

# UNDERSTANDING HYBRIDITY IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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This article explores and extends the concept of hybridity to understand current changes in public services organizations, notably as seen from an organizational studies perspective. The notion of hybridity has become more important, given that the public sector increasingly blurs with other sectors and more social actors. Previous reliance on the use of ideal-types in characterizing public services reforms has masked expanding heterogeneity. We here move beyond the (i) conventional focus on structural hybridity to consider (ii) institutional dynamics, (iii) social interactions, and (iv) new identities and roles in public services. Based on these four dimensions of hybridity, we review alternative theoretical frameworks. We suggest that bringing together work from the neighbouring disciplines of public administration and organization studies may improve our understanding of public services hybridity and outline a future research agenda.

## INTRODUCTION: GROWING HYBRIDITY IN PUBLIC SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS

Since the 1980s, we have seen the retreat of 'pure' public sector forms and increasingly porous boundaries between more actors, organizations, and sectors (Dunleavy and Hood 1994). Most obviously, New Public Management (NPM) reforms have created public/private hybrid forms (e.g. quasi markets, and executive agencies with more private income) and have attempted to make the public sector more 'business like' (Lynn 1998; Christiansen and Lægread 2011). But NPM is not the whole story. Governments now use various novel steering mechanisms to transform public action (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) and engage more with 'civil society', notably in arenas where co-production with citizens and behavioural changes is important (Fotaki 2011) or with a legacy of public sector failure. Not for profit or 'third sector' organizations have a growing role in public service provision (e.g. social housing; care of older people), but often under contract to public sector commissioners which in turn makes them less distinctive and more like 'firms' (more inter-sectoral blurring).

Despite its growing importance, hybridity is not a novel phenomenon in public services. The public sector has long displayed tensions between different organizing principles (Dunsire 1995; Gray and Jenkins 1995). Aucoin's (1990) analysis of reforms in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s saw them as a product of two opposing sets of ideas about public sector design that focused respectively 'on the need to reestablish the primacy of representative government over bureaucracy' (p. 115) and on the primacy of (private sector) managerial principles over bureaucracy. Combining such different principles for organizing public services often leads to hybrid structures and roles, and also creates tensions and contradictions (Aucoin 1990; Dunsire 1995).

Interest in hybridity and hybridization has been one analytic way to make sense of this growing differentiation (Christensen and Lægread 2011). Pressures for hybridization have become more intense across many sectors (for social policies, see Christensen and Lægread

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2011; Soennecken 2013; for higher education, see Boitier and Rivière 2013; Krücken 2014; for health systems, see Tuohy 2012; and for secondary education, see Fredriksson and Persson 2012). Public policies increasingly blur traditional boundaries between private, not for profit, and public sectors (Newman 2001; Bozeman 2013). The use of third sector providers to deliver public services is another growing phenomenon (Newman 2001; Battilana and Lee 2014). Billis (2010) suggests that the third sector is in a period of ‘intense organizational hybridity’ (p. 46) which needs theorization. Overall, this literature suggests that a broader mix of values, logics, and organizing principles is apparent in public services reforms (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).

Our introductory article reviews this evolving field and identifies alternative theoretical prisms to help understand various aspects of hybridity. We answer the following central question: *How can we understand the multiple manifestations of hybridity in public services and what are their consequences for individuals, organizations, and the (in)stability of reforms?* We will review various theoretical perspectives which can be used to grasp different dimensions of hybridity in public services and explore the organizational changes that may develop, given high hybridization.

### **A critical review of existing public management literatures on hybridity**

Public administration scholars have already explored long-term organizational shifts in public services which create hybrid organizational forms. While earlier neoliberal and NPM reforms (Hood 1991) straightforwardly privatized many nationalized industries, there are also ‘halfway houses’, such as expanding private contributions to public services (e.g. increasing student fees in public universities). Sociological accounting research critically examined multi-sectoral public–private partnerships for large projects and the introduction of private capital into public infrastructures (for the UK, see Broadbent *et al.* 2003; see also the comparative study of Héritier and Schmidt 2000). The ‘Network Governance’ tradition draws attention to a ‘more plural and pluralist’ state (Osborne 2010) with governments and private and non-state actors operating in complex policy networks (Rhodes 2007). Newman (2001) emphasized the blurring of the boundaries and responsibilities between sectors for tackling social and economic issues.

The specific concept of ‘hybridity’ within public administration scholarship is still undeveloped. We seek to contribute to a better theoretical understanding. The current literature often operates at a macro level. However, increased hybridity may also have important local implications for particular organizations, work teams, and individuals. While a macro focus on hybridity thus may be too limited, an overemphasis on individuals and their practices may insufficiently recognize macro- and meso-level factors (Reed 2009; Whittington 2011). We advocate a broader approach to hybridity that pays attention to the tensions and possible contradictions between different analytic levels, such as between hybrid organizational forms and individuals’ identity.

