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Talent Management in Public Science Funding Organizations: Institutional Logics, Paradoxical Tensions and HR Actor Responses

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Drawing on a study of three public science funding organizations in Ireland, Finland and New Zealand, we investigate the implementation of talent management (TM) through the lens of institutional complexity and paradox theory. Multiple institutional logics and institutional complexity create tensions which TM actors must respond to and manage and. We identify an important interplay of four institutional logics with the dominance of the professional logic acting as a unifying function to respond to tensions in TM implementation. We add to the emerging literature on day-to-day responses to competing institutional logics and public sector TM.

Keywords: talent management, institutional logics, institutional complexity, paradoxical tensions and responses, public science funding agencies, talent management actors

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Introduction

Talent management (TM) has achieved significantly increased visibility in public sector organizations in recent years (Boselie, Thunnissen & Monster, 2021; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Kravariti, Tasoulis, Scullion, & Khaled Alali, 2022). While scholars highlight the benefits of TM in public sector organizations (e.g., Brunetto & Beattie, 2020; Poocharoen & Lee, 2013), managing the implementation of TM is challenging because of the existence of two or more competing institutional logics that prevail in public sector organizations (Grant, Garavan, & Mackie, 2020; Fossestøl, Breit, Andreassen & Klemsdal, 2015). Institutional logics provide TM actors with a set of assumptions, rules, and beliefs (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012) that shape the decisions they make in the context of day-to-day implementation of TM. The ideas underpinning TM, which tend to be strongly market logic based (Grant et al., 2020), inevitably face conflicting public sector organizational values and beliefs that reflect a broader set of logics such as the professional, state and community logics (Coule & Patmore, 2013; Laihonen & Kokko, 2020; Shams, 2020). Institutional complexity, emphasizing the coexistence and interaction of multiple logics, is a key characteristic of TM implementation in public sector organizations, and results in tensions in implementing TM. How do HR actors respond to and navigate such tensions?

The existing research on institutional logics has tended to focus on macro- or more field-level dynamics (Almandoz, 2012). More recently, researchers have highlighted the need to better understand how organizational actors engage with multiple and often conflicting logics in

the context of day-to-day micro level implementation of HRM practices (Grant et al., 2020; Tyskbo, 2021). We suggest public sector organizations may struggle to implement TM due to differences in values and practices between private and public sector organizations (Boselie & Thunnissen, 2017; Glenn, 2012; Kravariti et al., 2022; Poocharoen & Lee, 2013; Vermeeren, 2013). In private sector organizations, the emphasis is on market legitimacy, financial growth, and knowledge whereas public sector organizations tend to value professionalism, social legitimacy, and social capital (Christensen, Lægreid & Røvik, 2020; Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017). Prior research suggests that the implementation of TM in public sector organizations may struggle due to differing objectives and divergent organizational approaches (Grant et al., 2020). Research to date has only begun to investigate one of the most fundamental drivers of such differences in day-to-day practice: the role of organizational values, belief systems and practices (Garavan, Morley, Cross, Carbery, & Darcy, 2020). We argue that investigation of how different and potentially conflicting values, belief systems and practices are managed in the context of the implementation of TM in public sector organizations can surface issues related to both the creation and resolution of tensions in day-to-day implementation of these practices. We propose that the utilization of both institutional logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009) and paradoxical lens (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014) help to address this important gap because institutional logics integrate the role of values, beliefs and practices whereas the paradox lens gives emphasis to the way in which tensions that arise from the operation of different institutional logics are resolved.

Institutional logics give primacy to 'socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality' (Thornton & Ocasio 1999, p. 804) and which have important implications for the behavior of

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talent actors. Utilizing an institutional logics perspective to investigate day-to-day TM implementation allows us to study tensions that stem from (a) differences in understandings of TM arising from differences in institutional logics and (b) understanding of different norms, values and assumptions shaped at the field level but which produce tensions at the level of practice (Friedland, 2017). Paradox theory takes a micro level perspective (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) to understand how HR actors cope with the tensions that arise from multiple logics and the responses these HR actors make to manage these tensions. Therefore, building on both institutional logics and paradox perspectives, we answer the following research questions: (i) what institutional logics and paradoxical tensions come into play for HR actors when implementing TM day-to-day in public sector organizations and (ii) what mechanisms do HR actors use to resolve tensions arising from these competing institutional logics. For our study, HR actors refer to senior leaders with responsibility for HR and TM including the Head of the funding organization, the HR Director or equivalent, managers in senior positions with responsibility for HR and TM in their units, and relevant external stakeholders who influence public sector HR policy impacting the organization (e.g., relevant Government Department or Ministry).

To investigate these questions, we studied three public science funding organizations in Ireland, Finland and New Zealand (one in each country), as a long-standing public sector setting in which HR actors have adopted the bureaucratic principles of HR over half a century but have needed to adopt to new principles and 'grapple with divergent goals, values, and identities' (Besharov & Smith, 2014: 391). Consequently, they are likely interacting with multiple and conflicting logics over a long period of time resulting in the blurring of some traditional practices between public and private organizations in the wake of, for example, New Public Management, since late 1980s. These organizations are progressive when it comes to the adoption of HRM

practices including TM and therefore provide an empirically sound context in which to study TM implementation. In addition, these organizations are characterized by significant institutional complexity which provides a good organizational context in which to study the interplay of multiple institutional logics. We make four contributions to the literature. First, we advance our understanding of the interplay and conflicts of multiple logics in TM implementation. Second, we identify the unifying potential of the professional logic allowing talent actors to work together and to guide their actions. Third, we generate important insights concerning the mechanisms that TM actors use to resolve conflicts to facilitate TM implementation. Fourth, we devise a process model highlighting the interplay of logics, tensions, and paradoxical responses to TM implementation in the organizations we studied. Taken together, this research suggests that greater attention should be paid to the values, beliefs, and practices in the study of institutional logics and TM in public sector organizations and the mechanisms used to resolve these tensions.

Talent and TM in the Public Sector

The literature on TM in public sector organizations is nascent but growing. A key theme within this body of literature is the notion that TM in public sector organizations has distinct and unique characteristics. Kravariti & Johnston (2020: 80) define public sector talent as individuals who possess 'competencies, knowledge and values that reflect the public sector's core principles, which enable him/her to use their exceptional abilities to serve the public for the common good'. Other theoretical and empirical contributions also emphasize its distinctive characteristics with Harrisr & Foster (2010) highlighting the strong strands of expertise and focus on leadership and development running through notions of public sector TM. Another theme that comes to the fore in current literature is the apparent disparity between private and public sector concepts of TM.

