

A relational bureaucracy framework for meaningful internal stakeholder engagement post-Covid 19



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Orientation: The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic forced organisations to rapidly redesign workplace structures to adapt to a changed and disrupted business world and improve stakeholder relationships. The relational bureaucracy theory (RBT) provides a valuable foundation for increasing stakeholder participation.

Research purpose: We investigate how a relational bureaucracy's organisational structure promotes internal stakeholders' involvement in a post-Covid workplace.

Motivation for the study: Limited frameworks illustrate how a newly emergent relational bureaucratic structure can enhance stakeholder involvement and engagement in the new world of work.

Research approach/design and method: The researchers followed a literature review to derive shared meanings in constructing an RBT framework for promoting stakeholder involvement.

Main findings: According to our preliminary research, the organisational type known as the engaged ambassador could be named the relational bureaucratic stakeholder prototype. Seven zones crucial to the business's overall operation are identified in the stakeholder landscape. Additionally, we illustrate the relational bureaucracy design ideas that promote stakeholder participation.

Practical/managerial implications: We propose that organisations could benefit from stakeholder engagement through interpersonal coordination mechanisms that create, maintain and improve stakeholder relationships through strategic human resource management (HRM) frameworks and RBT. We further argue that a relational bureaucracy's structure raises stakeholder participation for organisational leadership, coordination and coproduction.

Contribution/value-add: This article integrates some main effects of relational bureaucratic theory to provide a landscape for the needs of internal stakeholders in a disrupted workplace.

Keywords: engagement; internal stakeholders; organisation design; relational bureaucracy; stakeholder landscape; talent.

Introduction

Organisational researchers and practitioners have made great strides in understanding the techniques that might promote stakeholder involvement with favourable relational outcomes, such as a feeling of caring, collaboration and closeness for and among workers (Adler, 2012; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Gittell & Douglas, 2012). However, when these activities become bureaucratically codified, the beneficial relationship results of stakeholder participation may be eroded (Thomas et al., 2018). Scholars have not yet explored how to reduce this potentially destructive bureaucratic decision-making effect, nor have they provided strategies that can assist organisations in finding the ideal balance between productive reciprocal relationships at work and a thriving bureaucratic organisational form (Thomas et al., 2018). This provides a platform for investigating different organisational models that encourage stakeholder interaction.

This study investigates how a relational bureaucracy's organisational structure promotes internal stakeholders' involvement. In their research on relational bureaucratic theory, Gittell and Douglass (2012) have made substantial strides towards bridging the bureaucratic and relational components of organising stakeholder participation (relational bureaucracy theory [RBT]).

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These scholars argue that a higher-order hybrid form, known as the relational bureaucracy, can be created by organising relational components into roles to achieve a high-functioning integration of the positive elements of the relational and bureaucratic forms, such as connectedness, empowerment and mutuality. The difficulty lies in choosing a talent management strategy appropriate for the task while considering conflicting talent approaches characterised as humanistic, competitive, elitist and entrepreneurial (see Bolander et al., 2017). This decision will impact the task responsibilities and career opportunities that talented individuals value (Thomas et al., 2018; Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003), which should encourage stakeholder engagement.

A comprehensive, relational vision of the organisation is more critical than ever in today's new world of work in a post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) world of work (Vyas, 2022). As further mentioned by Vyas (2022), a 'one-size-fits-all' approach towards organisational structures and relationships will be deemed impossible considering the unique deviations in work practices to accommodate the new world of work. We move in that direction in this article. We get a fresh understanding of a newly emergent organisational structure, the relational bureaucracy, which serves as fertile ground for stakeholder involvement. We take our arguments from the literature that distinguishes relational or organic organisational forms with lateral communication and engagement from bureaucratic forms with vertical lines of communication and engagement as socially legitimate templates. This article thus develops and improves the notion of relational bureaucracy by emphasising the selection and inclusion of stakeholders with organisational zones. According to Bischoff (2020), RBT, combined with the tenets of the psychological contract, can proactively support the long-term retention of talent.

