

# The bureaucracy–democracy tango: a dual-source empirical revalidation by structural equation modelling in the Israeli public sector

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The relationship between bureaucracy and democracy in modern nations has gained the attention of scholars and experts worldwide. This article uses the allegory of a tango dance to illuminate core pandemics of the bureaucracy–democracy interface. First, we propose a theoretical model that relates these arenas in the public realm. The model is then tested empirically based on four in-depth field studies of Israeli public sector organisations (in the fields of public energy, healthcare, policing and local governance). The studies were conducted simultaneously and were based on both qualitative and quantitative data collected in the intra-organisational and extra-organisational arenas. Respondents were 159 public sector personnel and 158 citizens who received services from the same organisations. Data were analysed with a structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. The findings reconfirmed a solid positive relationship between elements of an effective bureaucracy and segments of an active democracy. Moreover, strongest support was found for a mediating model where perceived performance mediated the bureaucratic–democratic relationship. Implications of the findings are discussed in both the intra- and extra-organisational context.

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## Introduction

One of the major ironies in new governance is the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy. This relationship can be viewed as a tango where both spheres are independent but still closely related in a unique way. As in a tango, they move together in different directions, keeping their distance from one another.

Building strong modern societies relies heavily on efficient mechanisms for running the state, formulating wise policies, implementing them in good order, and thus providing excellent public services to citizens. However, at the same time, these mechanisms are expected to integrate themselves into a liberal environment with a strong commitment to people's rights and a concern for freedom of choice, an environment that listens and responds to the voices of various segments of society. Consequently, there are many occasions when bureaucratic mechanisms seem to be a barrier to a prosperous open democracy, and quite similarly, core democratic principles clash with ideal types of bureaucracy.

Thus, it is not surprising that the nexus between bureaucracy and democracy has become a puzzling research arena and the object of attention by both academics and practitioners worldwide over a number of years (Waldo, 1977; Thompson, 1983; Mosher, 1982; Kelly, 1998; Ulbig, 2002). This research track also affected the theory and models of new governance (Rhodes, 1997; Pierre, 1999; van Heffen et al, 2000; Buss et al, 2006), new public management (NPM) (Hood, 1991; Eliassen

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and Kooiman, 1993; Lynn, 1998; Christensen and Laegreid, 1999; Terry, 2005) and a wave of Third Way ideology for running the modern state (Powell, 1999; Ferlie et al, 2003; Newman et al, 2004) that has become so popular. Notwithstanding a common denominator of all these approaches and doctrines is the belief that reconciliation can be infused into the widening gap between public administration under pressure and democracies under threat.

This study builds on previous efforts to explore the relationship between managerial quality, participation in decision making, public sector performance and their democratic aftermaths. However, it is aimed at advancing knowledge about these interrelations in several ways. First, we adopt a dual-source approach for the study of the relationship between bureaucratic order and democratic outcomes of public policy. Two distinctive, yet closely related, samples of public sector personnel and citizens who receive services in four Israeli governmental agencies are used (a public energy firm, a public hospital, the Israeli police and a local municipality). Based on previous studies (ie King and Stivers, 1998; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2007) we suggest a theoretical model that relates elements of modern bureaucracy with essentials of a modernised democracy. The study thus endeavours to explain why bureaucracy is an essential construct of democracy and vice versa – why democracy contains structures essential for an effective bureaucracy. Second, a theoretical model is suggested for the relationship between the variables and its rationality is developed. Third, structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to test the theoretical model across the dual-source surveys. By so doing, we apply a test/re-test methodology that has the benefits of reliability and validity. Finally, we try to provide more solid support for the idea that bureaucracy and democracy are distinctive but strongly related realms that relate to each other in what seems to be a tango dance: closely attached but still keeping a safe distance as well as moving forward in a non-linear course of progress.

## **Literature and rationality: a profile of the tango**

Previous studies on the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy in modern societies suggest that many of the elements of one, conflict with those of the other. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, this tension was discussed by Waldo (1977), Mosher (1982) and Thompson (1983). More recently, Woller (1998: 84) encouraged finding ways for the 'reconciliation of the bureaucratic and democratic ethos', as the two are basic aspects of modern life in free nations. Similarly, a recent study by Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2007) suggests a conceptual framework for the understanding of the nexus between bureaucracy and democracy. According to this line of thinking, managerial quality and participation in decision making are essential antecedents of perceived performance in the public sector. How citizens view the performance of the public sector may, in turn, affect democratic values such as trust in administrative agencies and trust in government, as well as participatory behaviour of various types. However, their study relied on a single source of data, namely a survey of citizens' attitudes and behaviours. As far as we could find, no study since has tried to validate their findings using complementary data such as information from the intra-organisational arena and the point of view of public personnel. In the next

sections, we will review the general framework of the nexus between bureaucracy and democracy and suggest an alternative validation of this framework.

