



The influence of prebendal and clientel gladiators in max weber's bureaucratic theory: An analytical qualitative exploration from the lens of HRM.

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Abstract

Long-standing, Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy has served as a normative blueprint for modern systems of administration: formal rules, strict hierarchies, recruitment due to merit, and impersonal procedures with a view to improving efficiency and predictability. In many political set-ups, however, it is the “political gladiators” highly combative, powerful politics players, using patronage, charisma, mediacy, and factional leverage that intervene in administrative domains, transforming in the process the content of human resource management (HRM). This paper is a critical consideration of the extent to which such actors shape and affect Weberian bureaucracy through the HRM prism, in the recruitment and selection, performance management, rewards system, training and development and employee voice and ethics infrastructures. Politicization has the potential to erode meritocracy, institutional responsibilities, fairness of process and morale, although it can drive change. Finally, the paper presents an integrative framework and HRM strategies to balance political responsiveness and Weberian characteristics of impartiality and competence.

Keywords: Weberian bureaucracy, Politicization, Human resource management, Meritocracy, Patronage, Administrative ethics, Performance management

Introduction

Characteristics of a Weberian bureaucracy include: rational-legal authority, hierarchy, formalism, division of labor, and recruitment by merit (Weber 1978/2013). These features guard against the unrestricted exercise of discretion and insulate professional administration from factional pressures. But perhaps there are often

political realities which differ from this ideal type. In a more competitive political environment, “political gladiators” charismatic, partisan and media-aware power brokers—alter the routines of bureaucracy by filling appointments and offices with partisans, enact symbolic change, and intervene in discretionary ways (Hood, 1991; Peters & Pierre, 2004). These

dynamics have direct implications for HRM on both who is recruited and what performance is rewarded, the trajectory of careers, and the persistence of ethical safeguards (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Berman et al., 2019). In this essay, the influences are reviewed, and their pros and cons for long-term institutional risks assessed.

According to Weber's ideal-typical bureaucracy, five principles relevant to HRM are highlighted: (a) Principle of recruitment and promotion based on merit, (b) Principle of functional specialization and professional qualification, (c) Admission of a career service with tenure, (d) Principle of rule-bound administration and documentation, (e) Principle of impersonality in decision making (Weber, 1978/2013). These indicate HRM systems based on competitive examinations, competency frameworks, position classification, codified progression ladders and position classification performances management (Wilson, 1887; du Gay, 2000). Conceptual benefits are legitimacy and efficiency, via predictable processes and clear division of labour, and away from patronage. However, the model assumes political restraint which is undermined by gladiatorial politics in which leaders look for loyalists, quick results, and showmanship (Peters & Pierre, 2004; Hood, 1991).

Political Gladiators: Mechanisms of Influence on HRM

1. Politicized Recruitment and Patronage Networks Political gladiators often deploy patronage to consolidate coalitions and reward electoral support, displacing competency-based hiring with loyalty-based placements (Grindle, 2012; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017). From an HRM standpoint, this compromises validity in selection, misaligns person-job fit, and corrodes internal equity. While political appointments at the senior executive level can be legitimate instruments of

democratic control (Lewis, 2008), spillovers into the professional ranks (middle management and technical cadres) dilute Weberian merit, creating dual hierarchies of de facto political authority and de jure administrative lines (Peters & Pierre, 2004; Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016).

Performance Management as Political Signaling

Gladiatorial politics gains its way in the short term and visibility; it is less interested in long-term capacity-building. The HRM systems can be realigned to focus on tracking and rewarding politically salient outputs as opposed to service quality or institutional learning (Hood, 1991; Moynihan, 2008). There can be many targets in "performance regimes" and they are usefully highlighted for political spectacle. This introduces a danger of gaming, tunnel vision, and disconnect of formal performance systems and practice (Bevan & Hood, 2006; Radin, 2006). This leads to distortion of the Weberian promise of competence based, rule-bound evaluation being both fair and competence based.

Rewards, Sanctions, and Psychological Contracts

Perceived loyalty can be used as a means of mediation between rewards (bonuses, postings, training opportunities) and sanctions (transfers, sidelining) in politicised environments. The psychological contract of HRM, which is the employees' beliefs of fairness and predictability, moves towards the ambiguous, with impacts on commitment and public service motivation (PSM) (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vogel & Wänke, 2016). The responses of high-performing individuals can either be exit or a passive political alignment as a form of survival. This, in turn, introduces informal authority into the formal structure, undoing Weber's depersonalization of his authority (Pfeffer, 1981; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

Training, Professionalization, and Depoliticization Capacity

Weberian bureaucracy is based off the assumption of professional socialization which instills the norm of impartiality and integrity. Political gladiators can both bolster and impair this. Their resources can, on the one hand, be allocated to academies, academies as delivery units, and digital capacity as reform symbols (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). On the other side, oriented priorities of training can shift towards loyalty building and messaging, leaving technical mastery and codes of ethics behind (Berman et al., 2019; Christensen & Lægheid, 2007). HRD is thus an area of contention with regards to bureaucratic identity.

