

The Creation and Development of an Interest Group: Life at the Intersection of Big Business and Education Reform

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Responding to calls from the president of the United States and the Business Roundtable, business leaders have become increasingly involved in setting the education reform agenda. Using five interest group theories and longitudinal data, the authors examined the formation, agenda setting, and maintenance of an organization of business leaders. Moderate support was found for each of the theories. Analyses further revealed that policy interests and to a lesser degree, functional interests were important to the formation and activity of the interest group. To forge successful partnerships and to implement effective reform, educators, policy makers, and researchers must better understand the motives and actions that impel business involvement in education.

On the basis of assumed relationships between the success of the public education system and the U.S. economy, American government and business leaders sounded a call for improved schools in the name of the nation's

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economic well-being (Business Roundtable [BRT], 1990, 1992; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 1982). As a result, business leaders have formed coalitions and interest groups in nearly every state, aiming to wield influence in the education policy arena. This newfound role of business persists, despite much debate, controversy, and skepticism (Borman, Castenell, & Gallagher, 1993; Cuban, 1992; Kozol, 1991; Ray & Mickelson, 1990).

Responding to a decree from the BRT and the president of the United States, corporations in a midwestern state, like those in many other states across the country, joined together with the goal of influencing the educational policy-making process. Originally composed of 7 chief executive officers (CEOs) from the largest corporations in the state, and later growing to as many as 13, this coalition of business leaders, named Corporations for the Improvement of Educational Quality (CIEQ; a pseudonym), embarked on a 10-year commitment to improve public schooling in their state. Since its inception, CIEQ set an agenda for action, maintained and added to its membership, and became active in the state policy arena.

Attention should be paid to this type of group for three reasons, each related to its potential to wield considerable power and resources for education reform. First, the groups have high-level support for their involvement. These groups comprise blue chip companies charged by the BRT and then-President Bush to become involved in education reform by establishing coalitions with their governors to carry out state and local education reform. Second, the groups are broadly connected and influential at all levels of government, from local property tax assessors to state and federal officials. These large corporations span state and national boundaries in their scope and influence; such corporations are involved in issue networks on a myriad of issues (e.g., tax, health care, environmental law). Hence, the lobbying arms are well established and connected. Third, the financial resources available are sizable. CIEQ's annual budget is more than \$250,000, with each corporation paying substantial annual dues. These financial resources are spent on a combination of institutionalized operating costs (including a full-time executive director), information gathering, and information dissemination to other business and the general public. This combination of resources places CIEQ in the "privileged position of business" (Lindblom, 1977), enabling it to wield considerable power and potentially exert strong political influence when it chooses to do so. It is this potential to exert influence, combined with the widespread mistrust of business involving itself in issues of education, that make this study important.

Business involvement in local, state, and federal policy making is not new; in fact, students of public policy find it difficult to ignore the influence of business in nearly all aspects of public policy. But, for political and organi-

zational scholars, questions of how and why businesses unite to influence policy persist, or as Plotke (1992) states, "the reality of business mobilization . . . is not in question; the problem is how to explain it" (p. 178). In trying to better understand business involvement in education policy, Plotke argues against a rationalistic economic explanation and for a political view. He contends that business makes a series of political judgments about economic choices as they try to improve the general climate for business. Plotke's view suggests an array of motivations for business people becoming involved in education reform, ranging from individual gain to broad societal improvement. How such groups, like those established by business leaders in the late 1980s, form and maintain their organization, mobilize their resources, and ultimately influence education policy is not well understood. The purpose of this study is to respond to three research questions: (a) How and why did CIEQ form? (b) How did CIEQ set its agenda? (c) How has CIEQ maintained its membership?

INTEREST GROUP THEORIES: FORMATION, AGENDA SETTING, AND MAINTENANCE

Conceptualizations of interest groups are an outgrowth of organization theory, the key difference being the addition of an overt and sometimes covert mission to influence decisions external to the organization. We use a broad definition proposed by Thomas and Hrebener (1992) that an interest group is "any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, that attempts to influence public policy" (p. 153). This definition makes few assumptions regarding interest groups, their memberships, or their ideologies. CIEQ, with its stated mission of becoming a catalyst to influence state educational policy, clearly falls under the definition of an interest group without relying on empirically untested assumptions. We do not generically judge interest groups to be either a negative or positive influence, but simply an important influence in the policy-making process, worthy of study and attention (Petracca, 1992; Walker, 1991).

Five theories are used to examine and interpret the formation, agenda setting, and maintenance of CIEQ: Truman's (1951) order and disturbance, Olson's (1965) by-product, Salisbury's (1969) exchange, Sabatier's (1992) commitment, and McFarland's (1987, 1992) countervailing power. These theories are not mutually exclusive with regard to the motivations of individuals to form and join groups, make group decisions, and maintain membership. Rather, each theory offers substantive and differing perspectives on interest groups and is widely represented in the literature. Likewise, the three

guiding issues in this study—how interest groups form, set their agendas, and maintain their membership—are fundamental to any interest group and are consistently addressed by each of the various theories. Table 1 summarizes the relationships between the questions and theories that form the centerpiece of this study. The five theories are set in columns across the top with the three organizing questions down the left side of the table. Within each cell of the matrix, brief statements summarize how the respective theories address each question.

Interest Group Formation

Order and disturbance theory (Truman, 1951) states that humans are group oriented and that organizations commonly arise through the natural interaction of people with similar beliefs and interests. Therefore, a variety of groups will form around different sides of an issue, creating a naturally balanced and pluralistic approach to policy influence and policy making. Interest group formation is particularly prevalent when societal disturbances threaten the issues of concern to groups or individuals; external threats serve to heighten the interest of groups or individuals and thus also their propensity to interact and form organizations.

The basic premise of Sabatier's (1992) commitment theory is that group organizers are more devoted or extreme in regard to a particular issue than are typical individuals. This view also adheres to the pluralistic view of political activity. Strong conviction to a topic motivates individuals to engage in political action and to exert the time, energy, and effort necessary to form an interest group (McCloskey, Hoffman, & O'Hara, 1960; Sabatier & McLaughlin, 1990). In addition, commitment theory posits that for these few individuals who believe so strongly in an issue, the supreme motivation is the realization of collective benefits, well beyond the participants' personal economic benefit. From the group of "potential partisans" (Gamson, 1968) or the "potential group" (Sabatier, 1992) (i.e., the population of people who stand to benefit from interest group activity), leaders seek additional membership and support. Like order and disturbance theory, commitment theory need not rely on successful attainment of the policy goal. Working toward the achievement of the goal is sufficient to entice persons to join.

In contrast, by-product theory (Olson, 1965) asserts that individuals primarily act rationally on behalf of their own interests to maximize their own well-being. Therefore, it is not rational for individuals to join most interest groups, particularly large groups, because collective benefits from group activity are as likely to accrue to nonmembers as to members of the organization. Olson labels this the "free-rider problem." Olson believes that

TABLE 1
Research Questions and Interest Group Theories

<i>How Do Interest Groups . . .</i>	<i>Order and Disturbance</i>	<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Theories</i>		
			<i>By-Product</i>	<i>Exchange</i>	<i>Countervailing Power</i>
Form?	As a result of natural interaction and/or societal disturbance	To act on heightened personal interest in a particular issue	To maximize personal gain, also for political motivations in some cases	To maximize personal gain in exchange of involvement and leadership	To react to the dominant voice of well-organized interest groups
Set their agendas?	Naturally forming, based on common political views	Set by the most committed members	Set as a result of input from political members	Set by entrepreneurs and political members	Set in contrast to dominant groups
Maintain their organization?	Involvement reflects continued interaction and disturbance	Involvement reflects degree of interest	Involvement reflects political and economic benefits received	Involvement reflects benefits received	Involvement reflects continued presence of issue and opposing influence

NOTE: Sabatier (1992, p. 111) used a similarly constructed matrix that included four of the five theories and four different questions.

for groups to form, leadership must either provide sufficient selective benefits to members (i.e., benefits to which only members are entitled) or resort to coercion (e.g., closed shop policies and practices). Hence, group leaders must weigh the costs of attracting new members against the costs of sustaining their own interests and the interests of the group. Wider societal benefits are rendered only as by-products, once member needs and wants are satisfied. Additionally, individuals rarely join for purely political reasons (e.g., social and/or political causes) but typically join for reasons of personal gain (e.g., discounted insurance rates) or for some combination of economic and political motivations (Moe, 1980).