### *Perceived managerial quality*

As suggested in previous studies (ie Kahn, 1993; Koch and Cabula, 1994; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2007), managerial quality has a strong human resource facet that, in the eyes of many stakeholders (ie organisational members and citizens as clients), encompasses effective and efficient managerial decisions as well as strong personal skills of leadership that direct the organisation towards its goals and vision. Major components of managerial quality in public domains rely on the quality of the workforce, the merit and professionalism of public personnel and the excellence of managers who provide employees with supportive working environments and provide customers/clients/citizens with the best value for their effort and money. Other facets of quality management in the public sector are transparency and accountability (eg Finkelstein, 2000), the standards of morality and ethics demonstrated by the managerial cadre (eg DeLeon, 1996; Lui and Cooper, 1997) and the creativity and innovation of the leaders (Golembiewski and Vigoda, 2000).

### *Perceived public sector performance*

It is a common view today that a better understanding of public sector performance should rely on enriching and improving our ‘toolbox’ of performance indicators (PIs). In line with recent reforms in public administration, especially those stemming from the NPM paradigm, many PIs have been developed to evaluate administrative performance (eg Nyhan, 1995; Berman, 1997). Two of the most commonly used perceptual measures are (1) attitudes towards the general responsiveness of governments and public administration (eg Rourke, 1992; Stewart and Ranson, 1994) and (2) detailed evaluations of citizens’ satisfaction with governmental services (eg, Stipak, 1979, 1980; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2007). However, the literature is mainly concerned with citizens’ perceptions of these measures, while the views of other stakeholders, such as public personnel, are often overlooked. Thus, by using a variety of measures such as the quality and availability of services offered to citizens, public satisfaction with these services, employees’ satisfaction with their jobs and with the outcomes of their duties, and the responsiveness of the public system as perceived by both citizens as end users and public personnel as providers of services, we should be able to extend our knowledge about PIs in the public sector.

### *Participation in decision making*

Participation in decision making is also a concept with two anchors. From the extra-organisational perspective, it deals with the appropriate role of the public in public administration (Thomas Clayton, 1995; King et al, 1998; Weeks, 2000; Ebdon, 2002). In this respect, scholars suggest that higher levels of citizenship involvement (ie participation in administrative decision making, political participation, or community involvement) may lead to increased conflict over policy making and policy implementation (eg Thomas, 1995) or alternatively, to effective ways for

improving administrative outcomes and performance (King and Stivers, 1998). From the more generic managerial perspective, it is frequently argued that a higher level of employees' participation in decision making is strongly related to higher levels of organisational performance, achievements and goal attainment (Vroom, 1964; Aiken and Hage, 1966; Porter et al, 1974; Cohen, 2003). Moreover, today, most studies assume that citizens' participation at the administrative level can improve public sector performance (King and Stivers, 1998; King et al, 1998). The same logic can work for higher levels of employees' participation in decision making, especially in the public sector (Mizrahi, 2002).

### *Citizens' trust, employees' commitment and political participation*

There are numerous definitions of the term 'trust' (Luhmann, 1988; Bouckaert et al, 2002). Among these definitions, the one that views trust as the 'faith people have in their government' (Citrin and Muste, 1999: 465) has been adopted by public administration studies and applied to the administrative agencies that are an indispensable and central part of government. Trust in government and in administrative agencies represents an essential ingredient for building the 'contract' between citizens and governance (Coulson, 1998). Trust is a latent but still essential dimension of free societies that enables legitimisation of democratic actions and institutions. Open societies rely on citizens' trust. Lack of trust signals the desire for a vast political or administrative change. Recent years have witnessed a massive proliferation of the concept of trust both in public administration and in the social sciences. For example, Chanley et al (2000) support the claim for a stronger relationship between bureaucracy and democracy because the economic output of one (the bureaucracy) may change attitudes and beliefs about the other (the democracy).

