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An Institutional Perspective on Public Services

Managing Publicness, Identities, and Behavior

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4.1 Introduction

If random individuals are asked to mention a public service, they will intuitively provide an answer. They may mention a police department or a municipality. However, the answer in some countries may be "hospital" or "school," while individuals from other parts of the world may argue these services are private. It may become even more confusing when these people start to argue about whether the organization should be part of the public *sector* or whether it should be an organization that is publicly *funded*. Others may argue that this is not important as long as the organization has a public *aim* or fulfills a societal *need*. This chapter aims to delineate what public service means in an organizational context. Moreover, we discuss how publicness and the differences between public services can influence the behavior of organizational members.

Section 4.2 will first provide an overview of various perspectives of publicness. We will frame publicness as an important institutional characteristic of public institutions and discuss how to distinguish public from private organizations. Then, this differentiation in perspectives of publicness is not only applied to distinguish between public and non-public institutions but also to distinguish between public institutions themselves. Next, we will discuss the institutional dynamics and how individual characteristics and behavior can be meshed with institutional features. Here, concepts of identity and fit play an important role. In Section 4.4, the framework that has been developed illustrates the relevance of institutions as a crucial contextual element which influences behavior within a public service organization. Finally, in Section 4.5, practical and research implications of our institutional perspective are discussed.

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4.2 A Multidimensional Perspective on Publicness

Despite the intuitive answers of individuals regarding what public services are, distinguishing public from private is complicated as, first, publicness should be seen as a multidimensional concept, and second, what is seen as public is context-dependent.

When asked to define a public service, it is likely that individuals refer to different criteria. For example, one may point to the ownership of the organization, distinguishing between governmental or private ownership (Bozeman 1987). Others may point to the source of funding and argue that organizations that are not owned but fully subsidized by the government should also be seen as public (Bozeman 1987; Rainey 2009). Another argument may be based on the mission of the organization when one argues that if an organization aims to contribute to society, it must be a public service (Antonsen and Beck Jørgensen 1997; Bozeman 2007). In the literature, multiple dimensions feature to determine the publicness of services, such as ownership, funding, or values. These dimensions relate to different aspects of the institutional nature of services (March and Olsen 1989; Scott 2001). Here, we use institutional theory to explain the complexity of defining public service.

Institutions consist of elements such as rules and norms, which shape routines, common practices, and shared meanings, and can be seen as relatively persisting phenomena (Scott 2001). Institutions can be seen as social phenomena that regulate, and to a certain extent, standardize behavior (March and Olsen 1989). We can distinguish between structural, normative, and cultural–cognitive elements of institutions (Scott 2001). Rules but also buildings are examples of structural elements as they provide structure to the institution. For example, a church and its rules form important elements of the Catholic institution. Normative elements are values and expectations. In that same Catholic institution, priests are expected to remain unmarried and devote their life entirely to the church. Such normative elements are often less visible but can, nevertheless, play an important part in determining the behavior of individuals (Perry 2000; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Finally, cultural–cognitive elements are, for example, beliefs and symbols. Bringing it back to the Catholic Church again, the crucifix is an important and powerful symbol, but so are many other symbols which illustrate the underlying values. Institutions can, hence, have many different forms and arise at various levels of life.

An important feature of institutions is that they are relatively resistant to change. This can be attributed to the self-reinforcing mechanisms found in institutions, which strive to maintain points of punctuated equilibria (Krasner 1984). These are starting points of a long period of stability, and this is what institutions strive for through various mechanisms. Mahoney (2000) identified four of such mechanisms: (1) a balance of power that favors the current institutional make-up; (2) the existence of legitimacy for institutional practices; (3) a favorable cost–benefit balance

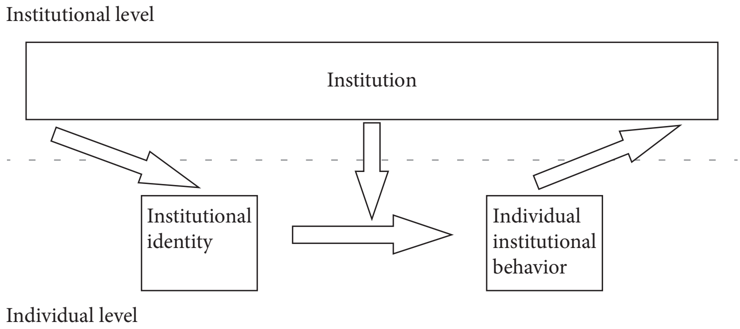

Figure 4.1 Institutional dynamics at the individual and institutional level

(it would entail more costs than benefits to induce change); and (4) the functionality of practices. Disrupting any of these will open a window of opportunity for change, and conversely, if not disrupted, great change will not occur, explaining why institutions are often more persistent than expected.