We therefore explore the concept of hybridity at multiple levels, especially using organizational studies based theories to complement public administration perspectives which often concentrate on formal structure/governance. A greater dialogue between the neighbouring disciplines of public administration and organizational studies is repeatedly advocated by scholars from both disciplines (Rhodes 2007; Bozeman 2013): after all, public services are often delivered by large and complex organizations within policy sectors (for example, healthcare, education, energy) where multiple state and non-state actors are also involved in the design of policies and implementation (Arellano-Gault *et al.* 2013).

The structure of this review article is as follows. First, we propose a fuller approach to studying hybridity by reviewing four theoretical perspectives drawn from organizational studies (Rhodes 2007) which focus respectively on: (i) governance forms; (ii) the institutional dynamics of hybridity; (iii) the social interactions behind hybridity; and (iv) individual consequences of hybridity for roles, work practices, and identities. We discuss these four theoretical perspectives in turn. We conclude by reviewing the other articles in this issue and their theoretical frameworks, and finally present promising avenues for future research.

### ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR STUDYING HYBRIDITY

'Hybridity' essentially refers to a situation of 'mixed origin or composition of elements' (Gittell and Douglas 2012). Given this broad definition, hybridity is an umbrella concept needing more precise exploration. Skelcher (2012) recently underlined the muddiness of the hybridity concept, its tendency to incorporate more and more organizational situations, and the false assumption that hybridity is a novel phenomenon (see also, in this issue, Skelcher and Smith 2015). Skelcher (2012) and Miller *et al.* (2008) argue that hybridity has been predominantly understood as *structural hybridity* with a focus on shifts in coordination (hierarchy, market, networks) and corresponding management and governance modes. The limits of a narrow structural (macro) approach are highlighted in recent public administration scholarship around hybridity, accountability, and public values (Moe 2001; van der Wal and van Hout 2009; Brandsen and Karré 2011; Gulbrandsen 2011; Blessing 2012; Mullins *et al.* 2012). So we agree with Bryson *et al.* (2014) who support a broader, more integrated approach for studying public values that relates to institutions and policy levels, but also organizational strategies and the role of public managers and professionals (Moore 2013).

Seeking to understand the concept of hybridity beyond the traditional focus on governance structures and to access wider literatures from organizational studies, we will build on recent articles (Skelcher 2012; Battilana and Lee 2014; Skelcher and Smith 2015), with a more inclusive approach in analysing hybridity. Building on dimensions of structure (organizational design), agency (activities), institutional context (environment, culture), and identities (workforce) found in these works, we here use four literature perspectives to map theoretical challenges in the analysis of hybridity in public services organizations. First, we explore well-established theories that seek to understand how shifts in *structures and governance* (hierarchy, network, market) affect organizational hybridity. Second, we introduce the theoretical perspective on *institutional dynamics* of hybrids (using organizational archetype theory and institutional logics). Third, we describe a theoretical prism for understanding hybrid *agency and practices* coming from sociological accounting theory, using Actor Network Theory (ANT). And fourth, we identify interesting literature on understanding hybrid *roles and identities*. Together, we suggest that these four theoretical perspectives offer an integrative framework for studying hybridity, incorporating multilevel and multi-actor perspectives (see figure 1).

Each theoretical perspective will now be further discussed. We then compare and contrast these theoretical explanations and analyse their implications for the other articles in this special issue.

#### Governance theory: understanding hybrid modes

A well-developed literature explores shifts in governance systems at the supra-organizational and systemic levels (Dent *et al.* 2007; Moore and Hartley 2008). A classic

