee, Jarzabkowski, and Smets, 2016), employees selected and performed particular actions in routines to manage the conflict between standardization and flexibility. Similarly, in a new educational venture, both employees and managers modified and combined actions in the hiring routine to balance the conflict between following the employment rules of the state system and breaking these rules to attract talent (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). In these examples, small and varied actions were essential to managing conflicting goals. This heterogeneity in action helped to address the goal conflict creatively and allowed work to proceed.

To further understand how actions taken in organizational routines can manage goal conflict, we need to understand how routines can be performed to accomplish conflicting goals without breaking down. In the traditional view of routines, conflicting organizational goals are managed through the ''routine as truce'' (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Kaplan, 2015). A truce is an agreement to cease fighting or disputing for a period of time. When observed in routine performance, a truce is an implicit agreement among routine participants to perform the routine task (e.g., developing a new product) for a period of time while suspending disputes about how to perform the routine task that would otherwise be engendered by their diverging interests. Prior studies of the routine as truce have little to say about the dynamics of truces and how they unravel, emerge, or change, because this work ''misses the conflict behind the truce; it reveals only the stable truce'' (Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010: 956). In past work, the stable residue of the truce-making process—the truce itself—has been the subject of study rather than the process. Yet understanding how truces unravel and are re-created over time is important in developing a dynamic understanding of how organizations manage opposing social phenomena.

To study truce dynamics and document how flexible performances of routines can be a means for managing organizational goal conflict over time, we contrast the traditional view of routines as inflexible and oriented toward a single organizational goal (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963) with a more dynamic performative view (Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Feldman, 2000) that defines organizational routines as ''repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors'' (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 95). This alternative view offers a lens for capturing how participants flexibly enact conflicting organizational goals while performing routines. In this

view, a routine is an ongoing, effortful accomplishment rather than a stable entity (Salvato and Rerup, 2011), and actors create and maintain routines by acting mindfully (Levinthal and Rerup, 2006). We suggest that through these and other actions employees regulate routines to manage conflicting goals. Such actions enable complementarity between goals (Danner-Schröder and Geiger, 2016; Spee, Jarzabkowski, and Smets, 2016), but "the microlevel dynamics by which goals confront one another" (D'Adderio, 2014: 1348) need further study to capture how goal conflict is managed over time and to develop a finer-grained understanding of the role of the truce in this process.

Just as our knowledge of routines has moved from static to dynamic (Feldman, 2000), our knowledge of truces—which in past work have been viewed as static—could benefit from being viewed as dynamic (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2017). This move could help us better capture how flexible routines and dynamic truces can be sources for managing conflicting organizational goals over time. For instance, in a firm oriented toward the goal of entrepreneurial profitability in the Alberta oil sands, workers had historically been rewarded for workarounds. Employees were supposed to track, complete, and document the completion of particular compliance obligations. But to make sure the paperwork did not reveal any non-compliance, employees used a separate document to track projects, and they populated the official spreadsheet only when the work was completed. As health, safety, and environmental standards improved, workers continued to perform actions that oriented routines away from regulatory compliance (Bertels, Howard-Grenville, and Pek, 2016), which suggested that organizational members may not be fully able or motivated to experiment with actions to create a flexible truce characterized by ongoing change.

A flexible truce is the effortful "making of form, the patterned unfolding of human action" (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 577). A flexible truce emerges out of a stream of situated interactions, initiatives, and experiments in which participants dynamically incorporate conflicting goals into a pattern so routines can be performed in a variety of ways that adapt them to everyday contingencies. Flexible truces are ongoing accomplishments that keep changing. To develop new theory on flexible truces, we traced actors as they performed the new product development (NPD) routine at Alessi, an Italian design firm, over 36 years. The participants initially enacted a "Dream Factory" pattern of NPD oriented toward producing iconic and expensive design products (1970–1990). Then a period of goal conflict (1990–1995) ensued when actors used the NPD routine to add cheaper, mass-market products. Enacting the "Efficient Factory" pattern of NPD initiated goal conflicts among the participants oriented toward either design or efficiency. We observed how the participants through "routine regulation" experimented with taking routine actions that regulated the conflict between the two goals (1995–2006). Although different types of routine regulation exist, in our study it is a type of action that routine participants perform to make routines flexible and manage conflict between goals.

## ENACTING GOALS IN ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES

### Enacting a Single Goal

March and Simon (1958) conceptualized a routine as a "performance program," a stable pattern of action, predictably performed, toward a specific organizational goal. They recognized that although stability in accomplishing an

organizational goal may involve conflict between the different interests of routine participants, conflicts are seldom fully explicit, because routines represent implicit organizational truces among conflicting interests (Nelson and Winter, 1982). In this view, individuals enacting a routine have implicitly consented to perform their role and to forgo demanding major modifications to how the routine is accomplished (Pondy, 1967, 1992). Conflicting interests are not erased, but the truce renders them latent and unobservable, such that ''where once upon a time there was overt conflict . . . in most cases it is largely over when the observer comes to the scene'' (Cohen et al., 1996: 662). Routines are stable and are adapted only incrementally when participants explicitly or implicitly agree to suspend conflict and collaborate to accomplish a single common goal, even when their interests are conflicting. Although some incremental adjustments take place, the routine as truce fluctuates between long periods of stability and moments of change that fundamentally revise the routine.

Work on the political and motivational aspects of routines (Lazaric and Raybaut, 2005; Gibbons, 2006) refines this logic by arguing that routines do not suspend conflict so much as establish the context for negotiating that conflict. As Pentland and Feldman (2005: 808–809) noted, ''Any organizational routine could be the locus for acting out many different conflicts. Each performance provides an opportunity for members to act out their differences and an opportunity to understand the routine differently . . . truce is a relative rather than an absolute term.'' Participants in a routine minimize the differences between their conflicting views by agreeing to substantial ''areas of behavioral discretion'' (Nelson and Winter, 1982: 109) within the routine, then granting flexibility to individual actors in those areas in performing the routine. It has yet to be established, however, by what actions the actors engaged in a routine over time can disrupt or re-create a truce (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2017).

### Enacting Conflicting Goals

Although classic accounts of organizational routines see them as accomplishing single organizational goals (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963), organizations regularly pursue multiple goals simultaneously. The classic approach suggests that when multiple organizational goals are present, conflict will increase to the point that any truce will no longer be able to keep that conflict under control. In these cases, routine participants will tend to overcome conflicts in one of two ways: by creating a new routine or by separating conflicting goals across space or time.

According to the first approach, disagreements about which organizational goal to pursue are disputed at the level of the individual routines. These disputes prompt changes to the routine to subsume the divergent orientations under a higher-level, common organizational goal. This new routine, designed to reduce goal conflict, is sometimes imposed by senior managers who are not involved in performing it. For instance, participants in the price adjustment routine described by Zbaracki and Bergen (2010) experienced conflicts that led to the collapse of a truce when a large investment in facilities reduced production costs by 30 percent. This allowed for a price reduction that exceeded the small price changes the firm had regularly enacted with the original routine. The resulting conflicts between the marketing group, which favored large price reductions to boost sales, and the sales force, which favored a more cautious

approach to price reductions to preserve profit, could be resolved only by the division's vice president, who altered the routine by establishing a task force to address the new goal of significantly reducing prices. Similarly, in her study of Citibank's 1990 crisis, Kaplan (2015) described how the CEO overcame the inertia of existing routines by using both cognitive interventions (e.g., creating task forces as a way to break out of a ''profit-center earnings mindset'') and motivational measures (e.g., giving managers authority over particular units).

According to the second approach, contention between conflicting organizational goals can be eliminated by differentiating goals spatially or temporally (Ethiraj and Levinthal, 2009). Spatial differentiation eliminates conflict by enacting conflicting goals in separate organizational units using separate organizational routines. The newspaper company described by Gilbert (2006), for instance, separated the different routines required by Internet publishing and traditional print publishing into different firm locations. Temporal differentiation, or attending to goals sequentially rather than simultaneously, eliminates conflict by separating efforts to enact conflicting goals across time (Cyert and March, 1963). In the electronics manufacturer investigated by D'Adderio (2014), for instance, participants were initially unable to balance the two conflicting organizational goals of ''copying exactly'' and ''improving'' a routine to transfer a complex server product. Thus the routine was first focused on ''copy exactly'' ''while disallowing and discouraging [views and actions] that favored improvement'' (D'Adderio, 2014: 1335). At a later stage, ''the rationale for copying exactly began to slowly but progressively shift into the background'' (D'Adderio, 2014: 1341), allowing actors to direct their efforts toward adjusting to the local context. It took participants a significant amount of time to learn how to balance the two conflicting goals.

Other studies of routine dynamics aim to capture organizational reality ''in flight'' over a short time period (Pettigrew, 1990: 268), to ''order the intrinsic flux of human action, to channel it towards certain ends . . . [and identify] a pattern [of work] that is constituted, shaped, and emerging from change'' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 567). Taking this kind of slice of action in time, however, creates two vulnerabilities (Nicolini, 2009, 2017). First, though such studies document how specific actions (e.g., aligning, prioritizing, recombining, and selecting) are central to balancing conflicting goals (Danner-Schröder and Geiger, 2016; Spee, Jarzabkowski, and Smets, 2016), they might not capture how the broader ecology of actions and the context more generally are involved in balancing conflicting goals (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011; Howard-Grenville et al., 2016). Studies over a short time might miss how experimental actions gradually turn into non-experimental actions (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Second, they might miss actions that either appear unimportant or remain dormant during the window of the study (Feldman, 2000), leading scholars to underestimate how seemingly unimportant or non-observed actions might be essential to balancing conflicting goals over time (Cohen et al., 1996). Unimportant or dormant actions may at another point in time not only help to accomplish the routines' tasks but also enable participants to form quality connections, which in turn allow them to agree upon which goal to enact in each performance of the routine and how (Feldman, 2016). Although research on routine dynamics has captured how action is central to the performance of a single routine with a single goal (Feldman et al., 2016), it has only started to capture how an ecology of actions could allow people in organizations to

accomplish conflicting organizational goals while also embracing goal conflict in a generative manner (Rerup and Feldman, 2011).

Conducting more longitudinal studies to further develop this knowledge is important because such studies may reveal new actions that are central to balancing conflicting organizational goals. Such new actions may allow us to rethink the routine as truce (Nelson and Winter, 1982) as an ongoing, effortful, and flexible process—a means for confronting and acting out goal conflict rather than eliminating it (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). This process orientation reimagines the routine as truce as a flexible arena for staging goal conflict and routine participants ''both as fight promoters who organize bouts and as referees who regulate them'' (Pondy, 1992: 259). Far from being afraid to take action that breaches the terms of the static truce, routine participants across the hierarchy could perform a flexible repertoire of actions that not only accomplishes the routine's task but also regulates the enactment of conflicting organizational goals through the routine. We use an inductive analysis of the new product development routines at the Italian design company Alessi to understand how routines can be flexibly performed to balance the tension between the conflicting goals of design and efficiency. The following research question guided our analysis: What role, if any, do routines have in managing goal conflict in organizations, and what specific actions may underlie this process?

