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Arguing for a license to operate: the case of the Swedish wind power industry

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the way organizational actors argue to obtain a license to operate for new ventures.

Design/methodology/approach – The design, which addresses the issue at the industry level, consists of a case study of the ways in which power developers argue for the development of wind energy in Sweden.

Findings – The study shows that wind power developers proffer a necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument that relies not only on the convincing character of claims grounded in premises, but also on the persuasive character of values, knowledge and opinion likely to win the adherence of the audience.

Research limitations/implications – From a theoretical perspective, this is an illustration of the relevance of bridging the divide between argumentation theories in tune with formal or informal logic and those oriented toward rhetoric and the social practice of communication.

Practical implications – More practically, the paper suggests that in order to obtain a license to operate, managers need to combine and balance in their practice of argumentation a logical approach to factual knowledge with a situational sense for the rhetoric favored by the audience.

Originality/value – This study emphasizes the key role played by argumentation in corporate communication.

Keywords Licensing, Corporate ventures, Wind power, Sweden

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Despite the global political success of an economics of freedom (Hayek, 1960) and the corresponding celebration of the economic virtues of entrepreneurship and free markets, the world is not a tabula rasa. In the words of the French poet, Valéry (1931), we entered the era of a finished world some time ago. There is no empty space waiting to be filled by a private or corporate initiative. New causes, projects or enterprises must have their place carved among or in replacement of that which exists. As I show in this paper, if these causes, projects or enterprises are to receive a license to operate (Graafland, 2002), someone must make an argument in their favor.

This study is part of the “Small scale renewable energy production” research project financed by SEMA – the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (KBM-Krisberedskapsmyndigheten), decision 0206/2002.
Management scholars and organization theorists have shown some interest in the role of argumentation in organizational contexts, but have largely ignored the issue of arguing for new ventures. Prioritizing matters internal to organizations, they have scrutinized instead the role of argumentation in decision making (Mitroff and Mason, 1982; Locks, 1985; Brønn, 1998; Werder, 1999), the management of conflict (Sillince, 2000) and moral justification (Lahdesmaki, 2005). Or they have called upon argumentation theory to investigate the assessment of beliefs (Benson et al., 1995), day-to-day sense-making (Watson, 1995), the institutionalization of argumentation in organizational settings (Sillince, 1999) and the contextual effectiveness of argumentation (Sillince, 2002).

In comparison, corporate communication and public relations scholars have shown relatively little interest in argumentation theory in any context. They have demonstrated sustained attention to corporate reputation (Dhir and Vinen, 2005) and legitimacy (Massey, 2001), two topics with a direct bearing on organizations’ acquisition and maintenance of a license to operate. They have also scrutinized the way corporations manage issues (Bridges, 2004); how they use advertisements to restore an image (Cowden and Sellnow, 2002); and, more generally, how they communicate with stakeholders on such matters as environmental and social responsibility (de Boer, 2003; Coupland, 2005; Branco and Rodrigues, 2006).

Communication and public relation studies that focus explicitly on argumentation-related issues remain rare. Hearit’s (1997) study of the appropriateness of a transcendent appeal to higher values does address the issue, of course, as do Samsup’s (2004) comparative analysis of argument quality in advertisements and news editorials, and Pollach’s (2005) analysis of arguments in self-presentations on the WWW. One could also mention Meisenbach’s (2006) advocacy of a Habermasian moral argumentation in organizational communication or Skerlep’s (2001) plea for increasing the role of argumentation in public relations theory. And relevant to the specific purpose of this paper is a ranking of communication strategies before hostile audiences in environmental public meetings – a study by Campbell et al. (1998). The practice of argumentation, upon which new ventures gain the right to come into being, have remained foreign to the concerns of communication and public relations scholars.

To date, our knowledge about the way in which organizational actors argue for new ventures remains rudimentary. Except for a study on the debate preliminary to a railroad project (Corvellec, 2001) and a proposal to approach projects as practical situations of argumentation (Metcalfe, 2005), we still know relatively little about how organizational actors argue for a license to operate. This remains true even in the academic field of planning. Although planning has long been seen as a practical process of argumentation (Fisher and Forester, 1993) involving the production of persuasive stories about the future (Throgmorton, 1996), argumentation theory has been used to assess stakeholders’ interests and viewpoints (Gottsegen, 1998).