An expanded view of exchange theory broadens the central tenets and rationally based suppositions of by-product and early exchange theory. Proponents believe that exchange relationships between individuals and organizations may well have a purpose beyond the simple promotion of personal gain (Moe, 1980). More specifically, individuals may participate in a group because of its purposive political goals. That is, if the proposed collective political benefit is sufficient and in agreement with their individual interests, individuals are apt to form and join organizations. It remains, however, that members expect to succeed and garner the rewards of success, whether individually or collectively, economically or politically.

Finally, some interest groups form to provide countervailing power to groups that may be dominating an area of policy (McFarland, 1992). In contrast to the conception that better-organized special interests gradually secure control over an issue, resulting in a policy standstill dominated by elites, countervailing power theorists argue that individuals form and join groups in the hope of filling a void in the policy debate.

Interest Group Agenda Setting

Order and disturbance theory posits that agenda setting stems from discussion and prioritization of goals and ideals of the majority of the group membership. Should an individual's ideals differ significantly from the group's agenda, the individual would naturally give up membership and likely seek another group whose goals are more closely aligned with his or her own.

Commitment theory holds that the agenda of interest groups is clearly set by the highly committed leaders of the group. Others may join and attempt to influence the agenda of the leaders, although the issue areas are clearly laid out by the founders before membership becomes too large. Others will join on the basis of the leaders' stated goals and thus are unlikely to want to modify them.

By-product theory sees the agenda setting of interest groups as driven in part by the need to maximize individual interests and benefits. Group leaders must ensure that they provide sufficient selective benefit for all members and only thereafter—as a by-product—can the leaders establish and carry out an agenda for broader collective benefit. It is this interaction between the leadership and the policy oriented members that sets the formal external political agenda. However, this agenda can only be set and acted on once the functional incentives are deemed satisfactory by a sufficient number of members.

The recent formulation of exchange theory views rank-and-file members as interested and involved in the agenda-setting process. The exchange relationship does not necessarily revolve around personal economic gain by members, but may involve an exchange of effort and dues for a particular collective political purpose. This is not to say that personal gain does not apply, but rather, that researchers must carefully examine what members are seeking in exchange for their efforts.

For coalitions providing countervailing power, the agenda emerges from the common interests that brought the coalition together. Important to the formation of a group's agenda is the issue network in which the group is involved, including policy experts from government, business, academia, and the media. McFarland (1992) argues that portions of the issue network may coalesce to form an interest group. Therefore, the agenda for such a group is formed through the issue network and set in contrast to the prevailing agendas of dominant groups in the policy arena.

Maintenance of Interest Group Membership

Order and disturbance theory (Truman, 1951) hypothesizes that membership in an interest group will be maintained as long as the issue of concern is addressed or as long as the problem exists. In addition, the continued presence of an external threat to or societal disturbance of the group's ideals serves to strengthen the resolve of individuals and thus serves to maintain group membership.

The maintenance of interest groups, according to commitment theory, is predicated on the benefits offered to or accrued by individual members. Given that the leadership is more committed to the cause than the rank-and-file membership, the leaders will typically remain in their positions as long as they continue to be interested in the cause or policy issue and as long as the

issue is unresolved. To the extent that the leaders can persuade the membership that the cause is sufficiently important and the leaders can provide results (i.e., show evidence of progress), membership can be maintained. It is important to note that successful attainment of the group's goals is not necessary to maintain the group membership and would likely serve to reduce membership. It is continued progress toward the goal that is crucial to maintaining membership.

In by-product theory, maintaining group membership is contingent on the provision of sufficient economic and sometimes political incentives to its members. That is, individuals will maintain membership as long as their functional needs are satisfied, with the exception of those individuals who joined in part for policy interests. These politically motivated members will maintain membership only if their economic and political interests are met.

Issue networks also help to maintain interest groups (McFarland, 1992). Groups within issue networks "have a much easier time when it comes to organization and maintenance than do national voluntary groups funded by contributions from strangers unconnected to a network" (McFarland, 1992, p. 77). Communication becomes important in responding to the more powerful groups in a given policy area. McFarland's thesis implies that interest groups acting as a source of countervailing power will maintain themselves as long as their interests are represented in the policy process.

In summary, these five interest group theories describe a variety of reasons for interest group formation. Groups may have a strong interest in a particular issue or may form to benefit individuals financially or otherwise (e.g., in terms of esteem, social status). Individuals may join out of a heightened interest in a given policy (policy interests) or for personal or collective gain (functional interests). Interest group agendas are typically established around the political or civic views of the group and based on the ideas and convictions of the membership and perhaps invigorated by a need to fill a void in the larger issue network. However, some argue that interest groups must first attend to the functional needs of their membership, particularly the economic members. For without continued membership and support, the formation and implementation of the policy agenda may be a moot point. Similar to the general principles of interest group formation and agenda setting, group maintenance is contingent on continued policy interest or the receipt of functional benefit by the organization's leadership and membership. Whereas some argue that continued presence of policy interest or continued progress toward influencing and implementing the policy will satisfy individuals

enough to maintain their membership, others contend that participants need functional benefit or goal attainment (either in the form of personal economic gain or collective benefit) to maintain membership.

METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

Sample

Founded in late 1989 and formally organized in 1990, CIEQ consisted of 9 CEOs (including the presidents of a university and the state chamber of commerce), 11 working group members, and 5 university representatives. Having grown to as many as 13 companies in 1993, in 1996 CIEQ consisted of 11 corporations, the state chamber of commerce, and a university. There have been additional participants from the governor's office, the state department of education, and another education reform organization. Since CIEQ's inception, one original company has withdrawn and six have joined (one of which has since left).

Data Collection

The data for this study include participant observation, extensive documentation, and structured interviews with central figures within and outside CIEQ. The participant observation includes the ongoing involvement of the authors with CIEQ as education consultants. The formal role of the university is to "provide direct assistance in helping the working group generate, deliver and monitor new educational initiatives" and "continue to develop policy perspectives and analyses for the [CIEQ] reform agenda" (1996 CIEQ Strategic Plan, full text available from first author). The consultation began in 1990 and continues today. Two of the four current members of the research team have been involved since 1990. Their participation provided a consistent source of observations, notes, and experience with the group through attendance at all monthly working group meetings, CEO-governor meetings, periodic committee meetings, and the annual strategic planning retreats, in addition to formal and informal correspondence.

Documents were gathered from a variety of sources and catalogued by topic and date. They consist of CIEQ publications, position papers, press releases, speeches, memos, letters, and e-mail among and between individuals involved with CIEQ. Documents were used as sources of original data

and to triangulate interview and observation data for accuracy and consistency by providing technical information such as dates, membership information, policy statements, and internal communication. Furthermore, these data provide accurate and reliable information on the group's formal and informal policy positions and characteristics of the group membership and leadership.

