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## 14. HRM and social legitimacy in the public sector

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### INTRODUCTION

Suchman (1995, p. 574) defines legitimacy as ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’. The concept refers to the congruence between the actions of the legitimated entity, for instance the services or HR practices of a country’s taxation department, and the shared beliefs of some social group such as its tax payers or its tax office employees. As this example illustrates, external legitimacy, which refers to the perceptions of stakeholders external to the organisation, can be distinguished from internal legitimacy, which refers to the perceptions of stakeholders internal to the organisation. It is most likely that external stakeholders, in our example tax payers, have perceptions of the legitimacy of a public organisation’s actions derived from the policies and behaviours of its employees that affect them, and that internal stakeholders, in our example tax office employees, have perceptions of the legitimacy of their organisation’s actions such as its HR policies and management actions that affect them as public employees. External stakeholders may also have perceptions of the legitimacy of how a public organisation treats its employees. Similarly, internal stakeholders may have perceptions of how their organisation’s HR policies have consequences for providing service quality to its clients or citizens generally.

According to institutional theories, organisations require not only human, material, technical, and financial resources to be viable, but also need to achieve some degree of legitimacy by being aligned with relevant rules, norms and cultural-cognitive frameworks (Lees, 1997; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007; Wright & McMahan, 1992; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Several HRM authors have recognised the relevance of the classic Harvard model of HRM developed by Beer et al. (1984) (for instance, Boselie, 2014; Boxall, 2007; Boxall & Purcell, 2016; Paauwe, 2004; Paauwe & Farndale, 2017). This model holds that HR policies and practices are influenced by an organisation’s environment, which includes a variety of situational factors and stakeholders, and contribute to long-term consequences, which include not just organisational effectiveness but also individual and societal well-being. The Harvard framework and later models, such as elaborated by Boselie (2014), Boxall and Purcell (2016) and Paauwe (2004), show that ‘at the same time as they are seeking economic viability, managers typically think about how to secure legitimacy in the societies in which the firm operates’ (Boxall & Purcell, 2016, p. 29). Paauwe and Farndale (2017) argue that social legitimacy in the case of HRM results from a firm’s response to meeting societal demands with regard to work, time, money, know-how and participation of employees. Such demands are embedded, for instance, in labour legislation or in trade unions’ policies and collective bargaining demands. An organisation’s compliance with such demands is assumed to result in a degree of social legitimacy for its HR strategy.

The contextual approach to HRM elaborated by Paauwe and Farndale (2017) and other HRM scholars offers a generic analytical framework. The institutional environment, including

the societal norms and values relating to how organisations should treat workers hold for both private sector firms and public organisations. However, public organisations do not face the primary problem of securing economic viability in a competitive market, although the health and education sectors in many countries tend to be ‘mixed’ industries in which there are elements of competition and varying economic fortunes. Public organisations are different from private firms because they exist to provide services ordered and/or mainly financed by government for its citizens and society as a whole (Rainey, 2009). Public organisations are assumed to create public value or collectively valued outcomes, as decided by elected politicians, often in the form of statutory public service standards (Moore, 1994). This notion of collectively valued social outcomes does not negate the existence of stakeholders who have their own interests and views. However, public value theory goes beyond the idea that stakeholders support a public organisation based on its actions’ expected value to their own interests, which Suchman (1995) typifies as ‘pragmatic legitimacy’, and holds that multiple stakeholders engage in public debate about what is seen as collectively valuable to society, which relates to the type of legitimacy that Suchman (1995) calls ‘moral legitimacy’.