Using an example at the industry level – how Swedish wind power developers argue for wind farms – this paper sheds light on the way organizational actors argue for licenses to operate. There are two reasons that wind power development is a particularly adequate case for this purpose. First, wind farm development ordinarily prompts lengthy debates and controversies, as national objectives are likely to run into local objections (Boholm and Löfstedt, 2004). Second, no wind farm can be built that has not been granted both a building permit and an environmental permit. In order to obtain such authorization, developers are required to argue openly for their project,
both orally at public hearings and in writing in their applications and environmental impact assessments. It is impossible to build a wind farm without a careful and convincing argument.

The first section of the paper provides background information on wind power development in Sweden, and the second describes developers’ arguments in favor of wind farms. The third section presents a two fold analysis of these arguments, revealing first the logic and then the rhetoric of their practice of argumentation. Argumentation is a speech act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004) that generates an important question: what do organizational actors do when they argue? This question is addressed in the fourth section, where it is suggested that in order to obtain a license to operate, developers must combine and balance in their practice of argumentation a logical approach to factual knowledge with a situational sense for the rhetoric that is in favor among public opinion. The concluding remarks reassess the study’s main findings and suggest some practical implications.

On wind power development

Wind power currently provides less than 1 percent of Sweden’s energy supply, but the Swedish national authorities have committed the country to a significant increase in production and consumption of renewable energy. The Swedish Energy Bill 2002 (Department of Industry, Employment and Communications (Sweden), 2002) has set “a national planning objective for wind power of 10 TWh by the year 2015” a level that is soon to be raised, according to a recent bill on wind power (Näringslivsutskottet, 2006). The current production level is 0.7 TWh (Swedish Energy Agency, 2006).

The development of a wind farm is entrusted to private companies. Inspired by the neoliberal principle of the superiority of market-based solutions over bureaucratic ones, the Swedish state has opted for a get-others-to-do rather than a do-it-yourself policy. It has financed an extensive research program and introduced a series of economic incentives such as investment subsidies, fiscal measures and green certificates (Astrand and Neij, 2006). The Swedish state does not actually develop wind farm installations, however.

Developers need to follow two separate legal permit application procedures: one to obtain an environmental permit according to the Environmental Code (SFS 1998:808, Miljöbalken) and another to obtain a building permit according to the Planning and Building Act (SFS 1987:10, Plan-och bygglagen). This process requires the developer to manage applications through a lengthy assessment that consists, in the case of the environmental permit, of up to seven steps:

1. the scoping stage;
2. public hearings;
3. preparation of the assessment report;
4. review of the assessment report;
5. consultation by authorities and the public;
6. the decision on whether or not to grant permission for the project development; and
7. possible appeal of the decision by various stakeholders (Tyskeng, 2006).
To complete this regime requires in-depth knowledge of the law and technical competence in fields as diversified as geology, zoology or engineering – along with a good dose of patience and the ability to make a good case in argument.

Arguing for wind farms

Wind farms must be carefully argued for, and this section presents the developers’ main line of argument. To begin, developers try to establish the necessity of developing wind power. They argue that wind energy is a clean and renewable form of energy that neither contributes to greenhouse effects and climate changes, nor puts biological diversity at risk. They also contend that Sweden needs to develop wind energy if national objectives for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the production of renewable energy are to be reached (Göteborg Energi, 2004). Wind power is featured as part of an environment friendly City of Tomorrow (Sydkraft, 2004).

Wind energy companies dispute the idea that one should reduce energy consumption rather than increase energy production capacity. They differ in this way from environmentalists, who support wind energy while simultaneously demanding a reduction in energy consumption (Världsnaturfonden – WWF, 2002). Some developers may acknowledge a need to improve energy efficiency (Airicole, 2004), but most do not. Lars G. Josephsson, CEO of the largest power producer in Sweden, declares, for example: “There is no value in itself in saving energy as there is no lack of it” (Rognerud, 2004). According to developers, there is an urgent need to build new electricity generation capacity.

Once developers have established the necessity of developing wind power, they have to establish their ability to do it. To validate their technical proficiency, developers can, for example, claim more than a 100 successful development projects (Eolus vind AB, 2004a). Or they can claim to be a world record holder: “Our 3,000 kW plant on Gotland has broken the world record in power generation” (Vattenfall, 2004c).