## METHODS

We initially selected Alessi as our research site because it offered an excellent setting for exploring how product development was central to firm performance. In the 1970–2002 period of our study, Alessi ''consistently outperformed its direct rivals'' on the main financial indicators (Salvato, 2009: 386). As the study unfolded, we learned that Alessi provided a context for longitudinally exploring how actions taken to perform the new product development (NPD) routine also served as sources for managing organizational goal conflict. We decided to focus on this process because the literature indicated that only limited knowledge existed on how truces were developed to accomplish conflicting organizational goals (Bertels, Howard-Grenville, and Pek, 2016; Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2017). In the 1990s, product designers and manufacturing engineers at Alessi were oriented toward conflicting goals. Designers were mainly oriented toward design and performing the NPD routine along a pattern they labeled the ''Dream Factory.'' Engineers were oriented toward efficiency and performing the NPD routine along a pattern they labeled the ''Efficient Factory.'' As one informant told us, ''because of the countless hard-to-make details in his designs, [designer] gets into long and hotly contested arguments with our engineers'' (product manager, interview #9).

We conducted an inductive, longitudinal study of Alessi's NPD routine to trace how organization members took action to make flexible truces and collaborated across these conflicting goals. We collected historical and field-based data (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Analyzing detailed archival data covering 36 years of Alessi's history (1970–2006) enabled us to trace flexible truce dynamics, while directly observing Alessi's staff performing the NPD routine and interviewing participants about their work allowed us to capture some of

the specific actions and artifacts that enacted the NPD routine and balanced the conflicting goals of design and efficiency.

## Data Collection

The first author gained access to Alessi in February 2000 and continued onsite data collection until July 2006. Offsite data collection continued until December 2012, and six additional interviews were conducted in early 2014. During the onsite period, he visited Alessi 44 times and gathered detailed data on 214 NPD projects that unfolded over 36 years (1970–2006). By tracing the actions of the actors who enacted the two patterns of the NPD routine, we were able to distinguish between the Dream Factory and Efficient Factory patterns.

**Archival documents.** Table 1 shows the number and variety of archival documents we analyzed. We also gained insight from academic writings about Alessi (Salvato, 2009; Dalpiaz, Rindova, and Ravasi, 2016). Our main sources of evidence were 214 NPD dossiers related to products developed between 1970 and 2006, which helped us reconstruct the historical patterns of the NPD

**Table 1. Quantitative Details of Archival Data**

| Source | 1970–1990 | 1990–1995 | 1995–2006 | N | Pages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alessi's NPD documents | | | | | |
| Desiderata | 98 | 50 | 66 | 214 | 642 |
| NPD dossiers | 98 | 50 | 66 | 214 | 9,260 |
| Artifacts (in NPD dossiers) | 43 | 24 | 62 | 129 | – |
| NPD database (Excel file, one per year) | 21 | 6 | 12 | 39 | – |
| Workshop schedules | 12 | 21 | 36 | 69 | 132 |
| Workshop "briefs" | 12 | 21 | 36 | 69 | 74 |
| Designers' individual "briefs" | – | 3 | 7 | 10 | 41 |
| "Success formula" score documents | 1 | 39 | 63 | 102 | 102 |
| Subtotal N | 285 | 214 | 348 | 846 | 10,251 |
| Alessi's other archival data | | | | | |
| Catalogs | 11 | 6 | 12 | 29 | 6,246 |
| Annual reports | 11 | 6 | 12 | 29 | 435 |
| Internal publications ("Dream Factory" annual publication, since 1999 + workshop pubs.) | 5 | 4 | 10 | 19 | 2,553 |
| CEO speeches (transcripts) | – | 3 | 7 | 10 | 72 |
| Suppliers' evaluation documents | – | – | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Supplier's presentations | – | – | 1 | 1 | 62 |
| Supplier's Roadbook manual | – | – | 1 | 1 | 42 |
| Reports on competitors | – | 1 | 2 | 3 | 312 |
| Organizational charts | – | 1 | 1 | 2 | – |
| Subtotal N | 27 | 21 | 64 | 112 | 9,740 |
| External sources | | | | | |
| Books about Alessi | 2 | 3 | 7 | 12 | 1,690 |
| Formal studies of Alessi | 2 | 3 | 6 | 11 | 2,310 |
| News articles | 17 | 32 | 41 | 90 | 146 |
| Teaching cases | – | – | 3 | 3 | 40 |
| Subtotal N | 21 | 38 | 57 | 116 | 4,186 |
| Total N | 333 | 273 | 469 | 1,074 | 24,177 |

routine (Salvato, 2006). Each dossier contained all the documents related to a specific NPD project, including letters, faxes, handwritten notes, designs and drafts, pictures, small artifacts, minutes of meetings, e-mail printouts, brochures of related products or materials, packaging items, transcripts of speeches, and technical data. As all documents were dated by informants, they helped us trace accounts of how actors in particular roles performed specific actions, which we used to create a detailed timeline linking actions and actors to specific NPD products. We also collected data in Alessi's company archive, such as letters and memoranda (e.g., briefs to designers), agendas and minutes of meetings, written reports of events (e.g., workshop agendas), administrative documents like proposals and progress reports (e.g., desiderata, NPD progress forms), and organizational records (e.g., product catalogs, annual reports).

Direct observation. We also pursued direct observations to see how the routine was enacted. The first author observed 90 hours of NPD activity and visited Alessi's production facilities, central warehouse, and retail stores to understand the NPD process from idea inception to final product sale. For products at the prototype stage, he participated in three meetings of the panel of experts used to decide the ''success formula'' score (explained below). These data helped us understand company descriptions of the NPD routine and capture how Alessi developed new products. Having detailed knowledge of the artifacts in the museum helped us establish common ground during interviews and understand different aspects of the NPD process.

Semi-structured interviews. We interviewed multiple informants at different levels and times. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours and were transcribed verbatim. As table A1 in the Online Appendix (http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0001839217707738) shows, our sample comprised 51 interviews with 24 internal and external focal actors spanning 74 hours of recording. We used both purposeful and theoretical sampling. We began by purposefully sampling specific individuals. Because of our research interests, we initially interviewed the new product development manager, workshop coordinator, and Alessi Museum curator to shed light on the actions that the various actors took to balance the conflicting goals. This created a foundation for our thinking about routine regulation. We then engaged in theoretical sampling to identify informants who could further unpack how the conflicting goals were enacted. We talked to the advertising and PR manager, marketing manager, operations manager, procurement manager, several designers and engineers, and the CEO. The CEO helped us understand the strategic and competitive necessity of balancing the two goals. We conducted multiple interviews with participants who during our initial conversation provided specific examples of efforts to balance the two goals. For instance, the marketing manager detailed how he experimented with new actions that would improve the relationships between the participants involved in ''scoring'' products oriented toward either goal. Likewise, the procurement manager and several engineers and designers unpacked how tensions between employees supporting the different goals were balanced by trying out experimental actions during color development. The informants explained how the various initiatives created junctures for collaborating across goals.

With two exceptions, all informants kept the same role throughout the focal period (1970–2006) and our data collection (2000–2014). Our informants spanned all categories of actors who developed new products. We interviewed employees, managers, designers, and suppliers who supported the Dream Factory or the Efficient Factory goal, capturing their viewpoints and social relationships. As is common in inductive studies, the questions we asked changed as our emerging theory developed; we increasingly focused the interviews on themes related to the enactment of conflicting goals.

## Data Analysis

For the analysis we primarily used process theorizing (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017), which consisted of three phases in which we moved from the description of routines as action sequences to explanation through detailed narratives of how certain regularities emerged (Pentland, 1999). This approach revealed the internal dynamics of the NPD routine as we gradually narrowed the analysis to focus on specific actions and actors and then connected the regulation of the Dream Factory and Efficient Factory goals to concrete actions.

**Phase 1: Identifying routines via temporal bracketing and identification of boundaries.** We developed a 130-page case description of how participants enacted the NPD routine over 36 years (Salvato, 2006) to identify actors, actions, and artifacts that contributed to enactments of this routine. We identified key events in Alessi's history by tracing their existence in real time across different archival data sources and comparing them with statements in the interviews about how the participants enacted these events. We wanted to address ''how and why things [at Alessi] emerge[d], develop[ed], . . . or terminate[d] over time'' (Langley et al., 2013: 2). This analysis helped us to identify conflicts and boundaries between the actors who supported the Dream Factory or the Efficient Factory. Three distinct stages or temporal brackets (Langley, 1999) in Alessi's history emerged from this analysis. The notion of stages or brackets creates a stylized and linear presentation of a ''messy'' process because our data showed that the change from one stage to another was not accomplished by a single action performed by a single actor. Instead, it was an emergent, distributed, and effortful accomplishment that involved numerous actions by numerous members of the organization. For analytical clarity, however, we singled out specific events that our informants identified as catalyzing the conflict and truce dynamics we report in our findings.

In stage 1 (1970–1990), or what we call the ''original truce'' stage, participants exclusively enacted the Dream Factory pattern, and thus no problems and boundaries between conflicting goals existed. In 1991, a workshop on the use of plastic and new design ideas—the F.F.F. Workshop—kicked off the emergence of the Efficient Factory, initiating the second stage. In stage 2 (1990–1995), the ''truce breakdown'' stage, participants enacted both Dream Factory and Efficient Factory patterns, igniting conflicts. In 1995, novel NPD enactments, through which participants tried to engage problems and conflicts across these boundaries, initiated the third stage (1995–2006), which we label the ''truce re-creation'' stage. We elaborate on these stages in our findings.

**Phase 2: Deepening our understanding of how routines unfolded via sequential analysis and data strings.** Consistent with practice and process approaches to organizational routines, we deepened our analysis by focusing on categories related to actors, actions, and artifacts (Feldman et al., 2016). We took an open approach and recorded actors who were performing specific actions (e.g., CEO, designer, engineer), the specific actions that were performed (e.g., drafting new object, prototyping, evaluating prototypes), the various artifacts that actors mobilized to accomplish specific actions (e.g., product prototypes, items in the Alessi Museum, color samples), and the outcomes of actions (e.g., new product proposal, new product assessment, advanced prototype).

Consistent with sequential analysis, ''where sequences of events that encode a process . . . [are] deciphered to understand the process'' (Poole et al., 2017: 254), we arranged the simplified descriptions of multiple NPD processes as strings of sequential data. An event sequence is an ordered listing of occurrences that is compiled to understand how a process such as a routine or parts of the routine are accomplished (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 145). For instance, one string of sequential data related to project origination revealed (a) how the CEO (actor) issued a written request (action/artifact) for a new product and (b) how the workshop coordinator (actor) responded to the request by sourcing ideas (action) from various designers (actors) and (c) invited (action) some of the designers (actors) to participate in a brainstorming session (action). Another string related to project evaluation revealed how (a) the marketing manager (actor) invited (action) individual organizational members (actors) to a meeting in his office, (b) the member (actor) accepted or declined the invitation (action), and (c) the members (actors) who accepted were asked to score or evaluate (action) prototypes of new projects (artifacts).