The key argument revolves around the perceived lack of fit of private sector notions of TM with the values, beliefs and practices found in public sector organizations. For example, notions of exclusive TM including 'appraisal and individualised reward and development philosophies' (Swailes & Blackburn, 2016: 124) fit uneasily with long-established equality policies and perceptions of fair treatment found in public sector HR and the emphasis on the assessment of talent, high potential TM and performance management processes (Bolander, Werr & Asplund, 2017; Dries, 2013). Yet what also emerged is the lack of a one-size-fits-all approach with some public sector organizations utilizing more exclusive approaches (Thunnissen and Buttiens, 2017) whereas others focus on a more narrow stream of TM emphasising development and career preparation (Capelli & Keller, 2017; Collings, Scullion & Vaiman, 2015; Grant et al., 2020). Taken together, the current literature on public sector TM is that the heterogeneous nature of public sector organizations has led to tailored adaptations of the globally dominant TM approaches found in MNCs to better fit the public sector institutional context. TM actors in public sector organizations have significant agency to address the tensions that arise from institutional complexity as they determine how to design and implement TM given their discretionary power in interpreting logics. TM, as a set of practices, requires that HR actors will have to cope with institutional complexity and use strategies and tactics to resolve tensions in the day-to-day implementation of TM in their organizations (Alvehus, 2018; Garavan et al., 2020).

Institutional Complexity and Logics in the Context of TM

Organizations experience institutional complexity when they are faced with competing prescriptions from many institutional logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta & Lounsbury, 2011). Institutional logics provide an important nexus between 'individual agency, cognition and institutional practices and rule structures' (Yin & Jamali, 2021: 676) and are

generally understood as 'macro-level belief systems that shape cognitions and influence decision making processes in organizational fields' (McPherson & Sauder, 2013: 167). Institutional logics represent taken-for-granted social prescriptions that are important in defining activities, goals and expectations and are embodied in organizational practices (Thornton, 2004). Besharov and Smith (2014) highlight that while institutional logics will impact the cognition and actions of HR actors in implementing practices in organizations, HR actors can also shape and change those logics. There is an assumption of agency in the institutional logics literature in that organizational actors can accommodate the tensions arising from institutional logics and therefore HR actors have agency in terms of addressing and managing tensions in terms of TM implementation.

Institutional logics and TM have, to date, been researched at macro and micro levels. Glaister, Al Amri & Spicer (2021) found that a state logic encouraged banking and petroleum organizations in Oman to implement TM practices that emphasized societal wellbeing and corporate social responsibility. In contrast, a market logic dictated a stratified and differentiated approach that emphasized organizational interests and created the impression that the TM practices were inclusive. Alvehus (2018) investigated professional service firms and found that, at a day-to-day level, actors reconciled professional and market logics while at the same time replicating, revising, and rejecting some of the different logics. Tyskbo (2021) found that the day-to-day processes of talent identification were shaped by the logics that HR actors enacted and made use of. Business and engineering logics also featured with the former focused on sales and performance and the latter emphasizing an engineering culture and product development. The use of these logics was linked to specific categories of HR actors or members of departments. HR actors used institutional logics to achieve individual and organizational goals, and these shaped their talent identification decisions. Grant et al. (2020) found that actors

experienced significant difficulties in blending the different logics and this resulted in significantly less progress in terms of TM implementation. In Scottish public sector organizations, competing logics hampered the implementation of cross-organization collaboration resulting in a significant watering-down of the market logic of TM practices with more emphasis placed on inclusive approaches to talent development. These studies reveal an organizational context characterized by polarities which in turn create tensions in the implementation of TM. Taken together, this research highlights that greater attention is required in investigating how institutional logics inform the day-to-day practices of TM actors.

Institutional Logics, Paradoxes and Responses

To address our second question, we utilize paradox theory because it emphasizes the need for day-to-day problem solving due to tensions arising from institutional logics (Garavan et al. 2020). Paradox theory emphasizes that tensions are inherent in organizations and the need for 'both/and' solutions to address competing priorities (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxes are defined as 'competing, simultaneous, interrelated and persistent demands that cannot be resolved for good and require constant attention' (Beletskiy & Fey, 2020: 865). Competing demands are therefore not mutually exclusive but have a persistent and interrelated paradoxical character (Lewis & Smith, 2014).

We focus in this paper on the paradox of performing which is concerned with managing competing goals, priorities, strategies, and timelines (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The research highlights the paradox of performing in the context of TM with, for example, tensions around the goals of high potential programs; the beliefs of HR actors about talent development; and the roles of HR actors within the TM process (Garavan et al., 2020). Garavan et al. (2020) found that HR actors used a combination of defensive and proactive responses to address tensions

including continued ambivalence, adjustment, confrontation, and acceptance. Institutional logics provide frames of reference that condition the types of paradoxes HR actors experience and how they respond. Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, (2012) and Hoiland and Klemsdal (2020) suggest that multiple logics act as frames for the choices that HR actors will make. The next section sets out the research methods used to gather our data and inform the empirical study.

Method

Research Context: Public Science Funding Organizations, Institutional Complexity and Logics

We conducted our two-year field study in three public science funding organizations in Finland Ireland, and New Zealand (in in each country). The focus is not on the science funding *per se*, but rather the selection of this policy sector enables a focus on similar organizational environment and TM contexts thereby enabling comparisons of TM day-to-day implementation across the three organizations. These organizations have distinct features that make them suitable as research sites to study institutional complexity and TM. Public science funding organizations tend to be independent organizations reporting to the relevant Government department or ministry responsible for the economy, business, and science. However, they also tend to be significantly influenced by public and civil service HR policy and by the Government department or ministry responsible for education and training. Public science funding organizations typically have greater control over HR practices and employ highly qualified and technically skilled staff members with significant competition for talent from private sector employers compared to their Government departments. These organizations embody multiple logics characterized by high centrality and low compatibility and where HR actors have to grapple with divergent goals and values when it comes to the implementation of TM. High

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centrality leads to multiple logics vying for dominance when it comes to the implementation of TM.