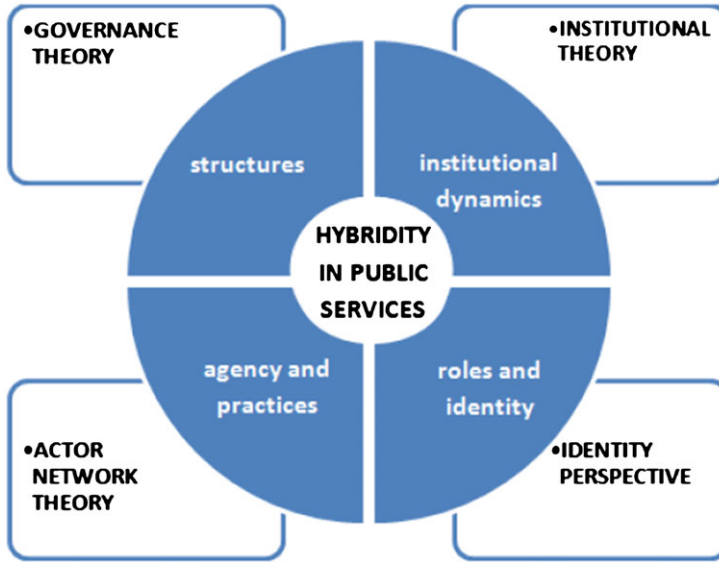


FIGURE 1 *Theoretical perspectives on hybridity in public services*

distinction drawn is between hierarchies, markets, and networks/clans (Ouchi 1979) as three 'pure' alternative modes of governance. Hybrid modes can then develop between these three pure forms, including relational markets (which mix markets and networks), 'managed markets' (which mix markets and management), and 'managed networks' (Ferlie *et al.* 2013) (which mix networks and hierarchy). Gittel and Douglas (2012) recently suggested a 'relational bureaucracy' (another mix of hierarchy and network) as an additional hybrid form. Networks are often by themselves considered a hybrid form.

This focus on hybrid governance forms goes against other analyses which suggest a pattern of radical paradigm shifts or linear progression from one governance mode in public services to another, notably a possible radical shift to a post-NPM paradigm (Moore and Hartley 2008; Osborne 2010). While we may observe a (partial) shift (Rhodes 1997) from NPM to network-like governance, we suggest on the contrary that there is no such simple radical transition. An implication is that intermediate forms (such as managed networks and relational bureaucracies) warrant further analysis.

Provan and Kenis' (2008) typology of network governance in public services distinguishes between pluralist and self-governing networks where participants have roughly equal power and ones where one organization emerges as a lead organization. While there is still no vertically integrated hierarchy, such networks are characterized by power inequalities with one dominant 'coordinating' organization. An interesting question is whether these hybrid forms can hold two governance modes in balance over time (Ferlie *et al.* (2013) empirically found that some 'managed networks' in the UK appeared successful in this respect), or whether they experience contradiction or incoherence, or regress back to a hierarchical mode.

Writing on the third sector, Billis (2010) explores their basic mode of organizing from a governance perspective. He suggests that hybrid organizations often have basic roots in one sector (e.g. UK NHS Foundation Trusts are mainly public sector organizations but with some third sector principles in a model of governance which includes multiple

stakeholders in part). They may well follow accountability lines in their primary sector and as expressed by their 'principal owners', and hence 'revert to type' rather than operate in a mixed mode. This model is consistent with a 'shallow hybridity' model (e.g. the point at which an NGO starts to employ paid staff), which does not disturb the basic third sector organizational pattern. It becomes more complex under 'entrenched hybridity', where members are imposed on an NGO's board from outside and when there is an elaborate and well-paid staff hierarchy (perhaps as a condition for funding from a firm or a public bureau).

Noordegraaf (2011) focuses on the contemporary emergence of the hybrid form of 'organized professionalism'. This form combines some imperatives of management with continuing attention to professional standards, driven by the presumed need of professionals to shelter in larger-scale organizations to achieve satisfactory working conditions and respond to external demands for the quality and reliability of services. This move marks a shift away from the classic professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg 1983), not just structurally but also at the level of practice through explicit organizational/professional standards that may reshape professional work practices.

We now introduce three alternative theories that go beyond the conventional focus on structure and governance so far considered.

### **Institutional theory: dynamics of hybridity**

A second approach comes from New Institutionalism, with its theoretical focus on organizational archetypes and institutional logics (e.g. Hinings and Greenwood 1988; Greenwood and Hinings 1993; Thornton *et al.* 2012). A traditional core assumption in institutional theory is high coherence within an embedded archetype, specifically between the three levels of structure, systems, and underpinning values and ideology. Archetype theory was originally sceptical that hybrids could stabilize, suggesting collapse through internal contradictions followed by reversion to one archetype. So multiple logics within a field would produce 'inconsistencies and tensions within and between social systems' (Seo and Creed 2002, p. 223) and provoke further cycles of change.

Yet later studies reported more complex findings. Cooper *et al.*'s (1996) study of strategic change in a Canadian law firm found a tension between a traditional professional dominance archetype and the new Managed Professional Business archetype (reflecting competitive pressures from marketization and globalization). Yet there was 'sedimented' change where different layers coexisted rather than a sharp transition, despite the distinctive features (and even values) of each pure form. The concept of 'sedimented change' allowed for some old values associated with law as a traditional profession persisting alongside new business-oriented values: 'these two powerful schemes can co exist, fuse and conflict within the sedimented structures of large law firms' (p. 635), like layers on top of each other in geological formations such as cliffs. Hybrids thus appeared to be a viable organizational form over time.