Furthermore, citizens' trust in administrative agencies and in government has much in common with employees' commitment towards the organisation. Both are core dimensions of general trust and faith in others. The former is directed towards the external entities of the state, whereas the latter is directed towards the internal units or individuals that constitute one's workplace. Thus, the intra-organisational meaning of trust can largely be represented by public personnel's commitment to the organisation (Porter et al, 1974; Cohen, 2003). Our view is that a public agency that wins the public's trust will probably also enjoy the internal trust and commitment of its own staff and employees, and vice versa. Moreover, when employees trust the organisation they work for and are committed to it, those feelings will be translated into high-quality performance that will spill over to the public and encourage citizens' trust in this agency (Wilenski, 1980; Peterson, 1990; Sobel, 1993).

Beyond trust, Brady (1999: 737) argues that participation is 'surely one of the central concepts in the study of mass politics' and that all definitions include four basic concepts: activities or actions, citizens, politics and influence. The classic definition by Verba and Nie (1972: 2) suggests that political participation refers to 'those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the decisions they take'. Such activities include voting, party and campaign work, community work, contacting officials, attending political meetings, protest activities and communication activities. As will be explained

below, we expect that people's attitudes towards the bureaucratic system, both from the extra-organisational and intra-organisational points of view, will be related to citizens' trust, public personnel's commitment, and more active behaviours such as the political participation of these individuals.

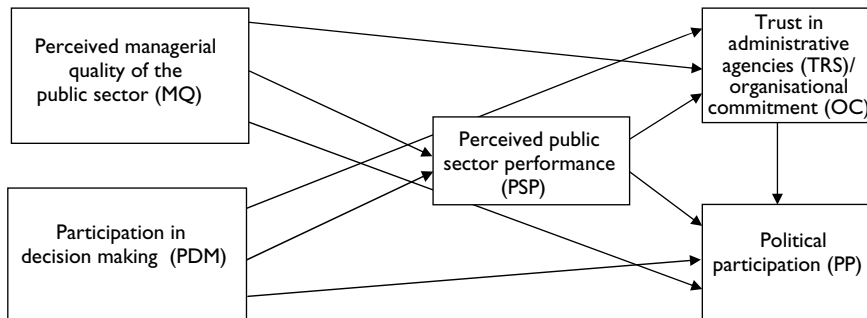
### **Theoretical model: relating the unrelated**

The theoretical model that underpins our logic is presented in Figure 1. The general assumption is that a well-performing bureaucracy may significantly affect democratic attitudes and behaviours such as citizens' trust, public personnel's commitment, and the general participatory behaviours of individuals. According to the model, bureaucracy and democracy may be directly related to each other, but at the same time they may be indirectly related via perceived public sector performance. More specifically, bureaucratic dimensions of managerial quality and participation in decision making may be linked to public sector performance, whereas performance may lead to democratic values of trust in governance, commitment to public organisations and political participation. Thus, high-quality management and participation in decision making will increase trust in governance only if they succeed in improving the performance of the organisation as perceived by citizens and employees. Satisfying this requirement is critical, because people who participate in making decisions may have raised expectations about performance and be critical of outcomes that do not meet these expectations. As a result, trust in government may decline even though people are participating in decision making. The model suggested here emphasises this often-ignored consideration.

The model presents several theoretical bases for these relationships. First, we rely on the spillover theory identified in social science literature. Studies such as those by Wilenski (1980), and more specifically Peterson (1990) and Sobel (1993) who dealt with the spillover of political attitudes and their impact on participatory behaviours, developed the idea that perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in one social setting can be manifested in other settings as a reflection of one's skills and experience. Thus, we suggest that the attitudes, perceptions and views (ie perceived managerial quality and participation in decision making) of individuals in one setting (the bureaucratic arena) may spill over and affect beliefs and views (ie trust and political participation) in a separate, but related, setting (the democratic arena), and vice versa.

Second, we argue that managerial quality is largely subject to the personal skills and talent of the higher ranks in the public agency. The senior staff members are expected to be accountable both to their subordinates and to citizens in the quest to produce higher qualities of public goods. Hence, at least cognitively, perceived managerial quality becomes central for public personnel and for the citizens when making judgements about the state of democracy. Opinions about whether the democracy is trustworthy and allows authentic citizens' involvement and participation in political processes and in shaping policies all flow from the public's view of managerial quality. This idea is in keeping with studies on the centrality of leadership and the leader's style in organisations and in the public sector (ie Bass, 1985; Avolio and Bass, 1991).