The various strings of sequential data reflected what happened locally and unveiled the web of enactment that constituted the patterning of the NPD routine. As themes and relationships emerged, we looked for similarities, patterns, and differences across strings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and retained only the strings of data that were stable and supported across data sources. Following process theory, ''[s]tability exist[s] only in the repetitions of activities that are oriented according to the same practice. But even these seemingly 'same' activities are never really the same; every repetition is always slightly different, such that all activity contains the micro mechanisms through which wider 'change' events can be observed'' (Jarzabkowski, Le, and Spee, 2017: 238). Through this inductive analysis of situated moments of specific strings of data in the history of the NPD routine, we identified three stable patterns of sequential task-specific subroutines: (1) the workshop routine for project origination; (2) the success formula routine for project evaluation; and (3) the color development routine within project development.

**Phase 3: Identifying outcomes of routines.** Having identified the various strings of data, we wanted to further unpack how the actors and actions in the specific strings of sequential data meshed to produce the outcomes we saw in our data: how they managed organizational goal conflicts in each subroutine. To make this conceptual leap (Klag and Langley, 2013), we traced how a sequential string of data gradually changed as the Efficient Factory was

introduced. For instance, in the project origination string described in phase 2, the CEO (actor) took a more active role (action) in designing the workshops, making them more oriented toward efficiency, which created animosity (conflict) between the workshop coordinator (actor) and the CEO (actor). Multiple instances in which similar dynamics shifted the orientation of the routine toward efficiency helped us capture how conflict ensued and the truce gradually eroded.

We then traced how the various strings changed as new actions were introduced to mend the relationship between the actors and rebuild the truces. In line with methods of process analysis, in which observing different types of actions is considered important (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017), we noted how participants who supported either the Efficient Factory or the Dream Factory engaged in experimental actions or trials to flexibly enact the NPD routine in ways that turned the problems between them into junctures for new collaboration, allowing the two organizational goals to coexist and flexible truces to emerge. By tracing specific micro-episodes of conflict as well as attempts to repair these conflicts, we were able to disaggregate routine actions into types of action (Rerup and Feldman, 2011), which gradually helped us see how various actions became sources for dealing with conflicting goals. We labeled the emerging forms of action with a combination of concepts already in use in the literature (e.g., task-specific actions, problems, and trials, Rerup and Feldman, 2011; junctures, Quick and Feldman, 2014) and new labels (e.g., regulatory actions). We labeled the data with existing concepts if the action was already captured in the literature on routine dynamics and the observations at Alessi did not add anything new to our understanding of how specific actions patterned the routine. We labeled data with new concepts if the action was new and provided further insight into how actions taken in routines can help to manage goal conflict. As we discuss below, the different types of action constituted an ecology of actions that documented how micro episodes of problem and conflict were worked out by actors who took action that regulated the performance of the routine.

## TRACING REGULATORY ACTIONS AND TRUCE DYNAMICS

### The Two Conflicting Goals of Alessi's NPD Routine

Our first finding was that there appeared to be two conflicting enacted patterns of the NPD routine. Alessi is recognized for its cutting-edge design of household utensils (Salvato, 2009; Dalpiaz, Rindova, and Ravasi, 2016). Founded in 1921, Alessi started to collaborate with external designers in 1970. While inspecting Alessi catalogs and sales data, we noticed a discontinuity. Between 1970 and 1990, Alessi developed only expensive stainless steel objects on a small scale. In 1991, it began to sell both exclusive metal objects and more-affordable, mass-produced plastic products. We learned that new projects seldom began with a straightforward orientation toward either design (metal) or efficiency (plastic). Instead, when a designer proposed an idea for a new product, Alessi staff involved in NPD flexibly performed a single routine that balanced the two conflicting organizational goals.

The NPD staff exclusively pursued its design goal between 1970 and 1990. Following this Dream Factory pattern allowed Alessi to become known for its exclusive focus on developing metal products that appealed to multiple senses

(e.g., sight, hearing, and touch) (Mendini, 1979; Gabra-Liddell, 1998; Alessi, 2003). For instance, one designer wanted to create a water kettle that combined material and poetic functionality by generating a melody when the water boiled. Enactments of the NPD routine in this period were focused on enhancing the designer's creative freedom so that he or she might produce a unique "top design" product: "A Dream Factory approach is not so much about the products we make, but about how we make them: all the designers' wishes are fulfilled, the entire staff is highly receptive to the designers' desires, and each activity is flexibly directed at creating design excellence" (CEO, interview #1).

Iconic objects created through this pattern earned the Officina Alessi trademark. Some had low functionality, and their price was often too high, but Alessi managers did not mind because many of them were showcased in design exhibitions worldwide, including at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Alessi labeled these objects as "super" and "excellence" for transcending "the creation of objects purely to satisfy function and necessity" (Alessi, 1994: 21).

The second pattern of the NPD routine—the Efficient Factory pattern—surfaced in 1991, when Alessi hired a workshop coordinator and gave her the task of organizing and overseeing brainstorming sessions (workshops) with young designers to explore new product and design ideas. One workshop focused on the use of plastic and ideas from the toy industry: "We all had the sensation that there was still a hidden side to [Alessi's] planet. . . . We needed new sensory experiences, and new materials to represent our new thoughts. . . . We wanted to discover other materials—plastic, for example—in order to better explore the world of color and sensoriality in objects" (Alessi, 1994: 131). Prototypes developed by invited designers made Alessi's NPD staff aware of the potential of the more efficient approach to product development that plastic afforded:

> [W]e gave [designers] more freedom to express themselves. Since plastic is cheaper, we could target market segments—i.e., young adults—who could not spend $100 or more on a design object. Today they can have, by paying $25, an object that has the same design content as our stainless steel items. With plastic we have reached two objectives: greater creativity, but also targeting a much wider market. (NPD manager, #8)

This new pattern added a focus on efficient, large-scale production by enhancing the point of view of actors such as Alessi's operations manager, engineers, and external suppliers: "Whenever a product idea suitable for a larger audience reached us, we realized that we could twist our [NPD] activities toward larger-scale and more efficient production. This usually meant tighter briefs, stricter timing, and a more no-nonsense and pragmatic approach to each sequence in the [NPD] routine" (NPD manager, #6).

By enacting this new pattern, Alessi started to produce objects that could be redeemed with supermarket coupons and that were distinct from the iconic objects in earlier catalogs. Staff members labeled these objects "popular" and "performance." They were later grouped under a new brand, Alessi A, and advertised as "Top design, pop prices."

Though no conflicting goals were present in the NPD routine in 1970–1990, following the introduction of plastic, some actors at Alessi were oriented

toward a Dream Factory goal (workshop coordinator, most designers, NPD manager, CEO), while others focused on the Efficient Factory goal (engineers, operations manager, suppliers). When the Efficient Factory pattern emerged in the early 1990s, actors with a Dream Factory goal orientation often believed the Efficient Factory pattern was enacted at inappropriate moments. Actors with an Efficient Factory goal orientation believed that their point of view could be useful even in the most design-oriented projects. These opposing opinions inspired frustration on both sides:

> Before 1990, all projects were perceived as identical [by NPD actors]: we were developing design objects together . . . they were all in the same design-quality segment and required a similar approach. . . . [After 1990] the distinction between approaches became unclear. The constructive interaction of ideas in our meetings became a dichotomy between design-oriented actors and the technical staff. The technical staff started to have a greater responsibility and the design dimension at times faded into the background. When that happened, I think it was a mistake . . . because it was more about personal issues than the project. (CEO's assistant, #27)

Around 1995, NPD staff started to enact the routine in ways that regulated conflicts between the two conflicting organizational goals. They began regulating their actions in a manner that encouraged new connections (junctures) between participants, creating opportunities for individuals to re-experience, or experience differently, the conflict between enacting the two goals, and in turn allowing them to become generative. The three narratives that follow offer a structured description of how Alessi NPD staff enacted routine regulation and a flexible truce.

### Alessi NPD Staff Performed Routine Regulation through an Ecology of Actions

Our second finding was that the actors at Alessi flexibly performed an ecology of actions to enact the two conflicting goals within the NPD routine. (1) ''Goal-specific task actions'' were routine actions through which participants accomplished the routine task (i.e., new product development) toward either the Dream or the Efficient Factory goal. This type of task-specific action is well-established in the literature (Feldman, 2000). (2) ''Goal-neutral task actions'' were routine actions oriented toward developing a new product regardless of the goal—design or efficiency—targeted by the specific NPD project. This is a new type of action that has not been given much consideration in past work. (3) Problems emerged when participants in the routine engaged in goal-specific or goal-neutral task actions but either were unable to complete the routine or failed to enact the routine in a way that satisfied all actors involved (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). (4) ''Trials'' were experimental actions (Rerup and Feldman, 2011) that responded to the problems, prompting the emergence of new types of actions that developed into the three recurrent regulatory actions described below. Trials were performed by routine participants at different levels in the organizational hierarchy and aimed to create opportunities for actors to work through conflicts and collaborate across boundaries.

(5) ''Regulatory actions'' were a new type of routine actions that emerged through trials and created new junctures for collaboration and addressing specific problems. With regulatory actions, participants directed the performance

of goal-specific routine task actions toward either goal (Dream Factory or Efficient Factory) while lowering related contention between the involved participants. Although other types of regulatory actions may exist, our analysis revealed three types that stood out in our context. ''Splicing'' regulatory actions involved the modular recombination of activities and participants, which allowed the expansion of debates between actors with different orientations, thus facilitating multivocality and inclusion. ''Activating'' regulatory actions involved switching on particular activities and participants in situations that required working jointly together. These actions—e.g., meetings and friendly interactions—allowed participants to recognize conflicting points of views and to enhance connections to pursue new, shared interests. ''Repressing'' regulatory actions involved switching off particular activities and participants to reduce novelty when it was not needed, thus minimizing the differences that created barriers to acting together. Table 2 provides additional supporting data for regulatory actions, the key construct in our study.