Using Hinings and Greenwood (1988) for initial theoretical direction, Denis *et al.* (2001) present case studies of organizational change in Canadian hospitals, seen as pluralistic settings where power is diffuse and objectives between the different stakeholders divergent. They explored how organizational change takes place, given competing managerial and professional logics, and found a pattern of high pluralism where power was bounded between three alternative elites: the governance structure, senior managers, and senior medical staff. Tensions among these groups encouraged hybrid forms to develop in highly pluralistic organizations. Theoretically, Denis *et al.* (2001) moved away from archetype



theory and towards a view based on an uncertain and bounded pluralist bargaining process. They suggested a novel analytic approach based on complexity theory (Stacey 1995) as perceiving change as a complex and dialectical process between opposing forces, with non-linear relationships, feedback loops, and unpredictable or cyclical patterns of change. Such processes may in their view be at the heart of enduring but unstable hybrids.

Reay and Hinings (2005) examined strategic change across the field in the Canadian province of Alberta. A radical and NPM-friendly provincial government (elected in 1993) quickly introduced reforms to facilitate cost cutting and business-friendly measures. They describe a contest between the old dominant institutional logic of clinical dominance and a new NPM logic from the elected provincial government. They found an 'uneasy truce' between the two logics as the old professional dominance logic had been 'subdued but not eliminated'. So two competing institutional logics coexisted in tension over time.

Reay and Hinings (2009) discovered four mechanisms enabling the new Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) and doctors to work together on a day-to-day level: differentiating professional decisions from other decisions; seeking informal input from professionals in management decisions; working together against 'a common enemy' (the provincial government); and jointly innovating in experimental sites. The rivalry between competing logics was thus managed through pragmatic collaboration.

Van Gestel and Hillebrand (2011) examined change processes in the field of public employment services in the Netherlands over time. They suggested that both the old punctuated equilibrium view of periodic radical change – leading to one clearly dominant institutional logic and a long period of stability – and recent studies (Reay and Hinings 2009) suggesting that competing logics coexist over time in tension may be limited. They suggested a third outcome of oscillation or switching: 'outcomes may also be characterised by ongoing change rather than stable fields with one dominant or multiple co-existing logics. In other words, while one dominant logic may emerge, it does so only temporarily and one change is followed by another' (p. 233). They use the image of 'fields in flux' to characterize this third scenario of an ongoing cycle of temporary truces.

Exploring unstable institutions, Bjerregaard and Jonasson (2014) focus on the process of 'becoming', rather than taking institutions as stable 'beings'. Supporting practice theorists (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007), they suggest a stronger emphasis on the everyday practice of managing high institutional complexity.

The lack of concern for agency is a well-known criticism of institutionalist approaches and one to which authors working in that tradition have recently responded. Notwithstanding a growing volume of work on institutional entrepreneurship and embedded agency (for an example from Canada, see Maguire *et al.* 2004; on a wider research agenda, see Garud *et al.* 2007), institutional theory often struggles with opening up the 'black-box' of agency (Suddaby *et al.* 2010) and the nature of structure–agency relationships, and still needs a more developed theory of human agency. Delbridge and Edwards (2013, p. 929) argue that the institutional logics perspective, despite incorporating a multi-level analysis (e.g. Thornton and Ocasio 2008; Thornton *et al.* 2012), still 'does not adequately specify the nature of agency nor how agency and the other levels of analysis connect'.

In the next section, another way to understand agency and practices is introduced based on ANT.

### **Actor Network Theory: agency and practices in creating hybridity**

A third literature perspective has a clear focus on agency and practices. It has been influenced by basic ideas from ANT (Latour 1987, 1993; Callon 1991; Law 1991). ANT's basic

concept is of a complex actor network consisting of clusters of human and non-human actors (actants), brought together in material semiotic networks. These networks are fragile, diverse, and shifting, so it may not be easy to establish a central forum to bring all network participants together. Somewhat contradictory to this suggestion, these networks are also seen as a technology to assemble heterogeneous actors and make joint action possible. It is through these networks that hybrids in action are developed.

Influenced by ANT ideas, some sociological accounting research assumes ready hybridization (Miller *et al.* 2008) of work practices. It is specifically argued that the heterogeneous and disparate elements found in contrasting regulatory regimes can constantly mix up and link in: 'a continually inventive process in which proliferation and multiplication are the norm'. So the interaction between diverse elements produces ready fusion of practices, processes, and knowledge. Miller *et al.* (2008) argue that such hybrids can produce stable states, overcoming internal contradictions.

Others argue, by contrast, that regulatory regimes consist of various values, norms, and instruments that may not be readily combined. For example, in the field of clinical risk management, two regulatory regimes have been identified – ethics-orientated and rules-based modes (Fischer and Ferlie 2013) – which may not readily coexist.