Findings from business studies about the advantages of employees' participation in decision making and the empowerment of both public personnel and ordinary

**Figure 1: Theoretical model**

citizens in helping make organisational decisions and setting policy also bolster our argument (Farh et al, 1990; Skarlicki and Latham, 1996). Participation in decision making is also positively related to work outcomes. Schnake (1991) argued that a leader's willingness to share power may create a need in subordinates to reciprocate. One way to 'pay back' a leader for their support is by demonstrating good citizenship through increased levels of trust and political participation. Thus, we expect that public employees' or citizens' sense of participation in decision making will be positively related to supportive behaviour by the leader and managerial quality (Niehoff and Moorman, 1993; Wayne and Green, 1993) and that both factors may affect the perceived performance of the public agency. Based on the logic above, the model basically suggests that perceived managerial quality, participation in decision making and perceived public sector performance have direct and indirect effects on the dependent democratic variables. Thus, the study's main hypothesis is that *the performance of the public sector, as perceived by various stakeholders, serves as a bridge between bureaucratic aspects of quality management and democratic aspects of trust and political participation.*

## Method

### *Pilot study*

As one of the major potential contributions of this study is the extension of a citizens-based study to the intra-organisational sphere and to public personnel, the pilot study focused on the employees of the public sector rather than on citizens. For models, data and knowledge about citizens' perceptions of bureaucracy and democracy, we relied on previous literature such as King and Stivers (1998), Box et al (2001) and others. Thus, a pilot study was first conducted in a public energy firm; we focused on a major branch of the organisation with around 503 employees, which is located in the central area of Israel. Qualitative data was based on archive information and on semi-structured interviews with a cadre of managers and employees. The results of the qualitative stage and the pilot survey helped in formulating the final version of the questionnaire that was later distributed in three organisations: a hospital, a police unit and a local municipality. Generally speaking, the findings of the pilot survey supported a positive relationship between managerial quality, participation in decision making and perceived performance by employees. These variables also

had a positive, yet more modest, relationship with commitment to the organisation and with active political participation.<sup>1</sup>

### *Sample and procedure*

Based on the quite extensive pilot stage described above, we composed a final version of the survey that was distributed in three organisations: (1) a central public hospital with around 2,000 employees, located in the north of Israel and providing a variety of medical services to a population of 800,000; (2) a police line-unit with around 100 officers that has a close and continuous relationship with the public and is representative of the Israeli police, with a staff of around 25,000; and (3) a local municipality in north Israel with around 4,000 employees and a population of 300,000. We chose these organisations as representing major public agencies that provide services in three different areas and which have a significant impact on citizens' daily life and their quality of life: security, medical treatment and local governance. We have strong reason to believe that, together with the field of energy that was tested in the pilot study, they cover a variety of essential public services in modern society. Note, however, that these organisations are not fully representative of the heterogeneous roles of governments, but they do provide a good indication of the perceptions of both public servants and citizens about the role of bureaucracy and democracy.

The total number of respondents in each organisation ranged between 50 and 60, so we could not analyse the results separately (especially with multivariate analysis or with SEM). We therefore pooled together the usable questionnaires from these organisations to increase the sample size, after carefully making sure that the demographic characteristics allowed such an aggregation. This decision also enabled us to analyse the results at a higher statistical level. Pooling the data together was also in line with our theory that argues for relationships beyond the intra-organisational level. Pooling the data together resulted in two separate files – one for employees and one for citizens.

All together, data were collected from 159 employees (a return rate of 69%) and from 158 citizens (a return rate of 76%) who appeared personally at the organisations to receive a service. Of the employees' sample, 40.1% were men, their average age was 39.9 (SD=9.1), 77.6% of them were married, they had, on average, 14.1 years of education (SD=2.1) and 94.9% of them were Jewish. Of the citizens' sample, 57% were men, their average age was 39.2 (SD=14.1), 58% of them were married, they had, on average, 14.3 years of education (SD=2.4), and 75.8% were not employed as public personnel elsewhere.