Structured interviews provided the primary data source for this study, 48 of which were conducted with key members of CIEQ and select policy makers external to the organization. The research team first identified a list of 51 potential participants on the basis of past and present membership lists and knowledge of key participants and stakeholders involved in state policy making from 1989 to 1996. An introductory letter was mailed to each of the individuals explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to be interviewed. Several days after the letters were sent, follow-up telephone calls were made to inquire about their willingness to participate. If the respondent agreed to participate, a list of interview questions and an informed consent statement was faxed to them, both making clear that responses would be taperecorded and guaranteeing the respondent's anonymity. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with 15 original members of CIEQ (5 CEOs and 10 working-group members, including 3 representatives from the university not involved in this research), 13 later-joining members, 8 state legislators involved in the education policy debate, and 12 other individuals involved in the education policy arena (advisers to the governor; leaders of state associations of teachers, administrators, and school boards; leaders of other educational reform organizations; BRT leaders; and state department of education leaders).

Two distinct yet overlapping interview schedules were created for the structured interviews. The first was used for all past and present members of CIEQ and the second for individuals external to CIEQ. Each schedule consisted of several questions asked to all participants as well as a number of probes to use contingent on their responses to the structured questions. Some questions allowed for open-ended responses. Sample questions include the following: What were the primary factors in your company's decision to join CIEQ? What personal goals or motivations influenced your decision to join? What issues or conflicts have arisen over the direction of the effort? What have been the most important successes in CIEQ's history? To whom do you attribute those successes? What role, if any, should business assume in promoting education reform? Has CIEQ been influential in promoting school reform in this state? The length of the interviews ranged from 15 to

70 minutes (mean length was approximately 25 minutes), depending largely on the familiarity of the individual with the history, operations, and influence of CIEQ. Thirty-two of 48 interviews (67%) were conducted over the telephone and 16 conducted in person. All but one of the interviews were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed. One respondent declined to be tape-recorded and so extensive notes were taken. To maintain confidentiality and to reduce bias, each transcript was assigned a random identification number and each organization was assigned a random identification letter prior to coding.

Data Analysis

Interview transcript coding sheets were based on the categories in Table 1. The unit of analysis for this study was not the individual participant, but rather, thoughts and phrases. Hence, each respondent had items coded for one or more of the five theories used in this study for each of the three central questions. All appropriate items were coded first by which of the three questions they addressed and then by which of the five theories (if any) they supported. The coding was conducted by two researchers and then checked by a third to ensure an acceptable degree of reliability among raters. Additionally, documents and researcher notes were used to corroborate or refute interview statements. In the results below, when reference is made to a specific quotation, the identification number is reported in place of the respondent's name. All identifiable references to respondents and organizations are removed to maintain anonymity.

Researcher Bias

The involvement of the authors with CIEQ raises inevitable tradeoffs in conducting research such as this. On one hand, being close to the group's leadership and membership inevitably subjects us to a certain degree of bias in our analysis. On the other, our position has provided us with access to people, documents, and events in addition to a high degree of trust unavailable to persons outside the organization. Researcher bias in interpreting and analyzing the data was checked in a variety of ways. First, the data were triangulated (when possible) by comparing data in its different forms (interviews, documents, and participant notes). Second, a researcher outside the research team reviewed our analyses. Finally, the double blind review process for publication offers a third check for bias in which the editors and subsequent readers become the check.

FINDINGS

Before the formal theoretical analysis of our case study, we include a brief but important section on the formation of the BRT education initiative and CIEQ to place this study within the context of the education policy debate of the late 1980s and 1990s.

Background of BRT Involvement in Education Policy

The BRT, a coalition of more than 200 of the nation's largest corporations, became a powerful influence during the 1970s and 1980s with regard to a myriad of public policy issues ranging from the environment and health care to education (Plotke, 1992). Popular (e.g., neoclassical, neo-Marxist) explanations for the formation and expansion of the BRT see member and potential member firms as purely rational actors. Such decisions as whether to join would be based on the individual corporation's needs and profits as it attempts to maximize the use of its political actions. However, Plotke asserts that this line of reasoning does not explain collective activity of businesses in a policy arena such as education. With some overlap, most firms have such divergent needs and interests with regard to issues such as state (de)regulation, tax law, and human resources that the formation of a coherent, specific agreement on education reform is improbable. Plotke believes general and overall business contexts and perspectives "rather than the aggregation of immediate business experiences" act as the carrot for collective action (p. 188). He argues that a "good national business climate" is what motivates the formation of organizations such as the BRT, as well as the subsequent and ensuing collective action of its members. With the general goal of a better educational system providing medium- and long-term benefits for business, the specific reform issues became more fundamental and common. It is through these general motivations, Plotke argues, that the BRT members agreed on and established their nine essential components of a successful education system (BRT, 1990).

Background on the Formation of CIEQ

In 1989, the BRT formed an education task force to study what role business should play in reforming the nation's public educational system. This formation came on the heels and the request of President Bush and his first-of-its-kind "education summit" with the nation's governors. This combination of events marked the reintroduction of education reform on the

national policy agenda. Together, these events signaled a call to arms in the fight to stem the "rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools and to quell the threat to American superiority in manufacturing and trade (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

John Akers, CEO of IBM, decided along with two other BRT leaders that they should become serious about education reform. They viewed education as a "white hat" issue, different from the interests (e.g., taxes, health care, environment) in which typically business has clear and immediate stakes (486). A respondent knowledgeable of the BRT education initiative discussed the interest of the BRT leaders in 1989, emphasizing the assumed link between education and the economy:

Education was . . . an issue which . . . rose above their peripheral interests and where . . . many of the very enlightened business leaders saw that this . . . went *far beyond the peripheral interest of the day*, but dealt with some of the *fundamental issues of our democracy*. . . . How are you going sustain an economic system, both democratic and capitalistic, unless you have a well-educated populace? (486; emphasis added)

As the business leaders convened in response to the President's appeal to lay a course for broad, national education policy activity, the BRT reasoned that the influence of its member corporations was more effective at the state than at the national level. Subsequently, each CEO was asked to adopt a state in which to focus his or her efforts on education reform.

Across the nation, the BRT recommended that CEOs form coalitions among business leaders, governors, and other state leaders. The business leaders were to make a 10-year commitment toward implementing the nine essential components outlined by the BRT. Specifically, each state-level coalition of CEOs was advised to pursue a comprehensive reform agenda by rating its state's educational system on the basis of the nine essential components, to develop recommendations and propose strategies to close the gap between the goals for each component and the state's current position relative to them, to generate public support with strong public communications programs, and finally, to introduce and pass comprehensive legislation ensuring implementation of each of the nine essential components (BRT, 1990). In short, the BRT provided a mandate to jump-start the state coalitions and a road map to guide the process.

To ensure adequate leadership for each state group, Akers, as chairman of the BRT Human Resources Task Force, personally asked, told, or sought a CEO from each state to voluntarily chair the coalition of his or her own state. In this midwestern state, the chosen leader accepted responsibility and convened the other CEOs who together committed to the 10-year mission

and formed CIEQ. They agreed to meet twice a year and to appoint corporate representatives to a working group. The working group, charged with conducting the day-to-day activities of CIEQ and informing their CEOs about the status and progress of CIEQ, met monthly. The makeup of the working group ranged from several high-ranking appointees with decision-making and voting authority for their company (generally vice president level) to lower level managers who needed authorization from their superiors for each CIEQ decision and policy. After nearly a year of self-directed leadership, CIEQ contracted with a university for technical assistance to guide policy development and decisions. Subsequently, the group invited the state chamber of commerce to provide managerial structure and to serve as a valuable bridge to other business leaders throughout the state.