Being technically able to build wind farm is not enough, however. As private companies, developers must also show that they are able to produce electricity at a profit. As wind power is still relatively more expensive to produce than several other existing sources of energy are, developers need to ward off cost comparisons and to use innovative ways of determining profitability. Thus, they adopt a replacement cost logic and observe that it is unfair to compare the cost for electricity produced in newly built wind farms with the cost for nuclear or hydroelectric electricity produced in fully depreciated plants. They claim that production costs for wind electricity should be compared instead with production costs for other newly built power production units, because older power generation units will soon need to be replaced by newer ones (Vindkompaniet, 2004). Developers also defend the legitimacy of public subventions (Vattenfall, 2004a), and argue that wind power is comparatively cheaper if one reintegrates all externalized environmental costs into the cost of power. To meet the criticism that wind energy is not profitable in the current state of affairs, developers recontextualise costs and redefine the terms of profitability comparisons. Every new commercial installation, like Vattenfall’s (2004b) €170 million project in the Öresund, is a way of supporting the claim that wind power is indeed profitable.

Having established both the necessity to develop wind power and their ability to do so, developers must finally counter eventual objections raised against wind farms and
establish the acceptability of their projects. The criticisms against wind power installations are many. Wind energy is accused of being expensive, intermittent and of limited capacity. Its CO$_2$ reduction potential is, therefore, claimed to be limited. Wind turbines are accused of having a negative visual impact on landscapes and an adverse effect on property values. They are charged with striking birds and bats, disturbing both livestock and insects, and producing health-damaging flickering and noise (including inaudible, low frequencies). They are also blamed for interfering with radar and television reception and for destroying jobs in the tourism industry. And, not least of all, wind energy is criticized for receiving tax subsidies (Föreningen svenskt landskapsskydd, 2005).

To meet these myriad criticisms, developers are explicit about their planning principles. They explain, for example, that no wind farm will produce more than 40 dB(A) measured outside the nearest house, or they detail the pitch-and-stall power control mechanisms that ensure the safety of turbines in the event of storm. Wind farm developers produce minute environmental impact assessments that describe the project’s entire lifecycle, including the noise, vibrations, spills, pollution, shadows and reflexes that the wind farm may generate; or its effects on wildlife, climate, shipping and landscape (Sweden Offshore Wind Ab, 2004). Developers insist that wind turbines be sited after a careful review by the authorities and with the greatest possible respect for nature, culture and outdoor life (Vindkompaniet, 2004). They aim at showing that “altogether, the negative environmental consequences of the planned installation can be deemed as little considering the suggested localization and design” (Infraplan AB et al., 2005, p. 3).

To gain further acceptance for their project, developers communicate with all possible stakeholders. For its (unsuccessful) Fladen wind farm project, Göteborg Energy has, for example, consulted tens of organizations, from the Swedish Armed Forces to the micro-companies that organize fishing excursions on the site where the project is planned (Göteborg Energi, 2002). Developers set up economic compensation schemes for neighbors whose property may lose value (Eolus vind AB, 2004b) or fishermen whose fishing grounds may be affected by an offshore project (Vattenfall, 2005).

Arguments of necessity, ability and acceptability aim at gaining a legal acceptance for the project. A negative answer stops the project or orients it toward lengthy procedures of appeal. A positive one, on the contrary, stamps it as legally compatible with national interests, respectful of the environment and compatible with existing municipal comprehensive plans and wind-power policies. Building permits and environmental permits provide closure to the extended process of consultations, environmental impact assessments, technical planning and negotiations that were initiated when the developer identified an adequate site. When actors consider that an appeal is unlikely to be successful or when there are no more possibilities for appeal, the argumentation is over.

**Analyzing the argumentation of wind power developers**

Different ways of conceiving of argumentation will prompt different understandings of the ways in which wind power developers argue. Some argumentation theorists approach argumentation as rational engagement, turning to formal or informal logic and focusing on the structural qualities of arguments. Others consider argumentation to be a communicative activity, turning to rhetoric and focusing on argumentation as a social practice (van Eemeren et al., 1996).
This state of affairs can be related to the publication in 1958 of two books that have profoundly influenced contemporary argumentation studies. One is Toulmin’s (1958, p. 97) *The Uses of Arguments*, in which he asks: “What is involved in establishing conclusions by the production of arguments?” and answers with a data-claim-warrant model that aims at describing the internal logic of everyday argumentation. Basically, he asserts, the claim is that which the argument seeks to establish, the data are those which support the claim and the warrant is a statement of general character that justifies a passage from data to claim. More elaborately, the warrant relies, in turn, upon a backup that is a general body of evidence, and modal qualifiers allow the claim to be established with varying degrees of certainty. Toulmin’s claim is that argumentation is structurally field invariant but contextually field dependent, meaning that although argumentation does follow formal, near-universal patterns, it follows these patterns in such a way that it will always be local rationalities that determine if a given argument is relevant (Carrilho, 1992).