Overall, the ANT perspective, and critical studies on professional practices in accounting, helps us examine hybridity within emerging regulatory regimes (e.g. risk management and safety regimes). Why might risk management hybrids (e.g. quality councils in healthcare) readily proliferate? One driver might be ready movement of dominant risk practices through increasingly well-developed inter-organizational networks that cross conventional organizational boundaries. A second driver is knowledge and expertise moving across old boundaries, as if ideas move through some internal force: 'novel types of expertise emerge, too, as financial expertise comes increasingly to be mixed up with other types of expertise, which earlier were viewed as distinctive and bounded if not its antithesis' (Miller *et al.* 2008, p. 952). A promising avenue suggested by ANT and its derivatives is the analysis of such boundaries and how they are transgressed in social and organizational settings.

Lamont and Molnàr (2002) identified two broad types involved in collective action: symbolic and social boundaries. They suggest that boundary transformation and permeability in society (organizations) is a plausible conceptual lens with which to study hybridity: 'Much more needs to be done in terms of exploring the conditions under which boundaries generate differentiation or dissolve to produce hybridity or new forms of categorization' (Lamont and Molnàr 2002, p. 187). ANT-style heterogeneous networks may reflect such boundary shifting and redefinition in social and organizational settings. Moreover a focus on boundaries' dynamics underlines the multi-level nature of hybridity: individuals, groups, organizations, and macro-societal processes. Shifts in boundaries through mixing of knowledge may occur at the individual and group levels without necessarily being visible in organizational structures or more formal governance. As discussed earlier, changing organizational forms may also develop in response to novel expectations regarding professional practices (Noordegraaf 2011).

### **The identity perspective: understanding hybrid roles and identity**

Given growing boundary permeability (sectors, organizations, practices, knowledge), the identity perspective at the individual level may also be helpful. Hybridity may entail changes to and the formation of new work identities. The mixing of multiple identities or the construction of a new identity present challenges and dilemmas for individual public

services practitioners, as hybrid roles emerge in public administration settings (Llewellyn 2001; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2006; Witman *et al.* 2011).

The public services professional moving into managerial roles (e.g. a doctor becoming a Clinical Director; a professor becoming a Vice Chancellor) may develop new skills and knowledge bases. This shift of role may eventually trigger a changed work identity. However, this transition may not be easy: work on organizational identity has focused on tensions and dilemmas in constructing and conciliating multiple identities (Iedema *et al.* 2003; Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003; Hallier and Forbes 2005; Beech *et al.* 2008).

Identity shifts and identity creation are important micro-level themes in this literature stream. Empirical studies in the field suggest that financial and medical expertise may sometimes hybridize. Comparing health systems in Finland and the UK following managerial reforms, Kurunmäki (2004) found that in Finland, doctors readily combined medical knowledge with new financial knowledge, forming new hybrid knowledges (including budget setting, cost calculation, and setting prices). Amongst UK doctors, however, hybridization proceeded more slowly. International variation in such hybridization processes is thus an interesting theme. Battilana and Dorado's (2010) study of two pioneering commercial micro-finance organizations found that they had to combine different logics of competition and philanthropy. The process of constructing new identities to support new hybrids was critical to their sustainability, involving HRM and socialization policies. Contemporary work on the interface of organizations and professionalism thus offers a fertile ground to examine identity reshaping and construction.

A logical consequence of the identity perspective is to become sensitive to possible resistance. Analysing American medical education, Dunn and Jones (2010) identified the tension between current practices and new systems of knowledge as a key trigger of change. Such discrepancies may shape dynamics of resistance expressed by *individuals* facing hybridization in public administration. Langley *et al.* (2011) used comparative case studies within two provincial healthcare systems in Canada to analyse identity struggles in merging organizations. They found that the reshaping of identities operates not only at the individual level but also at the group level, where group identities deal with the implications of major structural changes like mergers among RHAs or clinical units among and within teaching hospitals.

Critical theorists (Frenkel and Shenav 2006; Frenkel 2008; see also Shimoni and Bergman 2006 on hybridization in so-called multicultural managerial settings) have developed a post-colonial theory of management. They see in hybridization the resistance by individuals or groups to a colonization by new systems, norms, and codes of conduct. Hybridity is considered as a form of accommodation to coercive pressures, without becoming totally absorbed by them. The identity perspective on hybridity thus opens new ways to understand the consequences of macro- and meso-level changes in public services for individuals and groups, including their perceptions, adaption, or resistance to hybrid roles and demands.

## COMPARING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HYBRIDITY

We have here outlined four contrasting theoretical perspectives on hybridity and hybridization in the public services. We found that the four theoretical perspectives: (i) emphasize distinctive manifestations of hybridity, at different levels of analysis; (ii) stress diverse drivers of change; and (iii) present varying ideas about hybridity as a



coherent and stable phenomenon. For ease of reference, their core features are compared and contrasted in table 1.