Once CIEQ formed, setting its agenda proved critical to its survival and success. In 1989, there was a lack of focus about what CIEQ wanted to accomplish and a lack of understanding of educational issues. One member described these early meetings as “confused” (795). Most members of the group recognized the importance of a common, cohesive vision of what their group should advocate, but exactly what that vision should be underwent considerable debate. The lack of sound, reliable information handicapped the original members, a limitation of which they were well aware. Contributing to the confusion of the group was the lack of a clear direction. From a more positive viewpoint, a member stated that the lack of a preset focus enabled the group to “decide [for themselves] which way to go” (1042).

Coinciding with the formation of CIEQ was the creation of a coalition of businesses and leading universities in the state involved with issues of higher education. This higher education consortium happened to consist of many of the same business leaders (CEOs) involved with CIEQ. It was from this association, between the CEOs and a university president, that CIEQ came to hire their education consultants. The initial contacts were between the university president, an aide to the president, the dean of the school of education, several professors from various campus units, and the working group leadership. Once the consultants were brought into the working group meetings, the agenda-setting process began. A university representative recalls “a lot” of early meetings, in which the business people came with “several different agenda possibilities,” the most detailed set of ideas coming from the BRT.

Basically, they came to us wanting to know how to take these various educational reform initiatives and make sense of them in context of what was going on in [this state]. . . . We went around on that a few times, trying to elicit from them what they wanted, and got to a point where it was clear that what would

be most helpful for them [was] for us to say what we thought really needed to be done. (575)

The consultants then wrote a document for CIEQ laying out a first iteration of what would eventually be the group's agenda and mission. The education consultants determined that the agenda for the group must be persuasive politically and educationally. As a university consultant observed,

Their agenda would be compelling if they took a stand on saying they want, need, and value kids that learn more in school. That would be the kind of political position that corporate leaders could take and be credible [and] influential and retain legitimacy. . . . [As opposed to] arguing for dismantling the public school system through the kind of radical choice system that was being talked about at that time or arguing for merely trying to break the unions and reduce costs. That is not of course how they were putting it, but that is how it could have been framed by political opponents. (575)

In simultaneously framing both the reform and political agenda for the group, the consultants served to "shift [CIEQ's] focus to some extent" toward what children learn, an issue not originally on the business leaders' list of interests (575). In addition, the original report positioned CIEQ so that they could refocus the ongoing state-level education policy debate:

Because the political discussion had been so focused on finance and choice . . . if we could get the corporate folks to come out and say curriculum and assessment and preschool that would really be a major enrichment of the political dialogue. (575)

The document was presented to CIEQ's working group and subsequently was debated and revised for an entire year before the agenda was officially accepted and presented in a public forum. During this year of debate and revision, members of the working group became educated in the importance and complexity of a variety of issues related to education reform.

The viewpoint of a key state-level policy adviser sheds light on the efficacy of CIEQ's agenda, in particular the fundamental direction suggested by the consultants:

[The first report] was interesting to me because it didn't leap into the voucher fray or the charter school or choice fray, which I often see people from the business community pay a lot of attention to. The [CIEQ] group seemed to have a very good grasp and I think had very good staff helping them. The elements of so called systemic reform to focus on a core curriculum and particularly to focus on the needs of children from low income house-

holds . . . also the focus on what you might call compensatory early childhood education [were] very well advised too. (825)

In short, the consultants pared the issues in the initial draft of the agenda to four main items, with several subitems rounding out the agenda. Having laid out a first cut at CIEQ's agenda, the work of modifying, adapting, and adopting began in earnest for the members of the working group and their CEOs.

Although CIEQ is a small interest group—its largest membership reaching a peak of 13 companies with roughly 20 members on the working group—the size of CIEQ is not unusual for business interest groups, the majority of which have fewer than 50 members (Moe, 1980). The total number of businesses, and therefore members, in CIEQ has remained quite constant despite a high degree of participant turnover. The turnover is in part due to natural processes (e.g., retirement, career changes), but it is also heavily influenced by corporate restructuring and downsizing. Today, only two of the original CEOs remain involved and only three of the working group participants are original members. Despite the turnover, or likely a result of it, in 1996, the leaders for both the CEO group and the working group are original members and from the same corporation.

Research Question 1—How Did CIEQ Form?

The formation of an organization such as CIEQ can be viewed as a natural and likely occurrence surrounding a common interest (Truman, 1951), an outgrowth of highly interested and committed leaders around a singular issue (Sabatier, 1992), an unlikely and irrational activity unless sufficient rewards and benefits are offered to potential members (Olson, 1965) or leaders (Salisbury, 1969), or a reaction to fill a void in the policy debate (McFarland, 1992). In this study of a single interest group, we find data to support each of these widely held views of interest group formation.

We find broad support for the central tenets of order and disturbance theory. It is clear that the BRT affiliation provided interaction, a “natural tie in” or “fit” for the business leaders to join together (231, 552). In addition to individuals interacting with each other, order and disturbance theory states that groups form around a common issue. Clearly, for CIEQ participants the issue was education reform and supported by a comment from a CEO that education is “critical to the welfare of this nation” (828). Most corporations had previous or ongoing interest in education reform, one in particular, “had spent a lot of time in the legislative process on those issues, and it seemed

like a *natural coalition* kind of an effort that we could and should be involved in" (928; emphasis added).

Although there is some evidence that the issue of education reform by itself induced individuals to join, there is additional support for the notion of a societal disturbance provoking formation. Often the present educational system was viewed as a threat to the future of the nation's well-being, with the President, the National Governors Association, and the BRT fanning the flames. One CEO referred to the issue of education reform as the "great crisis faced by America in the late 20th century" (663), whereas another described the negative "social impact" from which the "whole country was suffering" due to the high cost of incarcerating dropouts (288). One member stated that an improved educational system will foster a "healthier society" with fewer "social pathologies" (1006). A common theme was the perceived threat to the economic competitiveness of the United States. The world is "becoming smaller" said one concerned member (288), increasing the need for the country to better prepare its future work force so that it can successfully compete in the new global economy.

Individuals, particularly the small group of leaders who form organizations, are sometimes believed to join interest groups because of a personal commitment to a given issue (Sabatier, 1991). Our findings also support the formation aspect of commitment theory. Members at all levels of the corporations voiced strong personal convictions about improving the public education system. Often, there was a strong corporate commitment to education issues as well. Most, but not all, corporate involvement in CIEQ began with the CEO. One CEO said that CIEQ was an "easy effort" to become involved in, both "from a corporate foundation as well as a personal standpoint" (367). The words of a working group representative recounting the day his boss returned from the 1989 BRT meeting in Washington, DC, typify the commitment of this CEO:

"We've got a challenge here," he said, "I think it's an excellent challenge. I've just made a 10-year commitment for myself and our company to work toward with the governors on education reform." He said it's something "I really believe in" and "I'm going to really be committed to and I want us to be active participants and supporters of the initiative." (392)

One member described his CEO's commitment to education as the "key factor" in the company's involvement (679). Another spoke of the CEO's interest and "advocacy in education over and beyond what he sees . . . our needs at the workplace" (646). Two CEOs came from immigrant families and attribute their success to their own education: "Without the process of

education I would never have gotten where I've gotten" (596); "it was just inborn into him [the CEO] the importance of education and it carried on through his life" (288); and "education was paramount in [my CEO's] life. . . . For him, education was a very personal issue" (1042).

Given the enormous demands on the CEOs' resources and time, it is not difficult to imagine that education reform could be overlooked or set aside by CEOs. One CEO describes how he came to give the issue such a high priority.