Public service performance is a core concept in public management research (see also Chapter 12). An influential conceptualisation sees public service performance as multidimensional, involving outputs, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and democratic outcomes (Andrews et al., 2006). This multidimensionality reflects the fact that public organisations are required by the political authorities to serve multiple ends. What is politically considered as promoting societal welfare is always contested, given the diverse opinions and interests of the many stakeholders that have a stake in public policies (Andersen et al., 2021). This implies that there are likely to be differences in the perceived legitimacy of public organisations’ actions between different stakeholders. In addition, notions of how public servants are expected to behave and criteria to assess public organisations’ performance have changed over time. The values that characterise the classic Weberian bureaucracy model constitute a ‘logic of legitimacy’, as Stout (2013) calls this, that differs from the values promoted by the New Public Management (NPM) model, terms we will explain below. Thus, the extent to which public servants’ actions, and the public service outcomes created, may or may not be seen as ‘desirable, proper, or appropriate’ (Suchman 1995, p. 574) depends on the dominant logic.

Governance models and their logics of legitimacy have implications for public organisations’ HRM. Thus, our aim of understanding HRM and social legitimacy requires us to tease out how, over time, legitimacy has been given different meanings in public administration discourse and practice. This will help us understand how HRM is designed with a view to achieving organisational performance in accordance with the dominant logic of legitimacy. This instrumentality of HRM is reflected in Kellough and Selden’s (2003, p. 166) argument that public servants are seen as responsible for translating legislative objectives into the daily operations of government programmes and when the HRM system is not operating optimally, the effectiveness and perceived legitimacy of government activities can suffer significantly.

The next section will briefly describe the late twentieth-century history of public administration reforms, which involve different governance models holding different logics of legitimacy. Reaching back to the earlier tradition of Weberian bureaucracy, we will describe how these governance models go along with particular personnel or HR policies. Our historical description sets the scene for an analysis of HRM and the social legitimacy of public organisations today. In this analysis, we will examine the extent to which studies have paid attention to HRM and social legitimacy, and what they say about different stakeholders’ perceptions of the

*Table 14.1 Stakeholders, public organisations' service and HR policies, and their legitimacy*

|   | External stakeholders: examples   | Internal stakeholders: examples   |
|---|---|---|
| Public organisations' policy and/or public service delivery | Citizens' trust in government<br>Client organisations' appreciation of good and accessible healthcare   | Public employees' perception of the extent to which their organisation's HRM enables them to generate public service performance for clients and society    |
| Public organisations' HR policies                           | Trade unions' involvement in collective labour agreements<br>Compliance with health and safety regulations as observed by the Labour Inspectorate | Public employees' acceptance of their organisation's pay policies as fair<br>Line managers' acceptance of HR devolution and their role in HR implementation |

legitimacy of public organisations' service and HR policies. Table 14.1 is designed to facilitate this analysis. It visualises the different kinds of stakeholders and the various actions of a public organisation that may be the focus of stakeholders' legitimacy perceptions. The cells of the matrix provide examples of expressions of legitimacy.

## GOVERNANCE MODELS, LOGICS OF LEGITIMACY, AND HRM

The public administration literature sees society's acceptance of the policies and actions of the political and administrative authorities aimed at the provision of collective goods and the pursuit of societal welfare as constitutive of the legitimacy of the incumbent government (Peters & Pierre, 2003). The lack of citizens' trust and confidence in government that manifested itself in many Western democracies from the 1960s onwards signalled a crisis of legitimacy. The then dominant Weberian bureaucracy model was characterized by the key features of legality, impartiality and hierarchy. Its constitutional logic of legitimacy required bureaucratic accountability and saw neutral competence as the criterion of proper behaviour (Stout, 2013). However, as a variety of academic studies have explained (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Van de Walle et al., 2016; see Chapter 21), the public sector became from the 1960s onwards increasingly perceived as lacking a customer orientation and a focus on results. As Bach and Kessler (2012, p. 7) note, critics such as Niskanen (1971) and Griffiths (1983) argued that the public sector was dominated by its workforce (often called 'producer capture'), operating in bloated bureaucracies and according 'a low priority to efficiency'. Popular depictions of the public sector often referred to 'featherbedding' or over-staffing of the sector.