Table 1 suggests that the different foci of the four theoretical perspectives, related to key dimensions of hybridity mentioned in recent works (Skelcher 2012; Battilana and Lee 2014; Skelcher and Smith 2015), imply various *manifestations* related to hybridization. Considered from the four theoretical perspectives, hybrids can simultaneously be perceived as: mixed governance structures; related to change in archetypes and institutional logics; constituted through a combination of knowledge (e.g. mixing accounting and clinical knowledge), of values and processes (e.g. market driven values in public arts or employment services); and as hybrid roles and identities of individuals and groups (e.g. managing doctors or professors).

Although hybridity is often related to multiple levels, each theoretical perspective prioritizes a particular level: either a macro (national/international), meso (organizational field/organizations), or micro level (groups and individuals). So hybridity can be perceived as embedded in individuals (occupational roles and identities), in groups (the combination of autonomy and managerial control of professional teams), in organizations (the incorporation of heterogeneous values in governance, like profit and social support), and in broad networks or organizational fields (like the combination of private and public sectors and NGOs in delivering social programmes). Combining these levels of analysis may open up new analytical perspectives and insights on hybridity (Thornton and Ocasio 2008; Bozeman *et al.* 2013).

Next in comparing the four theories are the *drivers* of hybridity. Hybridity may result from macro-transformations and shifting ideologies (NPM, post-NPM) in contemporary societies, as emphasized in all four theoretical strands. Scientific and technological innovations suggest new possibilities to shape and manage professional activities. For example, the evolution of informatics and digital applications has progressively changed clinical work in healthcare. In other cases, economic changes push public domains to develop new partnerships to ensure their viability or legitimacy. Some drivers reflect changes of values, norms, and expectations in civil society or among service users, as stressed in institutional theory and the identity perspective. A final point relates to hybrid situations within conditions of *coherence* (*consistency and stability*) or *fragility* (*temporary truces*). Theories of organizational archetypes (Greenwood and Hinings 1993) underline that mixing organizational types or logics may not necessarily achieve stability and a coherent configuration. Similarly, work on the experience of new roles and the re-composition of identities suggests that instability and tensions may be more frequent than assumed. The empirical analysis of hybridity should clarify the assumptions that various theoretical perspectives have about its coherence or fragility.

We now use our comparative review of theoretical perspectives (see table 1) to outline and discuss the other articles in this issue.

## AN OUTLINE OF THE ARTICLES

As with the theories discussed earlier, the issue's remaining articles also relate to various *manifestations* of hybridity. Three clear categories are visible: a first group examines public sector reform in a sectoral field (healthcare, education, labour, and welfare), linking national policies to organizational and/or individual responses. These articles include those on: Norwegian labour and welfare reform (Fossetol *et al.* 2015); higher education reforms in Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands (Teelken 2015); and reforms in Scotland

TABLE 1 *Contrasting theories of hybridity in public services*

	<b>Theory 1: Governance Theory</b>	<b>Theory 2: Institutional Theory</b>	<b>Theory 3: Actor Network Theory</b>	<b>Theory 4: Identity Perspective</b>
Focus	Understanding hybrid governance	Institutional dynamics of hybridity	Agency and processes in hybrid networks	Hybrid roles and identity
Manifestations	Governance modes and their shifts	Strategic organizational change and continuity	Hybridization in risk management regimes	Identity change within hybrid forms
Level of analysis	Social systems	Organizational fields (e.g., law)	Practices, processes, and knowledge	Groups and individuals
Drivers of hybridity	Growth of post-NPM political values; 'wicked' social problems	Institutional contradictions and external pressures	Networks and actor networks; mobile ideas	Structural changes and managerial ideologies
Coherence or fragility	Debate about any radical transition in governance modes or hybrid forms; How stable and effective?	More empirical evidence of enduring hybrids and sedimented change than originally predicted	Fragile and ever shifting	Diversity of hybrids in terms of identity. More or less stable hybrid identities, depending on context

and Ireland (McDermott *et al.* 2015). A second group concerns public–private relationships. Waring (2015) examines cross-sectoral effects on public services being transferred to private or mutual ownership in the English NHS; another article examines public–private collaboration in research centres in Norway and Sweden (Gulbrandsen *et al.* 2015). A third grouping concentrates on hybrid roles and identities of public services professionals. These articles are all situated in UK settings (a well-researched sector), but examine different professional groups, such as nurses (Croft *et al.* 2015), physicians (Spyridonidis *et al.* 2015), clinical and medical directors (McGivern *et al.* 2015), and medical doctors, practitioners, and assistants (Waring 2015). In addition to these main clusters, a remaining article more focused on theorizing hybridity cites examples from non-profit organizations (Skelcher and Smith 2015).