We present our findings of this ecology of actions through three narratives to unpack how routine participants engaged in regulatory routine actions across the three stages of Alessi's NPD routine and created a flexible truce. The three

**Table 2. Supporting Evidence for Regulatory Actions at Alessi**

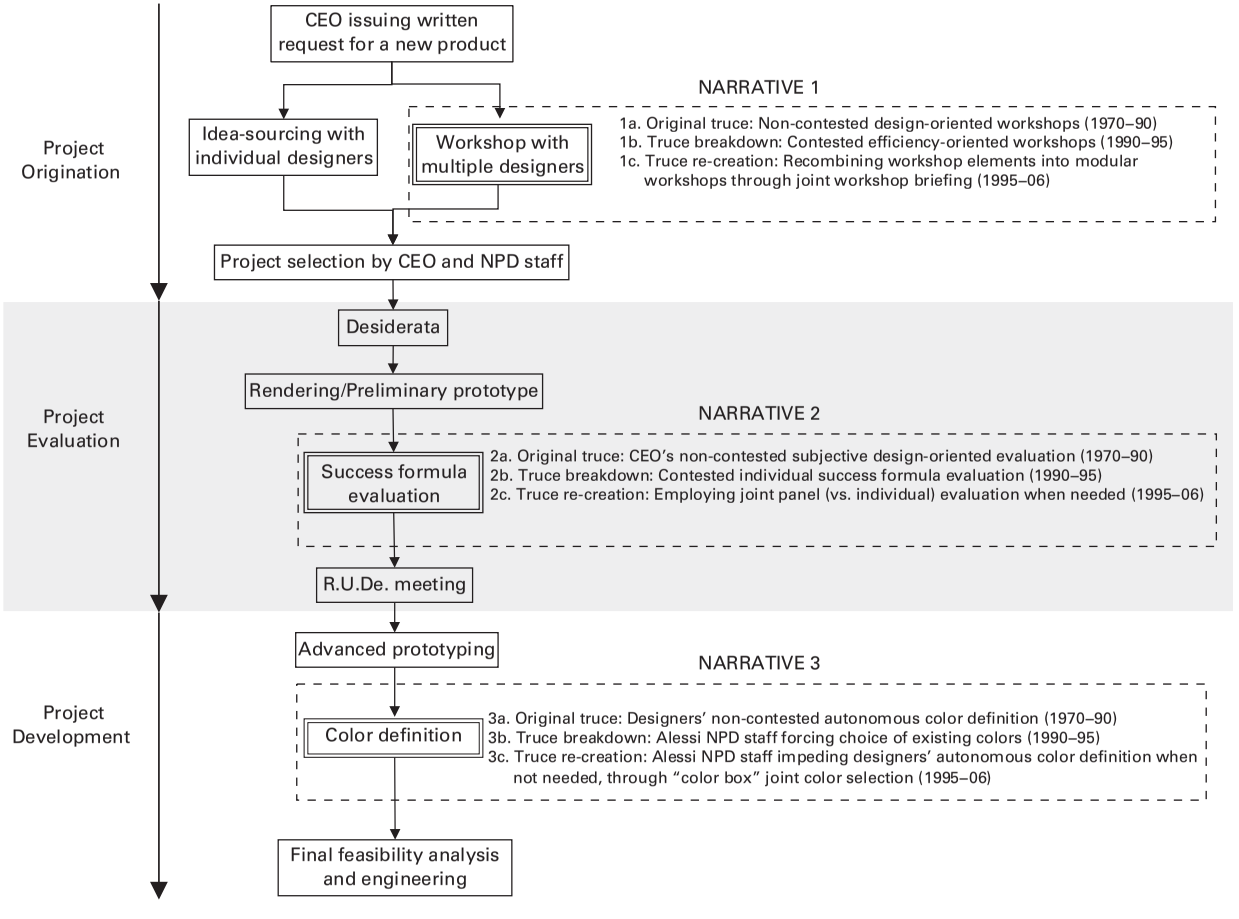
| Type of regulatory action | Representative quotes from the data |
|---|---|
| Splicing actions<br>Day-to-day actions that determine how a subset of modular NPD routine actions is alternatively recombined (spliced) as needed | ''Moving the workshops closer to the factory, rather than having it around the world, allowed NPD team members such as [product manager], [marketing director], and some engineers to participate. This helped me adapt creativity and cost- and time-efficiency in each specific new project.'' (Workshop coordinator, #30)<br>''The habitual visit to our museum during workshops is always instructive for these young designers. It helps them adapt their projects based on what can and cannot be done with our production technologies.'' (CreArt Museum curator, #25)<br>''My original idea for this [product] was different and a bit too 'crazy.' After talking to [Alessi product manager] on the second day of the workshop, I realized I had to adapt it to make it more practicable.'' (Designer 6, #41) |
| Activating actions<br>Day-to-day actions that determine how a subset of NPD routine actions is activated when needed | ''This is our panel of experts, which I integrate with other people. When needed, I show them the prototypes of our new projects and ask to rate them along the four dimensions [of the success formula].'' (Marketing manager, #17)<br>''When we decide to formally use it, the success formula score allowed us to balance different product orientations. If I make a cocktail shaker, I'm referring to a market with a few thousand units per year. If I develop a coffee maker, it's 6–7 million units per year. This has different implications on the four dimensions of the [success] formula.'' (CEO, #3) |
| Repressing actions<br>Day-to-day actions that determine how a subset of NPD routine actions is deactivated when they are not needed | ''We were asked by Alessi to file plastic samples of all new colors we develop . . . to repress the costly proliferation of new colors that is often prompted by designers.'' (Color supplier, #45)<br>''[The color box] tends to repress your creative leeway in color development, but I must admit it also prevents you from venturing into long and often painful and fruitless searches.'' (Designer 3, #37) |

stages are illustrated in figure 1. Our analysis revolved around a focal subroutine in each stage: the workshop routine for the origination of new product ideas in the project origination stage; the success formula evaluation for the assessment of new projects in the project evaluation stage; and the color definition routine for the selection of new project colors in the project development stage. This presentation unpacks the differences among the three forms of regulatory actions and traces how they separately and collectively balanced the two conflicting goals by creating junctures for bridging barriers among participants and how these actions and junctures contributed to create a flexible truce.

As figure 1 shows, in the project origination stage, Alessi's CEO issued a written request for a new product, such as a new coffee maker. This request was assigned either to an individual designer or to Alessi's workshop coordinator, who arranged a workshop with multiple designers to find someone who could develop the requested product. The project origination sequence ended when designers finalized preliminary drawings and handed them to the CEO and the NPD staff, who selected the most promising ones. In the project evaluation sequence, the CEO issued a desiderata document to Alessi's NPD staff, providing general directions about how to develop the selected projects in terms of material, price, and time-to-market. Based on these directions, an early prototype of each selected project was developed and evaluated through Alessi's success formula, a four-dimensional heuristic through which the marketing manager and NPD staff assessed new projects along design, functional, and price criteria. This sequence ended with the R.U.De. (*Riunione Ufficializzazione Desiderata*) meeting, in which NPD staff met to define directions for further project development or to discontinue the project. In the project development sequence, selected projects were refined through interactions between NPD staff and the designer to develop product details such as color, until a final prototype was ready and a pilot production batch was delivered. At the end of this sequence, the new product was ready for production after final feasibility analysis and engineering. This sequence, and the majority of people performing it, did not change across the focal period: ''With few exceptions, all products [1970–2006] were developed by following this sequence. We made a few electric appliances, for instance, which required some additional technical tests. But the project origination, project evaluation and project development sequence has always been the same'' (procurements manager, #24).

The stylized illustration in figure 1 captures how Alessi's NPD staff described the routine throughout the period of observation. Our main focus is to unpack how performing an ecology of different types of actions enabled the NPD staff to balance Dream Factory and Efficient Factory patterns in the final truce re-creation period of Alessi's history (1995–2006). In Narrative 1, we illustrate how NPD participants recombined workshop elements in a modular way to originate new products and reduce conflict. In Narrative 2, we document how routine participants balanced conflict by switching to a panel evaluation of new projects when needed. Narrative 3 shows how participants balanced conflict by switching on the color box to prevent designers from autonomously defining new colors when doing so was not needed.

**Figure 1. An overview of NPD routine enactments in the three narratives (1970–2006).**



### Narrative 1: Regulating the Workshop Routine in Project Origination

**1a. The original truce: Non-contested design-oriented workshops (1970–1990).** Early enactments of the Dream Factory can be traced back to 1970, when the CEO joined Alessi and started to collaborate with renowned external designers. In this phase, the designer was king because the NPD routine accommodated his or her every idea, which resulted in the development of exclusive, expensive objects. The CEO said, ''All the designers working with us were like little Picassos: their creation processes started from intuition, not from market research, and we closely followed them'' (CEO, #3). The CEO was also oriented toward the Dream Factory (''I was not working for the market, but for myself''; CEO, informal communication) by ensuring compliance with designers' every wish. The vice chairman (#5) explained:

> We even allowed [the CEO] a few planned ''fiascos''—expensive projects he could develop with his favorite designers for research or marketing purposes . . . the cubic pot he did with [designer] to honor him—a $500 pot, for goodness' sake! We let [the CEO] do it because he introduced the design concept . . . he said we should consider it as a marketing investment.

Each NPD stage was therefore directed toward enacting the Dream Factory. When participants enacted the Dream Factory pattern, they were performing workshops with an experimental approach that was only marginally concerned with efficiently producing useful outcomes. The CEO provided loose directions to encourage the designers' creativity around broad themes such as ''the offering of food'' or ''affective codes and transitional objects.'' Using these guidelines, the workshop coordinator organized workshops in different international locations, assembling 15 to 20 designers. Local guest speakers—anthropologists, sociologists, dancers, and poets—were invited to offer creative perspectives to challenge and enhance the imaginative content of designers' product ideas. Actors in these workshops interpreted them as ''a kind of creative forge to innovate Alessi's project system'' (Polinoro, 1989: 12). A designer who attended an early workshop said, ''I let myself brainstorm quite far from the given task, to reach unexpected stimulations'' (CSA, 1995: 21). Many objects did not make it to production because ''their execution presented insurmountable difficulties or their cost . . . was too high'' (Alessi, 1988: 5).

**1b. Truce breakdown: Contested efficiency-oriented workshops (1990–1995).** In the early 1990s, following experiments with plastic, Alessi members started to enact an Efficient Factory focus in NPD activities, which generated contention and barriers between participants. Whenever Alessi managers sourced a new idea, arguments emerged about whether the NPD routine had to be performed according to a Dream Factory or an Efficient Factory pattern. The original truce had broken down in all phases of the NPD routine:

> The hot period unfolded in the early 1990s. It was determined by our experience of the commercial power that design had when implemented by the right designers and with materials such as plastic. . . . We soon realized that the design-oriented dimensions . . . were in stark contrast to functionality and production efficiency. The more a project was focused on design, the more it clashed with the efficiency dimensions,

> and vice versa. We were aware of the conflicts this shift was creating among us, but we also realized that we needed more attention toward the efficiency dimensions. It was okay to keep working on the central [design-oriented] themes, but to expand our market reach and be successful we had to make everybody—designers and Alessi staff—target more projects toward functionality, efficiency, and price. (CEO, #1)

In the project origination phase, the workshop coordinator was prompted by Alessi's CEO to reorient the workshop from freely ''networking with young international designers'' and ''crafting imaginative prototypes'' to ''systematically developing actual marketable products'' (internal document, February 1993). The workshop coordinator commented on this change: ''That was the ambiguity: was the workshop still experimental, or were we now supposed to . . . efficiently develop actual products? . . . These objectives were at odds . . . and I felt that my role as creative director of the workshop was questioned. The contradiction was creating tensions and disagreement among us'' (#37). This reorientation led to unresolved conflicts. The CEO wanted workshop activities to be performed in Alessi's facilities, rather than at locations abroad. This allowed Alessi NPD staff to direct project activities toward efficiently developing marketable objects. Creativity-oriented presentations by guest speakers were replaced with presentations by Alessi NPD staff, aimed at introducing designers to Alessi's procedures. These changes did not alter the workshop's task actions, such as designers brainstorming around product ideas or meeting individually with the workshop coordinator to discuss their drafts and early prototypes. Yet problems emerged because the designer was no longer king and the centrality of design-oriented actors such as the workshop coordinator was reduced. Designer 1 commented, ''The interpretation of my works in the workshop was something I did not agree upon. . . . To me, the commercial 'toy-object' concept that the workshop coordinator imposed was a trivialization of what I developed borrowing from Baudrillard's theory of goods'' (#38).