Well it would have been difficult had I not said managing the bottom line should take 50% of my time; if it doesn't, the shareholders should replace me in a heartbeat. But that's *today's* bottom line. What are the issues that impact *tomorrow's* bottom line? Competitiveness, trade, environment, education, technology and corporate credibility. When I defined education as a *seminal* issue for [my company's] future, that legitimized me spending as much time as I felt was necessary to try to seek an improved set of circumstances for education. (853; emphasis added)

Finally, the commitment of the working group members was crucial to CIEQ's formation. One CEO believed that in general, the CEOs selected people for the working group "who had a serious and sincere interest in this to get the thing moving . . . [no one had] to push anybody into it" (288). One of the leaders of the working group described the involvement of members and how they "really commit themselves to doing this and none of them that I know of did it for personal gain." He continued, "I don't see anybody out there looking to build their resume by being on the [CIEQ]. Everybody's been pretty sincere in their goal to improve education" (828).

We found solid support for the idea that a unified issue among many of the business leaders was important to the formation of CIEQ and moderate support for the idea that increased personal and corporate use was also an incentive for joining. Clearly, whereas many individuals have a personal interest in educational reform and view it as a national problem, they admit they joined CIEQ with the hope that they could affect schooling, which would in turn improve their future work force. Even those firms who presently have no difficulties finding quality workers spoke of the need to have well-educated customers (1006).

By-product theory assumes individuals are rational decision makers and that a decision to join is made after it is determined that sufficient rewards to the individual (or firm) will be garnered. As one non-CIEQ policy maker commented, "corporate leaders know full well that to have a good work force, you got to have an educated work force" (906). There seems to be no doubt that business has much to gain from an improved educational system, and so

many business leaders and policy makers spoke directly to the necessity of corporate involvement in educational reform. Some respondents were quite blunt about their interest in education reform: "The quality of the future work force is directly tied to our company's prosperity" (1068).

Time and again, CEOs and working group representatives spoke of the high cost of training and retraining their workers. One member described his company's hiring policies and how they have changed over the last two decades. After watching the number of qualified applicants "dwindle" to the point where there were not enough qualified applicants, "we reduced the requirements for the courses they took in high school" (288). But once the requirements were reduced, the "burden of teaching" the new hires "fell on us." Many working group members and some CEOs echoed this sentiment, one stating that his company's employees "were not coming to us ready to work. We . . . were spending a lot of money retraining. . . . There should be some way for us to *use* the educational system so that people are more prepared" (390; emphasis added).

Although many participants were concerned about their own company's bottom line, there is also evidence to support Olson's idea that external benefits may result as a by-product once self-serving goals are met. One member, in describing the motivation behind his company's involvement, stated they did not join for publicity or because it was fashionable, but rather because the actions of such groups are "beneficial" to the broader society. He continued that the outgrowth of CIEQ is a "win-win situation for everybody" (390). Another member described the "corporate citizenship reason" as a motivation for joining CIEQ. This indicates the rational intent for corporate gain by making their corporation appear socially conscious. A member of the working group spoke of the difficulty of choosing not to be involved or supportive of CIEQ: "[Education] was a fairly popular issue, whether you strongly believed in it or didn't. . . . Who could possibly be against apple pie, motherhood and education?" (233).

Although some may view this type of involvement as purely superficial, the charade may also result in effort exerted toward a particular policy issue as a by-product of the improved corporate image. This member continued, saying that much of the public relations work of his company is to demonstrate "corporate citizenship and corporate responsibility," concluding all corporate activity does not "add profit" to the corporation (177). But in making the corporation look better, a collective benefit may result through the support of a policy position. A representative from a corporation that had joined CIEQ more recently emphasized the importance of a quality education system to the growth and maintenance of the nation's economy, upon which her company is dependent (453). Finally, one person's perception of his

CEO's motivations encapsulates the interconnected relationship between broad collective benefits for society and the practical, selective incentives for individual companies:

From a philosophical and personal stand point [my CEO] knew he wanted to be involved in education and knew it was important, but also from a very practical business standpoint it became imperative that business get involved. (1042)

Similar to the broadly perceived societal disturbance that drew corporations into CIEQ, changing conditions on the shop floor provided added impetus to join. We found numerous references to "dramatically" changing technologies in the manufacturing industries during the 1980s resulting in a need for workers with computer and literacy skills that had previously not been necessary on the shop floor (1042). For example, one member observed that with the new, "sophisticated" equipment, "we were spending lots of money on retrofitting folks we were hiring to bring them up in these basic skills" (646).

There is evidence of entrepreneurial aspirations among the CEOs. One expressed the sentiment to his working group representative that he wanted to eventually leave his position known as the "K-12 CEO" (392). A working group member said his CEO "wanted to take a leadership role in education at the national level" (679).

The theory of countervailing power suggests the following question: Did CIEQ form and did individuals join to fill a void in the debate over education reform? Certainly in the world of education reform, there are several very powerful and vocal entities (e.g., teachers' unions, state boards of education, governors) expressing dominant opinions. But did the business leaders join together in response to these dominant voices in an attempt to speak for business throughout the state? Our data indicate consistently strong opinions that the voice of business was indeed absent from the debate and that CIEQ provided a vehicle with which to fill the void. One individual outside CIEQ and familiar with state education policy, for example, argued that "there seems to be no real group talking very much about [accountability measures]. . . . There needs to be a group that talks about management issues" (883).

A leader of CIEQ familiar with state-level issues discussed prevalent opposition to "substantive reforms," but "felt that heightening awareness throughout the business community in a cooperative effort with the BRT members . . . would enhance the possibilities for some real change in education" (928). He continued that they wanted a recognized forum for stating

“what we need in business . . . [what] we need to make the business machine hum” (928). One member who had experienced frustration with the slow pace of educational improvement, voiced his view of the necessity for business involvement:

[Education reform will] never happen unless there are partnerships and everyone is involved in supporting that effort. And it's not to think that we [business] need to be the watchdog of education, but, gosh darn it all, I think it's unfair to think that education and the educators can move this agenda forward and continue without the input and involvement of the business community . . . and some process put in place that when changes are happening out in the business world that there are opportunities then to make those . . . changes within education. And so I don't think that can ever be accomplished if these kind of initiatives just go away. (392)

Summary. So why did CIEQ form? Our data suggest that many individuals at all levels of the organization had a policy interest, some to a quite passionate degree, in education. Although members did not join in pursuit of specific reform plans, their interest in education served as the catalyst for their involvement. Often, personal views of the importance of schooling, a perceived threat to American competitiveness, and a perception that their voice was not a part of the ongoing policy debate served to heighten their interest in education policy and involve them in CIEQ. Most viewed CIEQ as a vehicle for effecting broader change than was feasible from their own company's position. The actions of the BRT and subsequently, the CEOs, provided these individuals with the opportunity for involvement in their policy interest, an opportunity many individuals took seriously.

But did the CEOs and working group representatives join solely because of a policy interest or did they seek functional benefit in joining, as the rational theorists (e.g., Olson) contend? We found strong support for the view that the increasing costs of (re)training workers, especially with the addition of new manufacturing technologies on the shop floor, caused the business leaders to look beyond their own company to the public educational system for help (or to find a target for blame). The belief is that if schools could only educate the students with improved analyzing, communication, and technical skills, their corporations would be more efficient and competitive in the new global economy. But again, did corporate executives join for personal gain? We found support that “good corporate citizenship” activity—such as joining CIEQ—possibly helped and at least did not hurt the CEOs' reputation within the corporate community, but we found no evidence of any tangible functional benefit to the CEOs. Absent as well was any indication that working group members benefited from their involvement.

Research Question 2—How Did CIEQ Set Its Agenda?

After CIEQ's formation, the agenda setting proved of paramount importance to its survival and success. That the consultants drafted the initial framework for CIEQ's agenda is not unexpected, although not explicitly described in the interest group literature. The request by CIEQ leadership for the consultants to provide options and direction for the group is best viewed in light of Kingdon's (1984) argument that policy makers frequently dip into sources of expertise for policy answers. This is precisely what CIEQ did in seeking expertise on education policy from an organization in the field. Once the expertise was in hand, the group proceeded to debate, revise, and configure the policy solutions for its own purposes and desires.