The articles also combine diverse *levels of analysis*, with a focus on the meso and/or micro level. In theorizing hybridity, Skelcher and Smith aim to combine (macro) institutional logics with the level of organizations and also actors' identities. A few of the articles start discussing national reforms in public services followed by the responses at the organizational and individual levels: for example, McDermott *et al.*, comparing top-down versus bottom-up approaches to national policy change in two countries; Fossetol *et al.*, studying organizational responses to the NAV reform in Norway; Teelken, examining organizational and individual strategies in higher education reforms in three countries; and Croft *et al.*, identifying nurses' responses to NPM reforms in the British NHS. Other articles focus even more explicitly on organizational and individual consequences and practices of hybridity, including public–private research centres (Gulbrandsen), and studies of professionals' hybrid roles (McGivern *et al.*; Spyridonidis *et al.*; and Waring). Interestingly, the studies reveal that a situation of multiple institutional logics, competing national policy aims, and/or hybrid organizational structures does not necessarily lead to hybrid practices, roles, and identities (Gulbrandsen *et al.*; Fossetol *et al.*; Teelken; and Skelcher and Smith), or vice versa (Waring). These studies highlight the relevance of analysing hybridity at multiple levels, and beyond just structures.

As for the *drivers of hybridity*, the issue's articles discuss different NPM and post-NPM 'logics' that present competing demands for organizations and individuals, for example in the Norwegian reforms in labour and welfare (Fossetol *et al.*), and higher education in Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands (Teelken). The tensions and contradictions across various drivers and manifestations of hybridity often create unstable organizations and practices. This may influence the dimension of *coherence or fragility* in hybridity. Here the articles show a varied picture. On the one hand, many organizational and individual responses to hybrid contexts (national policies and governance structures) suggest adherence/compliance to one (dominant) logic (e.g. Fossetol *et al.*; Teelken). Others suggest a reconciliation of different logics in a weak or contested way (e.g. Gulbrandsen *et al.*), with strategies of segmenting/compartmentalizing, or indecisiveness (Fossetol *et al.*).

Examples of organizations and individuals where different ideological demands are strongly combined, leading to synergy rather than tensions, are scarce. We observe these examples in a few medium and small offices in the NAV reform (Fossetol *et al.*), or in a minority of the public–private research centres studied in Norway and Sweden (Gulbrandsen *et al.*). Compliance with one (dominant) logic, although with indecisive and instrumental strategies, is apparent when studying responses of organizations and professionals over time (Fossetol *et al.*; Teelken). Interestingly, professionals with more autonomy in providing their services (e.g. doctors) are more willing to adapt to a hybrid culture (professionalism/business) than individuals with a less powerful position (Croft

*et al.*; Waring; Spyridonidis *et al.*). Given the restricted time horizon of most articles, however, longer-term findings about coherence and fragility are still to emerge.

## AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this article, we have reviewed four alternative theoretical perspectives which provide contrasting and perhaps complementary conceptual lenses on hybridity in public services organizations. The other articles in this issue refer to some theoretical perspectives more often than others, while they also present different angles. The institutional logics perspective is most prominent in the articles of Skelcher (2012) and Skelcher and Smith (this explicitly theoretical article develops the institutional logics literature to analyse hybridity in non-profits, but also uses an identity perspective) and Fossetol *et al.*; it is used more indirectly by Teelken, building a framework for strategic responses; and by McDermott *et al.*, referring to path-dependency for limits in ready hybridization. The identity approach at the individual level is also frequently used in this issue (McGivern *et al.*; Croft *et al.*; Spyridonidis *et al.*). Other articles refer to alternative literatures, for example to cultural studies and diaspora literature (Waring), or theory on 'responsive regulation' and control systems (McDermott *et al.*). The theoretical perspective on governance/structures is less popular; furthermore, the ANT perspective is not used explicitly in the articles in the issue, leaving room for future research.

In general, we noticed that discussing alternative theoretical perspectives in this special issue has been an inspiring motivation for most authors, which was a main objective of the development workshops preceding this issue (Workshop at TIAS Business School, Tilburg University, the Netherlands in March 2013; and the Standing Working Group 'Organizing the Public Sector', EGOS conference, Montréal, July 2013).

Based on the theoretical framing already advanced and our review of the other articles in the issue, we conclude by suggesting promising avenues for further research.