Alessi managers considered several designers ''a real thorn in the side of our engineers'' (Alessi, 2003: 35). Some designers claimed that Alessi did not appreciate the importance of some details: ''We kept fighting for months, because . . . revised prototypes never matched my drawings'' (designer 2, #42). NPD participants were unable to flexibly incorporate conflicting goals into the routine: ''The workshop became excessively focused on efficient product development. This inflexible structure was wrong. There was no opportunity to discuss what we wanted to accomplish and how, to respect each other's ideas. An efficiency approach almost invariably dominated, but I felt it was not always appropriate'' (CEO's assistant, #26).

**1c. Truce re-creation: Recombining workshop elements into modular workshops through joint workshop briefing (1995–2006).** To reduce conflicts over the workshop subroutine, participants started to creatively and flexibly recombine elements of the workshop and steer workshop enactments toward either the Efficient Factory or the Dream Factory goals. We here provide details of how this modular recombination of NPD activities—which we label alternative splicing—emerged and functioned.

The CEO and the workshop coordinator started to meet to openly debate the orientation of each new project. With these informal and often unplanned

meetings (an example of what we call ''trials''), NPD staff experimented with new ways of coordinating their efforts, and they gradually started to appreciate that the enactment of the workshops could be done with ''quite some modularity. . . . There's a flexibility that suits the various project needs. . . . Some [workshops] are more geared to experimenting, while others are more accurate, more efficient'' (CEO's assistant, #27). They realized that ''the workshop can be organized in different ways'' and that debating the orientation of each workshop ''leads to organizing a team that can adopt radically different approaches and smoothly implement them. The preparation phase—the shared identification of the theme, aesthetic criteria, and a suitable team—is as important as the design'' (workshop coordinator, #36). Noticing the success of these emergent trials, the CEO decided to incorporate these joint activities into a formal ''workshop brief.'' With this more relational approach to planning the workshop, key participants were open to both giving and receiving ideas about how each new workshop should be structured and function. This approach contrasted with the one-way directions that the CEO had provided in the previous periods. The CEO commented on why this more interactive approach was introduced: ''Jointly discussing the [workshop] theme that I have in mind with [workshop coordinator] allows her to anticipate struggles. Once these struggles become clear to both of us, I can more confidently provide directions that she can creatively implement with designers'' (CEO, #3). In an informal note to Alessi staff involved in the workshops, the CEO concluded: ''Our workshops would benefit from more open interaction . . . rather than the one-way faith in my own ideas. . . . Maybe [workshop coordinator] and [CEO's assistant] have ideas we could incorporate. . . . There is plenty of room for flexible experimentation and efficacy, for convergence and divergence among us'' (internal document, March 2003).

After the workshop brief became a stable pattern in the routine, defining workshop objectives and format became a highly relational activity. Different participants started to enact it in ways that enhanced their capacity to influence others and to be influenced by others. In most of the workshop brief documents we examined, for instance, the CEO explicitly considered the workshop coordinator's viewpoint after 1995. The workshop coordinator and the CEO interacted intensively while crafting the workshop brief and the workshop structure:

> Sometimes I send [the CEO] a document with my view. I then ask him if he can write a brief illustrating the specific objectives he has in mind for that workshop. We agree upon [product] types, approaches . . . this is his input. . . . My input concerns who should join the workshop [as speaker], who should be in the team, and what [designers] should do. . . . The recent example of the Japanese designers we hosted is illuminating: their approach was more ''poetic'' and artistic than product and market oriented. . . . Our usual production-oriented workshop didn't work well with them. (Workshop coordinator, #37)

These interactions allowed the CEO, the workshop coordinator, and NPD staff to develop common ground and agree upon varied ways to perform in-house workshops. In-house workshop schedules after 1995 show that after they

started to interactively perform the brief, schedules departed from the rigid structure that determined conflicts in the early 1990s.

This flexibility was particularly influenced by how participants switched the workshop routine toward Dream Factory or Efficient Factory enactments. A first element of flexibility was the workshop brief, which allowed participants to accommodate either orientation. For instance, when the brief designated a workshop as Dream-Factory-oriented, the coordinator included a visit to the Alessi Museum to create awareness of functional product features. The visit allowed designers to understand what a project needed to become *Alessi-izable.* Design staff also made presentations about Alessi design philosophy to further help new designers understand how to balance the dual demands exemplified in the Dream Factory and the Efficient Factory.

The second element of flexibility comprised the modular inclusion of goal-specific task actions that enacted an Efficient Factory pattern. If a workshop brief indicated an Efficient Factory project, Alessi product managers and staff were asked to develop advanced prototypes of promising objects and provide targeted directions: ''These projects are presented to the technical team for evaluation of the commercial potential of the objects as well as production problems that might ensue if they were manufactured'' (workshop coordinator, #36). This step could also be applied to those Dream Factory products that needed to be developed more efficiently, providing a modular approach to redirect workshops as they progressed. Receiving such directions lowered barriers between designers and NPD staff and created junctures for appreciating each other's points of view:

> The specific needs of large-scale production became apparent to me in the workshop only during the company visit where an Alessi engineer vividly showed me his difficulties in turning the details of a designer's sketch into a functioning prototype. From that day I sympathized with the engineers. Previously, I had mostly seen them as obstacles to my work. (Designer 4, #44)

Through these actions, participants could recombine (i.e., splice) workshop components in ways that prevented disruptive conflicts. In the interaction that established the objectives for each workshop, participants defined the most suitable recombination of modular workshop components. For example, the in-house workshop team was re-created in an ad-hoc fashion based on each workshop brief (workshop coordinator, #36). Workshops oriented toward developing uniquely crafted objects were staffed with the Alessi Museum curator, designers, artists, and anthropologists, and they were sometimes held outside Alessi. The workshop coordinator inserted or skipped these activities as needed, while all other workshop goal-neutral task actions did not change. For instance, design brainstorming sessions were always performed, regardless of the specific workshop goal. Recombining elements of the workshop brainstorming routine in a modular way allowed NPD staff to flexibly balance Dream Factory and Efficient Factory goals. The workshop brief allowed participants to recognize and accept the presence of distinctions among actors and use them as a basis for negotiating the modular recombination (alternative splicing) of workshop elements, allowing a plurality of individual perspectives and organizational goals to coexist.

Narrative 2: Regulating the Success Formula Routine in Project Evaluation

**2a. Original truce: CEO's non-contested subjective design-oriented evaluation (1970–1990).** Dream Factory enactments were pervasive when new projects were evaluated in this period. After ideas originated from the workshop, the CEO assessed them and issued the desiderata document for projects he considered worth developing (see figure 1). He focused on design-oriented considerations that favored ''top design,'' as product functionality and efficiency were not central concerns. In 1989, he developed the Alessi ''success formula'' to assess new products. It included two design dimensions: SMI (sensoriality, memory, imagination) and CL (communication and language):

> The success formula was conceived in the late 1980s, to meet the board's request to understand . . . [how I decided] whether to make a project . . . which was entirely based on gut feeling. I . . . assessed all 300 projects I had worked on. . . . I analyzed the reasons behind their outcomes, the different reactions of customers. . . . It became apparent that there were two central parameters: SMI, which corresponds to when the public says ''That's beautiful!'' or ''That's interesting, unsettling'' . . . and CL, which corresponds to when an object is used as a communication tool, such as status or style symbol. These had been the two central parameters of Alessi's success and of my assessment of projects . . . the unquestioned pillars of our NPD efforts . . . all activities were performed in this light, as I and designers required. (CEO, #1)

The success formula made project evaluation structured and systematic. Yet the two design-oriented SMI and CL dimensions and the central role of the CEO always prompted NPD staff to orient project evaluation toward the Dream Factory.

**2b. Truce breakdown: Contested individual-level success formula evaluation (1990–1995).** Increasingly frequent enactments of an Efficient Factory pattern after 1990 prompted NPD participants to alter how they performed the evaluation of new projects. Alessi's Board of Directors required the incorporation of two efficiency-related dimensions into the success formula: F (function) and P (price). Adding these dimensions to the existing design-oriented SMI and CL parameters altered how participants performed the success formula routine. First, the CEO discontinued his individual assessment and started to require a formal project evaluation based on the four dimensions of the success formula performed by Alessi NPD staff: ''I realized that I was always too inclined toward top-design projects with my subjective assessment. We needed a more balanced assessment, as the board had asked—a process that could reliably balance 'super' and 'popular' viewpoints'' (CEO, #1).

Second, Alessi's marketing manager devised a scoring system that allowed NPD staff to evaluate each new prototype. The marketing manager averaged staff members' assessments and relayed the score to the CEO and the staff, which changed ''project evaluation from the job of the CEO to a contested task performed by many individuals'' (marketing manager, #18). These alterations raised problems and barriers between NPD actors with conflicting goals: ''We all had different opinions about which dimensions counted more . . . and we obviously scored them differently'' (workshop coordinator, internal document).

Conflicts ensued between actors focusing on Dream Factory (SMI and CL) and Efficient Factory (F and P) dimensions:

> Staff members that usually focus on design and creativity . . . scored imaginative prototypes high on SMI and CL, without paying much attention to F and P. The same projects were scored much lower by people concerned about functional and market considerations like me. . . . When the average score was communicated along with the directions it suggested, sparks started to fly, because none of the individuals who participated felt that his or her individual assessment had been fully taken into consideration. (Marketing manager, #18)

A key dynamic involved the contrast between the workshop coordinator and the NPD staff. After sourcing creative product ideas, the coordinator tended to push them by boosting her assessment along the two creative dimensions, SMI and CL (minutes of NPD meetings). In contrast, the product, marketing, and operations managers were oriented toward production efficiency and market receptiveness, therefore emphasizing function and price. Actors used the success formula to evaluate products as "black or white" and "either/or." The marketing manager spoke of "split ratings," which effectively broke the truce in the period 1990–1995.