We report support for Truman's view that the agenda is set through a natural process of group consensus based on the membership's common beliefs. Although the decision-making process was not always smooth, the ultimate goal of improving the teaching and learning in schools prevailed. Original members of the working group spoke of the "good healthy debate" (332), the "natural process" (906), and how the members were "willing to compromise and give and take for the common good" (849). A consultant stated that there was "discussion, there were pieces of [the agenda] they wanted to put in or take out, and there was a fair amount of revision that went on" (575).

At several points throughout the first few years, alternative agendas were presented by members and alternative groups who were also working on education reform. A common response to the alternative agendas was that CIEQ cannot be all things to all people. The group focused on their set of issues, "stayed the course," and did not let themselves be distracted by alternative agendas (177, 288, 392, 928, 1042). One current leader stated that at every meeting, "somebody raise[d] the question 'What does this mean for academic achievement of children?' " (828). Having this "measure" ensured that "we [did not] wander off and start chasing and hearing the siren song." Finally, this leader concluded, "we're here, we've got a mission, we've got a goal, and [the measure is] just a constant reminder" (828). Despite the apparent focus, the priorities laid out in the final version of the group's formal agenda proved to have "enough breadth that [they] encompassed enough of what each of the players coming to the table wanted to accomplish" (1042).

The degree to which the CEOs were in agreement was seen as only marginally debatable (most agreed there was broad consensus), but there were differing views about how much the CEOs were involved and how much they actually understood. Although one respondent summed up the agenda of the CEO group saying, "I think everybody [among the CEOs] conscien-

tiously is behind the education process and wants to make it better" (596), a leading state policy maker, whose view is supported by a few key members, saw the role played by the CEOs differently. He described the working group representatives as those who really understood the issues, and "were really engaged with it." When the CEOs were brought together to meet with the governor, "it was just more of a show and very little substance" and the "governor was able to use that occasion to simply trumpet whatever he wanted" (897). It is important to note that it was not the ceremonial leaders (i.e., CEOs) who set the CIEQ agenda through their common vision or frequent interaction, but rather the working group members, working monthly in conjunction with the university people, who carved out the agenda.

Although not running counter to the order and disturbance and commitment views of agenda setting—guided by the policy interest that brought them all together—CIEQ did have some disagreement throughout the agenda-setting process. Individuals and firms stated their opinions, but when the majority of the group decided to disregard the opinion, the dissenting individuals withdrew their support and "took more of a back seat kind of role" (646, 231, 417). One member became particularly frustrated and eventually left CIEQ, although his corporation remained a member. He believed business was "speaking out of both sides of its mouth on this issue." He noted that although the members worked in businesses that "thrive in a free market environment," driven by competition, "that is not the approach we took in education, as if somehow education was different" (231).

CIEQ leadership also played a role in the agenda-setting process. The group leaders provided a structure for discussion, disagreement, and agreement. The leaders "really kept our nose[s] to the grindstone and tried to keep us from getting too far afield. Because in an effort like this you can get scattered all over the landscape," one group member commented (332).

A substantial portion of the agenda-setting debate focused on the members' commitment to the fundamental goals of CIEQ: improving the teaching and learning in schools. In 1989 and 1990, as the original members worked to establish the mission and agenda for CIEQ, there is evidence of a serious commitment on the part of those sitting at the table. One active member described the early members of the working group as being "very committed to a cause and very committed to education and making a difference. Everything was measured by how many kids is this going to help and how quickly?" (1042). A CIEQ leader reflected on the importance of the conviction of the early members: "If the members had not been deeply involved, CIEQ might have changed or softened its position on education reform" (849).

Staying the course and moving the agenda forward was critical to the success of the organization. A CIEQ leader spoke of the need to be “vigilant” and not “stagnant” to maintain their public credibility (828). However, sometimes in the attempt to remain current or be on the cutting edge, a group leaves its fundamental principles behind. One CIEQ leader was well aware of this dilemma: “I’d rather have the serious difficulty that we’ve been in as far as being wedded to our principles and not being ready to chase off after some more sexy kinds of initiatives” (828). CIEQ, through much debate and argument, remained focused on its original agenda items, often sounding the cry, “refocus the focus.”

There is also consistent evidence that CIEQ set a formal agenda with functional gain in mind, as expected in by-product and exchange theory. Our findings provide some support for the notion that an agenda for collective benefits can be formulated and implemented so long as the members’ selective benefits are satisfied. Three of the stated goals of several members indicate interest in such selective gains. First, several of the corporations and CEOs desired to create a stronger working relationship—a tighter coupling—with the executive office and legislature of the state government. Second, some CEOs wanted to be recognized as a state and national leader in education reform. Third, some corporate members attempted to drive the agenda to ease their immediate business problems or quite possibly to ease their consciences. Ironically, none of these three goals necessarily affected the content of the agenda—just its magnitude, scope, and implementation.

The desire to tighten the tie between CIEQ and the governor should not be surprising, given the early mission of the state coalitions, which was to build an alliance between the business leaders and the governor to improve state and local education policy. Although structuring a relationship among business leaders and governors proved an attractive incentive for CEO activity (“Frankly the only way we got most of our CEOs to the CEO/governor meetings was that the governor was there”) (177), this sort of CEO-governor involvement was also construed as harmful to the autonomy of CIEQ. At times during the CEO-governor meetings, the state’s chief executive overshadowed or even co-opted CIEQ’s agenda (177, 1068).

The state-level activity (among CIEQ, the governor, and legislature) dominated the agenda and attention of CIEQ in 1993 and 1995, subsuming much of the local-level activity. Although this predominance pleased some, others called for greater action at the local-level, geared toward classrooms, teachers, and students. Explaining the shift of activity from local- to state-level activity, a CIEQ leader said, “originally we had talked about having a good deal of focus on making program changes at the local-level,” but with the need for statewide improvement in education, it was “simply the reality

of politics and . . . public opinion that we needed to spend a lot of time with state-level policy makers” (928).

Another CEO saw CIEQ’s participation in legislative activity as an important end in itself: “We can sit around a room and talk about what’s right and what’s wrong and unless it’s really decided on and the decisions made and put into effect through legislation it won’t work” (p. 596). A key policy adviser outside of CIEQ, however, described the group as becoming “intoxicated” by legislative activity, becoming “too concerned with being involved with the legislature” (102).

The second source of evidence that group leaders used the agenda-setting process for personal gain is inherent in the CIEQ leadership’s wanting to be perceived in the broader state and national community as leaders on the cutting edge of education reform. In describing one such leader, a working group member stated:

He wanted results within a very quick time table. He wanted a guaranteed product so he could say as chair of the effort in [this state], “here is what we have done and here is what we are going to do.” . . . [He] wanted something done and he wanted something done now. (231)

Other members echoed the sentiment and said that one corporation dominated the early agenda and “held it with a rather tight rein” (417) and “there was not a lot of flexibility . . . and that was a frustration for us” (646).

The third indication that the agenda was set to serve corporate self-interest comes from a few companies that viewed CIEQ as a vehicle for “rectifying” the problem of retraining workers that they had previously laid off (p. 1042). This caused a divide early on as to what the mission of CIEQ would be. Namely, should CIEQ aim to improve the educational system for future generations or create programs to address immediate problems the companies were facing? “We had to keep pointing back to them and remind[ing] them that what we agreed to be involved in [was] elementary education [and not adult education]” (1042).