Public administration reform programmes were initiated in the late twentieth century partly because of the weakened legitimacy of public bureaucracies. They aimed at increasing opportunities for citizen participation, transparency and the quick, correct delivery of customer-attuned services (Peters & Pierre, 2003). These reforms varied between countries but shared in the key characteristics of efficiency, performance and innovation, which have been associated with the New Public Management (NPM) model (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Van de Walle et al., 2016). Its logic of legitimacy is based on entrepreneurial responsibility for desirable outcomes and regards taking this responsibility as a vital criterion of proper behaviour (Stout, 2013).

Reform, however, often brings unintended or unanticipated consequences. The NPM had negative effects in terms of increasing fragmentation within the public sector, bringing coordination challenges across government agencies, and may have weakened the public service ethos (for instance, Bach and Kessler, 2012, pp. 29–30). As a response, a new governance model emerged by the turn of the century, referred to as Neo-Weberianism or New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Its key characteristics include collaboration and effectiveness, and its logic of legitimacy is based on stewardship responsiveness to the citizenry (Stout, 2013). However, the emergence of a new model is a long and variable process, and does not involve the complete replacement of the ‘old’ model by the new one. Reforms sediment within public administrations, creating an additional layer with ideas and instruments that are to some extent adapted from the previous governance model, and which increase complexity and variety (Bezes, 2018; Van de Walle et al., 2016). For the purpose of this chapter, the Weberian bureaucracy and the NPM model will be examined as the focal governance models. These models have left their imprint and their logics of legitimacy are associated with distinct types of HRM.

### **The Weberian Bureaucracy and the ‘Model Employer’**

Consonant with the key features of legality, impartiality and hierarchy, Weber (1978, pp. 956–958) described principles of a modern bureaucracy that distinguished the modern state from feudal states. The goal was to establish a competent and strictly impersonal discharge of official duties by secure and appropriately paid public servants. This style of state administration emerged slowly in the nineteenth century and grew in the twentieth century, particularly in the decades after the Second World War as the welfare state expanded and widened in scope. As this process unfolded, the Weberian principles of bureaucracy became expressed in a widely recognised set of personnel policies, including recruitment based on competence, seniority as the basis for promotion, rationally structured pay systems, and employment security, with the intention of encouraging impartial decision-making and execution of tasks. In this context, civil servants’ jobs did not depend on their loyalty to the ruling powers as in the feudal world. In addition to standardised employment conditions in pay, working hours, job security and promotion, HR policies in the post-war decades provided for staff training and development, equality of opportunity in the workplace, employee participation, consultation with staff, and bargaining with trade unions (Farnham & Horton, 1996).

Underpinning these standardised policies, there was a strong emphasis on fairness, both substantively and procedurally. This pattern was characterised as the ‘model employer’ tradition in public sector management (Bach & Kessler, 2012), which implied that in its treatment of its employees, the state was holding itself to high standards and setting an example for the private sector (see Chapter 20). It could at least be argued that public organisations’ HRM had a strong focus on promoting employee well-being and, thus, on obtaining a high level of *internal* legitimacy.

### **HR Policies and the NPM**

However, as the bureaucratic governance model suffered a legitimacy crisis because of criticism of its customer orientation, staffing levels, and service performance, administrative reform programmes advocated the introduction of private sector management principles

(Bezes, 2018; Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). These were meant to put an end to an overly restrictive structure of rules and procedures, which was seen by critics as severely limiting management freedom and organisational performance (Kellough & Selden, 2003, p. 166). Changes included privatisations of public services (for instance in the energy, water and transport sectors), often leading to major job losses, and separation of the purchaser role of government from the provider role of various types of public organisation, enabling competitive tendering of services (Bach & Kessler, 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2002). Within public organisations themselves, governments fostered greater management discretion, changes towards a career structure where every grade is open to internal and external competition, the growth of performance appraisal and performance-related pay, and greater flexibility in contracts and working hours. Such HR practices would supposedly focus public servants on delivering outcomes for clients and society, and contribute to achieving a higher level of *external* legitimacy. But changes such as these to HRM do not necessarily happen quickly, completely or without controversy (Boxall & Purcell, 2016).