### *Measures*

The measures in this study included (1) independent variables, such as perceived managerial quality of the public sector (MQ) and participation in decision making (PDM); (2) dependent variables, such as trust in administrative agencies (TRS), organisational commitment (OC) and political participation (PP); and (3) a mediating variable, perceived public sector performance (PSP). Details about the items that comprised these scales are available in the Appendix at the end of this article.

### *Empirical analysis of models*

SEM with AMOS 6 was used for the assessment of the research model. SEM is a statistical method that is based on path analysis and was originally designed to test competing models in the social sciences (Joreskog and Van Thillo, 1973; Joreskog, 1977). The major advantage of this method is its test of 'correctness' of a theoretical model against an optimal real solution. (Another option is to test a theoretical model against alternative models; for reasons of simplicity, we note this possible approach in an endnote but have not described it here in detail.<sup>2</sup>) SEM is thus based on a comparison of an integrative 'basket' of mutual relationships that also allow causal implications rather than merely correlative ones.

Eight indices were used to assess the fit of the models. The first two were chi-square tests (a low and non-significant value of the chi-square represents a good fit with the data) and the ratio of the model chi-square to degrees of freedom (a ratio of up to 2 is considered a satisfactory value). We also used the Relative Fit Index (RFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), which helps overcome problems with the NFI. The closer the value of RFI, CFI, NFI and TLI to 1, the better the fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of up to 0.05 indicates a close fit, and values up to 0.08 represent reasonable errors of approximation. Another recommended index for the selection of one of several proposed models is the Expected (single sample) Cross-Validation Index (ECVI), which should be as close to zero as possible. We also considered path coefficients, and the percentage of explained variance for the dependent variables.

### **Findings**

Tables 1 and 2 provide descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the two samples. As shown, the psychometric properties of the research variables across the samples are reasonable. All variables have fairly normal distributions and acceptable Cronbach Alpha ratios (0.70–0.90) for all the variables included. In addition, most of the intercorrelations hold in the expected directions. In both samples, perceived performance is positively related to the independent and the dependent variables. For both samples, participation in decision making is positively related to trust/organisational commitment. An interesting bivariate finding is that political participation is positively correlated with most of the other variables in the citizens' sample, but not in the employees' sample.

Table 3 provides the fit indices for the models. According to this table, the analysis of the theoretical models for both samples yielded reasonable fit indices, even if somewhat below the levels recommended in the literature (ie Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Bollen, 1989; Bentler, 1990; Medsker et al, 1994). The  $\chi^2$  value is significant, which indicates that the model is not a perfect description of the reality. In the citizens' sample, the  $\chi^2/df$  value is the closest to 2, whereas in the public personnel sample it is 2.36. In both samples, the NFI, RFI, TLI and CFI are close to 1, and RMSEA and ECVI are close to 0. All of these findings indicate that the theoretical model has a relatively good fit with reality. Furthermore, in both samples, RMSEA is .08–.09, which again, indicates a relatively good fit of the model. Taken all together,

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations matrix (reliabilities in parentheses) for the public personnel sample**

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Perceived managerial quality of the public sector (MQ)	3.34 (0.84)	(0.83)				
(2) Employees' participation in administrative decision making (PDM)	2.24 (0.99)	0.31***	(0.88)			
(3) Perceived public sector performance (PSP) (employees' job satisfaction and responsiveness)	3.61 (0.68)	0.58***	0.45***	(0.70)		
(4) Trust in the administrative agencies (TRS)/organisational commitment (OC)	3.79 (0.77)	0.37***	0.49***	0.67***	(0.81)	
(5) Political participation (PP)	1.83 (0.51)	0.02	0.15	-0.07	-0.05	(0.86)

Notes:  $n=159$ ; \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\* $p<0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<0.001$ .

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations matrix (reliabilities in parentheses) for the citizens' sample**

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Perceived managerial quality of the public sector (MQ)	3.15 (0.88)	(0.84)				
(2) Citizens' participation in administrative decision making (PDM)	2.26 (0.82)	0.60***	(0.83)			
(3) Perceived public sector performance (PSP) (citizens' satisfaction with services and responsiveness)	2.91 (0.92)	0.72***	0.59***	(0.85)		
(4) Trust in administrative agencies (TRS)	2.97 (0.94)	0.67***	0.44***	0.67***	(0.90)	
(5) Political participation (PP)	1.93 (0.42)	0.21**	0.27***	0.16*	0.25**	(0.75)

Notes:  $n=158$ ; \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\* $p<0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<0.001$ .