There was also a certain level of impatience and urgency about improving the system, with some members advocating the implementation of proven business improvement strategies (e.g., Total Quality Management) without spending valuable time educating themselves on educational issues:

It was a little more reflective and took a more intellectual approach than what I think some of us really wanted to have in the beginning. Yes, we understood it was important to study what was going on, but what was happening in [this state’s] schools couldn’t wait 10 years to study. We had to make incremental

improvements now; that is part of what business brought to the table and I don't think we stepped up to the plate as well as we should have. (1042)

In the period from 1994 to 1995, maintaining the original agenda may have taken a political turn. One original member was "definitely convinced" that the recent CIEQ agenda has been unduly influenced by "political forces" (882), particularly with regard to the relationship of the chamber of commerce to the governor's office. The effort on the part of some members to "front" their CEO for certain issues—that is to advance the image and position of their CEO as a state leader in education—"rather than dealing with overall educational reform" caused conflicting interests for several members (882). A member who made this observation concluded: "I don't think we should stray from those goals for political purposes. Although we will" (882).

The perceived politicization of CIEQ's agenda produced a direct loss of credibility (p. 836). What had originally given the group credibility with educators and policy makers—its commitment to improve teaching and learning without regard to political or financial gain—was lost in the eyes of some. Once the group was perceived to have eased off its hard stance on its original priorities and to be playing political games, many people, including some state representatives, came to view CIEQ as just another self-serving interest group. A leading educator in the state described the turn:

When [CIEQ] tried to play political games by trying to sign on toward supporting the charter schools stuff . . . it lost its thrust. . . . It was as if all the work that it believed and it did for 3 years was now put aside and forgotten. And it looked as though it was simply a political jump to try and stay on the right side of the governor, and much of the credibility, in my perspective and throughout the state, that [CIEQ] had built up had been lost. (897)

We also found evidence that CIEQ viewed itself as a countervailing power filling a void in the policy debate on education reform. Although we showed above how some members advocated a broader collaborative effort in setting the agenda, there is much evidence that at least part of the membership advocated an independent voice absent from the policy debate.

Many respondents referred to CIEQ as working to represent the voice of business in the education reform debate; one stated that "[CIEQ] needs to stand up and say that's wrong" (849). Two members warned that in the face of alternative organizations and agendas, "We don't want to lose our identity. . . . We should have agreed to disagree on some issues" (643) and "[CIEQ] could really make a distinctive mark" (177). In trying to determine the "right agenda from a business standpoint to pursue," a former member

described other constituencies, some very large, that he viewed as obstacles to CIEQ's proper agenda (646). An original member believed that CIEQ tried to find a "niche" that "nobody else was filling" (882).

People outside the organization also supported this view that CIEQ should be an independent voice. A policy insider not affiliated with CIEQ worried that CIEQ might be too close to educators' views of reform: "[CIEQ] leadership doesn't need to clone the leadership in education" (102). Another non-CIEQ respondent discussed the need for a group such as CIEQ:

Obviously there is room for improvement in terms of the advocacy and the independent voice that [CIEQ] can represent. I think that is an area that the [CIEQ] group wants to pay close attention to, to be an independent business voice. (889)

Summary. The two fundamental principles of interest group activity, policy interest and functional interest, hold true for CIEQ's agenda-setting process. Although the interest group literature is quiet with regard to seeking expertise outside the organization, the original members had a strong interest in education reform policy and action. Once they sought guidance and expertise from consultants, the natural interaction of ideas and debate fine-tuned and prioritized the agenda. We found evidence that the group was able to incorporate many issues advocated by a variety of members. Clearly, the policy interest in improving the instruction for and learning by children heavily influenced the agenda. In addition, the functional benefit sought by some members also played a role in the agenda setting. In particular, the focus on the state-level as opposed to local-level activity was possibly due in part to the perceived benefit to CEOs and working group participants should the group tighten their association with the Governor and legislature.

Research Question 3—How Has CIEQ Maintained Its Membership?

With its agenda set, CIEQ began its efforts to reform public education. However, over the course of the next 5 years, high rates of personnel turnover affected the working group membership, just as CEO turnover affected the CEO portion of the effort. Despite this, CIEQ's continued focus on education reform helped to preserve the organization.

Continuing concern for the educational system remained a rallying point for members. An officer of one CIEQ company considered the early years of the group as an information-gathering phase to determine those issues that "require ongoing attention." "I think the need is as substantive as ever," he

noted (853). One CIEQ leader said he hoped to work himself “out of a job,” but that much work needed to be done (828). A company official said the problem was not so much that the educational system was worse than before, rather that current expectations for learning are necessarily higher: “The challenge is that there is so much more that needs to be learned and to be expected of our kids” (1006).

The regular interaction of members looms vitally important for the maintenance of CIEQ. Several members commented that the cooperative nature of the group contributed to its preservation and successes (288, 828). CIEQ also offered its members the opportunity to “to tie into” government and education officials throughout the state, including the department of education and the governor’s office (453, 825). The network created by CIEQ enabled member companies to “feel like we can have our voice and be heard in the state through [CIEQ]” (552).

Member turnover, particularly in small organizations, can be lethal to the maintenance of an interest group. However, despite a high rate of turnover (five of seven original CEOs) and a high rate of turnover among working group participants, CIEQ grew to 13 companies while maintaining all but one of the original member corporations. A number of respondents cited personnel turnover in CIEQ as an obstacle to its success (392, 643). As one company official said, “it is a challenge to maintain continuity and commitments of the individuals on behalf of the companies that are represented in [CIEQ]” (928). The consultants (two of whom remained active from the beginning through 1996) and the CIEQ staff person who has remained since his hiring in early 1992 have been important to providing continuity. These people filled the “need to have some fulltime leadership” and have been a “major reason for the maintenance of the organization” (1006). A number of respondents also pointed to the commitment of the initial leadership of the group as vital to its maintenance: “The original people who got involved with [CIEQ] believed in it, had a passion for it, [and] were supported by their CEOs” (552). Several respondents pointed to the important leadership of the first CEO to lead the group and of the staff he committed to CIEQ (575, 727). But with five new CEOs from the original companies, each of whom was less committed than his predecessor, the corporate commitment diminished. One close observer of education policy in the state noted that once the CEOs lost interest in CIEQ, the organization began to suffer (897).

Few of the respondents cited any corporate or personal functional gain as the essential reason for maintaining membership in the organization. As one representative commented, “I think from a company standpoint, it’s a matter of being more than just a good corporate citizen. There are benefits to be gained from the company’s standpoint” (390). Others noted, however, that if

tangible benefits to member companies were the reason for company participation, CIEQ could not survive. One company official said that on strict economic terms, "there was no value for the kind of money we were being asked to front" (882). Community service by a company was an important motivation, "but the most important thing is it's tied so closely to the economic survival of our country and the economic survival of kids going into the work place" (392).

Several respondents saw the participation of companies in the form of an exchange of benefits for participation. One explained that the CEOs of member firms participated in return for some sense that "they can make a difference" (367). In contrast, another said that several individual company representatives exchanged their support and participation for the opportunity "to make their own CEOs look good . . . so their guy could become the state's education guru" and develop a closer relationship with the governor (882). As to direct evidence of personal gain, there is little indication that members of CIEQ garnered any personal or corporate benefit from their involvement in CIEQ. No companies reported an improvement in the qualification of their new hires or a reduction in retraining costs. No CEOs or state government officials reported newfound power for CEOs or access to the governor nor that working group members attained higher positions within their corporations. The only tangible benefit we found for CIEQ members and companies are described by two corporate representatives. They saw their companies benefiting from becoming more informed on education issues and becoming more involved in the policy process (392): "We regard it as a success that our involvement in [CIEQ] has made us more knowledgeable and more active by far on educational issues than we ever were before we joined" (332).