When we consider the use of 'relational' in the literature on organisational forms, we can observe two problems with the term. The first problem could be rephrased as the first research question: who should work in a relational bureaucracy as an inclusive stakeholder construct? We will focus on this research question by detecting the type of stakeholder needed in a relational bureaucracy that should drive stakeholder engagement. The other problem could be rephrased as the second research question: what kind of work zones are offered in a relational bureaucracy as parts of the stakeholder's landscape? The organisational bureaucratic structures discussed in this article support stakeholder involvement and relational outcomes, including worker connectivity and collaboration. We examine the necessity of managing stakeholder involvement and fruitful interpersonal results for different stakeholder categories. We further distinguish between organisational zones of stakeholder participation in a relational bureaucracy.

We furthermore bridge the gap by creating fresh concepts for relational bureaucracy, given the minimal attempts to combine stakeholder participation, inclusiveness and democracy with organisational design. Firstly, from the

perspective of social identity, we propose theoretical concepts of relational bureaucracy. Secondly, we examine relational bureaucracy as an organisational form historically. Thirdly, we examine the internal stakeholders required in a relational bureaucracy to foster the interpersonal connections necessary for stakeholder engagement. To identify the landscape of stakeholders in a relational bureaucracy, we integrate new aspects into the organisation's design. By doing this, we create a relational bureaucracy organisational typology that offers fresh insight into the relational bureaucracy as a social environment that encourages stakeholder participation.

Research method

This research article adopted a general and semi-systematic literature method to achieve its primary objective. Semi-systematic literature reviews are used when a topic is still in development and where it is difficult to obtain a host of articles focussing on one specific topic. Instead, semi-systematic literature review focusses on how research within a specific field transpires over time and across different research trajectories (Snyder, 2019). This approach was therefore ideally suited as a sound theoretical framework in support of meaningful internal stakeholder engagement, which needs to be revised in a new disruptive world of work. Consequently, many research studies were explored to detect the most prominent theories applied to how internal stakeholders and talents could best be optimised within a fit-for-purpose relational and organisational framework. Various databases and search engines were explored. The search resulted in a great diffusion of theories, from which the researcher selected the most prominent theoretical applications to a relational bureaucracy. The findings are presented in a narrative format, as Grant and Booth (2009) recommended.

In the next section, we start conceptualising relational bureaucracy as an organisational form that emerges from social interactions and conjunctions of people, time and space.

Theoretical background

Relational bureaucracy

People respect and emotionally connect with their identity because they feel a sense of unity with others who belong to an organisation or a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). According to Hogg and Terry (2000) and Whetten and Mackey (2002), group identification is best characterised as a reciprocal relationship in which the individual gains a sense of purpose, belonging and positive distinctiveness that shapes and improves their self-concept. At the same time, the individual's membership benefits and strengthens the group and the institution (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

How organisations set up the framework for stakeholders to manage their institutional space inclusively and dynamically remains an area of vagueness and debate. These questions trigger the theoretical notions of a relational bureaucracy.

Constas (1958) draws attention to Max Weber's conception of a relational bureaucracy, a socially acceptable model for an organisational form defined by role-based expectations and relational practices based on employees' duties and a sense of community. Thus, according to Castelló et al. (2013), Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013), Trittin and Schoeneborn (2017), Gumusay et al. (2020), a relational bureaucracy is a recognised organisational type that may promote organisational polyphony.

A relational bureaucracy's fundamental components consist of three mechanisms: relational co-production, relational coordination and relational leadership (see Gittell, 2002, 2012). Relational co-production comes through interactions between employees and customers to find the best way to produce a result that will satisfy both parties. Relational coordination is 'a process of interaction between relationships and communication used for task integration' (Gittell, 2002, p. 301). Relational leadership acknowledges the competence of each function and assigns responsibility in line with that expertise (Fletcher, 2012). To achieve collective self-control, this leadership breaks from conventional ideas of leadership as top-down, dyadic and externally imposed control (see Uhl-Bien, 2006). Instead, it adopts a vision of leadership as a system of multidirectional influence interactions (Thomas et al., 2018). These three kinds of processes highlight the interrelationships that underlie stakeholder participation, the interdependence of tasks, and the roles stakeholders play in these tasks (Gittell, 2012).

In summary, a relational bureaucracy is a cohesive whole with stakeholders who see themselves as a part of the group and feel a feeling of belonging. Additionally, a relational bureaucracy is a social group of connected individuals who share a common objective, purpose and self-identities derived from their organisational membership. According to this definition of a relational bureaucracy as an organisational form, interactions between individuals and formal institutions are ingrained, and tasks and roles are interdependent.