There are two areas of potential upside: Responsiveness and Reform Energy.

In order to make a critical evaluation of the influence, it is important to recognize possibilities in the upside. Political gladiators can provide a force for change that bureaucracies are loath to alter because of path dependence while also generating coalitions to advance modernization (Kingdon 1995, Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Where such patronage is limited to top leadership roles, and where there are clear performance contracts, such political drive can help accelerate digitization and pay reform, and establish a culture of performance orientation (Hood, 1991; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). HRM elasticities might involve enhanced competency frameworks, strategic workforce planning, and motivating pay based on the services outcome. At the heart of it is the institutionalization of guardrails that prevent “spillover politicization” in the ranks of professionals (Lewis, 2008; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

Political signaling is the second paradigm of performance management.

The second paradigm of performance management is Political Signaling. In a gladiatorial politics, it is nowadays more about short-term successes that are sought, which are then appreciated “first and foremost,” than about long-term capacity building. HRM systems can be refocused to capture—and reward politically relevant outputs, rather than service quality or institutional learning (Hood, 1991; Moynihan, 2008). Targets can become more and more stringent in “performance regimes,” while metrics are cherry-picked for political show. This potentially introduces problems with gaming, tunnel vision and formalism, (between performance regimes and practice), Bevan & Hood (2006) and Radin (2006). The consequence is a breaking down of the Weberian notions of competency and fairness in rule-bound assessment.

Reward, Sanctions and psychological contract
Rewards (bonuses, postings and training), sanctions (transfers and sidelining) can be mediated by perceived loyalty within politicalized environments. In the psychological contract of HRM (fairness and predictability), there is a tension shift to uncertainty which affects the commitment and public service motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vogel & Wänke, 2016). Those who perform well may leave, or maybe may have to comply as a survival mechanism. This calls into question Weber's disembodied authority by introducing the informal exercise of power in formal institutions (Pfeffer, 1981; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

The process of training, professionalizing, depoliticizing.

Capacity Weberian bureaucracy assumes that the norms of bureaucracy of impartiality and integrity have been founded through professional socialization. This can be strengthened and/or weakened by political

gladiators. They can, on the other hand, allocate inputs to 'flagship' academies, delivery units and digital capacities as the representations of reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). On the other hand, training might focus on loyalty and messaging, leaving out training in technical competence and ethics (Berman et al., 2019; Christensen & Lægred, 2007). In this sense, HRD is a space of contestation of bureaucratic identity.

Financial Management, Auditing and Investments

Procedures are not the only vehicles used to ensure the impersonality of rule, as also voice mechanisms: grievance procedures, whistleblower protections and independent oversight. Political gladiators can reduce the strength of these checks through informal threats and pressures, contracting safe space for dissent (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008; Lewis, Brown, & Moberly, 2014). If there is no credible voice, the Weberian pledges of legality and documentation run the risk of becoming "ceremonial conformity" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), receiving their due formalities but otherwise being undermined.

Potential Upsides: Responsiveness and Reform Energy

Particularly, it is important to recognise upside possibilities in order to critically assess influence. Political gladiators can create momentum for change that would not happen on the steering group's own, disrupt path dependence and ensure a coalition-wide buy-in to modernization efforts (Kingdon, 1995; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In the absence of patronage-like system to fill other positions, and clear performance bonds, there can be targeted political drive to promote digitization, pay reform and performance orientation (Hood, 1991; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). This could mean improving competency frameworks, strategic workforce planning, and incentive approaches tied to the

results of the services in HRM. The most important is when there is institutionalised guard-railing to prevent spillover politicisation into professional ranks (Lewis, 2008; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

In this regard, we should inquire about the structural risks of erosion of merit, capacity, and trust.

Skill Mismatch due to lack of awareness and capacity of institutions. Political appointments to technical posts systematically affect a skills stack and decrease the organisation memory, which affects policy development and execution (Grindle, 2012; Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016). HRM has a chronic turnover or frequent reshuffle and transaction costs include line managers having to re-skill the new hires.