The second book published that year that had a strong effect on argumentation theory was *Traité de l’argumentation-La nouvelle rhétorique* (*The New Rhetoric – A Treatise on Argumentation*) by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958). This philosophical theory of argumentation blurs the difference once made by Aristotle between dialectics and rhetoric. It focuses on real-life situations of argumentation, and is organized around two primary concerns. One is a concern for the moral value component of the theses in presence, for whether they support or contradict one another and for the conclusions the public can draw from them. A second is the concern that every argument, whether written or spoken, is directed, and hence adapted, to an audience, whether that audience is present or not. To combine these concerns for values and audiences, the new rhetoric reinterprets, reorganizes and develops the categories inherited from classic rhetoric. Descriptive rather than normative, it details and classifies the discursive techniques that aim at creating or increasing the adherence of an audience to the theses with which it is presented.

The divide created by these authors between an approach to argumentation presented primarily in logical terms and an approach presented primarily in rhetorical and communicative terms still exists in contemporary argumentation theory. Some scholars work on the “logical” side (Williams and Colomb, 2003), some work on the “rhetorical” side (Willard, 1989); others expend their energy trying to substantiate the intransient nature of the divide (Rescher, 1998); yet others try to bridge it (Johnson, 2000; van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003). As a rejoinder to the last group, I intend to show that one can combine heuristic inspiration from the logical side and the rhetorical side of argumentation theory. I first present an analysis of the logic of wind developers’ line of argument and then analyze the rhetoric and language use present in developers’ arguments.

**A necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument**

In Toulmin’s (1958) terms, wind power developers are involved in a claim-driven activity organized around the overarching claim that they should be granted a license to develop wind farms. Developers produce various types of data (or premises) to support this claim – that the Swedish parliament has committed the country to a reduction of CO₂ emissions, for example. They also produce various warrants that justify a passage from these data or premises to their claim – the claim that building
wind farms reduces CO² emissions, for instance. Moreover, they mobilize a varied and comprehensive body of evidence that they use to support these warrants, for example, about the negative impact of fossil energy sources on climate change. Their responses to criticism function finally as modal qualifiers that clarify the degree of certainty for the passage between data and claim. They counter claims that wind power consumes important quantities of steel and concrete with life-cycle analyses in which they show that most wind turbines recover their CO² cost in a few years.

Developers organize their arguments in various ways and allow several independent serial arguments to converge after (Beardsley, 1950) on the claim about their right to build wind farms – the claim about CO² reduction, for instance, and the claim that wind energy contributes to the country’s energy independence. For analytical purposes and loosely inspired by the pragma-dialectical procedure of argument reconstruction (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004), one may reconstruct the argumentation described in section on wind power development in terms of a necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument. Formulated in Toulminian terminology, acceptability (acting as a proxy for legal acceptance) stands for the claim, necessity for the data, and ability for the warrant linking the two. Reconstructed in this manner, the developers’ line of argument stands as a stringent, if not a logical, support for the claim that they should be granted a license to develop wind power.

The key issue, then, is the logical strength of this necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument. Two types of flaws can indeed be identified that weaken it: first, that each of the necessity, ability and acceptability steps is controversial and therefore uncertain as a premise; and second, that the line of argument is not a logically valid argument. I will detail the former first.

One can challenge the argument of necessity by denying that the climate is actually changing and, for this reason, that there is no urgent need to assume global environmental measures (Lomborg, 2001); or by claiming that energy change is a less pressing priority than is economic growth; or by advocating that it is preferable to save energy than to increase production. These objections can create doubts about the starting point of developers’ line of argument, so that wind power projects can be dismissed right from the start on the basis of there being no need for such projects.