Stakeholders in the context of a relational bureaucracy

A relational bureaucracy requires stakeholders who gain meaning, belonging and positive engagement from the organisation. Stakeholder inclusion and a shared sense of belonging are critical components of a relational bureaucracy. These parties can engage with other parties, including coworkers, team members, and clients, to create a highly interdependent multi-team system with heavy coordination and communication procedures (Heaphy et al., 2016; Schwartz & Carroll, 2008). For instance, employees who work as personal assistants, secretaries or concierges must understand the people they support and why this is important to the smooth operation of the entire firm. Or, to strengthen stakeholder involvement, people in sales or customer service must cultivate and maintain connections with clients and

consumers. In a nutshell, there is a need for people with a sense of unity and stakeholders skilled at 'playing well' with others who share their views and work for the same institution in relational bureaucracies (Peters, 2015). This calls for stakeholder management and human resource (HR) procedures to align with the organisation's whole human system. According to Thomas et al. (2018), staffing the organisation with individuals who can move between relational and bureaucratic goals to develop, maintain and strengthen relationships required for stakeholder inclusions will be necessary.

However, we must first comprehend the conceptual and historical underpinnings of the relational bureaucracy and whether it encourages and necessitates stakeholder participation. Next, we will explore a relational bureaucracy from a holistic perspective.

Holistic perspective

The holistic perspective of a relational bureaucracy and stakeholder has its roots in the work of Mary Parker Follett, who, in the early 1900s, viewed stakeholder engagement as aligning stakeholders in the organisational activities in which they wanted to be involved (Follett, 1924). Follett (1924) argued that groups are crucial for fostering human growth, social structure and democracy because they enable cooperation, creativity and expansion. As a result, organisations need a comprehensive perspective that encourages inclusion and engagement despite the social and economic constraints they must overcome (see Follett, 1924, 2013).

Similar to Follett (see 1924, 2013), Koestler (1968) invented the term 'holarchy' to describe a grouping of holons or units that are independent and self-sufficient but yet dependent on the larger whole of which they are a part. A hierarchy of self-regulating holons that work as independent wholes and dependent portions is another way to describe how holarchy looks.

The concept of holarchy was further expanded to *sociocracy* by Gerard Edenburg (see Robertson, 2007), who combined the principles of the science of steering and control (i.e. cybernetics) with the principles of relationality to organise work successfully. By expanding on the procedures of effective organisational systems, Robertson (2007) further developed 'holacracy'. Additionally, Robertson (2015) used the fundamental ideas and procedures of a holacratic system to assist businesses in establishing holacratic constitutions. The article of Gittell and Douglas (2012) in the *Academy of Management Journal* on relational bureaucracy fuelled the next phase of theory development and organisational studies in this field.

Connecting relational bureaucracy and stakeholders

Drawing from the studies in the field of relational bureaucracy by Follett (1924), Koestler (1968), Robertson (2007), and

Gittel and Douglas (2012), we explore the characteristics of a relational bureaucracy as a contemporary organisational form that smoothens the path for stakeholder inclusion. This emphasises the organisation as a cohesive whole and a live, open system of individuals and their interactions, functions and relationships. Considering the necessity for stakeholder involvement when the corporate social responsibility agenda is under pressure from a catastrophic pandemic, growing disparities and false news discourse, we believe that this mental model of a corporation is particularly pertinent (Wenzel et al., 2021).

What are the implications for the need for stakeholders to see the organisation as a bundle or system of relations that operate because of interconnected and interrelated actors? The idea that stakeholders in a relational bureaucracy can be seen as the micro-foundations of an organisation is pertinent to this subject (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Ployhart, 2015). We can imagine a prototype of actors, or the ideal internal stakeholders of a relational bureaucracy, to determine what kind of micro-foundations fit in one.

Pless et al. (2012) identified two dimensions of types of actors in organisations in general. The degree of accountability towards others and the breadth of component group emphasis (narrow versus broad) are two areas where they contend that an ideal internal stakeholder obtains high scores (narrow versus broad). Regarding the former, internal stakeholders with a broad focus pay attention to the needs of numerous constituents or stakeholders, while internal stakeholders with a narrow focus concentrate on the needs of a particular constituent or stakeholder group (this could be shareholders and/or owners, for example). Pless et al. (2012) characterised internal stakeholders who hold shareholders and/or owners accountable as belonging to the low-accountability end of the accountability continuum. However, internal stakeholders holding themselves to a high accountability standard believe their obligations extend beyond the owners or shareholders.