Individuals interact with many different institutions on a daily basis. These institutions structure their behavior, and at the same time, individuals form and constantly reshape those same institutions. For instance, political structures determine how individuals behave, but with each electoral cycle, this political structure can be adjusted or changed by citizens (March and Olsen 1989; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). When we try to describe the influence of institutions on individuals, we can look at the *institutional context* of particular individuals, which is comprised of all institutions with which these individuals interact. Within the literature, some scholars focus on macro-level institutions, such as countries or political systems. Others focus on societal values and groups at the meso-level. Here, we focus on the micro-level of institutions, which entails interaction between institutions and individual behaviors (see Figure 4.1). The institutional environment stretches over various levels, ranging from macro to micro-institutions, all of which are interdependently interconnected and influence one another.

Looking at the institutional context raises the thorny issue of the concept of context itself. Different traditions in management and public management take the role of context into account in varying ways. By determining the expectations, rules, routines, and norms, the institutional context influences the behavior of an individual (Greenwood et al. 2010; Scott 2001; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). This is the perspective taken here, and it offers a different conceptualization of context than Johns' (2006) and also a broader one than what has been customary in other traditions in public management (O'Toole and Meier 2015; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; see also Chapter 1). Our conceptualization combines various insights, as we will explain. This will allow us to provide more insights into the actual dynamics of leadership, management, and performance in public service organizations.

4.2.1 Approaches to Publicness Seen from an Institutional Perspective

Various public administration scholars have aimed to disentangle the concept of publicness as an institutional characteristic of public services. We will use the institutional perspective to discuss several main approaches that aid us in understanding the nature of public services.

Bozeman (1987) boldly claimed that *all organizations are public*, arguing that each organization is funded, owned, or controlled by society to a certain extent. Even the most private companies are regulated by public authority and rules and are often partly dependent on public funding (e.g. for research or innovation) to survive. Moreover, he argues that there are many private organizations that fulfill a societal need. He argues that it is, therefore, impossible to regard publicness or privateness as a dichotomy. Instead, publicness should be seen as a multidimensional concept. Three dimensions are distinguished.

First, ownership, which can be private, governmental, and many different forms in-between such as non-profit foundations or public–private partnerships. Second, publicness is determined by the degree to which the organization depends on public funding. Schools may be privately owned but fully funded by government, as is the case in the Netherlands. According to Bozeman (1987), such a dependency on public funds makes it likely that these services will be subject to societal pressures to a higher degree than organizations that are funded privately. Third, the degree to which organizations are controlled by public authority determines the publicness of the organization (Haque 2001; Koppenjan 2005). In the US, some prison facilities have been privatized, but they are still subject to strict public regulation. Hence, according to Bozeman (1987), we should speak of organizations providing public services that differ in degree of publicness based on their ownership, funding, and public authority. In his analysis, Bozeman (1987; 2007) focuses on what we would call structural elements of institutions as determining the publicness of organizations. He focuses on the organizational characteristics and regulatory elements of organizations that make them more or less public. This perspective leads to the conclusion that an organization or service can be seen as public when it is publicly funded, publicly owned, and subject to public authority to a high degree.

Antonsen and Beck Jørgensen (1997) take a different approach by focusing on the values that define publicness, thereby focusing on normative and cultural–cognitive elements that shape the publicness of services (Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; Moynihan et al. 2011; Rainey and Bozeman 2000). From a cultural–cognitive perspective, publicness is about the values that an organization relates to and the mission of the organization. Publicness is about whether the organization plays a role in upholding important public values such as equity, legitimacy, and responsiveness (Antonsen and Beck Jørgensen 1997). Beck Jørgensen and

Bozeman (2007) distinguish various categories of public values (see Chapter 2). For example, there are public values relating to a public administration's contribution to the public good and regarding the relationship with citizens, which includes responsiveness. From the perspective of public values as the most important driver of publicness, organizational ownership or authority (economic or political) is not relevant. It is the values the organization stands for that determine whether it can be characterized as a public service. This means that companies that are entirely private from a structural perspective can be public when they adhere to public values.