The implementation of TM in public funding organizations is shaped by a variety of external logics. These organizations are subject to political, legal, cultural, and financial influences (Yang, Wu & Chen, 2012; Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013). They are subject to reforms designed to build human capital in public sector organizations and to implement HR practices that potentially conflict with core public service values such as transparency and equal opportunity. Changes in political priorities may, for example, impact budgets for TM and public science funding organizations may experience difficulties in attracting younger generations and specialist talent (Van den Brink, Fruytier & Thunnissen, 2013) leading to significant talent shortages (Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017). Exclusive approaches to TM are perceived as a potentially unfair process that clashes with public sector principles and values (Grant et al., 2020) and more inclusive TM approaches are perceived to support core logics found in many public sector organizations (Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017). In addition, the institutional culture of public sector organizations can drive or restrain particular types of TM practices and these organizations are highly bureaucratic thus restricting the types of practices that can be and are implemented (Troshani, Jerram & Hill, 2011). Public science funding organizations, therefore, represent organizations characterized by institutional complexity and the existence of multiple logics.

Research Design

Our research design draws on the principles of case study design using an inductive approach. Case studies provide for exploration of dynamics within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989) and they provide rich, empirical description of a particular phenomenon usually based on

several data sources (Yin, 1994). To develop insights about multiple institutional logics, paradoxical tensions and responses of HR actors when implementing TM, we selected public science funding organizations in three different countries. These case organizations each serve as 'an experiment', allowing for contrasting of results and extension of emerging theory (Løkke & Sørensen, 2014; Yin, 2003). Additionally, our case organizations provide similar contexts in terms of the purpose and nature of the organizational setting which allows for comparison.

We selected our case organizations sample based on similarity between (i) economies and (ii) how the science funding organizations are managed and operate in relation to government departments and ministries. The sampled countries, Ireland, Finland, and New Zealand are part of the Small Advanced Economies Initiative (SAEI) recognized by the International Monetary Fund and are similar in scale regarding population and economic activity. The three organizations studied here report to government departments responsible for science and innovation and are constrained by national HR policy and are likely to experience similar institutional complexities such as the existence of multiple and competing logics. For example, they experience talent attraction and retention challenges given the high skills and qualifications of science funding agency employees where they compete with the private sector (and its market logics regarding pay and conditions) but are constrained by national public sector pay and reward management policies (state logics). By selecting science funding organizations in countries that are perceived to be similar as well as organized in a similar way at national level, we are potentially capturing similar sets of competing institutional logics.

Participants and Data Collection

For each organization, we identified the relevant informants to be interviewed. We interviewed 26 including the Head of each Funding Agency (3), Head of HR or equivalent in

each organization (3), senior leaders in relevant leadership positions (15), and interviews with relevant external stakeholders (5) (see Table 1). There is a difference in the number of interviews in relevant leadership positions internally across the three organizations reflective of the difference in size (i.e., the Finnish organization was the largest of the three organizations) and management/organizational structures. Managers in senior roles with HR and TM responsibilities were interviewed in each organization. A high-ranking civil servant in relevant external government department(s) responsible for civil servants or a high-ranking civil servant coordinating between the funding agency and its parent Government department/ministry was also interviewed in each country. In selecting the sample for the study, we followed the advice of O'Reilly and Parker (2013) who pointed out that in qualitative enquiry, it is important to pursue a strategy of gathering sufficient information until the phenomenon studied is fully described.

Given that a key goal of the study was to explore how HR actors' experience paradox in the context of multiple institutional logics and their paradoxical responses, we made use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were an effective method to capture study participants' perceptions of institutional logics and their experience of paradox in day-to-day activities. Reay and Jones (2016) highlighted the value of qualitative methods such as semi-structured to research institutional logics. We interviewed multiple senior-level informants in the three organizations. We made the decision to collect data from multiple informants to reduce subject biases (Golden, 1992; Miller, Cardinal, and Glick, 1997) and to provide richer insights and triangulation (Schwenk, 1985).

Data Analysis

To develop insights on institutional logics, paradoxical tensions, and responses we utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three of the authors independently coded

one full interview from the country they were most familiar with in terms of the context. Each author also created a document summarizing their coding and reasons for their analysis. This initial exercise led to a decision on the unit of analysis (a message) and generated initial codes from the interview transcripts by taking 'units of meaning' and assigning labels to the first order concepts (see Figure 1). The coding team coded another interview independently from each other from a different country context. Code descriptions were agreed for each code and differences in coding were discussed. At this point we noticed a merging of coding approach in terms of application of codes and delimiting of messages. As we progressed through the coding process, we reviewed our first and second order codes and categories to refine and check for the links between the coded extracts and overall aggregate themes. This process was beneficial because it helped us to develop familiarity with the three organizational settings and the empirical data. Based on our knowledge of institutional logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014), we expected that multiple logics would exist in science funding organizations in the context of TM because we characterized them as contested organizations. Consistent with theory and research on paradoxical tensions and responses (Garavan et al. 2020; Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva & Hoeksema, 2017), we expected talent actors to experience tensions related to the goals, roles, and implementation of TM and to utilize multiple responses to address these tensions.

Findings

Institutional Logics on the Ground

Our first question focused on identifying the institutional logics that HR actors experienced on the ground when implementing TM. Across the three agencies, we found that four distinct institutional logics were invoked by HR actors: the professional logic; the state

logic; the market logic; and the community logic. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of each logic in the context of public sector TM.

The Professional Logic

The professional logic emphasizes that talent resides with individuals and there is a strong focus on credentials and professional qualifications as well as experience in different professional roles. It plays a particularly dominating and unifying role in these organizations. 'Most of the scientific staff in [this organization] are post-PhD so they are very highly qualified individuals' (ID41) and are seen as 'key experts…with critical competencies' (ID26). The legitimacy of talent within this logic is derived from a successful track record as a professional and strong socialization in the ways of that professional group. 'Usually they are beyond consistent performance, they are individuals who are really at the top of their game in the current role and often times they are on the cusp of looking for their next promotion or new opportunity' (ID37). The development of expertise, strong professional networks and a variety of professional experiences are key to notions of talent within this logic. Talent, therefore, is anybody with specialist professional knowledge and these roles are located where professionals are required to achieve the goals of the organization. The enactment of the TM professional logic is seen in the strong focus on talent development processes including targeted individual development activities, career planning and little exclusive TM processes as talent development should apply to all professionals. It also plays a major role in resolving conflicts with other logics. However, interviewee ID22 stressed the fact that 'everyone has opportunities here, as long as they want to build their own path'. As the three agencies reflect relatively flat structures, career opportunities can include 'a sideways kind of step' (ID38) or talent pathways 'where you could develop your talent and to utilize it in a more varied way. But not so that you come here into an expert position

and then into a more challenging expert position and a supervising position. We don't have those kinds of career paths to offer, so that of course has an impact' (ID26).