**2c. Truce re-creation: Activating joint panel evaluation (1995–2006).** To address these conflicts when projects were particularly complex and potentially contested, the marketing manager engaged in several trials in which he started to enact the success formula in a relational and collaborative way, rather than separately collecting the scores attributed by individual actors. Collaborative enactments of the success formula subroutine were activated only when needed, typically in projects that were highly contested due to their unclear Dream Factory or Efficient Factory nature. Actions performed by him and the other NPD staff re-created non-contested project evaluation after 1995. To align the actors, he began using an expert panel composed of NPD staff and Alessi area managers to evaluate the most contentious projects:

> All our area managers come to my office once a month for the evaluation panel. The other NPD staff rotate. . . . I keep prototypes of the projects that passed the desiderata stage on this table in my office. [Panel members] assign a score on each of the four dimensions. We comment on each other's scores, we discuss, we often adapt our initial assessment. Next, we assign the score for the R.U.De. [meeting]. (Marketing manager, #17)

This panel gave actors the opportunity to understand and influence each other. The marketing director's office, located in the Alessi Museum, was the venue for these meetings. Participants pulled out prior Alessi products during meetings and compared them with the prototypes under evaluation: "When we are at the museum, we go and get reference objects from the shelves in 95 percent of cases" (CEO's assistant, #27). By interacting, panel members could understand and align each other's positions, which helped to create shared appreciations for prototypes in assigning the score: "[Panel attribution of] the success formula score allows us to balance different product goals . . . [which have] different implications on the four dimensions of the [success]

formula'' (CEO, #3). Specifically,

> A common ''project culture'' emerged. . . . We're obviously human, therefore we always face our own technical and competence approach. However, a shared project culture started to connect our efforts. . . . Meeting together often for product evaluation helped us resolve several issues. We obviously kept our identity, and clearly [the CEO] and I tend to favor the designer's concept, while [NPD staff favor] functionality and cost. . . . [But] we walk out of those meetings with increased energy and confidence about our joint ability to get [the project] right. (CEO's assistant, #27)

The CEO realized that the score of successful Alessi products fell within given ranges of the four success formula dimensions (each having a 0–5 range, with total scores between 0 and 20): high on SMI and CL, but relatively lower in terms of function and affordable price. This range was defined by the CEO as the ''Alessi area,'' which he made explicit in an internal document dated October 1997. A new project could advance beyond prototype stage only if the panel-assigned score fell in this area. This facilitated the negotiation of new-product evaluations in the more-contested cases. A project scoring less than 13, the lower boundary of the Alessi area, would seldom progress. Yet if it was considered promising, panel participants initiated a discussion to decide if it could progress. A high design-oriented evaluation by the coordinator could be balanced with evidence of low price and function scores, placing a project outside the Alessi area (e.g., the fondue set by Botta, 1998). Alternatively, participants could balance low function and price scores by assigning higher SMI and CL scores, which allowed design-oriented actors to advocate for imaginative projects (e.g., Meda's hot plate, 1997). The rotating nature of the panel created junctures that aligned actors with conflicting points of view. The relational dimension of regularly meeting in an informal setting was central: ''Depending on the importance of the project, I can fit between five and 30 people [in the panel]: it will always yield a balanced assessment. . . . Sometimes I even asked some of the janitors to participate, and in the interaction their opinion became more salient than that of an area manager!'' (marketing manager, #18).

NPD staff regulated the project evaluation sequence by activating the panel—rather than the individual—attribution of the score for contentious new projects. The individual evaluation, which created relational problems in the previous period between participants supporting either the Dream Factory or the Efficient Factory, was used for all other projects. The activating actions that we traced allowed actors to switch on the panel evaluation as needed, thereby reducing conflicts and re-creating the truce between actors who supported conflicting goals.

### Narrative 3: Regulating the Color Development Routine in Project Development

**3a. Original truce: Designers proposing non-contested design-oriented color definition (1970–1990).** The status and centrality of the designer in the early original truce period were also pervasive in the final project development sequence. The goal of project development activities, such as color development, was to make designers feel in control even in this later NPD stage: ''Our

attitude toward color development was that the designer is always right. Our goal was to make the designer happy'' (product manager, #16). Cost and time were unimportant when the designer asked to develop new colors: ''It did not matter how long it would take, or how much it would cost'' (supplier 3, #50). When a new product was selected, Alessi's product manager sent the designer a formal request for color definition. Designers indicated the color they wanted by attaching a color sample to their drawings. An NPD engineer said, ''In this period [1970–1990], designers frequently indicated colors on any kind of material: a piece of paper, a piece of plastic, or a piece of fabric. For his new coffee maker . . . [designer] gave us a piece of the tiles he was using for building one of his clients' houses. We went to the house to better understand what he wanted'' (engineer 2, #33).

These suggestions were costly to replicate but were considered necessary to retain designers' freedom. This process pushed new projects toward a Dream Factory enactment. As one of Alessi's suppliers told us, ''[T]his approach resulted in the proliferation of new colors tailored to designers' creative needs . . . but neither designers nor engineers cared about costs and lead time. . . . They all agreed that this was the way to go'' (supplier 1, #48). Conflicts on product development were focused on the task and perceived as enhancing project quality: ''Our job was the outcome of this dialectic, which was focused on the project, generating positive energy, not conflict. Our excellent project outcomes resulted from the interaction of both design and production forces in the field'' (CEO's assistant, #27).

**3b. Truce breakdown: NPD staff forcing choice among existing colors (1990–1995).** Growing Efficient Factory enactments influenced changes in downstream project development actions such as color development. Alessi's NPD staff started to force designers to adopt existing colors already used in past Alessi products, as an alternative to a new color that the designer identified, which had been the dominant approach in the previous phase. The engineer or product manager showed Alessi's catalog to the designer or brought Alessi objects to product development meetings (minutes of meetings). Next, a conflicted negotiation started between Alessi staff and the designer to establish convergence. The designer invariably intended to develop a tailored new color: ''We told them: 'We already have these three reds, please choose from here,' and they replied: 'oh well, I'll do the fourth one'!'' (procurements manager, #23). In contrast, NPD staff needed to balance the designer's ideas with cost and lead time. These efficiency-oriented attempts at pushing existing colors created clashes between designers and Alessi's engineers and color suppliers. Designers often rejected Alessi's suggestions to adopt existing dyes because they felt those limitations reduced their creative freedom: ''I'm sorry, but standardizing colors of metal rings would deteriorate the design. Please proceed in developing colors as I suggested'' (designer 5, internal document). Engineers reported difficulty ''in imitating the reference designer's sample'' (internal document). Designers were unhappy about the reduced ability to match colors with their original ideas: ''We often started from a sample, [but] they could never get the right color. They drove me crazy, there were always . . . a bunch of problems'' (designer 2, #41). Some designers took offense at engineers' suggestion to select a color used by other designers:

''They seldom said that explicitly, but clearly when we showed them [an existing object from the Alessi catalog] the reaction sometimes was: 'How dare you suggest this rubbish for my matchless new project?''' (engineer 1, #32). These frictions show that color definition had become a highly contested phase of NPD.

**3c. Truce re-creation: Repressing autonomous designers' color definition through ''color box'' joint color selection (1995–2006).** To manage these problems, Alessi staff started to switch off contentious NPD actions in the project development phase when they were not needed. We here provide details of how the switching off of certain color-development activities—which we label as ''repressing''—emerged and functioned in the product-development subroutine. When Efficient Factory enactments emerged in 1990, Alessi NPD staff started to propose existing colors to designers, which created contention. To reduce conflict in the color development subroutine, some designers tried to experiment with alternative solutions. They asked if the color experiments they proposed could be systematically collected and filed with colors of existing Alessi products, to facilitate comparison and selection. We traced the first trial of this new approach to color definition in a fax that a designer sent to an Alessi engineer in December 1995: ''Dear [engineer], I sent you 'fluo' colors for a new project: What happened to them? Were they discarded? If not, is it possible to see a plastic sample of them? If we pursued these insignificant experiments systematically, and filed them, when we need a new color it would already be formulated and ready for inspection.''

To pursue this and other trials performed by designers and engineers, Alessi's product manager asked a consultant to develop a structured color filing system to ease the interaction between designers and engineers in selecting colors. It comprised thousands of color tags—over 100 for each color—in a ''color box'' that displayed all colors Alessi had developed: ''We have samples of all colors we make. In 25 separate boxes, we have all our colors. In practice, they are plastic samples, eight by eight centimeters. For each one, we have both the polished and the satin version, made by our suppliers'' (product manager, #9). The color box facilitated a flexible approach to color development, which showed us that who was performing the color-definition routine mattered in determining outcomes. Engineers used it for more-efficient color development, while designers could use it to enhance their creativity by sifting through hundreds of colors, nuances, and finishes: ''The principle behind the color box is flexibility in color development: when the designer asks for a specific color, it provides a reference template; we start from the most similar we have, to develop the nuance he requires. But you can use it to say: we already have 12 reds; please, designer, select from here!'' (procurements manager, #22).

Alessi's product manager and engineers used the color box depending on a project's needs: ''The 'color box' was meant to facilitate the designer's job and to develop objects that match with each other. Yet bringing it [to the designer] is also a powerful weapon for us engineers to repress excessive and costly color proliferation'' (engineer 3, #34). When an Efficient Factory approach was needed, using the color box allowed engineers to deactivate the traditional approach. When a Dream Factory approach was appropriate, it provided

hundreds of color alternatives and nuances to inspire designers' suggestions or to help engineers and color suppliers reliably develop the colors that designers suggested. An engineer explained:

> It depends on the specific project . . . this is the box of greens I'll show [designer] tomorrow. . . . How is it possible that you [designer] cannot find "your" green among these? . . . [I]t can happen that the designer says: "No, I want a new color." For specific project reasons, this *could be* acceptable. With the "box" in front of us we discuss, we negotiate, we find an agreement. But, at least, we do not always have to develop 10 new colors for each new object we make! . . . In the past, we [engineers] depended entirely on the designer's will in determining color. We now have a more balanced interaction and [the color box] helps us. We can use it to force a predetermined choice. [Designers] can use it to more easily and convincingly translate whatever awkward idea they have in mind. . . . We have more power now. (Engineer 2, #33)

One engineer spoke of "reduced skepticism" and "greater readiness" in describing how designers took Alessi's suggestions based on color box samples compared with the previous approach of showing existing products (engineer 3, #35). The color box became a repository that helped resolve actors' conflicting viewpoints on new projects. When proposed by designers, it enhanced rather than upset their creativity and design orientation. As one designer observed, "No, I don't feel constrained. [The color box] provides so many alternatives that you often don't need to spend the time to work on your own [color] proposal" (designer 5, #46).

Using the color box, engineers and designers developed stronger interpersonal connections. When they sifted through the hundreds of color tags in the box, color development actions were apparently more personal than role-based, allowing these individuals to work through their differences while taking each other's point of view:

> Using the color box turns the engineer into a "collective agent" with an ability to achieve harmony with the project elements and people involved in the NPD process. A necessary condition, along with talent, is the capacity to relate with the production team . . . a form of receptivity and mutual understanding with the other members of the team and the designers. (Product manager, #9)

Engineers and designers who knew and liked each other were more likely to overcome the tensions created by conflicting viewpoints in the project origination phase. The positive personal relationships facilitated by discussing colors around the color box created an open, friendly atmosphere, which worked as a juncture for addressing and solving contrasts. Negative relationships hindered negotiated solutions, so Alessi's NPD managers sought out good interpersonal ties when they matched engineers with designers: "I was assigned [Designer W] with whom I work well. Our CEO says: 'because I love [Designer A] or 'because I love [Designer B]. I could say: 'because I love [Designer W]! I like him as a person, he's one like us, somebody who 'I do my job and you do yours' . . . it's easy for us to solve issues related to our different standpoints" (engineer 1, #31). Alessi had found a way to enact connections between engineers and designers, which made it easier to balance conflicting goals by repressing costly color definition when it was not needed. These actions

reduced relationship contrasts between these groups and facilitated the emergence of shared enactments of the color development subroutine.

The three types of regulatory actions that we observed across the three narratives emerged to overcome the problems and barriers between design and efficiency goals. NPD participants performed different routine actions that created junctures that in turn allowed simultaneous and non-contested enactments of the Dream and Efficient Factory patterns: splicing actions in the workshop subroutine (project origination stage); activating actions in the success formula evaluation (project evaluation stage); and repressing actions in color development (project development stage). Previous attempts to reduce relational problems during the truce breakdown period had failed because actors who supported conflicting organizational goals continued to wield unilateral influence. In contrast, after 1995, enactments of Alessi's NPD routine allowed participants to recombine, or switch on or off, routine task actions depending on a project's circumstances. By performing these regulatory actions, participants unlocked relational connections that expanded the truce in the NPD routine, allowing them to maintain a generative level of contention and conflict between the Dream Factory and Efficient Factory patterns.