A final perspective on publicness can be derived from the public value framework. This framework derives publicness from the impact of an organization on society (Moore 1995). Public organizations should focus on the impact they have or want to have on society and ask themselves if they have legitimacy and support for their mission as well as the capabilities to reach it. A crucial role has been reserved in this process for public managers, who are the prime actors in creating public value, obtaining legitimacy with the authorizing environment, and building capacity to obtain results (see Chapter 2).

Each of these approaches provides a different focus on how to distinguish publicness. All of these are grounded in an institutional perspective, zooming in on different institutional components (structure, mission, or values, respectively, and function or impact). Although these elements of the institutional context are almost a given, institutions are not a given but can change: Routines can be altered, and values can evolve (Scott 2001). What is seen as public service is dynamic in time and place as we can see differences between countries and eras in what is considered a public service. Before the twentieth century, healthcare was considered a private service in many countries, relying on charitable foundations or upper-class citizens to provide these services to poor people unable to pay for them. After a period of expanding welfare states in which healthcare was a public service, we can now see a development toward the privatization of healthcare services. Other services that were seen as typically public until recently, such as postal services or telecom, have been privatized in various countries (Haque 2001). On the other hand, for years, banks have been claiming that they were not providing public services, but when the context changed and the Great Financial Crisis evolved, some banks proved too big to fail and were considered to be public from a structural perspective at least. These examples show that public services are not a stable phenomenon: Societies think differently over time regarding whether services are public. The line between public and private has, over the years, also become more fluid due to public–private partnerships, privatization, and private companies such as social enterprises aiming to contribute to society (Moynihan et al. 2011; Rainey and Bozeman 2000). Moreover, there are large differences between countries regarding what they see as public. Whereas hospital services are part of the public sector in some countries, they are not in other countries. While schools are public organizations in many Nordic countries, they are private in the Netherlands and the US (albeit fully publicly funded).

Hence, when referring to public services, this should always be placed within a specific time and place.

This section has shown how scholars have different perspectives on publicness and public services. It shows that what is a public service is context-dependent, heavily influenced by the institutional environment. However, we have provided some insight into institutional elements that play a role in determining publicness. This can be used to describe and analyze the public nature of specific services.

4.3 Differences in Publicness between Public Services

The discussion above shows that because of multiple foci, of which often only one is taken into account, much ambiguity exists with regard to the concepts of public sector or public service. Even within what would be considered the public sector or public services, major differences can be found between organizations. For example, would we argue that schools and government agencies are similar? When we speak of the public sector or public services in too general terms, this conceals the amalgam or patchwork of organizations that these broad terms actually entail. Public service organizations share certain similarities but are also distinct in several important ways (Perry and Rainey 1988; Rainey 2009). Below, the same foci as above are applied to examine the institutional characteristic of publicness further.

A first important difference between public services is the degree of public authority to which they are subject. Whether public service organizations are under scrutiny not only depends on the nature of the service but also on the political climate or even the salience of the service in society at a given moment. For example, the relative autonomy of schools can suddenly be limited when a major scandal with spending public funds is discovered. An organization that is scrutinized thoroughly will likely be subject to stronger institutional forces determining behavior within the organization (Haque 2001).

Second, public services differ in the values to which they adhere (Antonsen and Beck Jørgensen 1997). For example, penitentiary services may place less emphasis on responsiveness to clients than schools. Differences in mission between organizations in a public sector may matter for how they steer or direct the behavior of employees (Van Loon 2017).

Third, the nature of the service may differ between organizations that are publicly owned, funded, or controlled. Some organizations aim to regulate, while others aim to provide services (Kjeldsen 2014; Van Loon et al. 2013). Hasenfeld (1983) distinguished between people-changing and people-processing organizations. People-changing organizations need to build long-term relationships with clients and aim to change the clients they serve. For example, both schools and prisons (in many countries) aim to change the individuals that enter the organization (Hasenfeld 1983; Kjeldsen 2014). People-processing organizations, on the other hand, do not aim to change their clients but change their *status*. They have more single-shot contacts, such as when citizens apply for a construction permit. These are ideal-types and many organizations will be a mix between the two. Municipalities, for example, have some tasks resembling a processing service and others a changing service. However, a dominant nature can often be identified. The processing or changing nature of organizations matters for the way the work is organized and which values and norms are imposed on employees (Van Loon et al. 2015).