The State Logic

The state logic in the context of TM extols the virtues and importance of a fair and equitable process when it comes to the implementation of TM practices and the importance of technical and managerial expertise as a key component of talent.

> 'To exaggerate a little bit, the exclusive way is, you could say, excluded. If it were visible that there are two kinds of people [talent and non-talent], that wouldn't fit our HR policy nor the expectations of our staff … we haven't had that kind of a plan at any point. When it comes to the inclusive model, we're very strong at that. Nobody is excluded' (ID22).

While recruitment across the three agencies is through an open public application procedure it can present challenges. Interviewee ID23 declared that 'we need a permission for every single recruitment from the top management…sometimes we get the permission, sometimes not.' 'If you want resources you go to our human resources committee with your workforce plan, and we might consider whether you'll get the resources' (ID08). Interviewee ID37 lamented that she was three months waiting for a decision on a critical technical-managerial role and the 'challenge is trying to keep the candidate interested'. Talent legitimacy is understood in terms of managerial and professional expertise, education and scientific credentials, and experience accumulated. Talent is considered stable to achieve organizational goals and contribute to society. As part of HR planning in one organization, they are looking at 'what kinds of talent have to be strengthened…making use of the ability to invest in science policy talent and so on' (ID26). All employees constitute talent, and it can be located throughout

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the organization as one interviewee states: 'All of them [employees] have talent and everyone's talent has to be developed… so it's really sort of embracing all potential within the organization' (ID29).

The Market Logic

The market logic emphasizes efficiency, performance of talent and utilizing a rational managerial or business model. 'In order to be an attractive employer, we have to strive towards the work being interesting both in terms of its contents and benefits, salary, other compensations, taking into account how these things are defined in the state' (ID22). 'We're just not able to pay in comparison to what [the private sector] offers. So, we do lose some really good candidates because they can get you know five or ten K more sometimes' (ID38).

The market logic closely aligns with the approach taken by commercial and private sector organizations and the use of more exclusive TM approaches for those displaying particular expertise and potential. 'When you notice that there's an enthusiastic, motivated, hungry science advisor, for example, he will then gather a diverse task package, and his talent will develop almost automatically, since he's ready to take it' (ID24).

Talent legitimacy is understood in terms of senior leadership with significant experience within the organization and enjoying a certain level of prestige based on success. One respondent captures the market logic and focus on leadership as talent as follows: '[Talent refers to] their leadership qualities. So, I suppose yeah, I mean talent probably isn't a word that we use internally very much. We tend to talk about leadership, we tend to talk about you know excellence' (ID39).

Another interviewee refers to talent in this way indicative of a market logic:

'There's a massive degree of change coming our way. And top talent is the kind of people who can respond to that and be continuously learning and changing and evolving to meet that. That's the kind of talent you wanna have. They're passionate about what they do, and they can flex and change' (ID11).

The Community Logic

The community logic is focused on the role of talent in meeting the needs of citizens, customers, and the public. According to this logic, the public science funding organization is accountable to multiple communities and society at large. 'I think the values of government are quite significant in terms of a lot of people are attracted to things like the openness, the diversity policy, the transparency' (ID19). When enacted, the community logic directs cognitive attention of HR actors towards the higher purpose of the organization, encouragement of consideration of the role that talent plays in this context and the need to ensure that talent is managed and developed in a way that strives to deliver for society. Talent legitimacy is derived from personal characteristics and skills with particular emphasis on service orientation and values aligned with the greater good of the organization. All individuals who deliver service to the community or society are considered talent and talent is located throughout the organization. When enacted, a community logic directs the cognitive attention of HR actors to the development of talent with a service focus, the elimination of status difference in the goals of TM, and emphasis on the team as a core component of talent identity. The TM community logic and delivery of service was evoked in the following sample extract:

'I mean the staff that work [here] I would say are, for the most part, vocational. So that's the kind of atmosphere that we have. And I think when you have those kinds of people who are doing a job because they have a genuine belief in the kind of vision and mission

of the organization, you tend to bring a lot of their talent to the surface. Because they have a personal alignment with what they're doing…'It's [talent] context based. It can be in different functions in different levels in different disciplines… talent has to be right down through the system you know' (ID08).

In terms of the basis of attention, the community logic directs the focus of the organization when it comes to TM to the development of skills to continually deliver high quality service, the need for the organization to treat employees as talent that respects their individuality, and strong recognition of the contribution that talent collectively makes to achieving community and societal goals. One interviewee epitomizes the community logic in this way: 'So for us, talent development is maybe more related to metrics and impact assessment around societal impact and these kinds of things' (ID30). The most common enactments of this logic occurred through practices such as developing the service orientation skills of employees, communicating ideas around the mission of the organization, utilizing talent development strategies that develop team working and collaboration skills and treating all talent equally (rejecting exclusive TM) when it comes to talent advancement and development opportunities.

Institutional Complexity, Logics and Paradoxical Tensions

We identified the tensions that arose due to the coexistence of the different logics and institutional complexity as set out above. We report three sets of tensions that emerged from the data (see Figure 1).

Paradoxical Tensions linked to the goals and values of TM

The operation of multiple logics gave rise to different tensions around the values and goals of TM. Study participants identified three specific tensions that arose within their

organizations: (i) inclusive TM versus ambivalence about exclusive TM associated with TM in private and commercial organizations; (ii) objective measurement of talent potential; and (iii) openness in talent identification versus a more closed approach within the public sector. In respect of the ambivalence about the market logic of exclusive TM processes, many HR actors argued that an inclusive approach is most appropriate to their organization. For example, 'we're really inclusive, so for all jobs there are mainly open calls. That's an important thing… people have to be able to apply openly… the criteria have to be publically known'(ID02). Tensions also arose around the notion of measuring talent and openness in the talent identification process as suggested by a market logic and the emphasis of the state logic on more closed processes of identification exemplified by this comment: 'What we don't have is and I know other organizations I worked in previously they would be more advanced in terms of their talent management strategy we have a very clear pathway for high performers, high potential pool" (ID07).