### **Evidence of Change in HR Policies at the Turn of the Century**

What does the evidence say about the extent of change? In respect of the early period of NPM reform, Boyne et al. (1999) concluded that HRM in the UK public sector continued to remain oriented towards employee well-being through HR practices promoting staff training and equal opportunity in the workplace. Managers in public organisations were less likely to support and pursue performance-related pay practices and flexible employment practices, indicating limited influence from NPM ideas. By the mid-1990s, administrative reforms had apparently not linked HR policies and practices more closely to business objectives and to delivering public service outcomes. That was also the case for the USA, as shown by Kalleberg et al. (2006), who used data from a 1996 national survey to study the uptake of high-performance work practices in for-profit, public and non-profit organisations. Kalleberg et al. (2006, p. 274) argue that public and non-profit organisations may be assumed to be interested in HR practices that are thought to make organisations more competitive, innovative and flexible because of pressures to improve their performance coming from declining public confidence. They also argue that public and non-profit organisations may seek to restore their legitimacy by adopting structures and processes that private organisations have adopted successfully and that enjoy widespread social acceptance. However, they found that practices of participating in decision-making were more common in public and non-profit organisations than in for-profit organisations while the reverse holds for output-related compensation arrangements. Among the factors that may explain these results, Kalleberg et al. (2006, p. 274) argue that public organisations are ‘especially subject to pressures to display good organisational citizenship by instituting employment practices that treat workers holistically and equitably’. Their findings suggest a strong link between management support for employee well-being and the social legitimacy of HRM.

These studies illustrate the complexity of change in public organisations, which face a wider range of stakeholders with a greater variety of interests than for-profit organisations do (Fernández-Alles & Llamas-Sánchez, 2008). A telling example of the apparent difficulties in focusing HR practices on delivering client and citizen outcomes comes from a 1994 study of the introduction of performance measurement in a variety of UK public sector organisations (Lawton et al., 2000). Many public organisations introduced performance measurement

systems, but these appeared to favour performance measures such as efficiency that met the requirements of central government and served to ensure stability of central government funding and thus the organisations' institutional legitimacy rather than the interests of the citizen or client.

### **Evidence of Change in HR Policies in the 2000s and 2010s**

Studies conducted in the 2000s and 2010s, however, point to a greater degree of change in HR practices in the public sector towards the NPM model without a complete overturning of the 'model employer' tradition. Van Wanrooy et al. (2013, p. 99), analysing the UK's Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS), for example, show a significantly higher incidence of performance appraisal in the public sector (87 per cent of employees) than in the private (67 per cent of employees). The proportion of these appraisals linked to pay is the same in both sectors (25 per cent). The WERS data also show that the public sector tends to use more forms of numerical flexibility (such as fixed-term contracts and agency workers) than does the private sector (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013, p. 40). Initially, the UK's trend towards an NPM model involving performance appraisal, pay for performance, and employment flexibility was followed by some European countries, including Sweden, Denmark and Italy, but not by others such as Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands (Bordogna & Neri, 2011; Willems et al., 2006). However, by the late 2010s performance appraisal had become mandatory in central governments of all EU member states, except Austria, albeit in some countries without sanctions if performance appraisal is not undertaken or less frequent than annually. Even performance-related pay is now available as an instrument in a majority of EU member states, but the extent to which it is used is unknown (Thijs et al., 2017, pp. 26–27). These data imply that elements of the NPM model have infused the public sector, co-mingling with what remains of the 'model employer' tradition (see Chapter 20).