One can also challenge the arguments of ability. Critics claim that wind turbines are not only inefficient, but are also dangerous in storms (Radetski et al., 2005). Or they contend that there is no specific need to develop wind power, as other renewable sources of energy like hydroelectricity, or even nuclear power are better options for reducing CO² emissions. Or they claim that wind power cannot produce enough power for industrial needs (Hägglund and Stadde, 2005). The purpose is to incapacitate wind energy as a source of energy, so as to stop individual projects and drive wind energy back to the margins of the power production system. More generally, refuting the capacity argument means breaking the logical link between necessity and acceptability.

The arguments of acceptability are likewise challenged every time anti-wind-power actors appeal court decisions, invoke a lack of democracy, or stage local actions – suggesting that there is a strong but unheard popular opposition to wind power. Such criticisms not only counter, delay and halt wind power projects on a case-by-case basis; because they instill the idea that permits granted to developers may be illegitimate, they undermine the idea that legality can be used as an unquestionable proxy for legitimacy.
More important from a logical point of view is the flaw that the necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument is not conclusive. One cannot logically infer from it that wind power should be developed, because the need to develop wind power does not follow logically from the necessity to limit the greenhouse effect, the ability to set up to 5 MW wind turbines or the legality of all wind power installations. These are favorable but not sufficient conditions for the development of wind power. Arguments of necessity, ability and acceptability do not entail, in the formal sense, a license to operate. Developers may try to build a line of argument that complies with the rule of formal logic; they nevertheless evolve within the realm of informal logic proper to real arguments (after Fisher, 1988).

It is not conclusive, but it is a well crafted argument, to use Williams and Colomb’s (2003) metaphor – and this is of major importance. Flawed according to criteria of formal logic, the developers’ line of argument passes Johnson’s (2000) criteria for a good argument according to informal logic: acceptance, truth, relevance, sufficiency and compliance with dialectic obligations.

Speaking of acceptance, the fact that developers do receive permission to build wind farms indicates that their arguments are deemed to be satisfactory by permit granting authorities. The propositions that compose the developers’ line of argument are also reasonably true, in the sense that they are anchored in a broad corpus of scientific knowledge, engineering competence and political concerns. It is definitely relevant in the context of energy infrastructures, moreover, to refer to climate change, profitability, sustainability or legality. Moreover, even if arguments of necessity, ability and acceptability are insufficient to render the claim logically compelling in a formal sense, they apparently provide sufficient support for the claim to be considered acceptable. Developers, finally, do comply with dialectical obligations that characterize situations of argumentation. They answer criticisms and avoid common informal fallacies such as irrelevant conclusions or irrelevant shifts in argument (Walton, 1989). The necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument may not be a logical reasoning that irresistibly sustains their claim. It is, however, a thoroughly focused, clearly structured and far-from-arbitrary exercise of manifest rationality, to use Johnson’s (2000) vocabulary, which provides, in terms of informal logic, strong support of its claim.

Wind power developers manage to create a justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1987) that combines logic of industrial efficiency with logic of the general good. By so doing, they follow in the wake of utilitarian modernist planning-moral, in which one systematically moves from a descriptive state of that which is possible into a prescriptive one of that which should be done (Olson, 1990). True to the traditions of industrialism, civil governance and modernist planning, developers endeavor to form their prescriptive claim in a logical form, aiming at the indisputable persuasiveness of logical knowledge or episteme. Their claim nevertheless remains a matter of public opinion or doxa. This is why, after having unfolded the logical content of the necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument, I now focus on the unsaid; the implied; and, more generally, the doxic logic of persuasion of their arguments. Thus, I turn to a rhetorical approach to argumentation and focus on its communicative nature.

The rhetoric and language of argumentation
Developers do not simply rely on the logical force of plain evidence to convince their audience of the validity of their claim for building permits and environmental permits.
They also make consequential efforts to persuade audiences that their claim is an acceptable one. Turning to the rhetorical side of the practice of argumentation in this section, I illustrate how developers try to acquire and maintain the adherence of those able to affect the outcome of the application process using values, knowledge and opinion. I use the analytical framework of the new rhetoric of Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca (1958) in this discussion, as well as the theory of argumentation in the language of Anscombe and Ducrot (1983).

One way to obtain an initial adherence from the audience is to present adequate premises, either pertaining to the real, such as fact or truths, or based on preferables, such as values (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 15-27). Developers make use of both types of premise. They refer to observable facts, such as the decision by the Swedish parliament to increase the production of wind power electricity. They also refer to supposed facts, such as the need to reduce CO\textsuperscript{2} emissions or to presumptions about a rise in the cost of fossil energy. Developers appeal likewise to values like responsibility (mitigating climate change) or self-discipline (selecting only suitable locations), and appropriately hierarchise these values according to the audience’s preferences.