Tensions linked to the implementation of TM

The data revealed several tensions around the implementation of TM. Three specific tensions were emphasized by HR actors: (i) the desire to develop talent but not create talent progression expectations; (ii) public sector resource scarcity versus the requirements of private sector TM; and (iii) the use of systematic talent identification processes versus the need to fit with mandated public sector HR processes. The first tension under this category was very prevalent throughout the responses of HR actors with one such example:

> 'Some of it is back to the problem that we do have or the challenges we do have with our staffing model, we have people on contracts that end and where they go from that. They can be our high performers so then there's a different conversation'. (ID37)

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The tensions created by the market, public and community logics are also revealed when it came to meeting the resource requirements of effective TM policy and practice. Respondents highlighted issues related to expertise deficits in TM, the lack of skills required in the HR teams for private sector TM systems, and the lack of an appropriate HR function mindset or the well-defined TM processes and philosophy that TM requires.

Tensions Around Roles in TM

The data revealed several tensions related to roles within the TM process. These tensions focused on (i) traditional managerial roles in public sector organizations and the types of roles specified by private sector TM, (ii) the priority given to predictability and compliance versus new role dimensions in the context of TM, and (iii) the desire of the HR function to have a more structured one-size-fits-all approach versus the expectation of managers and employees for customization and individual development. The traditional role of manager in the public sector as administrator created tensions with the developmental role expectations of TM. Tensions also arose in terms of the state logic emphasis on having systematic and predictable processes and the requirement for greater agility and creativity in the context of the implementation of private sector TM. Respondents used phrases such as: 'we are too slow in identifying talent issues', 'everything takes too long', 'we are too cautious', and 'the lack of formal recognition of new roles for managers'. Finally, tensions arose around the state logic focus on having a systematic and one-size-fits-all approach versus the concern of the professional logic to develop individuals' skills and create individual development plans. For example, 'where it falls over is that there is no specified resource, or skill base … so we get the one size fits all approach' (ID19).

Responding to Paradoxical Tensions

Our analysis revealed the different responses that HR actors used to balance competing institutional logics and the tensions that they created. We focused on the paradoxical responses that HR actors engaged in throughout the course of their everyday work. We found that they used three sets of responses that we now describe.

Role Enactment and Performance to address Tensions. The analysis revealed that HR actors had the capacity to change their approach and 'blend in' as a reaction to efforts to implement TM. Their ability to act as chameleon was evident in terms of reactions of the HR function to implement private sector TM when it came to managing talent. Respondents used expressions like remaining open to new people management ideas, 'I must talk different languages depending on the audience' and the need to be a different person depending on who the actor is interacting with. Respondents emphasized the importance of building relationships and collaborations to build support for particular responses. The need to nurture and retain relationships with different HR actors within the organization enabled tensions and conflicts to be more effectively managed. Respondents also highlighted the use of shadow TM processes in the form of unofficially developed TM processes instead of more formal TM as this respondent states: 'it's more of a challenge to manage exceptional people within the constraints of a public service given the salary caps and no bonuses and no share options and so on, than it is in the private sector but actually you can still do it so you just have to be clever about it" (ID41).

Use of Distancing from and Transformation of Core TM ideas. Some TM actors used distancing type paradoxical responses such as downplaying the core ideas of TM as having value in the public sector, voicing value threats to public service ethos, and transformation of TM into something different that aligns with professional development. HR actors used distancing type strategies to protect themselves from the negative connotations associated with private sector

TM. They did so by downplaying the core ideas around TM or by adopting a more conspiratorial approach highlighting fewer positive features of TM. They used phrases like 'TM is not for the public sector', 'TM is not going to work here' to highlighting its lack of success in other types of organizations. Alternatively, they voiced the key threats of TM to public sector ethos, and this usually took the form of highlighting that TM was 'not fair or equitable', and that 'it leads to division in the organization'. We also found that another dimension of distancing involved transforming the TM practice into something else which almost invariably involved some form of development as this quote exemplifies: 'I mean talent probably isn't a word that we use internally very much. We tend to talk about leadership, we tend to talk about you know excellence. We tend to talk about training and mentoring' (ID39).

Use of Language to Address Tensions. HR actors used language in several different ways to address paradoxical tensions. Three key approaches to the use of language emerged: the avoidance of labels or categorization of TM processes; the reframing of TM activities as something else; and the use of language to 'soften' TM ideas and legitimize them in the public sector context. This use of language revealed the vagueness and multiplicity of ways in which HR actors described TM to their colleagues in the organization. The use of these terms and value descriptions kept the concept of TM open and avoided conflict. Respondents highlighted the use of reframing tactics to project that TM was a positive activity that should be embraced by the organization. These reframing responses involved projecting that TM was very similar to 'leadership development', 'professional skills development', 'individual development planning', and 'employee development'. This use of language has the effect of softening the stronger market logic components and making it a better fit with prevailing professional and state logics of the public sector.

Discussion

This paper integrates institutional logics (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Besharov & Smith, 2014) and paradox theories (Lewis, 2000; Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016) to address the day-to-day implementation of TM. While prior research has taken a macro perspective in understanding the impact of multiple institutional logics on organizational practices, we focus on the micro responses of HR actors in the everyday performance of their roles (Alvehus, 2018). The focus on the day-to-day responses of the HR actors to multiple logics and the paradoxical tensions that they give rise to is highlighted in the literature as an area where new insights are required (Alvehus, 2018). However, the existing literature base is silent concerning how HR actors respond day-to-day to deal with this institutional complexity and our paper makes a significant contribution in this regard. Specifically, we examined how different and conflicting logics emerged in the context of TM implementation and how the tensions arising from these logics were addressed. In doing so, our contribution is fourfold. First, we advance our understanding of the interplay and conflicts of multiple logics in a unitary organization setting in the case of TM. Second, we identify the unifying potential of the professional logic in this context. Third, we show the distinct mechanisms that TM actors use to address these tensions. Fourth, we propose a process model highlighting the interplay of logics, tensions, and paradoxical responses. We discuss these four theoretical contributions below and conclude with limitations and avenues for future research.

The interplay of multiple institutional logics

In the three public sector organizations we analyzed, the interplay and dynamic between four institutional logics gave rise to tensions. We observed a "contested" relationship of logics between market-based logics and state-based logics vying for dominance, while community-

based logics still prevailed within each organization. What becomes clear is that multiple, and

potentially incompatible, logics were central to the day-to-day implementation of TM and a

conflict of logics did emerge at times. Our findings highlight the salience of contextual factors.