More than the ideology of NPM has, of course, come into play in recent years. The global financial crisis of 2008–9 and the crisis in public finances that ensued, have legitimised significant change in the staffing levels and HR practices of public organisations. Demmke (2017) provides an overview of changes that have occurred, showing that many countries in the OECD have frozen or downsized the staffing of their central public administrations, cut back on public sector training, and instituted pay freezes or pay cuts in the public sector. Their capacity to cut back on conditions in professional services in health and education, however, is more limited because of the increasing demand for these services, their ongoing importance to voters and the strike-power of public sector professionals such as nurses and teachers. The measures taken have varied. The cuts have been more far-reaching in countries with the greatest budgetary crises (for instance, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Spain) while more modest in countries with stronger finances (for instance, Australia, Norway, Sweden).

With this backdrop, we turn now to a discussion of what we know about how different stakeholders regard the legitimacy of HRM as a dimension of public sector performance.



## THE SOCIAL LEGITIMACY OF PUBLIC SECTOR HRM: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS AND CONFLICTS

Andersen et al. (2016) conducted a conceptual review of public service performance research and concluded that the most important distinction in the evaluation of public service performance is the identity of the stakeholder behind a given performance criterion. Concretely: who actually decides what a good performance is? However, an exploratory analysis of a sample of recent public administration articles showed that just over half the studies used performance measures that relate to specific stakeholders' views, and measured these directly by surveying the stakeholders concerned (Andersen et al., 2021). On this basis, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which public organisations' actions are perceived as legitimate by different stakeholders. So, how is HRM research doing in this respect?

Much of the HRM performance literature is concerned with behavioural, financial or productivity outcomes, and relatively few studies explicitly include social legitimacy as a dimension of organisational performance. One that does is the study by Esteban-Lloret et al. (2018) of the contribution made by employee training in large Spanish companies. They show that companies' training efforts contribute not only to financial performance but also to legitimacy among external (business circles, media, society) and internal stakeholders (employees), as perceived by these companies' training managers. Another study examined how a large Australian retail organisation responds to societal expectations of creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities (Moore et al., 2017). The study shows that the organisation is motivated to contribute to governmental welfare-to-work programmes by employing people with disabilities in order to gain legitimacy from external constituents such as customers, local communities, and government agencies. These studies are, of course, concerned with the private sector.

### **Public Sector HRM's Internal Legitimacy**

The studies we have of the legitimacy of public organisations' actions have focused on internal and external legitimacy. The former will be central to this section, the latter to the next section.

A study by Stanton et al. (2010) examines the factors that influence HRM's legitimacy among the various levels of management in three Australian hospitals. Their findings underline the crucial role of the CEO in imputing significance to HRM, providing leadership, and committing resources. Where CEOs do not do so, and do not build consensus within and across the management layers, the consequences include 'perceptions of lack of fairness and trust, and confusion among lower level managers about desirable organisational behaviours and outcomes' (Stanton et al., 2010, p. 578). In a similar way, Perkins and White (2010) examine how pay systems have been reformed in the UK public services of local government, healthcare and higher education, and signal that the changes have not secured legitimacy among various employee groups.

Recent studies point to significant challenges to HRM in the public sector, which we interpret as challenges to HRM's internal legitimacy, although the studies themselves do not examine these as legitimacy challenges. For example, Demmke (2017), whose work is referred to above, analyses the impact on employees of public sector reforms since the global financial crisis. He distinguishes between austerity and non-austerity countries and his results (Table 14.2) show that the negative impacts on employee attitudes are much greater in the former

*Table 14.2      Impact of austerity on employee attitudes*

| Factor   | EU: % of austerity countries reporting | EU: % of non-austerity countries |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
|  |  | reporting                        |
| Decrease of employee trust in the organisation | 73                                     | 21                               |
| Decrease in employee commitment                | 58                                     | 36                               |
| Loyalty somewhat decreasing                    | 58                                     | 14                               |

*Source:*    Extracted from Demmke (2017).

group. In terms of the impact on the ‘model employer’ tradition, the most significant effect is likely to be the diminished sense of job security among workers in public administration, if not among public sector professionals. This clearly weakens the legitimacy of HRM as perceived by public policy advisers and administrators, in particular.