The continuing need to provide an alternative voice in educational reform was important in preserving the organization as well. One participant repeatedly stressed that CIEQ needed to continue to preserve its identity as a voice for business on education reform, even if this voice did not "coincide" with that of state board of education, the governor's office, or other state education groups (177). Another respondent saw the potential for conflict between CIEQ's opinions and those of teachers and administrators, but asserted that differing of opinions is important (646).

Summary. Most members maintained their participation in the group because work remained to be done. CIEQ's initial goals had not yet been realized, and the issue of school reform had not been resolved. This is consistent with several of the theories that state that as long as the societal disturbance or traditional policy dominance continues, the participants' pol-

icy interest will continue. We find solid support for this continuance of effort, albeit with some frustration for the slow pace of reform. We find less indication that realized functional benefit is needed to ensure membership.

ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

Our goal in this study was to improve our understanding of interest group formation and activity, using and assessing five interest group theories. On the basis of our data analysis, we now assess the relative strength of the five theories (see Table 1 for guidance). Did any single theory stand out as most informative? Clearly, our findings suggest that no single theory is most appropriate or powerful; we found strong support for several of the theories across the three questions.

Assessment of Theories

The two main components of Truman's (1951) order and disturbance theory are natural interaction among (potential) members and perceived societal disturbance. In the case of CIEQ, each of the original members was also a member of the BRT and each expressed an interest in education reform. In addition, the BRT and CIEQ leadership clearly articulated the perceived threat that the educational system posed to both the nation's well-being and the business climate. As a result of this natural interaction and the perceived societal disturbance, individuals and corporations joined CIEQ.

With regard to agenda setting, we found evidence that CIEQ engaged in a naturally occurring debate on the issues, consisting of argument, compromise, and consensus. Those members whose ideas were excluded from the agenda, faded into the background and eventually left the group. This withdrawal behavior is consistent with order and disturbance theory. Those members who remained with CIEQ did so because of the continued presence of the societal disturbance (total agreement that the problems with schools remain), their continued involvement with the BRT, and persistent stimulation by the group's leadership.

Commitment theory is well supported by our data. It is very clear that the vast majority of the members had a strong interest in the issue of education reform. Although some attribute their conviction to personal experience, many spoke of their strong desire to see an improved society with fewer social ills. They viewed improved education as a way to alleviate those ills and found involvement in a group with such a charge desirable. The commitment

on the part of the members also carried into the agenda-setting process. This helps to account for their advocacy of long-term, systemic, and equitable goals, rather than a quick fix to improve the bottom line for their companies.

Maintenance of membership is a less complicated matter in terms of commitment theory than it is in others (e.g., by-product). The key is maintaining individuals' commitment to the issue. Given the inherent interest on the part of the original membership, this does not seem arduous. The difficulty of maintenance for CIEQ was posed by high rates of turnover among the CEOs and working group members. Again, whereas the corporate involvement was steady (in the form of annual dues payments), there was some evidence that the new CEOs were less committed than their predecessors, which may have reduced corporate commitment to the project. With diminished corporate commitment, however, commitment theory would predict greater corporate defection than we documented (only two businesses left the group in the 7 years). The high degree of commitment to an improved educational system that the new crop of working group members exhibited offset the potentially negative effect of participant turnover.

Turning to by-product theory, we found limited evidence to support Olson's (1965) claim that individuals act on behalf of their own self interest. CIEQ members often stated that their corporations were spending large amounts of money retrofitting their workers and commonly believed that money and effort was better spent on earlier efforts at educating the future workforce, namely early childhood, primary, and secondary education. Such efforts are geared toward long-term corporate interests, however, and do not necessarily result in personal gain for participants. Similarly, the agenda-setting process of CIEQ was geared toward the long-term rewards of systemic reform. Realizing that many silver-bullet approaches advocated for reform are not good long-term solutions, the group focused on rigorous curriculum and assessment tools. Had the group set forth an agenda composed of short-term changes geared toward immediate results for the participants and member businesses, then their actions would be evidence of working in their own self-interest. We did not find this to be the case.

We found a similar situation for the maintenance of the interest group. Little evidence appeared that any member, whether it be a working group representative or CEO, received direct benefit from continued membership. The one exception may be the CEOs' relationships with the governor (which could be beneficial to the CEOs in future policy debates). Although we found evidence that some CEOs wanted to tighten the connection with the executive office, we found no evidence of any member actually gaining from the improved contact. However, our data limit this analysis to people involved

in education issues; we are unable to measure benefit in other realms (e.g., tax, health care, environmental policy).

Salisbury's (1969) early view of exchange theory received only marginal support. Two CEOs expressed an interest in becoming the visible leader of the education reform movement (at least from the standpoint of business), but neither garnered any tangible benefits in return for their leadership. With regard to what Sabatier (1992) referred to as "expanded exchange" theory, we found limitations similar to those expressed by Salisbury (1992). The current view of exchange theory is so inclusive that it is difficult to separate it from other theories (e.g., commitment). Although it holds that entrepreneurs will exchange the effort necessary to form an interest group for adequate progress toward the realization of a desired policy or action, this motivation becomes vague and difficult to categorize.

Finally, the theory of countervailing power is well supported by our findings. The formation and maintenance of the original membership and the establishment and maintenance of the agenda all reflect a need and desire to insert the voice of business into the education policy arena. Both members and nonmembers alike viewed CIEQ as a valuable and necessary voice previously missing from the policy debate. Though some policy makers disagreed with CIEQ's agenda, they welcomed the group into the discussion.

Concluding Observations

Our case study of CIEQ revealed that this interest group is a complex organization of complex individuals who joined and stayed for a variety of reasons. Although we found some support for each of the five theories, none individually could describe or predict the formation, agenda setting, or maintenance of CIEQ. We doubt that individuals joined CIEQ simply because of a perceived societal disturbance or their commitment to the issue of education or to fill a void in the policy debate. But rather, they became active through some combination of interests and needs. We believe that such actions are contingent on the participants' having a strong policy interest and to a lesser degree, a functional interest. Nearly all participants had a basic interest in education policy with that interest heightened by at least one of several mediating factors. The rationally based principle of functional gain is weakly supported.

So where did the business leaders acquire their interest in education reform? Interest group theories do not address this question directly; they simply assume inherent interest or desire for functional gain. To understand the source of interest, we recommend adding an institutional perspective to

the political interest group theories. There is no doubt that the business leaders, most of whom have been in private business all of their adult lives, were influenced by their interactions and experiences and the norms of the private, free-market world of business. These institutions must be investigated, as should the new institutions encountered once the group acquired the services of the consultants. Current thinking posits institutions as sources of limited choices for thought and action in regulative, normative, or cognitive forms (Scott, 1995). Acting within these institutionalized forms increases legitimacy from the surrounding environment. In the case of CIEQ, the group needed to gain legitimacy from the governor and legislature, the business community (including the BRT), and to some degree the educational establishment (including the state department of education and local school districts). Such an institutional perspective on why and how CIEQ formed and maintained itself is beyond the scope of this study but we believe it has the potential to explain these relationships further.

Finally, the issue of business involvement in education reform will not soon go away. In March 1996, at the second national education summit, each governor brought one business representative to the 2-day conference. The visible presence of business leaders sitting with governors discussing education reform spoke volumes about the future agenda for education policy and who will be in a position to call the shots. This study attempted to provide a unique look into one such business-governor coalition by analyzing the formation, agenda setting, and maintenance of a group of business leaders. We choose not to assess whether such interest groups are efficacious, but rather to focus on improving the understanding of how and why such groups form and operate. Perhaps, once we understand the motives and practices of business involvement in education, we can then assess their impact on teaching and learning.

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