## UNPACKING THE THREE NARRATIVES

In the following analysis, we use evidence presented in the three narratives to show how an ecology of actions can turn organizational routines into a locus that allows participants to flexibly enact conflicting organizational goals. By separating the different types of action that we observed, we saw how splicing, activating, and repressing actions allowed participants to flexibly perform rather than suppress conflicting patterns of the NPD routine and balance the goals of the Dream Factory and the Efficient Factory. Our analysis, summarized in figure 2, identifies how effortful regulatory actions created junctures among participants that allowed them to start crafting a more flexible truce.

### Routine Regulation Is Embedded in an Ecology of Actions

Our data reveal the dynamism and emergent character of organizational life in which participants, by performing an ecology of actions, are able to manage rather than suppress conflicting organizational goals. In this ecology, regulatory actions allow participants to accomplish conflicting organizational goals with the same routine. Figure 2 summarizes the four types of routine actions that allowed Alessi's NPD routine participants to accomplish non-contested outcomes: (1) goal-neutral task actions, (2) goal-specific task actions, (3) trials, and (4) regulatory actions. Participants used the first two types of actions to develop new products. Through the other two types of actions, participants first experimented with new ways of enacting the two conflicting patterns to avoid tensions (trials) and later systematically enacted those ways that proved effective in avoiding tension (regulatory actions). Through regulatory actions, participants then directed the performance of the routine toward either the Dream Factory or the Efficient Factory, while also reducing contention and conflict between participants.

Goal-neutral task actions are essential to accomplishing the routine's task regardless of the goal. At Alessi, these actions were enacted to develop new products. In the workshop routine, for instance, activities such as a group

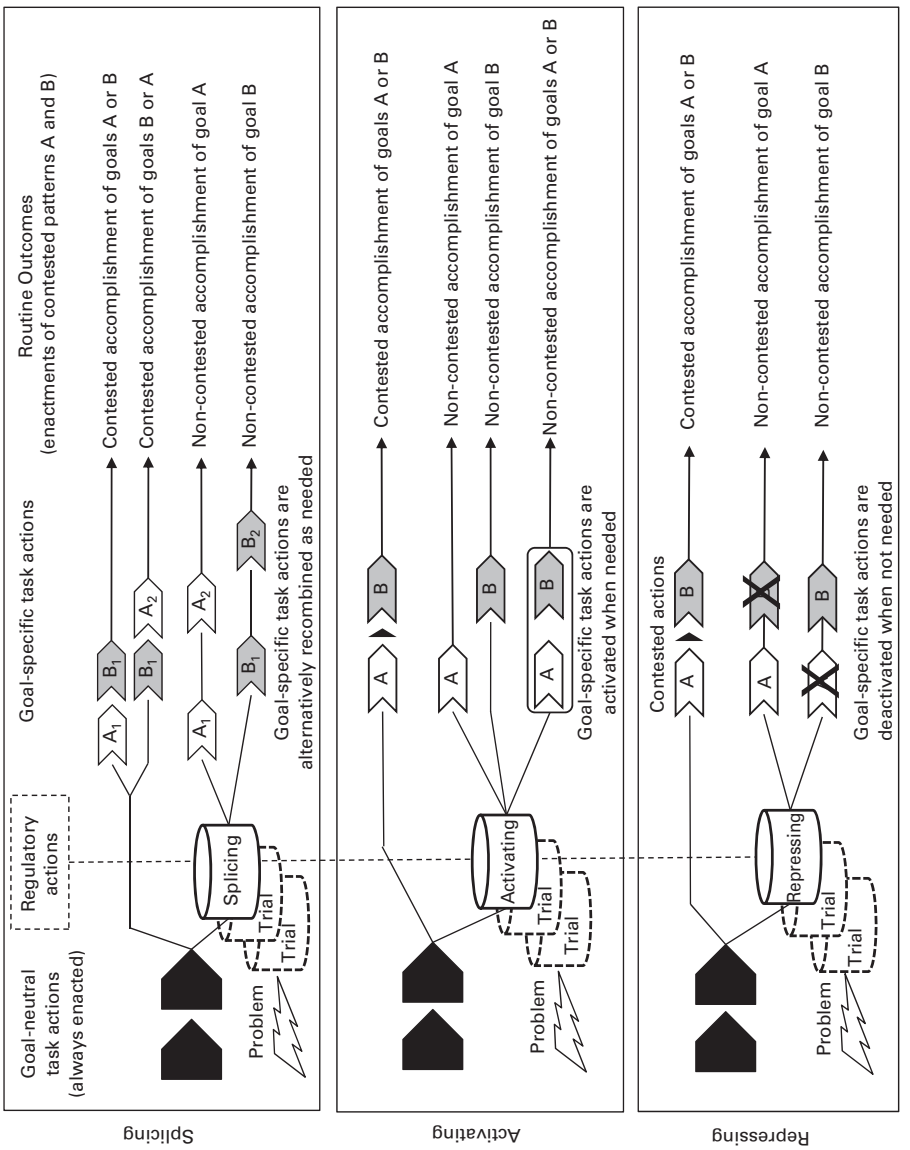



**Figure 2. Visual representation of three regulatory routine actions.**

brainstorming session around preliminary design ideas were always performed. In the success formula subroutine, we traced activities such as development of a desiderata document and of a product prototype in all projects.

Goal-specific task actions are also essential to accomplishing the routine's task, but they contribute to enacting a specific goal. At Alessi, these actions were performed to direct product development toward realizing exclusive objects (Dream Factory) or affordable ones (Efficient Factory). In the workshop, for instance, guest presentations by poets or anthropologists contributed to enacting the workshop toward a Dream Factory goal, while presentations by Alessi's operations manager oriented enactments toward an Efficient Factory goal. These modular actions could also be recombined to enact conflicting patterns and goals. In color development, the autonomous definition of colors by designers enacted the Dream Factory pattern, while engineers imposing existing Alessi colors enacted the Efficient Factory pattern.

Trials are actions that allow participants to experiment with new ways of enacting the routine to balance the potential tensions between conflicting, goal-specific task actions. To balance the conflict between Dream Factory and Efficient Factory actions, the CEO and workshop coordinator tried to jointly discuss the orientation of each new project, which later resulted in the enactment of the workshop brief as part of the workshop routine. Similarly, some external designers suggested filing both existing colors and designers' autonomous color proposals, which later resulted in the development of the color box. These trials were performed by routine participants at all levels in the organizational hierarchy: the CEO initiated splicing trials in collaboration with the workshop coordinator; the marketing manager attempted the first activating trials; and external designers collaborated with engineers on repressing trials.

Regulatory actions, which emerged through trials, oriented routine enactments toward either goal by splicing, activating, and repressing goal-specific task actions. With the workshop brief, for instance, Alessi's staff spliced workshop task actions based on the requirements of a specific project. By selecting alternative project assessment methods—individual or panel—participants activated the evaluation approach that was deemed most suitable to each new project. Finally, the color box allowed Alessi's product manager and engineers to repress the costly autonomous definition of new colors by designers when such a complex approach was not needed. As figure 2 illustrates, after the first trials and experiments, participants saw regulatory actions as part of the repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions that created and re-created the routine. Unlike task-routine actions, they did not directly contribute to the development of new design objects; instead, they recombined the task actions that did so. Regulatory actions created junctures that introduced the opportunity for people with conflicting points of view to get together and turn their conflicts into generative interactions. Performing regulatory actions made the underlying truce more flexible by turning relational barriers into junctures for finding common ground. Therefore different combinations of actions yielded two different types of routine outcomes: non-contested and contested accomplishment of goals.

### Truce Dynamics and Truce Flexibility

The actions taken to accomplish the specific routine tasks also produced and reproduced the routine as truce. The ecology of actions described above

captured how the truce did not turn into a rigid entity but was enacted with increasing flexibility. By identifying different types of actions in the ecology, we traced how the truce gradually broke down and actors at different hierarchical levels engaged in strategies of action that dynamically accommodated tension and problems between routine participants. These performances constituted a process of effortful truce-making through which the participants were actively building and expanding the truce. These performances also provided opportunities for actors to experience conflict differently and build flexible truces by interrelating their actions. Flexible truces were thus patterns that emerged out of accommodations involving a myriad of situated individuals rather than an entity implemented by a top manager. Had we focused only on goal-neutral task actions and goal-specific task actions, however, we could not have revealed how trials and later regulatory routine actions created junctures within the routine that allowed routine participants to craft flexible truces.

By enacting a flexible truce, the organizational actors balanced the conflicts between the organizational goals by privileging open participation and constructive conflict, which facilitated relational junctures that allowed contrast to become part of the patterning of routines. This tendency is demonstrated in the joint workshop briefs, for instance, in which the interactions between the actors involved were characterized by both top-down and bottom-up suggestions, openness, and generative divergence, which allowed them to collaborate. Likewise, the enactments of the panel in the success formula were characterized by openness, wide participation, and healthy disagreement, and enactments of the color box were marked by partnerships and receptiveness to alternative ideas that made conflicts generative. The possibility that participants have to accommodate conflicting goals within the boundaries of a given truce changes as they experiment and flexibly renegotiate what it means to comply with the truce. At Alessi, these actions managed conflicts by introducing an orientation toward relational openness and a willingness to influence and be influenced by other actors. Stronger connections between actors with conflicting viewpoints facilitated a mutual understanding of the conflicting organizational goals, in turn permitting a flexible truce to emerge.

## DISCUSSION

This paper explores how organizational routines become sites for managing organizational goal conflict. In the management literature, there are two traditional ways to deal with organizational goal conflict. One way is to eliminate conflict by separating the enactment of goals. Another is to reduce conflict though managerial intervention. We elaborated a third view by highlighting how an ecology of actions performed to accomplish organizational routines can play a fundamental role in managing goal conflict. We showed how regulatory actions can be a means for regulating conflicting goals and creating flexible truces. A flexible truce made it easier for the members of Alessi to take actions that enacted the two conflicting goals in a generative way. The label ''routine regulation'' captures the process in which routines are actively directed. Regulatory actions can direct routines in many ways to accomplish different outcomes. In this study, we documented how routines were directed toward managing organizational goal conflict.

This study makes three contributions. First, it extends the literature on routine dynamics (Feldman, 2000; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Feldman et al., 2016) by showing that routine actions can be a generative resource for managing conflicting goals through regulatory actions that cultivate junctures between actors distributed across the organization. Second, it develops a performative understanding of truce and conflict management in routines by reconceptualizing the routine as truce (Nelson and Winter, 1982) as a dynamic and flexible process. Third, it adds an agentic perspective to the cognitive, structural, and temporally oriented conversation in organization studies, strategic management, and organizational sociology about how people in organizations constructively deal with conflicting organizational goals.