But there is also widespread evidence of discontent with government approaches to HRM among public sector professionals. A major source of this discontent relates to problems of role overload and employee burnout. Studies of the public sector professions regularly show that excessive workloads are a threat to the retention of professionals and, thus, to the sustainability of public services (for instance, Gorgievski et al., 2019). For example, a study of 2,876 New Zealand nurses shows that higher workload and greater work-life interference result in higher levels of employee burnout and are the strongest predictors of intentions to leave the profession (Moloney et al., 2018). In a study comparing the attitudes of radiologists in the public and private sectors, Lim and Pinto (2009) found that the former were more stressed, less satisfied and more burnt out, creating recruitment and retention problems for public hospitals.

These sources of discontent are accompanied by resistance to what many public sector professionals see as encroaching ‘managerialism’ or ‘de-professionalisation’ of their work. While many enjoy their work intrinsically and exemplify ‘public service motivation’ (Knies & Leisink, 2018), there are ongoing tensions around professional autonomy. The problem is illustrated by Lloyd and Payne (2012) in a study comparing the professional control of vocational teachers in England and Wales, on the one hand, and Norway, on the other. The former ‘operate within a regime of top-down marketization and audit-driven performance management’ while ‘Norway provides a concrete example of an alternative way of managing employees that is not based on low trust and which does not require extensive systems of monitoring and control’ (Lloyd & Payne, 2012, p. 46).

Similarly, a study of ambulance workers in the UK finds that they are alienated by ‘performance targets, organisational change and lack of resources’ brought about by ‘constant restructuring over the last 30 years’ (Granter et al., 2019, pp. 283, 289, 290). While it would be unfair to argue that all public service workers are experiencing role overload, it is clear that there is a significant issue with work intensification and the undermining of professional autonomy in the public sector, generating high levels of conflict and low levels of trust, and therefore threatening the legitimacy and sustainability of HRM among professional groups in the public sector (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). It is not surprising that we see higher levels of industrial action, individual grievances and employee absence in the public sector than in the private (in respect of the UK, see Van Wanrooy et al., 2013, pp. 148–152).

These HRM-related issues affect employee well-being, which used to be the focus of public sector HRM under the classic bureaucracy model (see also Chapter 13). The various employee reactions indicate a low level of internal legitimacy. Although public sector workers’ commitment to contribute towards public service users may be less affected by organisational changes



than their organisational commitment is (Conway et al., 2014), the effects of ongoing changes might also undermine wider social confidence in how the public sector is managed and create risks for external legitimacy.

### **HRM and Public Organisations' External Legitimacy**

Only a few HRM studies have attempted to study aspects of public service performance that relate to external stakeholders, although measured as perceived by employees. Vermeeren (2017) examined the impact of HR practices on work units' organisational performance, operationalised as efficiency, effectiveness (meeting the work unit's objectives) and fairness (understood as equity and observing the rule of law in the organisation's dealing with stakeholders). Her study covered a variety of public sector organisations in the Netherlands, including central and local government, police and education. She found that ability- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices were positively related, directly and indirectly, to all three performance dimensions. Knies et al. (2018) took another approach and examined 'mission performance' as representing the ultimate goals of public organisations. They studied eldercare organisations in the Netherlands and operationalised their mission as 'thoughtful care' for clients, surveying employees' perceptions of how their frontline managers supported them to provide such care.

Another key issue affecting the external legitimacy of HRM is the extent to which the public sector workforce mirrors the composition of the national population (see also Chapter 25). Meier (2019) argues that a bureaucracy that looks like the citizens it serves is more likely to produce outputs that benefit those citizens, thereby enhancing its social legitimacy. The notion of representative bureaucracy motivates a growing literature on social equity and diversity policies that relate directly to HRM (for instance, Ashikali et al., 2021; Gooden, 2018; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Diversity policies include affirmative action and equal-employment opportunity (EEO) policies that aim to achieve a better representation of minority groups based on moral and legal grounds condemning discrimination and unfair treatment. The HRM process is involved through recruitment, selection, development, promotion and retention practices. Groeneveld and Verbeek (2012) show that Dutch public sector organisations reported more diversity policies than private organisations and that these focused more on responding to the influx of ethnic minorities. Similarly, in New Zealand, Houkamau and Boxall (2011) show that the incidence of formal diversity policies is significantly greater in the public sector than in the private.