Four different categories of internal stakeholders can be identified by mapping these two dimensions together and elaborating on the revised typology provided by Doh and Quigley (2014): (1) the salaried employee (low accountability, narrow stakeholder focus); (2) the opportunity seeker (low accountability, broad stakeholder emphasis); (3) the individual performer (high accountability; narrow stakeholder focus); and (4) the engaged ambassador (high accountability, broad breadth).

Pless et al. (2012) stated that each type of stakeholder in a relational bureaucracy likely has a different strategy for creating, maintaining and using relationships in organisational operations. Stakeholder type 1, the salaried employee with a typical work orientation, is likely to show little devotion to stakeholders other than themselves based on these theoretical presumptions. In the ideal scenario, individuals use their voices to participate in organisational

decisions and activities and adhere to functional norms or role standards for the tasks and activities that should be performed (Pless et al., 2012). Stakeholder type 2, the opportunity seeker, is more likely to participate in interpersonal interactions and organisational dialogues if there are personal motivations for doing so, such as if the stakeholder thinks that building relationships and trust will contribute to a sense of belonging or improve working relationships (Pearce et al., 2014). These two orientations strongly emphasise the notion of low accountability to the organisation.

In contrast, the individual performance stakeholder type (type 3) is more likely among stakeholders who take ownership of their learning, development and mastery – those with a strong drive for success and advancement. The engaged ambassador, the last type of stakeholder, deliberately incorporates the interests of a wider variety of stakeholders and tries to achieve results along multiple bottom lines by integrating goals across different groups (Pless et al., 2012). With stakeholder inclusion as a fundamental tenet of this organisational structure, stakeholder type 4 appears to be the optimum type of stakeholder in a relational bureaucracy. In other words, type 4 stakeholders are necessary for relational bureaucracies since they are organisational polyphonic and purpose-driven organisational systems that are simultaneously integrated with various functions. We contend that a relational bureaucracy will be an organisational setting with rough terrain, stumbling barriers for the other stakeholders, and a suitable working environment for type 4 engaged ambassadors. All stakeholders can actualise their aims and engage with and dynamically balance competing logic thanks to the organisational-individual interaction. To do justice to their interests as stakeholders, actors conducting organisational tasks must deal with or work through this complex web of tensions, contradictions and conflicts. An in-depth investigation is required to determine how these characteristics of organisational polyphony affect stakeholder participation in a relational bureaucracy at both the organisational and personal levels.

Based on current theory and insights, type 4 stakeholders will have higher levels of stakeholder engagement than other stakeholder types. From an organisational standpoint, this implies that choosing and keeping individuals that fit that profile is necessary to manage stakeholder engagement. Handling calls for corporate leadership and communication based on stakeholders' inclusion from stakeholders. A high level of stakeholder engagement should be anticipated from all internal stakeholders, which they should all be aware of. This will encourage internal stakeholders to grow into type 4 stakeholders. As a result, the following are our hypotheses regarding the stakeholder typology in a relational bureaucracy as an organisational polyphony and system driven by a purpose:

Proposition 1a: On the organisational level, a relational bureaucracy as a contemporary organisational form that smoothens the path for

stakeholder inclusion needs the selection and retention of type 4 stakeholders with high levels of stakeholder engagement.

Proposition 1b: On the individual level, a relational bureaucracy as a contemporary organisational form that smoothen the path for stakeholder inclusion is a driver of the development of internal stakeholders towards type 4 stakeholders with a high level of stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder landscape

Prototyping and fuelling the organisation with the right stakeholders is not enough to become an inclusive organisation with high stakeholder engagement. It is the start of realising their full potential as people, agents and social entities. We examine how those functions from a design standpoint in this part. As an organisational form, we concentrate on the stakeholder infrastructure as dots and lines inside a relational bureaucracy. Relational bureaucracy and stakeholder engagement offer ideas that could be the cornerstone of understanding this transformation as traditional bureaucratic organisations shift to more cross-functional organisational structures. In particular, creating a relational bureaucracy within the business aims to maximise stakeholder involvement and reduce barriers to efficient stakeholder interaction (Snell & Morris, 2021; Thomas et al., 2018).