4.4 The Relationship between Public Service and Public Service Identities

The interplay of various institutions eventually determines the guise of a public service. This is only the start of our perspective on the role of institutions and their characteristics. The analysis has, until here, focused on the institutional level, but as said before, institutions are constantly being reproduced by individual members (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Therefore, it is important to also bring the individual level into the equation as an important actor influencing public service.

4.4.1. Individual Behavior: Institutional Rather Than Rational

In contemporary Western culture, individual liberties seemingly contradict the idea of institutionalized individual behavior, in particular when thinking about behavior in public institutions. Popular conviction has always been that people pursue their own self-interest, be it in business, love, or public affairs. A widespread assumption is that people rationally calculate what is in it for them and subsequently act accordingly (also described as the "economic man"). Nowadays, reference is often made to millennials as being narcissistic (Twenge et al. 2008), but earlier, entire behavioral models were developed assuming that humans were completely rational when deciding on a course of action. A prime example of such an approach is Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory of motivating behavior that stated that people calculate the utility of an action based on its valence (or the value they would attribute to it), rendering a preferred course of action.

However, the presumption that people behave based on rational expectations is as flawed as is the presumption of millennials being narcissistic (Roberts et al. 2010). In fact, the general assumption of the dominance of rational behavior—understood as calculating a course of action based on available alternatives and other sources of information, such as the probability of future events and possible outcomes (Simon 1955)—is more often than not debunked by scientific insights. Simon (1997) developed the term "bounded rationality" for this observation. An important part of the explanation for bounded rationality comes from the psychology of irrationality (Simon 1997), characterized by the predominance of intuition over other types of cognition, the limited processing capacity of human cognition, and other types of cognitive biases (later further developed by Kahneman et al. 2011; Thaler and Sunstein 2009). However, Simon (1997, 111) also pointed to institutions as important sources determining individual behavior: “Human rationality gets its higher goals…from the institutional setting in which it operates and by which it is molded.” March and Olsen (1989) have described this as “the logic of appropriateness.” According to them, “to act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good” (March and Olsen 2004, 479). This explains the individual behavior in an institutional environment rather than the “logic of consequence,” on which the stereotype of the “economic man” and its rational behavior is based.

4.4.2 Explaining the Mechanism behind Identities and Institutional Behavior

Moving between the institutional and the individual level to unravel the process from institutions to individual behavior, we require a concept that has clear links with both levels. One such concept is “identity” which refers to one’s internalized positional designations (Stryker 1980). There is a plethora of interchangeable or related terms such as “self,” “self-concept,” “social identity,” and “role identity.” The concept of identity and other related terms have the idea in common that they refer to some kind of socially constructed perception of how one sees oneself in a particular institutionalized situation. On the one hand, this causes identity to be an important explanation of various kinds of individual behavior in institutional situations (“who am I as a child, a parent, an employee, a citizen; and what are the associated values and goals?”). On the other hand, institutions play an important role in forming identities through internalization or socialization (Berger and Luckman [1966] 1991). In this, the concept of identity acts as a bridge between the institutional environment and the reflexive individual and their individual behavior. Figure 4.1 illustrates the dynamics at the institutional and individual level.

The process of socialization (from the perspective of the institution) or internalization (from the perspective of the individual) can be observed from various viewpoints. Socialization into institutional identities partly takes place by responding to the expectations of others (Stryker 1980). In this way, every interaction in a structured or institutional environment is socialization, and it is an ever-continuing process. By taking the role of others through using common symbols or language—carriers of institutions (Scott 2001)—one gets socialized into a particular identity. This “altercasting” (Stryker 1957) transfers the logic of the institution to the individual member, helping the individual to understand what is being expected as a member of that particular institution and internalizing it.

However, not all internalization is equally successful. Ryan and Deci (2012) distinguish between various types of identities, ranging from an externally regulated identity—in which only the necessary information instrumental for operating in a particular institution to reap the benefits of that institution is internalized—over an introjected identity—in which the information for institutional approval is internalized—to an identified identity—in which the logic of an institution is internalized to the extent that this becomes a matter of personal importance. A particular type of identity is an integrated one, which involves that various identities are assimilated reciprocally such that they are all aligned. The degree of internalization depends on the extent to which the basic psychological needs of relatedness (belonging to an environment), autonomy (minimal external control), and competence (conveying information of success) are provided by the institutional environment (Ryan and Deci 2012). Gagné (2003) provides a compelling example in which female gymnasts' identity was leaning more toward identification if their coaches were autonomy supportive, but conversely displayed a more externally regulated identity if their coaches were seen as controlling. This illustrates that one's identity as an institutional member not only depends on the logic of the institution but also on the extent to which an institution provides satisfaction for one's basic psychological needs.