An example of such contextual factors is that public science funding organizations have a high

dependency on external actors (e.g., the governing Governmental department or ministry,

relevant civils service HR Department) for resources therefore they are likely to respond to the

demands of these actors even though they may oppose the logics that underlie the demands

(Jarzabkowski & van de Ven, 2013). Several studies have identified the role of field-level

conditions and their impact on institutional complexity and our study highlights their importance

in shaping the day-to-day practices of TM actors in the public sector organizations we studied.

HR actors were likely to be less buffered in these organizations from the influence of logics

present in the field. Yet, at the point of TM implementation within these organizations, there

were disagreements and conflicts in some cases motivated by the self-interests of the different

actors who promoted their particular goals in respect of TM. Our findings thus enrich the

existing literature concerning how disagreement over goals and the underlying values of TM are

likely to trigger conflict (Garavan et al., 2020; Pache & Santos, 2010).

The dominating and unifying role of the professional logic

Our findings point to the dominating and unifying role of the professional logic (Tyskbo,

2021) in these public sector organizations. We specifically observed that the professional logic

brought a sense of cohesion to the decision making of TM actors concerning the types of TM

practice implemented. This occurred especially where there were debates concerning the use of

more market driven TM practices. In these situations, the professional logic was able to

subsume the conflicting norms that would otherwise arise from the market logic and provide

guidance to TM actors concerning the types of practices to be implemented. The professional logic amplified the value of more inclusive TM practices that were beneficial to the employee, in the first instance, and then beneficial to the organization in terms of effectiveness (Skelcher & Smith, 2015). The professional logic framed TM as an opportunity rather than something that was negative and where, potentially conflicting goals were perceived as complementary rather than competitive. Table 2 points to some of the characteristic of this logic that help it play this dominating but essentially unifying role in dealing with conflicts in TM implementation. These include elements of networking and the primacy of professional expertise, something that is valued in public sector organizations, in addition to the individualized nature of development processes (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016).

The use of distinct mechanisms to manage paradox

The study contributes to the literature by revealing three distinct proactive strategies TM actors use day-to-day to navigate tensions in the implementation of TM (Keegan et al., 2017; Jay, 2013) including role enactment and performance, distancing and transformation, and the use of language. HR actors demonstrated considerable fluidity in the way they performed their roles to address paradoxical tensions. Following Cross and Swart (2021) and Reed and Thomas (2021), they acted as chameleons to act dynamically in a relational way to dialogue with other HR actors. HR actors used distancing and transformation such as downplaying the value of TM, and voicing concerns (Garavan et al., 2020; Cappellaro, Tracey & Greenwood, 2020). The mechanisms we identified may not produce long lasting conflict resolution between TM actors employing different types of institutional logics at the organizational level but, consistent with paradox theory, they provide workable solutions and potentially prompt public sector organizations to consider different types of TM practices (Garavan et al., 2020). Finally, HR

actors used language (i.e., words, concepts and ideas) that supports multiple meanings or logics and therefore reduce the conflict arising from paradoxical tensions in TM implementation. This finding speaks to the notion of polysemy (the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase) as proposed by Gümüsay, Smets & Morris (2020) where words and language can be interpreted in both different ways and different contexts and therefore allows the accommodation of incompatible logics.

A process model of institutional complexity in context of tm and paradoxical responses

We distil our findings in a process model illustrated in Figure 2. Consistent with the literature on institutional logics, the model reveals that HR actors experienced three types of paradoxical tensions related to goals/values, roles, and day-to-day TM implementation. These tensions do not stipulate a specific repertoire of paradoxical responses but rather a situation where HR actors made use of the three distinct mechanisms to address multiple tensions. Therefore, in the day-to-day performance of TM tasks, HR actors subtly craft paradoxical responses to align with the situation in which they find themselves and they make use of a full repertoire of strategies focusing on language, role enactment and defensive type strategies. These paradoxical responses highlight the HR actors' agentic ability, and they use their agency to both proactively achieve their goals while also using responses that mitigate, downplay, or transform the TM practice. In proposing this process model, we respond to calls for dialogue between institutional logics and paradox theory. In doing so, we offer greater understanding of key paradoxical mechanisms at an intra-organizational level and we theorize that TM actors working in unitary organizations will adopt a wide range of paradoxical mechanisms as creative responses to institutional complexity.

Limitations and Further Research

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We acknowledge a number of limitations in our study. Given the qualitative nature of our data, the interpretations are naturally not fully objective or neutral suggesting avenues for further research. For example, one avenue concerns investigation of overlap of paradoxical responses to address the tension to get the task completed. It is possible that the different tensions may elicit different paradoxical responses. To what extent are some conflicting logics and the corresponding paradoxical tensions more salient for specific organizational actors in the context of TM? There is scope to investigate the role of the social context more fully on the use of these paradoxical responses. It would be useful to investigate the long-lasting effect of conflicting logics on different HR actors' paradoxical responses.

Conclusion

In this study, we shed light on how institutional logics interplay and how they are addressed in the context of public science funding organizations. Utilizing institutional complexity and paradox theory, we reveal that TM actors encounter different conflicts around the goals, roles and day-to-day TM practice implementation shaped by four logics. TM actors use three distinct mechanisms to resolve tensions: role enactment and performance, distancing and transformation, and language. We devise a model illustrating the characteristics of the interplay between the four logics, the tensions that they create, and the paradoxical mechanisms used to resolve them. Operationalization of this model offers insights for managers within public sector organizations when implementing TM.

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Figure 1.   Data Structure: First Order, Second Order and Aggregate Themes

First Order Concepts   **Second Order Themes**   **Aggregate Themes**

- Talent is about professional qualifications, credentials and experience.
- Talent is about having a successful track record as a professional
- Talented employees are those who perform professional roles in organisations.
- Development of talent is progressive and sequential

The professional logic

- TM is about fair and equitable TM processes.
- Technical and managerial talent is key in organisation.
- TM is an inclusive process
- Talent is developed through time served in the organisation.

The state logic

Institutional Logics about TM

- TM is about performance and alignment of talent with organisational goals.
- Talent is located at senior leadership levels within the organisation.
- TM is exclusive in focus
- Talent development process is about skills and competency aligned with organisational goals.

The market logic

- TM is about ensuring that organisation can meet needs of clients and serve the public.
- Talent is managed in a way that ensures a good balance between social and economic aspects of work
- Talent exists throughout the organisation
- Talent development emphasises soft skills, teamwork and collaboration skills.