A first avenue concerns linking the study of hybridity across multiple levels, explicitly building on the suggestion here that hybrid structures do not necessarily lead to hybrid practices (Gulbrandsen *et al.*) or vice versa (Waring). Several articles highlight that we need to study hybridity on multiple levels. This task may require developing the connections between various actors, strategies, and interactions at different levels of analysis. Future research may build on Pandey and Wright (2006), who combined political studies and organizational behaviour literature in understanding the impact of the political environment on organizational and public managers' role ambiguity. McDermott *et al.* have developed an 'integrative governance model' to connect national and local organization with bottom-up and top-down approaches to support improvements. In particular, the impact of wider public management reform and hybridity on individual roles and identities is of great interest (McGivern *et al.*; Croft *et al.*; Spyridonidis *et al.*; Teelken). Conversely, linking changes on the level of individual professionals or groups in public services to their changing, often hybrid, organizational and political environment, is an important challenge (Waring).

For a rich investigation across multiple levels, we need further exploration of various definitions of hybridity. This issue reveals at least two different views on hybridity. While some authors in this issue (Fossetol *et al.*; Gulbrandsen) define hybridity as a mix of two previously distinct principles for governing or organizing, leading to new organizational forms (e.g. 'holistic/integrative public services organizations', public-private partnerships-PPPs); others (e.g. Croft *et al.*; Waring) view hybridity rather as the liminal

space between two or more original approaches or practices rather than combining into a new one.

A second direction for future research is moving beyond a typology of various response strategies (Fossetol *et al.*; McDermott *et al.*; Skelcher and Smith; Teelken) to understand better the agency and social interaction processes that shape these responses and consequently explore the hybridization *process* in various public sectors. In examining reasons for such varied responses, the differences in positions among professionals and managers deserve more attention. As argued by some authors here (McGivern *et al.*; Croft *et al.*; Spyridonidis *et al.*; Waring), professionals may differ in their response strategies dependent on their position. For example, Waring and Croft *et al.* show that doctors, based on their elite knowledge and independence, are more willing to take up new and different values and principles imposed on their work than nurses, who 'exist in a perverse liminal space, exposing them to identity conflict and a lack of organizational influence' (Croft *et al.* 2015). McGivern *et al.* highlight that the willingness of medical doctors to develop hybrid roles is more important than their managerial preparation. Following these articles, in seeking to improve professionals' capacity to deal with the often competing demands in hybrid situations, it would be beneficial to strengthen professional knowledge, independence, and willingness rather than using a direct control approach.

At the organizational level, we need better explanations for hybrid practice variance. Gulbrandsen *et al.* assume, in their study of research centres as PPPs, that radical modes of interaction are more difficult to implement and therefore have a lower impact on local practices. From that perspective, it might be effective to use incremental change models. However, without more radical change, the incentives for change, in this case for partners in PPPs to collaborate, may be too low to be effective. This points to the question of which organizational strategies are most effective for collaboration in hybrid settings. McDermott *et al.* refer to Braithwaite's (2013) recognition of practitioner innovation, which goes beyond persuasive and punitive styles as seen from a top-down regulatory perspective. They suggest the need for further research on how top-down and bottom-up strategies can be effectively aligned. Fossetol *et al.* indicate that organizational responses synthesizing multiple demands are dependent on conditions of low work pressures and small/medium-sized offices. Productive collaboration in hybrid public services may require more in-depth insights into the role of these and other underlying conditions for effective responses.

Finally, we suggest that combining multiple theoretical angles from the two disciplines of public administration and organization studies in studying hybridity may be fruitful (Rhodes 2007). We have made a first step on this path in this issue by bringing together theoretical perspectives from organization studies into a field normally seen as lying in public administration. Although we hope that scholars in public administration welcome this literature and can use it for their research, we also recognize that important elements in studying hybridity in public services are undeveloped in the field of organization studies. Most obviously, theoretical works in organization studies usually lack attention to the crucial role of politics in designing and implementing change and creating hybridity in public services organizations (Bozeman 2013). Organization studies can learn greatly from public administration literature. Conversely, public administration can benefit from an organization studies prism, most explicitly in studying implementation in organizations. Bozeman (2013, p. 173) explains the marginal role of implementation in public policy studies: '... many policy studies are surprisingly ill-informed about organizations and



organizational theory, often unconsciously channeling ideas that have been longer and better developed in organization studies’.

Interestingly, in both academic fields, hybridization is increasingly seen as a permanent process rather than a temporary phenomenon. Fossetol *et al.* demonstrate the growing importance of hybridity even in highly institutionalized (mature) policy fields, such as labour and welfare. One interesting hypothesis of their study is that enduring hybridization is facilitated by post-NPM reforms and stimulated by governance-like modes of control. Waring demonstrates the hybridization of occupational and business culture, but suggests that the basis for cultural hybridity is broader than just the blurring of the borders of public versus private sectors.

Further research may investigate these arguments, in other policy sectors and countries.

Bringing together theoretical and empirical work from both public administration and organization studies, therefore, can increase our understanding of such manifestations, drivers, dynamics, and the (in)stability of hybridity in public services organizations.

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