Once internalized to a certain degree, individuals will act upon their institutional identities and consequently behave according to the logic of appropriateness. As a general rule, the values and goals incorporated in a given identity will increase the probability of related behavior. Multiple theories (Ajzen 2005; Bandura 1986; Stryker 1980, to name but a few) posit that internal standards of some sort lead to associated behavior by means of self-regulation, without external pressure or rewards. However, several factors influence how strong this effect will be.

A first set of factors relates to formal characteristics of the identity. The degree of internalization matters substantially. Applying the terminology of self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2012), more autonomous types of identities (identification) will demonstrate a stronger link with behavior as opposed to controlled types of identities (externally regulated or introjected). However, it is not only the type of internationalization but also its saliency that determines its impact on behavior (Stryker 1980). The higher placed in the salience hierarchy, the more often an identity will be used as a reference for behavior.

A second set of factors has more to do with the environment in which prospective behavior is to take place. A core tenet of institutional analysis of individual behavior is that the institutional environment is key to what kind of behavior is expected. After all, the logic of appropriateness is limited to the particular institution for which the specified behavior is appropriate. A police officer first and foremost behaves as a police officer when in uniform. Police officers outside their institutional environment may be seen as showing certain—stereotypical—behavior attributed to their "police personality" (such as being overly strict as a parent or having a "bossy" or "tough" nature among friends). The relatively greatest likelihood of finding a police officer behaving like one will be within the boundaries of the related institution.

The explanatory mechanism for this observation lies with the theory of person–environment fit (P–E fit). This is an amalgam of related theories that explains behavior by means of the interaction between the individual characteristics and the environment (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Fit is defined as "the congruence, match, similarity, or correspondence between the person and the environment" (Edwards and Shipp 2007, 211). This could be either supplementary fit, referring to similarities between the individual and its environment in terms of values or goals, or complementary fit, when "a weakness or need of the environment is offset by the strength of the individual and vice versa" (Muchinsky and Monahan 1987, 271). The effect of identities on institutional behavior is mainly explained by means of supplementary fit. In any work organization, this could either be fit with the organization in general (person–organization fit), fit with the supervisor or leader (person–supervisor fit), or fit with the team (person–team fit). Such fit is substantially correlated with, for example, job performance or reduced turnover (Hoffman and Woehr 2006; Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Verquer et al. 2003). Although person–environment fit theory focuses on the organizational context, it is easy to see an analogy with non-"work organization" types of institutions where supplementary fit leads to behavior that is appropriate for a given institutional context, such as in church. However, the multitude of identities and institutions individuals are involved in opens up the possibility of misfit and value conflict between the individual and a given institution. Integrated identities or highly salient but non-fitting identities could cause an individual not to match with the environment in any way. Apart from possible coercive measures from the side of the institution, this will also have a self-regulatory effect as it causes frustration and counterproductive behavior. There are many different types of misfit possible, and these are likely to have different consequences for individual behavior (Edwards 2008).

4.4.3 Behavior in Public Institutions: Management of Individual Behavior as a Link

Public institutions, and in particular public organizations, shape and guide behavior. According to Simon,

> Administrative organizations cannot perhaps claim the same importance as repositories of the fundamental human values as that possessed by older traditional institutions like the family. Nevertheless, with man's growing economic interdependence, and with his growing dependence on the community for essential government services, formal organization is rapidly assuming a role of broader significance than it has ever before possessed. (Simon 1997, 111)

Public institutions can give rise to different identities and behaviors, for example, a soldier's almost physical reaction—such as increased heartbeat or arousal due to pride—when seeing the national flag or a uniform, but also the dress code or lack thereof of civil servants. The part of the self that is associated with public institutions is a complex amalgam. However, not all identity-related elements are of importance for management. Beer et al. (1984) identified different institutional subsystems that are important in managing human assets. For our analysis, four systems have been identified as relevant for management. They entail work systems, reward (or motivational) systems, (a system of) human resources flow, and (a system of) employee influence. These four can be considered sub-institutions at the intra-organizational level as they structure and constrain behavior within the organization. It is interesting to note that they have particular guises when it comes to public institutions.