Fairness, Equity and Morale.

A sense of injustice in recruitment and rewards can erode morale and help to foster negative employee actions in the workplace (Colquitt et al., 2001; Kim & Rubianty, 2011). Employees adapt rationally; putting on more political skills than professional skills; Weberian role expectations turned upside down

Rule of law and procedural integrity. Political discretion has a discretionary effect on compliance, when discretion can outplay the rules. In time organizations develop a "logic of appropriateness" that focuses on the politics of fidelity to the organization rather than on conformity to legal-rational rules (March & Olsen, 1989). HRM's control systems (audits, evaluations, disciplinary systems), become irrelevant (Radin, 2006; Miceli et al., 2008).

HRM Levers to Reconcile Political Responsiveness with Weberian I Dual-Key Appointments and Bounded Politicization Provides a narrow window for political appointments (e.g., a minister or special adviser) while leaving the statutory positions (e.g., professional) protected. Introduce co-signatures

for higher-ranking job appointments by independent civil service commissions to protect merit (Lewis, 2008; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

Transparent, Competency-Based Selection

Introduce and validate competency models, workbook tests, work samples, and shortlists that are open to public audits. HR analytics can monitor the pass-through by demographic and political cycles to identify anomalies (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Berman et al., 2019). Set up recruitment dashboards for reputational costs of interference.

Systems that provide: Balance of Performance

Outputs and Integrity have created balanced scorecards which combine indicators of service quality, user satisfaction, equity and ethics with indicators for output counts. Link targets to learning reviews and independent audit trails to minimise 'gaming' (Bevan & Hood, 2006; Moynihan, 2008). Align management incentives with developing team capability; not only short term victory.

Justice, Whistleblowing and Ombuds Strengthening

Legislate whistleblower protections, create independent ombudsman offices, and provide for anonymous reporting systems that cannot be identified with protective measures against retaliation (Lewis et al., 2014; Miceli et al., 2008). Integrate ethics education and use scenarios to practice responding to political pressure.

2.06-2.16 Professional Development and Socialization

Put resources into academies that focus on values in favour of citizens, use of evidence and impartiality. While permanent rotations might be used for perspective widening and to standardize professional norms throughout ministries (e.g. Christensen & Lægheid, 2007; Berman et al., 2019).

6.ynamics and Rewards of Insulation

Implement pay bands and advancement based on certified competencies and peer-reviewed performance. Using multi rater (360°) evidence for discretionary rewards can minimize the risk of being captured by a single actor (Perry & Wise, 1990; Vogel & Wänke, 2016).

A public justification is provided, along with procedural documentation.

Weber's emphasis on documentation can be modernised through e-HRM systems that enter the details of hiring, appraisal and transfers through the time stamp. When appointments are subject to mandatory public justifications, there is ex ante transparency and ex post accountability (du Gay, 2000; Radin, 2006).

The effect of political gladiators on Weberian bureaucracy of an organization can be charted in two dimensions: (a) scope of politicization (bounded vs. pervasive) and (b) institutional capacity of HRM guardrails (weak vs. strong).

Bounded Politicization + Effective Guardrails = Productive Alignment: political leaders are in charge of priorities; HRM guards merit.

- 1) Weakness of guardrails + bounded politicization: Missed opportunities—reforms undermined by administrative inertia.
- 2) Protection of merit + frequent stand-offs: Contestation.

Decay: Pervasive politicization and weak guardrails lead to the dominance of patronage, and to weaker capabilities, fairness and trust (Peters & Pierre, 2004; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017). It is a framework that proposes that the main function of HRM is to put in place credible constraints and allow elected leaders the flexibility to achieve programmatic objectives. Thus the paradox of Weberian administration in gladiatorial politics is solved, not by de-politicization per se, but by constitutionalizing of the embedding rules of HRM that are capable of

surviving periods of gladiatorial political intensity.

Constitution: Weber's bureaucracy makes a strong base for the idea of impartial competent public administration. Political gladiators, who are the products of competitive, media-saturated politics, attempt to make all things political and party loyal and eventful. Their impact from an HRM point of view is ambivalent – they can inspire change and aid in resource mobilization but at the same time pose a threat to social values in the sense of Weber to merit, impersonality and rule bound fairness. Neither naive insulation nor unfettered politicization of the way ahead. Rather, HRM needs to reinforce bounded political discretion, transparent and competency-based processes, ethics infrastructure and evidence-based performance systems. Credible HRM guardrails can enable political energies to be channeled to build sustainable administrative capacity instead of sapping it.

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