In addition to knowing what a relational bureaucracy needs regarding internal stakeholders as human capital, we also want to explore what a relational bureaucracy offers regarding activities, roles and positions. We do this by separating work orientations towards bureaucratic goals and work orientations towards relational goals in the literature. In modern businesses, stakeholder may be more narrowly focussed on attaining objectives (G-role orientation) or creating and maintaining connections (R-role orientation). We build on Thomas et al. (2018) and Nilsson's (2015) work for framing and separating these two dimensions. Instead of connecting their conceptual framework of role orientations to an organisational design or landscape, these researchers discussed the role orientations of internal stakeholders in organisations. We choose the latter course.

Organisations need stakeholders who can carry out work related to the two distinct role orientations: roles that require a G-role orientation and roles that require an R-role orientation. This is because organisations in a connected and global world are becoming more polyphonic, relational, collective and collaborative. Goal-oriented stakeholder engagement is one of the positions having a G-role orientation. G-role stakeholders support the bureaucratic goals of the organisation. One of the duties with an R-role orientation that is carried out to support the relational goals of the company is stakeholder engagement. R-roles are typically used to manage interactions among organisational members and are connected to stakeholder involvement.

We suggest that, considering these concepts, stakeholder in a relational bureaucracy comprises groupings of G- and

R-oriented job roles. These variants, which we refer to as the stakeholder work role dimension's two extremes, are different ways of looking at the same thing. Stakeholders participating in G-work roles must, on the one hand, be goal-oriented to create desired outcomes like originality and invention (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019), efficiency and efficacy (Scherer & Vöglin, 2020), and a social licence to operate (e.g. Scherer et al., 2014, 2015). On the other hand, stakeholders in R-work roles must be relation-oriented and participate in organisational activities like work coordination, collaboration, and connection that shape relationships.

In line with these observations, we propose that a relational bureaucracy offers stakeholders an environment that fully leverages their internal human and social capital resources (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). We conclude that the stakeholder landscape of a relational bureaucracy comprises two sides: the G-side and the R-side. This suggests that certain features of the stakeholder landscape should be considered when deciding which stakeholders are required for an organisation to enable successful stakeholder involvement.

Organisational mechanisms for stakeholder inclusion

According to Gittel and Douglass (2012), a relational bureaucracy consists of three mechanisms in the organisational form through which stakeholder inclusion is performed in the organisation: (1) relational leadership as vertical connections between organisational leaders and internal stakeholders, (2) relational coordination as a horizontal connection between internal stakeholders and (3) relational coproduction as vertical connections between internal stakeholders and external stakeholders, such as customers, clients and patients. Stakeholders for these three processes must be able and willing to interact, behave and follow the 'rules of the game' in the polyphony (integrated systems) that develops in a relational bureaucracy. Moreover, these role-based relationships provide a foundation for the development of universalistic norms of caring between employees, management and customers. A more detailed description of these organisational mechanisms and its application for talent management is described in the section below.

Engagement triangles

Sociologists believe these three mechanisms can be visualised as two engagement triangles. Sociologists refer to the 'stakeholder triangle' that describes modern work that includes external stakeholders in addition to the traditional 'dyadic' interaction between internal stakeholders like managers and employees (Weinstein et al., 2010). Two service triangles – one connected to relational coordination and leadership and the other to relational coordination and coproduction – could be recognised after the relational bureaucracy as an organisational form enabling stakeholder participation. The triangle of stakeholders includes those who work in management and staff positions in the organisation's

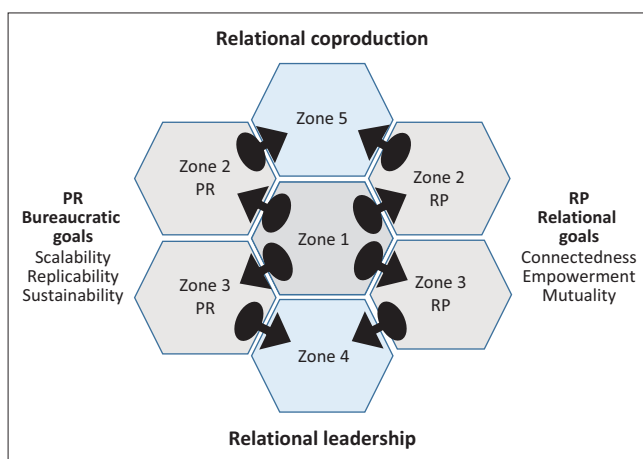
back office. In the other stakeholder triangle, stakeholders who work in front-office, core-business roles are represented.