**Table 3: Goodness of fit indices**

Sample	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	p	NFI	RFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	ECVI
Public personnel <sup>a</sup>	158.1	67	2.36	<0.000	0.87	0.79	0.87	0.91	0.09	1.66
Citizens <sup>b</sup>	134.0	67	2.0	<0.000	0.90	0.85	0.92	0.95	0.08	1.52

Notes: <sup>a</sup>  $n=159$ ; <sup>b</sup>  $n=158$ .

these findings indicate that for both samples, and especially for the citizens' sample, the theoretical model appears to be quite workable. While it is far from being the 'correct' model in terms of fit for either sample, it has advantages and does indicate that perceived performance has a mediating role in the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

In addition to the model's fit, Table 4 allows an in-depth analysis of the path coefficients and explained variance ( $R^2$ ). In terms of path coefficients, the model has four significant paths in the public personnel sample ( $MQ \rightarrow PSP=0.35$ ;  $PDM \rightarrow PSP=0.17$ ;  $PDM \rightarrow PP=0.18$ ;  $PSP \rightarrow OC=0.83$ ) and three in the citizens' sample ( $MQ \rightarrow PSP=0.69$ ;  $PDM \rightarrow PSP=0.20$ ;  $PSP \rightarrow TRS/OC=0.58$ ). These findings indicate again that perceived public sector performance has a mediating role between constructs of good bureaucratic management and aspects of a well-functioning democracy (especially, trust and commitment). Furthermore,  $R^2$  statistics show that the highest explained variance is for the trust in administrative agencies/organisational commitment variable, for both samples (61% in the citizens' sample and 72% in the public personnel sample), meaning that the independent bureaucratic variables of managerial quality and participation in decisions best explain citizens' trust in government and employees' commitment to the public organisation, via perceived performance. The explained variance for perceived public sector performance was 78% in the citizens' sample, and 35% in the public personnel sample, meaning that the independent bureaucratic variables are excellent predictors of public sector personnel's performance and good to fair predictors of public sector performance as perceived by citizens. Finally, the findings for political participation are much more modest. Explained variance for this variable was 4% in the citizens' sample and 7% in the public personnel sample. All the above findings again support the theoretical model and the role of perceived performance as a linking variable between bureaucracy and democracy. They do, however, show the model's limitation

**Table 4: Path coefficients and explained variance**

Path	Public personnel	Citizens
$MQ \rightarrow PSP$	0.35*	0.69*
$MQ \rightarrow TRS/OC$	0.02	0.22
$MQ \rightarrow PP$	0.06	0.06
$PDM \rightarrow PSP$	0.17*	0.20*
$PDM \rightarrow TRS/OC$	0.05	-0.01
$PDM \rightarrow PP$	0.18*	0.03
$PSP \rightarrow TRS/OC$	0.83*	0.58*
$PSP \rightarrow PP$	-0.12	-0.12
$TRS/OC \rightarrow PP$	-0.02	0.03
$R^2$ :		
TRS/OC	0.72	0.61
PP	0.07	0.04
PSP	0.35	0.78

Note:  $p^* < 0.05$ .

in predicting political participation. The implications of these findings are discussed more extensively in the final section of this article.

## **Summary and implications: lessons from the tango dance**

The relationship between bureaucracy and democracy is similar to a tango dance where ‘it takes two’ to make a system move forward. Bringing together the ideas of good management and a well-performing administration on the one hand and a prosperous democracy with a high level of citizens’ trust in governance and healthy patterns of active participation on the other has become a timely and urgent challenge for our modern societies. Kelly (1998) even suggested that together with the common idea of ‘representative democracy’ there might be a place in our modern nations for a ‘representative bureaucracy’ where various citizenry groups gain representation in public administration bodies and have an influence on the decisions made within them. By so doing, the gap between bureaucracy and democracy can be narrowed and the potential for conflicts in values and priorities declines. However, few studies have empirically tested the meaning of and change in this gap by relating measurable elements of effective bureaucracy with those of a stable democracy.