Once they have won some adherence, developers try to bring their projects into presence for the audience (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 29). To that end, they argue using a broad repertoire of techniques of association (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 44). The necessity-capability-legality line of argument draws some of its persuasiveness from its resemblance to logic (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 45). The reduction of CO\textsuperscript{2} claim is likewise a pragmatic value transfer from climate change onto wind farms (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 62). When they describe wind turbines as the modern heirs of traditional windmills, developers also use the associative technique of co-existence (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 68). And in order to draw upon the force of the real in argumentation (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 78-80), they produce numerous examples, illustrations and models that depict the project when completed.

Developers also try to win adherence for their cause through techniques of dissociation and disconnection (Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1958, § 89). They stress the point that wind power is clean and that fossil fuels are not. By so doing, they introduce dissociation, within the more general concept of energy production, between dirty and clean. This dissociation forces the audience to take a stand on its energy future on good premises for wind power. They also systematically attempt to disassociate wind power from anything that could have a negative impact on their line of argument. To those who invoke the negative impact of wind farms on bird life, they oppose minute studies of flight routes. To those who fear a disturbance of radio and TV waves, they offer technical solutions. In argumentation, the move of dissociation and disconnection is the same: to affirm that elements that should be kept apart are not associated.

The new rhetoric shows that arguing is less a matter of crafting stringently than of rhetorically establishing the reasonableness of one’s claim.

Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca (1958) show that persuasion is more than a mere matter of logos. Ethos and pathos play an important part. Staying at a distance from both the aporias of formalism and the lure of demagogy, developers need to identify the ideas, wording and style that ground their own credibility and match the audience’s
hierarchies of values at the time and place of the presentation. Public attitudes come and go. Developers need to find the discursive devices that will win the audience’s adherence for the reasonableness of their claim and retain it as long as possible.

For Anscombe and Ducrot (1983), such devices exist in the structure of language itself. Noting that argumentation takes place within a language, they emphasize the linguistic character of argumentation. They consider that the structure of language imposes its conditions on argumentation in a way that is reducible neither to logic nor to psychology. The meaning of a statement comprises, as an integrated and constituting part, a kind of influence that they label “its argumentative force”. The characteristic of this force is to orient meaning. For a statement to signify, it must provide orientation.

How language orients argumentation can be illustrated with the argument that an eventual negative impact of wind turbines on landscape can always be reversed, as turbines can be easily pulled down when they have reached the end of their economic or technical life (Graninge, 2004). The “reversibility argument” is used as a rebuttal to the accusation that turbines damage natural landscapes. Aside from the fact that the argument implicitly admits that turbines can damage the landscape, the crux of the matter is that a wind power installation is short-lived. This fact can easily be turned against wind power, by claiming that wind power is too temporary a solution to be worthy of the investment. The challenge for wind power developers is thus to orient the “reversibility argument” to their advantage. They do so by introducing a distinction between wind turbines and wind power: They admit that turbines are short-lived but emphasize that wind energy is eternal, thereby linking the reversibility argument to the renewable character of wind and turning reversibility into renewability. If the audience imagines that the dismantling of a nuclear plant faces many unsolved technical challenges, the reversibility argument may then be oriented even more strongly in favor of wind power. Anscombe and Ducrot’s (1983) rhetorical approaches to argumentation shows that wording practices are so essential to the pragmatics of argumentation that every word can count.

In conclusion, the wind power developers’ practice of argumentation appears to be a form of communication (Willard, 1989) grounded in a rich and diversified work on language and meaning. Developers mitigate the logical flaws of their reasoning with skilful strategic maneuvering in argumentation (van Eemereen and Houtlosser, 2003) based on rhetoric. While dressing their message in logic, they are highly discriminating, inventive and sensitive in what they select, organize and deliver to audiences. They are particularly careful at orienting their arguments with adequate wording and contextualizing strategies. And unless one oversimplifies their story, it is difficult to reduce their practice of argumentation to logic or rhetoric.

