

INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

Representation and Design Issues

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Leaders are an essential element of global governance. Leaders can rise above domestic politics and adopt policies that provide global collective benefits. Leaders can apply peer pressure and clarify enlightened self interest in coordinating actions on deadlocked global crises. Inter-personal trust among leaders allows for candid discussion of sensitive issues without political posturing. The relationships between leaders are an important factor in the success of summits. More leaders make these relationships more difficult to establish. The emergence of the G20 as *the* forum for dealing with global issues will undoubtedly change the personal and political dynamics of summitry.

The smaller the group is, the greater the probability that the dynamic between leaders will be conducive to agreement. A greater number of leaders presents a greater challenge in developing empathy and personal relationships—imperative in formulating consensus. In comparison to a meeting of eight leaders, a meeting of twenty leaders makes free-wheeling discussion at the summit table more difficult and hampers the ability of all leaders to intervene on all issues. Additionally, it puts an even greater premium on good interpretation. A larger summit also complicates preparation: logistically, administratively, and substantively. This more complex preparation process raises the issue of whether or not a more permanent secretariat is needed to manage summit preparations.

The first three G20 meetings convened more participants than just the twenty leaders, including heads of international organizations and finance ministers. Heads of international organizations attend summits for reasons of legitimacy and follow-up, not for their “expertise”. Summits are not about expertise, but about political deals and leadership. They should be forums in which leaders deal with other leaders. The expertise provided by heads of international organizations and ministers should be drawn upon in the preparation of summits. The majority of issues are discussed and agreed upon during summit preparation. The summit table should be reserved for the twenty leaders to crunch the issues that cannot be agreed upon beforehand.

There are too many summits. The G20 emerged as the “premier economic forum”, while the G8 continues to meet and address other global problems. Provided the G20 is able to deliver on promises made regarding the economic crisis, it will likely enlarge its agenda to tackle issues the G8 currently addresses. The extent to which China and others block enlarging the G20 agenda, will determine the viability of other summits remaining active, particularly the G8.

The Sherpas for the G20 are the same as for the G8; they are personal representatives of their leaders and come from various parts of government. Therefore, a shift of the G20 agenda from an economic and financial focus to broader issues such as climate change and development will have little impact on the key ministries involved in summit preparation. Already, summit preparation involves several agencies, departments, and arrangements between finance deputies, foreign affairs sous-Sherpas and political directors. The key to the process are the connections between the Sherpa and the leader and the Sherpa and the various preparatory processes and officials.

The ability of summits to address global challenges depends on Sherpas being truly representative of their leaders. This is especially the case in the absence of super-ministers—as is the case in most countries—when multiple ministries are deeply involved, where no single ministry is clearly in charge and the challenges themselves are inter-sectoral, multi-ministerial and horizontal across government. Sherpas are able to bridge these divides if they really represent their leader. Furthermore, it is important to recall that the purpose of summits is to: commit countries to internationally agreed upon principles and policies, form agreement on working together, create new organizations or processes, and ask for reports. Summits are not designed nor expected to solve the world's problems. They should be designed so that agreements and solutions to problems are internationally coordinated and executed.