Such a study is the goal of this article. We followed a theoretical framework developed in other studies (eg Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2007) and applied an SEM technique that reconfirmed a solid, positive relationship between elements of an effective bureaucracy and aspects of a trustworthy and active democracy. Our findings thus offer some support for previous studies in this field, including those by Waldo (1977) and Mosher (1982) who dealt elegantly with the important dilemmas stemming from the co-existence of these two social mechanisms. Moreover, our hypothesis about the bridging (mediating) role of public sector performance is largely supported. Public sector performance, as perceived by both citizens and public personnel, seems to have a major mediating function in the bureaucratic–democratic relationship. The quality of management in the public sector and the willingness to treat citizens and employees as partners in the role of delivering services to the public has an effect on the performance of the public sector as perceived by citizens and employees. Similarly, this performance has much to offer to build trust in government, bolster the commitment of public employees to the organisation, and perhaps enhance other democratic values and behaviours. In short, our findings support the metaphor of bureaucracy and democracy dancing in a tango, engaged in a relationship that is not trivial and direct but more complex, indirect and dependent on other variables, such as the quality of the results and outcomes of both bureaucracy and democracy.

### ***Dancing the tango, but keeping a distance***

The findings also support much of the NPM literature that cites the performance of the public sector as a desirable goal of bureaucracy. Our results further suggest that improving the level of this performance is also valuable for democracy. Moreover, this finding is consistent not only with the literature on NPM (ie Kooiman, 1993; Lynn, 1998; Christensen and Lægreid, 1999) but also with other studies that have focused on the satisfaction–trust relationship. For example, a study by Ulbig (2002:

801) suggested that 'satisfaction with the procedures and people of government ... helps to boost feelings of trust in government' because citizens who are satisfied with governmental policies also have a meaningful voice alternative. The findings also offer no support for any direct-effect theory. To the degree that the findings of this study indicate, managerial quality and participation in decision making, both extra-organisational and intra-organisational, are not related directly to democratic values of trust, commitment or participation.

A close and independent assessment of each of the samples that were used here yielded other results of interest. For example, in the intra-organisational environment, public personnel's participation in decision making was positively and directly related to political participation. This finding is interesting, as it may imply again, based on the spillover theory, that learning, skills and attitudes acquired in the organisational climate can be translated into more general codes of behaviour at the community and national level (Sobel, 1993). Nonetheless, this finding was not replicated in the citizens' survey, which somewhat limits its external validity. Furthermore, the relatively modest relationship that was found in this context calls for more studies in this direction. Another result of interest is the relationship between participation in decision making and perceived performance in both samples. This finding may imply that positive perceived performance is, to a certain degree, subject to citizens' or employees' involvement in making decisions and setting policies. This finding is meaningful in both the intra- and extra-organisational contexts. It supports organisational theories on the centrality of participation in decision making in forming a healthy job environment (ie Vroom, 1964; Drucker, 1974). Moreover, it is also in line with recent calls for more citizenry-infused government and for more collaboration and consultation between the state and the people, or even between these players and the private sector (ie Thomas, 1995; Pierre, 1999; Ebdon, 2002; Newman et al, 2004). While the strategy of including such players in decision making is not always realistic, as an approach it is one that has been little explored. Such an approach has the potential to have a strong positive effect on how the public sector is viewed and ultimately on the democratic values of trust in government and active political participation.

### *Dancing the tango: some practical lessons*

The findings of this study may also lead to some practical dance lessons for this tango. If the major theoretical implication stemming from the findings is that bureaucracy and democracy have a mutual influence on one another, then governments, policy makers and citizens should be involved in heightening the positive aspects of both institutions. Hence, our study has three major practical recommendations:

- (1) Governments must make every effort to create and maintain high standards of managerial quality in the public service via investment in human resource programmes and by increasing the human and social capital of the higher ranks in public agencies.
- (2) Governments must make every effort to encourage mechanisms of greater involvement in decision making, both for public personnel, but especially for citizens.

- (3) Beyond the responsibilities of governments, citizens have their role as well. Citizens' groups, citizens' organisations and the growing-in-scale third sector are important partners in the bureaucracy–democracy tango.

## Conclusions

Despite some limitations that this study has (ie the difficulty in generalising findings from the Israeli arena to other countries and cultures, the use of subjective measures and scales, and the relatively small-sized samples based on only four public organisations), it offers theoretical, methodological and empirical advantages for the study of the tango-style relationship between bureaucracy and democracy. As in a tango, players are close but not really touching, and the dance moves one step forwards and two steps aside, in the general direction of progress, but with restraint. Theoretically and methodologically, the dual-source approach we used tries to shed more light on the nature of this dance in the context of bureaucracy and democracy in modern nations. Finally, the study reconfirms that the bureaucratic realm and the democratic realm are distinct but strongly related areas that have a powerful effect on modern societies worldwide.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Additional information on the pilot study is available directly from the authors.