The community logic

• Inclusive TM versus ambivalence about private sector exclusive processes. • Objective measurement of talent potential. • Openness in talent identification versus more closed approach in public sector.	Tensions around goals and values of TM
• Desire to develop talent but not create talent progression expectations. • Public sector resource scarcity versus requirements of private sector TM. • Systematic identification processes versus need to fit with mandated public HR processes.	Tensions around TM implementation
• Traditional managerial roles in public sector versus roles specified by private sector TM • Priority to predictability and compliance versus new roles in context of TM • HR desire for a one-size-fits-all approach versus managers' and individuals'' expectations for customization and individual career development	Tensions around roles in TM
• Acting as a chameleon in respect of expectations of managers and employees. • Developing collaborations with key actors to pursue specific TM agendas. • Implementation of shadow TM in organization.	Role Enactment and Performance to address Tensions
• Downplaying the core ideas of TM as practiced in private sector. • Voicing TM value threats to public sector ethos. • Transforming the TM practice into something that aligns with professional development.	Use of Distancing from and transformation of core TM ideas
• The avoidance of labels or categorization of TM processes. • Reframing TM activities as something else. • Using language to soften TM ideas and legitimize them to public sector context.	Use of Language to address tensions

Tensions arising from Institutional Logics
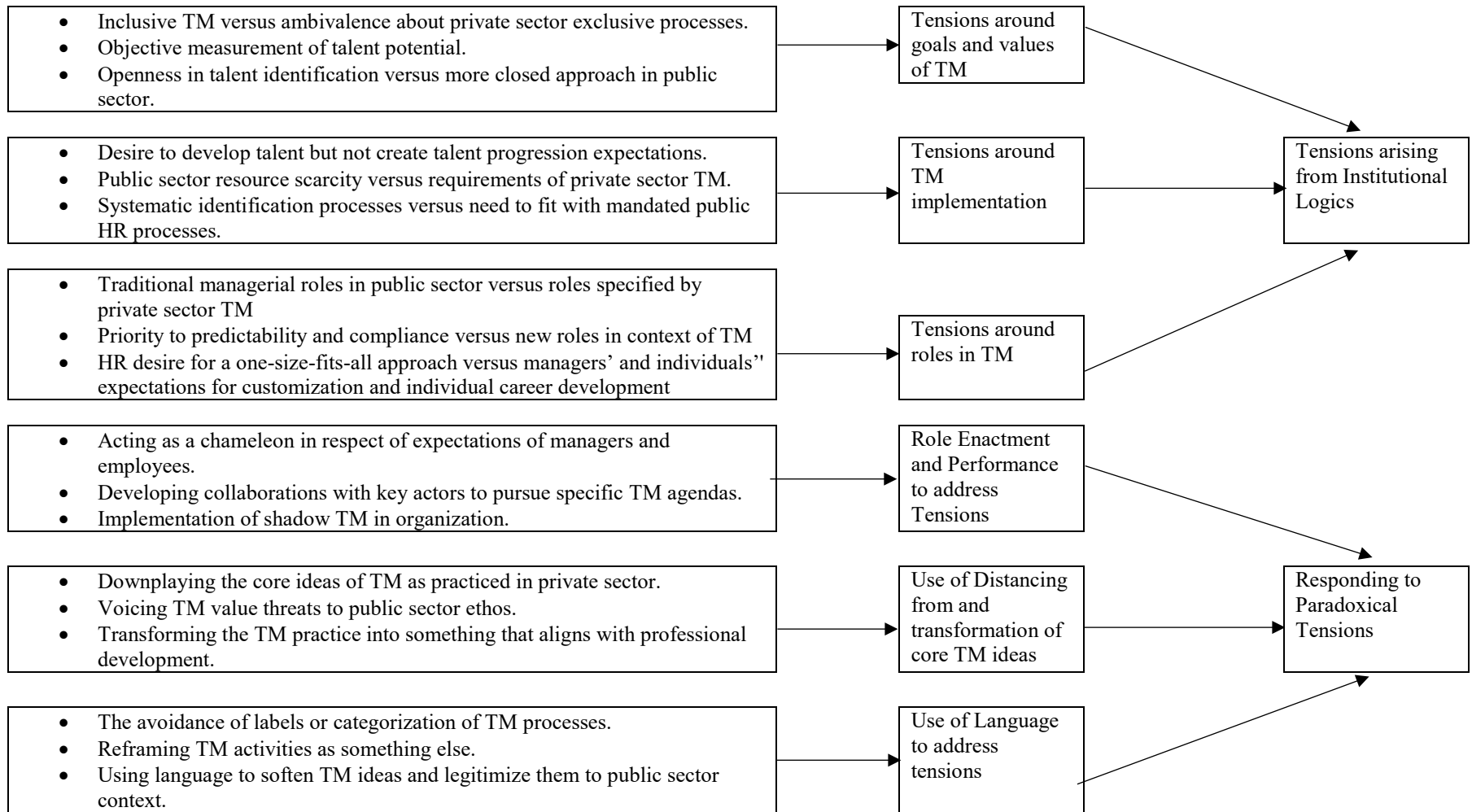
Responding to Paradoxical Tensions

Figure 2. Micro-Process Model of Paradoxical Tensions and Responses to Institutional Complexity in the context of TM