Building on the dimensions of the stakeholder landscape, with role-orientations (G-roles and R-roles) and the two distinguished stakeholder triangles in a relational bureaucracy (back-office versus front-office), we construct a stakeholder landscape of a relational bureaucracy with seven zones. Figure 1 depicts this as a stakeholder landscape of a relational bureaucracy.

Each zone is a structural component of a relational bureaucracy in which processes between tasks, positions and stakeholders are interactive. The three engagement mechanisms of relational coproduction, relational coordination and relational leadership – each of which is ingrained in the organisational structure of a relational bureaucracy – are used to further these activities.

Stakeholders zones

The ways by which a relational bureaucracy promotes stakeholder inclusion are graphically depicted in Figure 1. The three-way intersections of relational coproduction, relational coordination and relational leadership with relational and bureaucratic aims are represented by seven zones. It is crucial to remember that our theory is fundamentally multidimensional since we believe that both the micro and macro levels coexist. Because macro and micromechanics are mutually constitutive, they constantly influence one another and cannot be separated (Thomas et al., 2018). We contend that stakeholder inclusion fosters stakeholder engagement at the organisational level by allowing internal stakeholders to communicate and relate to one another in whatever context. We expect that when a stakeholder enters one zone of the relational bureaucratic organisational structure, the transfer will benefit the stakeholders in the other zones and the organisation. From the standpoint of stakeholder engagement, we primarily concentrate on the seven stakeholder zones as vital elements of the entire company where people work, interact and participate. Figure 1 clarifies how we think of people



PR, Producing results; RP, Relating to people.

FIGURE 1: Stakeholder landscape.

as stakeholders in a relational bureaucracy's stakeholder environment. The career paths that stakeholders could take in the stakeholder landscape to further their interests in the organisations are also shown in this picture.

Following these insights, we propose that, on the organisational level, a relational bureaucracy enables stakeholder inclusion. On the individual level, we propose that a relational bureaucracy serves stakeholder engagement. Therefore, our propositions related to the relational bureaucracy as the landscape that enables stakeholder inclusion and engagement are as follows:

Proposition 2a: On the organisational level, a relational bureaucracy enables stakeholder inclusion via an integrated structural and social network of stakeholder zones.

Proposition 2b: On the individual level, a relational bureaucracy serves stakeholder engagement via an integrated structural and social network of stakeholder zones.

Zone 1. This area serves as the organisational core and the workspace for stakeholders on the front lines. Zone 1 operations and procedures are closely related to the organisation's primary business. In a relational bureaucracy, career zone 1 corresponds to the organisational zone where stakeholders interact daily with patients, clients or consumers. They must build strong working connections internally with their coworkers and outside at the point of contact with clients, patients and consumers. One must actively communicate with all parties on an operational level for this task. It takes ongoing investments in education, training and development in knowledge, skills and abilities related to the organisation's core business to be a valuable stakeholder in zone 1.

Zone 2. This zone lies between the core business of the organisation and the relational coproduction with customers, clients, patients, etc. The practices and activities in zone 2 are directly related to the central business, transforming customer interactions into opportunities for business growth and value customisation. Like stakeholders in zone 1, those in zone 2 engage with patients, clients and consumers on a tactical or even strategic level. In zone 2, the emphasis shifts from direct sales and standardised production and services to customer involvement and creative solutions through relational coproduction with external partners. More precisely, in zone 2, stakeholders are forming bonds with customers to achieve administrative objectives and achieve desirable results. For instance, stakeholders who oversee sales teams may fall within zone 2, which results in outcomes like value generation and close client relationships. The main concerns of zone 2 stakeholders who invest in client relationships are achieving relational objectives and obtaining a social licence to operate.

Zone 3. The organisation's main business and internal relationship leadership meet in this area. Zone 3's operations and procedures have a tangential relationship to the organisation's leadership and its primary line of business. The people who work in zones 1 and 4 are immediately

affected by the activity in zone 3. Zone 3 stakeholders could be compared to middle managers from a typical hierarchical standpoint. However, under a relational bureaucracy, zone 3 stakeholders behave in all stakeholders' best interests (Gittell, 2016). They interact primarily with their colleagues in zone 4 and zone 1, respectively. Specifically, in zone 3, stakeholders support organisational objectives focussing on achieving administrative objectives and producing desired results.