### Routine Actions Can Be a Generative Resource for Managing Conflicting Goals

Our research shows how a routine's participants can manage conflicting organizational goals by taking regulatory actions that embrace the conflict, rather than avoiding or resisting it (Pratt and Pradies, 2011; Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016). The longitudinal design was essential to our discovery of regulatory actions because it made us consider a broader ecology of actions in Alessi's new product development routine. Had we used a shorter timeframe we would most likely have focused only on goal-neutral task actions and goal-specific task actions, which would have prevented us from noticing how trials and later regulatory routine actions allowed routine participants to craft flexible truces. So far only a few empirical studies have started to show how routine enactments may enable actors to cope with conflicting organizational goals (Birnholtz, Cohen, and Hoch, 2007; Turner and Rindova, 2012; D'Adderio, 2014; Danner-Schröder and Geiger, 2016; Spee, Jarzabkowski, and Smets, 2016). Further, this existing work has only started to capture the importance of looking at a broader ecology of actions (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). The dynamic relationship we traced among problems, trials, regulatory actions, and junctures identifies a new type of actions (regulatory actions) that has escaped research attention. Regulatory actions highlight two undertheorized features of how action is central to managing conflicting goals.

First, action taken in routines accomplishes multiple purposes. People take action to accomplish specific tasks and organizational goals such as developing new products, but they can also reproduce friendships, conflicts, truces, and other organizational features as they do so (Feldman, 2016). Regulatory actions directed at dealing with specific problems can shape routine performances to accomplish conflicting goals. Our study suggests that if organizational members create junctures where everyone has a voice, and they interact to build mutual understanding across boundaries, routines become a flexible means for accomplishing conflicting goals. As other work on the dynamics of routines has documented, the quality of the interactions between participants matters a great deal because they constitute the basic building blocks for maintaining conflicting goals within the routine (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002). At Alessi, regulatory actions enhanced the connections among NPD routine participants. Stronger interpersonal junctures enabled them to acknowledge and embrace the two conflicting organizational goals and to enact courses of action that accomplished both (Ashforth et al., 2014). Interpersonal junctures are points or

moments in a relationship between specific routine participants in which a deeper bond is established. The juncture allows one person to develop respect and understanding for a position or goal supported by a second person that is in opposition or conflict with a position or goal supported by the first person.

Second, regulatory actions can alter participation in the routine from an individual experience to an intersubjective experience because such actions transform the barriers between participants focused on conflicting goals into junctures that allow them to flexibly negotiate which goal they should enact in each performance of the routine (Quick and Feldman, 2014). This alteration occurs as routine participants build strong mutual relations (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002; Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton, 2011; Turner and Rindova, 2012) and have face-to-face encounters (Birnholtz, Cohen, and Hoch, 2007; D'Adderio, 2014) that allow them to create interpersonal junctures where organizational goal conflict is worked out. Through these connections they develop a shared understanding of the joint goal and of the best way to accomplish it (Bechky, 2003). For instance, people at Alessi found ways to enact the two conflicting organizational goals in the NPD routine by performing regulatory actions that encouraged connections among the participants and provided opportunities to re-experience, or experience differently, the conflict between enacting the Dream Factory and the Efficient Factory. These actions resemble the boundary work practices traced by Quick and Feldman (2014) in the context of public problems in which different and often conflicting goals meet. In this context, boundary work allows actors to translate across differences in goals, align such differences to enhance connections across them, and reduce contentious differences and boundaries that have been enacted as barriers. Similarly, at Alessi regulatory routine actions taken to address particular problems created a more dynamic truce, suggesting that participants can enact a routine in ways that affect the potential for conflict and how that conflict can be enacted through the routine. Our study of Alessi extends existing research by showing how junctures play out in the context of organizational routines and truce dynamics.

### Truce as Process: A Performative View of Truce and Conflict Management in Routines

Nelson and Winter's (1982) model of the routine as truce assumes that long periods of stability are interrupted by brief periods of change during which senior management interventions reconfigure the truce (Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010; Kaplan, 2015). As a contrast, our study shows ongoing truce dynamics. The new truce that emerged at Alessi was not an episodic entity implemented by a senior manager to eliminate goal conflict. Instead, the truce emerged through an effortful process of truce-making involving many participants. The outcome of this process was not necessarily a consensual agreement but a willingness to make concessions. In this view, organizational routines are not static but are processual accomplishments that emerge through their own enactment. Like a complex system that never reaches equilibrium (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997), the truce as process stays constantly poised between stability and flexibility, thereby remaining sufficiently inflexible so that the known pattern of the routine can be performed but not so inflexible that experimentation and accommodations cannot be used to accomplish conflicting goals.

Our study proposes a performative model of the routine as truce, in which actors continuously respond to problems by taking regulatory actions that create junctures between individuals supporting conflicting goals, thereby embracing conflict and keeping the truce balanced, flexible, and alive. This process conceptualization offers a foundation for revisiting the assumption that routines as truces ''show us how firms avoid conflict'' (Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010: 957). When the routine as truce is seen as a process, participants take actions that dynamically accommodate tension and problems between them. Conflict is not suppressed or eliminated by the truce but is embraced, and the truce is actively built and expanded by routine participants engaging in effortful relating and regulatory actions. In this view, a flexible truce is actively emerging out of regulatory actions.

According to the traditional view of routines, individuals with conflicting orientations agree to perform specific actions and not to interfere in the jurisdiction of the others. The set of actions that each group of participants performs in parallel represents a ''zone of discretion'' (Nelson and Winter, 1982: 108) in which the group has some autonomy to perform the routine while other groups mutually agree not to interfere (Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010: 963). As a result, conflicts remain latent and routine performances tend to be stable. When conflict levels cannot be addressed within the boundaries of the zone of discretion, senior managers need to intervene (Kaplan, 2015).

By contrast, participants at Alessi took action to create a highly flexible truce through which they could balance conflicting organizational goals without the need for episodic top management intervention. That is not to say that the CEO did not act, but the actions of many other actors were also important. Our focus on actions and the relationship between problems and trials, regulatory actions, and junctures allowed us to trace the specific regulatory actions through which participants accomplished this performative outcome. NPD routine participants with conflicting goal orientations continued to operate in parallel in their zones of discretion. Engineers and suppliers performed task actions oriented toward production efficiency, while the workshop coordinator and designers pursued the goal of exclusive design, yet actors also developed and performed a set of joint regulatory actions through which they could find common ground. In contrast to the zones of discretion, the performance of regulatory actions created zones of jointly constructed flexibility in which actors took action to create junctures and bridges between different groups of participants supporting different organizational goals, enabling flexibility and collaboration and allowing performances to be inclusive and to cross jurisdictional boundaries. A zone of jointly constructed flexibility is a collective and shared space in which participants engage in trials and regulatory actions to expand the truce to accommodate moves that would otherwise generate truce-breaking conflicts. In this view, the truce is not constructed from the outside by senior managers but is an effortful accomplishment constructed by local participants.

The junctures and zones of flexibility that are co-created by specific routine participants may crack, however, if the specific participants involved change. Therefore, our study not only corroborates the role of individual agency in determining routine dynamics advanced by the literature on routine dynamics, but it further suggests that the specific actors who perform a routine, and their relationships with other specific participants, are essential to determining their capacity to systematically manage the routine's conflicting goals.

## Coping with Organizational Goal Conflict through Agency

The agentic perspective of our study offers a corrective to two prevailing assumptions in organization studies about how organizations deal with conflicting goals and opposing social phenomena. The first is that solutions to conflict are largely structural and cognitive, and opposing forces need to be separated through structural or cognitive means. Smets et al.'s (2015) study of reinsurance trading in Lloyd's of London showed how individuals used micro-structural and cognitive strategies to manage competing logics and their shifting salience in their everyday work. Although this work shifts the focus away from senior managers providing solutions to conflicting goals, it remains structural and cognitive. We build on this work by also arguing that it is necessary to focus more on how front-line workers and middle managers contribute to managing conflicting demands. Our study shows how the distributed membership of an organization can be a new and more agentic medium for coping with opposing social phenomena. A focus on agency is important for several reasons. By largely relying on structural and cognitive responses to goal conflict and contradictions, prior research has largely delegated the initiative of finding ways to cope with opposing forces to the upper echelon of the organization, leaving the role of agency across the organization in the shadows (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; March, 2008). Further, cognitive and structural responses need to be turned into situated practice, which is often far from simple because new tensions often surface when people take action (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Routine regulation generates distributed opportunities for coping with conflict. Along with other work (D'Adderio, 2014; Bertels, Howard-Grenville, and Pek, 2016; Spee, Jarzabkowski, and Smets, 2016), we show that the actions people take matter in how conflict within routines gets worked out. The performative perspective we offer highlights the ongoing agentic work that is required to enact conflicting goals.

The second assumption is that routines are obstacles for accomplishing conflicting goals. In contrast to scholars who conceptualize routines as inertial structures that generate pressure for minimizing internal conflict (Smith, 2014), we provide evidence consistent with the literature on routine dynamics that routines are generative sources for counteracting inertia (Feldman et al., 2016). This evidence indicates that actors who enact routines can engage in flexible performances that allow organizations to adapt to particular circumstances. Our study introduced regulatory actions to explain how actors can create and recreate routines to enact conflicting organizational goals within a single routine.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

We have intentionally prioritized the role of action over the role of context in explaining how participants balance conflicting goals in organizational routines. It is possible, however, that the openness and interaction between actors that helped create the junctures that facilitated the simultaneous enactment of both the Dream and the Efficient Factory already existed in Alessi's organizational design and culture. Future research could investigate how culture and structure interact with or even substitute for regulatory actions in addressing conflicting organizational goals (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011; Howard-Grenville et al., 2016). Another limitation concerns the transferability of findings from a

single case. We selected Alessi because its uniqueness made the processes of routine regulation and truce dynamics more pertinent for examination. The study of Alessi provided a unique introduction to these phenomena and facilitated developing rich theory (Bamberger and Pratt, 2010). Because the importance of dealing with competing demands has been documented in a broad range of contexts (Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016; Schad et al., 2016), we believe routine regulation and flexible truces are widely applicable practices for managing organizational goal conflict—including goal conflict, hybridity, and paradoxes—in different types of organizations.

Routine regulation contributes to the literature on organizational routines by developing a process-oriented understanding of truce and conflict management that is grounded in what people do. But more work is needed to understand how the pacing and temporality of routine regulation create truce dynamics and flexible truces that unfold over hours, weeks, and days, rather than years and decades, and with varying and changing sets of actors (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2017: 334). We also need to know whether flexible truces are created and maintained at different levels and locations in organizations, and whether the rhythm and tempo of truce dynamics follow similar patterns in a given context. Finally, research needs to determine whether other types of regulatory actions exist beyond the three uncovered in this study (e.g., splicing, activating, and repressing) and whether routine regulation can direct routines toward other outcomes than managing conflicting organizational goals.

There is plenty of exciting work to be done, but, as a new construct, routine regulation provides a welcome opportunity for moving more agentic solutions to opposing social phenomena to center stage in organization theory, sociology, and strategic management. Embracing this opportunity allows scholars to relax the tendency to impose structural, cognitive, and temporal solutions to opposing social phenomena and to explore the microfoundation of organizational conflict through a process- and practice-based perspective.

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