However, Groeneveld and Verbeek (2012, p. 371) note that diversity policies may have been important for enhancing public organisations' legitimacy but have not substantially increased ethnic minority representation. A similar critical conclusion appears from Gooden's (2018) analysis of the effects of EEO laws in the USA, which started much earlier in the twentieth century than they did in Europe. Public personnel management, says Gooden (2018, p. 50), is good at diversity 'talk' but not at diversity 'walk' alignment of HR policies with the overall strategy (see Chapter 2 for a critical analysis of 'fit' in the context of public organisations). Important characteristics of federal employment are not well aligned with the broader values articulated by diversity talk. For instance, over the 2000–10 period, Hispanics were underrepresented in all areas of federal employment and have the largest underrepresentation. Women and the disabled also remain underrepresented. In addition, a substantial share of federal agencies failed to comply in the submission of legally required EEO reports.

Clearly, then, in terms of its contribution to the creation of representative bureaucracies, and the further goal of enhancing public organisations' effectiveness in achieving their mission and their external legitimacy, public organisations' HRM has a mixed scorecard. In this domain, as in the other aspects of HRM that we have discussed, there are serious legitimacy issues in the contemporary public sector.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We conclude that HRM in the public sector in many of the world's countries is now characterised by a hybrid governance model. Its logic of legitimacy does not rest on a single foundation but incorporates aspects of both the Weberian, 'model employer' tradition and the New Public Management. Both sets of ideologies have made their impact on contemporary HR practices. Responses to the global financial crisis, and the subsequent crises in public finances, have made for a slimmer, more austere regime in public sector HRM, with the greatest impacts in the most financially troubled countries. When we consider social legitimacy from the perspective of employees in the public sector (internal legitimacy), we see a range of significant problems, including job insecurity, role overload, de-professionalisation and mixed progress in equal-employment opportunity. These issues do not only affect the internal legitimacy of HRM in the public sector but are also putting the sustainability of various public services at risk, thereby creating severe risks for HRM's external legitimacy.

In terms of the perspectives adopted by existing research, an obvious weakness is the dearth of studies assessing how stakeholders regard public organisations' service and HR policies' legitimacy. This may partly be attributed to the public administration literature's lack of explicit reflection on the meaning of public service performance among different stakeholders and the consequent study of their evaluations (Andersen et al., 2016, 2021). So, while public sector scholars are aware of the multiple dimensions of public service performance and the variation among stakeholders in how they evaluate each dimension and weigh them, there are no HRM studies that explicitly examine public organisations' HRM contribution to legitimacy in the eyes of multiple stakeholders. We need such studies to address the relationships between internal and external legitimacy, including both shared interests and those that are conflicting.

The shortage of studies that analyse multiple-stakeholder perceptions of HRM and legitimacy means that we have no information on several relevant issues. For instance, can public managers deal with tensions between a public organisation's external legitimacy among its clients and citizens and HRM's internal legitimacy? What paradoxes are involved – such as the tension between better services and greater taxation – and how are they best managed (Greener, 2013)? What role do the typical characteristics of public organisations, such as the constraints on managerial discretion and the strength of employees' public service motivation (Knies & Leisink, 2018; Leisink & Knies, 2018), play in this respect? Do public managers actually engage in creating societal legitimacy for public service and how does this relate to and inspire HR practices that support public service values (Paarlberg et al., 2008)? Why do some public organisations not comply with legal requirements and social expectations regarding employment practices (for instance, regarding equal-employment opportunities (Gooden, 2018))? These are all important avenues for future research.

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