Considering work systems, a typical governmental organization is depicted as a bureaucracy and has a number of identifying characteristics. Strong hierarchy, division of labor, high levels of formalism in terms of regulation, and written records have always been the trademark of bureaucracy (Weber 1978). Robert Merton (1939) noted early on that there was also an influence on civil servants' behavior, or as he termed it, "personality." He noted that civil servants often lacked flexibility or even demonstrated "trained incapacity" as a result of their membership of public bureaucracies. This has been attributed to "infusing group members with appropriate attitudes and sentiments… [and] there are definite arrangements in the bureaucracy for inculcating and reinforcing these sentiments" (Merton 1939, 562–3). Although not all public organizations adhere to the ideal-type of the bureaucracy, elements of bureaucratic work systems are often associated with public organizations, for example, for reasons of public control, ownership, or funding. The point is that this sub-institution structures public servants' attitudes and behavior to fit the organization.

Another sub-institution concerns the HR workflow or how personnel and their individual careers are managed. Although various traditions and systems exist in the public sector (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004), the common foundation is that of an ideal–typical bureaucracy where civil servants are employed for life (Weber 1978). Combined with a pyramidal organizational structure, this results in a career system that is rife with formal selection and promotion procedures. Georgellis et al. (2011) noted longer tenure for public sector employees. Houston (2011) demonstrated that this is not just an institutional arrangement but that government employees also exhibit higher levels of preference for a secure job. Whether this is a selection effect (Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007) or a socialization effect is of little importance as it clearly indicates that individual identity mirrors the institutional system of how human resources are managed. Even with public service bargains being reconsidered (Van der Meer et al. 2013), many traditional elements still remain in place in public organizations.

A third sub-institution of importance in Beer et al.'s (1984) framework is that of employee influence or the systems put in place to create participation. Public organizations have, in recent decades, put an elaborate system in place to ensure employee participation. Collective bargaining rights have been established (Nomden et al. 2003; Riccucci 2011) although these may be differently structured than in the private sector. At the same time, other systems of individual and collective participation were applied (Horton 2003). This is subsequently reflected in how individual behaviors adhere to the institutional arrangements. In the US, union membership steeply increased in the public sector following the acquisition of bargaining rights. Unionization rates in the public sector have been substantially higher in both the US and Europe compared to the private sector (BLS 2020; Scheuer 2011).

A final sub-institution is that of the rewards system, and by extension, the entire associated motivational system. Part of the rewards system concerns compensation aimed at providing extrinsic rewards. Traditionally, bureaucrats were paid a fixed salary in return for their services (Weber 1978). After their career, they received a state pension, which was usually higher than regular pensions. Various reforms tried to introduce more flexible pay systems, not always with great success (Perry et al. 1989; Willems et al. 2006) as public servants have less preference for performance-related pay (Houston 2000). Rewards, however, surpass mere compensation as its main aim is to motivate employees (Beer et al. 1984). This is where another type of public institutional identity, public service motivation, requires attention because it is an important reason why the rewards system and its aim to motivate public servants through financial incentives are problematic (Georgellis et al. 2011; see also Chapter 14).

Although its name refers to motivation, public service motivation has been conceived in such a way that it can be considered a public service identity (Perry and Vandenabeele 2008). First, given its definition as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (Perry and Wise 1990, 368), it is clearly related to the concept of identity as applied in this chapter. Likewise, the definition by Vandenabeele (2007, 549) refers to the "belief, values [and] attitudes," which also refer to the components of identity. Second, the definitions by Perry and Wise (1990), Rainey and Steinbauer (1999), and Vandenabeele (2007) refer to institutional elements, explicitly addressing various types of institutions, such as nation, state, or community of people, as a framework of reference. Finally, most measures of public service motivation use some type of value-related construct as its constituting basis. Dimensions such as public interest, public value, self-sacrifice, or compassion are among the most popular operational definitions of public service motivations' dimensions (Kim et al. 2013; Perry 1996; Vandenabeele 2008). These all refer to values that are particular to the institutional environment in which public service motivation is found (Vandenabeele 2011). For all these reasons, public service motivation as applied in contemporary research is as much a motivation as it is an identity.