Table 1. Interviewees

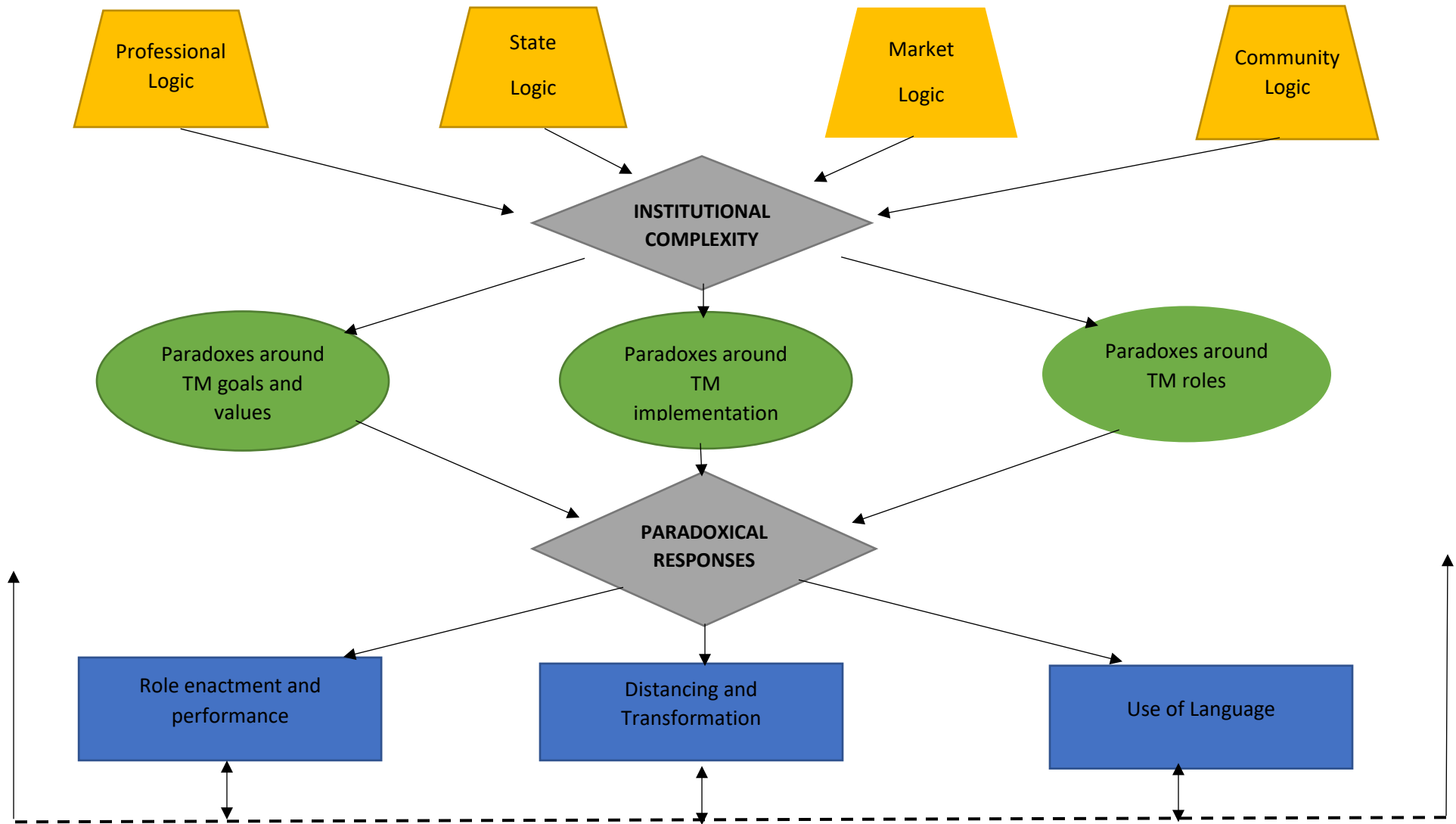|	Finland	Ireland	New Zealand	Total
Head of Funding Agency	1	1	1	3
Head of HR or equivalent	1	1	1	3
Interviewee in relevant leadership positions internally	8	5	2	15
Interviewee from external stakeholders (other Departments)	2	2	1	5
Total number of interviews	12	9	5	26

Table 2. Institutional Logics and TM in Public Sector Organizations

	Attributes	TM Professional Logic	TM State Logic	TM Market Logic	TM Community Logic
Basis of norms: **Assumptions about the legitimacy of the approach to talent, who is talent and where it is located in organizations**	*Talent Legitimacy*	Educational credentials and professional experience. Strong professional networks. Professional competence is individualized and a track record of professional success.	Managerial or professional expertise, education and scientific credentials. TM opportunities on the basis of equity, fairness and merit and sometimes time served in the role.	Senior leadership potential and experience within organization. Prestige and success within the organization. They have authority to make decisions.	Derived from personal characteristics and skills. Broad notion of skills and competencies.
	Who is Talent?	Anybody with specialist professional knowledge	Any individual irrespective of position.	A small number of talented individuals in organization. They are knowledgeable about the organization's resources and occupy strategic roles where they make decisions about talent issues about other employees.	All individuals who contribute to the delivery of service. Utilize very democratic notions of talent. Strong emphasis on the team as a unit of analysis.
	Where is Talent Located?	Wherever there are professional roles required to achieve the goals of the organization.	Located throughout the organization	Located at senior level in organization and in key positions within the organization.	Located throughout the organization in service roles.
Basis of talent strategy: **How the logic perceives the goals of TM, its identity and strengths**	*Goals and values of TM*	Professional competence is individualized in terms of certifications required to contribute to organizational goals.	Talent is considered stable in respect of organizational goals of contributing to community and society through laws and regulations.	Strong alignment of skills and competencies required to achieve the goals of the organization.	To develop talent that is service focused, responsive to the needs of the community.
	Talent Identity	Highly involved professionals or service advisors.	Steward use of public funds; ability to contribute to good of society	Advocates for the organization; links employee skills to needs of organization.	Emphasis on fairness and equity; 'other' focused talent that prioritizes community over individual needs
	Strengths as Talent	Network of professional contacts. Ability to implement processes.	Competent in technical processes and systems of organization; prudent and cautious.	Knowledge of the organization and its environment; strong buy-in to the strategic goals.	Responsive to changing community and society needs. Potential to sell legitimacy in the wider environment of the organization.

	Attributes	TM Professional Logic	TM State Logic	TM Market Logic	TM Community Logic
Basis of attention: **Assumptions about how to succeed**	*Assumptions about Success*	Importance of professional expertise; close professional networks and role of professional expertise. Talent takes time to develop.	Professional autonomy and decision making; demonstration of expertise in a consistent way. Talent development is progressive and deliberate.	Continued networking; high profile roles and projects with visibility; sponsorship and mentors are key. Talent development can be accelerated.	Continued delivery of high quality of service to the community; loyalty to the service goals of the organization.
Enactment of logic in TM in public sector organizations: **Assumptions about the ways in which the logic is enacted in TM approaches**		Strong focus on talent development process; use of talent development practices to retarget individual development activities; some career planning activities; very little exclusive TM processes; development for all professionals.	Objective and fair competency assessment; openness, transparency and fairness of opportunity essential; rejection of exclusive approaches to talent management; strong focus on progressive rather than fast track advancement; slow and unwieldly talent processes; respect for the decision making of senior managers.	Individualized talent assessment and personal development plans; planned and structured development processes; planned organizational development assignments, committee and project work; use of competency frameworks.	Development of team talent and skills to work collaboratively; promotion of equal opportunity top talent initiatives; clarity around the operation of TM practices; rejection of exclusive approaches to talent management.