Zone 4. The purpose and strategic objectives of the organisation are related to this zone, which serves as the cornerstone for organisational transformation and leadership. Stakeholders in zone 4 are the spokespersons for a common sense of purpose, shared objectives, and the overarching organisational emphasis in a relational bureaucracy. The agenda for the organisation is defined by stakeholders in zone 4, who are also in charge of outlining the organisation's ultimate aims and aspirations and directing staff in that direction. The fabric that supports stakeholder inclusion through possibilities for alignment between ultimate long-term ambitions, short-term objectives and goals, and immediate responsibilities and activities is relationships between stakeholders in zones 4 and 3. Workers in zone 4 strike a compromise between the requirement for immediate economic viability and the potential long-term gains from relational leadership and stakeholder management both inside and outside the company (Pearce et al., 2014). Additionally, zone 4 stakeholders can have productive conversations with various internal and external stakeholders and help others become more competent (Gittell, 2016).

Zone 5. The organisation's interface with outside stakeholders is located in this area. Stakeholders in zone 5 make an organisation look good or bad in the eyes of its clients, patients or customers. Participants in zone 5 are experts at relational coproduction. They enjoy interacting with customers, are subject matter experts, and are the producers of novel goods and/or services that have the potential to upend the market. In professional service organisations, the effectiveness and innovativeness of the entire organisation are largely influenced by the quality and quantity of interactions that stakeholders in zone 5 have with their coworkers and external stakeholders (Gittell, 2016). Therefore, stakeholders in zone 5 must be chosen for their high levels of functional competence and capacity for relational coproduction in a relational bureaucratic organisational form.

These observations aid in understanding a relational bureaucracy's stakeholder landscape. However, additional research should use these insights as starting points in their quest to comprehend how an organisation can achieve stakeholder balance in a relational bureaucracy to fully understand the dynamics of this organisational form and the impact of stakeholder inclusion and engagement.

Discussion and conclusions

Stakeholder inclusion is ingrained in the organising principles of a relational bureaucracy. In this article, we

attempted to connect strongly between relational bureaucratic theory, the demand for stakeholders and contemporary companies' stakeholder environment. Additionally, we demonstrated how the relational bureaucratic organisational form might impact stakeholders' role orientations. Finally, we looked at the types of stakeholders that would work well in a relational bureaucracy's organisational structure that refers to polyphony and stakeholder inclusion in general.

We have built on earlier research conceptual work in related fields by providing stakeholder zones where the actions and practices in a relational bureaucracy take place and relating it to the requirement for stakeholders and the stakeholder landscape. Our claims are supported by works of literature from similar domains. They contend that an organisation comprises a collection of active participants who share common goals, a sense of unity, and a sense of belonging. In this regard, we created a relational bureaucracy as an organisational form that consists of tools for engaging and including stakeholders. As a result of the reciprocal relationships that a relational bureaucracy creates, internal stakeholders experience a sense of purpose, belonging, and positive emotional attachment to the company, which promotes stakeholder engagement at the organisational level.

Engagement and relationships are essential for converting human capital and social capital into performance (Hollenbeck & Jamieson, 2015; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). High-quality interactions transform the organisation at every level (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Peters, 2015). In line with these ideas, we conclude that organisational outcomes and effectiveness are influenced by stakeholder relationships and the roles, behaviours, and actions that result from stakeholder engagement at the organisational level. Our findings imply that a relational bureaucracy encourages ties between internal and external stakeholders while also providing the chance to develop relationships based on human and social capital. We looked more closely at the kind of stakeholder required in a relational bureaucracy as an organisational structure and a socially acceptable model for stakeholder inclusion. Additionally, we identified seven areas where stakeholders who are organisational participants – whether they are internal stakeholders (front-line staff, back-office employees or leaders) or external stakeholders – could contribute to value creation (customers or clients). Our research shows that a relational bureaucracy provides areas for stakeholders who support relational goals like connectivity, empowerment and mutuality and those who support bureaucratic goals like scalability, replication and sustainability. Our study then demonstrates how these findings result in a stakeholder grid, a landscape that supports a relational bureaucracy that encourages stakeholder involvement, and a landscape that promotes stakeholder inclusion.