Public service motivation has been associated with various types of outcomes. However, not all outcomes are equally affected by individual public service motivation levels. Outcomes that are more related to particular public values are more strongly related to employees' public service motivation (Van Loon 2017). For instance, service outcomes (societal added value) and democratic outcomes demonstrate a stronger correlation than other outcomes, such as efficiency, timeliness of service, or individual citizen satisfaction.

This overview of institutional characteristics and associated behavior illustrates the relevance of taking the institutional context, including various sub-institutions, into account when managing for public service performance. Institutional characteristics of the organization influence the effect of public service motivation on performance. In addition, work systems can reduce or foster public service motivation. Likewise, Davis (2013) observed linkages between unionization, red tape, and public service motivation, again creating links between multiple sub-institutions. It is, therefore, only to be expected that other institutional characteristics will also moderate this relationship between public service motivation and performance.

4.5 Institutions, Identities, and Management: Implications for Practice and Research

Our unsurprising conclusion is that good management is not about pushing the correct buttons in the correct order to ensure "getting things done." Management requires sound knowledge of the institutional layout of both the organization and its institutional context, as the interdependence of an institution with its surrounding institutions determines the actual guise of that particular institution. This would explain the failure of, for example, the Belgian Copernic Reform of federal government (Bourgeault and Van Dorpe 2013). An important element was bringing in senior managers from the private sector. However, in only a few years, most of them had left, being unable to navigate the institutional waters of federal government (see Chapter 6).

However, knowledge alone is not sufficient. Management also requires the ability to navigate this complex environment in order to make the right decisions. After all, an institutional perspective claims that institutions both constrain and enable agency (Giddens 1984). This insight is incorporated into the contextual perspective that Paauwe (2004) has presented for strategic human resource management. In this perspective, it is important to align the strategy with the "institutional drivers" from the external environment and with the internal institutional layout. By also identifying the "dominant coalition" and its associated room for maneuver, management will be more successful (Paauwe 2004). By harnessing the right institutional identities and looking for fit, management will obtain the best results, given the institutional environment.

Management is not limited to passively responding to the environment and operating within the "room for maneuver" associated with this layout. Taking into account the interdependent institutional framework, institutions can also actively be changed. However, for this, it does not suffice to change organizational structures or practices. Rather, management should seek to alter the institutional features by responding to, or even creating, windows of opportunity for change. By capitalizing on disruptions of self-reinforcing mechanisms (e.g. the advent of new technology) or by creating them (e.g. changing the power balance by replacing managers), institutions can be changed. These changes will trickle down to the individual level and be internalized. Transformational or charismatic leadership (see Chapters 5, 11, and 13) may be of help in further internalizing these new identities. However, it may be easier to use the existing institutions and pick the "low-hanging fruit" before trying to reach for the sky of fully-fledged institutional change.

An important resource for a management strategy is the availability of sufficient robust and evidence-based knowledge that can be applied in practice. In this respect, a lot of research work remains to be done. Institution- and identity-building are long-term and complex processes, and these processes are not easily mapped and investigated. The fact that multiple identities can intersect and multiple institutions are interdependent complicates the development of a causal chain tremendously. Experiments that fully include these processes are not easily set up, and alternatives such as case study research or survey research—even longitudinal—are lacking in external or internal validity.

Nevertheless, apart from the self-evident strategy of triangulating various results to garner meaningful insights, some alternative strategies present themselves. First, in terms of assessing causal relationships, identifying natural experiments in which change projects were more or less randomly assigned can supplement other, less internally valid strategies to further triangulation. Such natural experiments (Morton and Williams 2008)—e.g. based on differences between different entities in terms of reform or with respect to certain systems that, for some reason, have been "randomly" applied to individuals—could cast additional light on assumed causal relationships. Such natural experiments would cover a longer-term period and would not entail the artificial environment associated with a lab experiment. Second, another strategy addresses the issue of multiple identities. Even outside the realm of public management, such knowledge is scarce (Burke and Stryker 2016). Nevertheless, to fully grasp the complexity of the process in which multiple institutions and their associated identities interact, such knowledge is indispensable. Further research into identity salience—in particular, how to measure this—would be key to understanding this process, for which Burke and Stryker (2016) have provided challenging suggestions.

A lot of work remains to be done, and our knowledge will only incrementally move toward a better understanding of these processes. Therefore, the most important resource is probably an attitude of persistence with respect to developing and applying this knowledge. After all, only this will get us past the stage of reaping the low-hanging fruit.

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