**Obtaining a license to operate**

The argumentation of developers in favor of wind power is a case of organizational actors arguing in favor of a license to operate for their new ventures(s). The notion of license to operate appears less in academic circles than in those of practitioners (Dean, 2001; Elkington, 1998). It refers in a theoretically unelaborated but telling manner to one of the common tenets of stakeholder theory (Friedman and Miles, 2006), corporate social responsibility theory (McWilliams, 2001) or business citizenship theory (Logsdon and Wood, 2001): that organizations cannot run their operations
unless the communities in which they operate accept their presence. Licenses to operate, like medieval corporate charters, are reminders that corporations are social as well as economic institutions and thus subject to public accountability and control (Keller, 1997).

The notion of license to operate actualizes one of the core tenets of new institutionalism in organization theory: that organizations require institutional legitimacy in order to survive (Powell and Di Maggio, 1991). A license to operate, like legitimacy, is a matter of social acceptance, and strategic maneuvering in argumentation toward the obtaining of a license to operate reminds one of the rhetorical strategies of legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). There is an important difference between a license to operate and legitimacy, however. Whereas legitimacy expresses how an organization is perceived by its constituencies at any given moment, a license to operate remains in the possession of the organization until it is revoked. The two do not always coincide. An organization can be legitimate, yet denied a license to operate, as in the case of the African National Congress under the apartheid regime in South Africa. Correspondingly, an organization can enjoy a license to operate without being acknowledged as legitimate by major stakeholders, as a rogue corporation would be, or a corrupt administration. The difference between legitimacy and license to operate is akin to the difference between legitimate and legal.

Aware of this difference, developers argue to establish the legitimacy of wind power and to obtain a legal license to operate. A legal license to operate is the binary measures of their performance as arguers, and like all acknowledgement of performance, it is something that developers cannot themselves produce, but can only strive for (Corvellec, 1997).

It is important at this point to bear in mind that argumentation is a speech act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004). Correspondingly, how developers argue – the observable product of their argumentation – is that which they do as developers. In broad discursive terms, wind power developers argue to create favorable conditions of possibility (after Foucault, 1971) for their projects. In more practically terms, developers mobilize, organize and present a broad corpus of technical knowledge on the basis of a rich experience and a discriminating intuition. They assemble logically organized arguments in a socially competent way, paying cautious attention to the wording or communicative contexts of the delivery of their message, and joining rigor with imagination.

Developers arguing for a license to operate constantly combine and balance their practice of argumentation between logic and rhetoric. Developers try to convince and reach the intellect with the force of logic, while simultaneously trying to persuade and influence the will of others by appealing to their moral sense and to their emotions. To succeed, they need to combine the rational force of plain evidence with the enticing force of seduction. Alternatively, they make a rhetorical use of logic, by trying to make a persuasive tool of its supposedly logically binding character, while making logical use of rhetoric when they systematically exploit the rhetorical mechanism of argumentation. In their language usage, developers work simultaneously on logic and rhetoric, so as to satisfy the parallel and sometimes concurrent demands of stringency and persuasiveness placed upon their projects by the institutional environment. They combine the rational and the reasonable within their professional practice, in a way that bridges, for practical purposes, the theoretical divide between logic and rhetoric.
Argumentation is their trade, and they need to manage the conceptual and practical richness it involves, even the numerous contradictions it conceals. This is a condition of their success at obtaining the building and environmental permits that are the *sine qua non* conditions of the realization of their projects.

**Concluding remarks**

Two main traits emerge when we examine the developers’ arguments for obtaining a license to operate wind farms in Sweden: first, that their approach can be formulated in terms of a necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument; and second, that they combine a logical approach with a rhetorical approach in their practice of argumentation.

Is this way of arguing specific to wind farm development or can one find a similar approach to argumentation in other situations and contexts? Considering that the necessity-ability-acceptability line of argument expresses a mode of justification that associates a technical logic of industrial efficiency with a legal logic of public will, and that both are widely advocated in late capitalism (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1987), I would answer that it is a recurrent pattern of justification within organizational contexts.

Likewise, I would suggest that the dynamic blend of logic and rhetoric at work in the developers’ argumentation is a recurrent trait of practical argumentation in organizations. Whereas strong pressures are placed upon managers to show signs of logic rationality, they argue in *ad hoc* social contexts of communication in which rhetoric is never at rest.

So, if some practical recommendations can be made to managers in the parting words of this analysis, it would be to combine in their argumentation a logical approach to factual knowledge with a situational sense for the rhetoric favored by the audience. A good start would be to reflect on how to logically and rhetorically link the premises upon which rest the idea of launching a new venture with the proposal that it should actually be done.

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