Practical implications

It is recommended that stakeholders who accept complete responsibility for their roles, actions and behaviour – rather than acting as agents but as representatives of the

organisation – should power a relational bureaucracy. This underlines a need for specific stakeholders in a relational bureaucracy as a contemporary organisational form. A business should be conceived as a relational bureaucracy driven by stakeholders with a high level of responsibility and a broad stakeholder perspective if it is to become or remain essential. Based on Pless et al. (2012), we identified this group of stakeholders as engaged ambassadors. The notion of stakeholder inclusion and the full potential of stakeholders may be realised by investing in interpersonal ties in addition to this type of stakeholder. This necessitates paying more attention to organisational stakeholders than personal traits like knowledge, skills and capacities. The intended quality and number of stakeholders should be taken into consideration by HR practices. However, this focus should be broadened to include the amount and quality of their interactions as organisational actors.

This insight differs from more traditional organisational designs and HR practices. The search for internal stakeholders has historically been focused on the knowledge and experience needed to complete tasks and perform job-related duties. As a result, the influence of stakeholder interconnection and interactions is underappreciated. In this sense, relational bureaucracy refers to more than just an organisational structure related to polyphony as an important and contemporary phenomenon in our interconnected, international workplace. Additionally, it provides fresh viewpoints on how stakeholders are managed within businesses, with consequences for the need for and pursuit of stakeholders. In this article, expanding on a stakeholder typology and stakeholder landscape offers a potential direction for additional study in this field.

Recommendations for future research

This article highlights gaps in the current RBT knowledge and its role in encouraging stakeholder engagement. We, therefore, urge future research to concentrate on procedural matters: If relationships are so meaningful, how might this stakeholder engagement component be included in hiring and selection practices, performance management frameworks, learning and development initiatives or stakeholder management in general? To give voice to all stakeholders in a relational bureaucracy in our fast-paced, globally changing environment, research is also required to examine how stakeholders should connect, interact and communicate. Further research should focus on how businesses may prepare for productive communication processes with stakeholders essential to their capacity for learning and innovation. More research is required to fully grasp how relationships and communication affect organisational performance and development outcomes, relational competency, stakeholder involvement, and the strength of social links inside the company.

We realise that having specific objectives, solid connections and a sense of belonging are just the beginning.

Understanding the short- and long-term effects of a relational bureaucracy and associated organisational design principles on stakeholder engagement, turnover, and professional growth will be necessary. According to strategic human resource management theory, including stakeholders fosters higher levels of value creation, creativity and innovation. These higher levels of value creation, creativity and innovation are correlated with clusters or systems of high-performance work practices, such as strong social ties. The causal relationships between stakeholder inclusion and outcomes like increased productivity, better customer service, positive attitudes, improved decision-making, reduced turnover, and ultimately a solid social licence to operate and improved organisational performance need to be examined at the organisational level (e.g. Dineen & Allen, 2016; Huselid 1995; Jiang et al., 2012). We need to identify effective HR approaches that fully utilise the organisational human and social capital and translate stakeholder inclusion into performance, internal mobility and stakeholder development to disentangle the human resource practices that specifically make or break stakeholders in relational bureaucratic organisations in today's dynamic, complex and uncertain world. By examining how relational bureaucracy as an organisational form affects the requirement for stakeholder inclusion and participation, we took some steps in that direction in this article. More research is required to explore this area.

Conclusion

This article indicates some of the main effects of relational bureaucratic theory and a holistic view of stakeholders' needs and the landscape for internal stakeholders. It opens up new avenues for future research on relational bureaucracy as a modern organisational template. However, much work remains to be done on the side of relational bureaucracy – which leads one to ask what we can do to let relational bureaucracy be the construct that helps us to build businesses that could overcome the significant challenges in the 21st century via stakeholder engagement, and on the academic and/or research side, to provide advice and/or assistance to leaders who wish to be considered as 'relational' and 'engaged' as part of their legacy.

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Authors' contributions

L.v.d.S. and E.N.B. were responsible for the conceptualisation, investigation, writing of the original draft, visualisation, project administration, validation, review and editing. N.E.S. was responsible for the conceptualisation, writing of the original draft, visualisation, review and editing.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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