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical model was compared against a fully mediated model and against a fully direct model. For reasons of simplicity, we decided to present only the results of the theoretical model but its qualities were quite similar to those of the fully mediated model. This finding again supports the strong mediating role of perceived performance, in both samples.

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## Appendix: Measures

### Perceived managerial quality of the public sector (MQ)

This independent variable was measured by items taken from Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2007). In the citizens' sample, we used three items (sample item: 'Employees of this organisation are professionals and highly qualified'). In the employees' sample, we also used three items (sample item: 'Managers in this organisation are successful in defining and meeting goals'). Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of this scale was 0.84 and 0.83 in the citizens' and employees' samples, respectively.

Participation in decision making (PDM): this independent variable was based on previous measures of involvement and PDM that have been applied in the discipline of organisational behaviour and management (ie, Aiken and Hage, 1966). PDM was defined as the degree of input and participation in administrative processes aimed at determining the policies, strategies, plans or actions of public agencies by either citizens or employees. In the citizens' sample, PDM was measured by three items (sample item: 'This organisation is interested in involving the public in important decision-making processes'). Responses were made on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the employees' sample, respondents were asked about the degree to which they participated in decisions on the following three issues: (1) hiring of new staff; (2) promotion of any of the professional staff; and (3) adoption of new policies or programmes. Responses were made on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Internal reliability of this scale was 0.83 and 0.88 in the citizens' and employees' samples, respectively.

### Perceived public sector performance (PSP)

Based on Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi (2007), this potentially mediating variable was measured with two latent measures – responsiveness and satisfaction with services. Responsiveness refers to the accuracy and speed of public sector reaction to citizens' needs (Thomas and Palfrey, 1996) and was measured by two items each in the citizens' and employees' samples (sample item: 'This organisation is sensitive to public opinion and tries to respond to the public's needs' and 'The employees in this organisation provide quality service to the public'), for the citizens' and the employees' samples, respectively. Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The subscale on satisfaction assembled information regarding citizens' satisfaction with the services of the specific organisation, as well as employees' satisfaction with their work and job. Four items were used in the citizens' survey (sample item: 'How satisfied are you with the level of service in this organisation?'). Employees were asked to report

how satisfied they were with their work, with their supervisors, career, co-workers and job in general. Respondents were asked to report their answers on a scale from 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 5 (highly satisfied). Internal reliability of this scale was 0.85 and 0.70 in the citizens' and employees' sample, respectively.

### **Trust in administrative agencies (TRS) and organisational commitment (OC)**

Trust in government and in public administration is a dependent variable in the model. It refers to the level of faith or confidence citizens have in state authorities and in administrative branches of various kinds (Citrin and Muste 1999). In the citizens' sample it was measured using three items (sample item: 'How much trust do you have in the managers of this organisation?'). Respondents were asked to answer on a scale ranging from 1 (very low trust) to 5 (very high trust). Organisational commitment generally refers to employees' trust in the organisation, their willingness to be part of it and their desire to remain in the organisation for an extended period of time (Porter et al, 1974). It was measured by three items (sample item: 'I find that my values and those of the organisation are very similar'). The response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of this scale was 0.90 and 0.81 in the citizens' and employees' sample, respectively.

### **Political participation (PP)**

This dependent variable comprised of two subscales: participation in national-level politics and community involvement. At the national level, this variable represents 'those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they make' (Verba and Nie, 1972: 2). At the community level, it reflects actions through which ordinary citizens contribute to or attempt to influence outcomes at the local level (Nagel, 1987). An eight-item scale was used to measure national-level participation (based on Brady, 1999; and Verba et al, 1995). An additional six-item scale was used to measure community involvement. Respondents were asked to report the frequency of their involvement in various activities (sample items being a member of a political party; keeping informed about politics; voting regularly in general or local elections; being a member of a tenants' committee). Answers were given on a three-point scale: (1) never was active, (2) was active in the past and (3) am active today. The total score for each respondent was calculated by summing the responses for each item. Internal reliability of the combined scale was 0.75 and 0.86 in the citizens' and employees' sample, respectively.

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