

Exploring citizens' legitimacy judgments about governmental refugee policies

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Master's Thesis
Department of Language and Communication Studies
University of Jyväskylä
Spring 2017

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Title Exploring citizens' legitimacy judgments about governmental refugee policies	
Subject Organizational communication and PR	Level Master's thesis
Month and Year 5/2017	Number of pages 34
<p>Abstract</p> <p>The aim of this study is to gain insight into how young, educated citizens grant legitimacy to the Finnish government's refugee policies. The study is part of an international research project conducted in Finland, Spain, and Germany. The theoretical framework of the research is based on legitimacy theory, and specifically Suchman's (1995) four legitimacy subtypes. The methods used are focus groups, Q-method and direct content analysis.</p> <p>The results indicate trust in the government's actions and the process by which the refugee crisis has been handled. In this study, the government of Finland seems to be granted legitimacy on the grounds of processes they use to achieve their goals. However, a lack of trust was noticed in European political structures and their readiness to manage challenges. A time of change is critical for the legitimation of organizations. Change and crisis challenge legitimacy, which may have to be re-negotiated with publics. Therefore, a shift to more open and interactive governmental communication is recommended.</p>	
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Communication, Communication strategies, Focus Groups, Q-method, Governments, Political communication, Governmental communication, Issues management, Legitimacy, Legitimacy judgment, Legitimacy management, Public Institutions</p>	
<p>Depository University of Jyväskylä, Department of Language and Communications Studies</p>	

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä Riikonen Maria	
Työn nimi Exploring citizens' legitimacy judgments about governmental refugee policies	
Oppiaine Yhteisöviestintä	Työn laji Maisterintutkielma
Aika 5/2017	Sivumäärä 34
Tiivistelmä Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on saada tietoa siitä, miten nuoret, korkeakoulutetut suomalaiset muodostavat legitimitteettiarvioitaan Suomen hallituksen pakolaispolitiikasta. Tutkimus on osa kansainvälistä tutkimushanketta, joka toteutettiin Suomessa, Saksassa ja Espanjassa. Työn teoreettinen viitekehys on legitimitteettiteoriassa ja erityisesti Suchmanin (1995) neljässä legitimitteetin alatyypissä. Tutkimusmetodeina käytetään fokusryhmätutkimusta, Q-metodia ja teoriaohjaavaa sisällönanalyysia. Tulokset osoittavat luottamusta hallituksen toimia kohtaan pakolaiskriisissä. Tämän tutkimuksen perusteella Suomen hallitukselle myönnetään legitimitteetti sen pohjalta, miten hallitus toimii päästäkseen tavoitteisiinsa. Toisaalta tulokset osoittavat luottamuksen puutetta Euroopan poliittisia rakenteita ja niiden kriisivalmiuksia kohtaan. Yhteiskunnalliset muutokset ovat kriittisiä organisaatioiden legitimitteetille. Ne haastavat legitimitteetin ja organisaatio saattaa joutua yleisöjen uudelleenarvioitavaksi. Tästä syystä hallituksen viestinnässä on syytä suosia avointa, vuorovaikutteista viestintää.	
Asiasanat Viestintä, Viestintästrategia, Fokusryhmä, Q-metodi, Poliittinen viestintä, Hallituksen viestintä, Issues management, Legitimitteetti, Legitimitteetin muodostuminen, Legitimitteetin hallinta, Julkishallinnon organisaatiot	
Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopisto, Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos	

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1 Introduction

Europe has faced economic and financial challenges in recent years. The situation has put increasing pressure on public institutions dealing with citizens' expectations which are not met like before (Canel 2016). Along with economic challenges, the EU battled the refugee issue in 2015 - 2016. More than a million asylum seekers entered Europe in 2015. National governments and public institutions are handling the situation according to international agreements and European regulations on refugee and asylum seeker rights. Finland works towards these goals as a part of the EU and considers it important to cooperate with the entire international community (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2016).

In addition to the refugee issue, the challenges public attitudes in general place on the EU has been noted by several scholars. In 2004, 50 per cent of Europeans reported tending to trust the EU, compared with just 31 per cent nine years later. Citizens seem to have withdrawn their support for both multi-level and national level institutions. (Mcevoy 2016, 1159.)

The situation where the national governments are facing pressure - and citizens' expectation vary - gives rise to questions about the legitimacy of public institutions, including governments. Organizations are forced to maintain legitimacy to preserve existence (Canel & Luoma-aho 2015). Legitimacy is a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995, 574). Legitimacy is based on how the organization's actions relate to existing social norms and values (Metzler 2012). Although legitimacy can be viewed as an asset owned by a certain actor—an individual, organization, or category of organizations— it still is a social evaluation made by others (Bitektine & Haack, 2015, 50), both consisting of individual judgments and as a collective process (Bitektine & Haack, 2015, 50; Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006, 57).

Organizational communication strategies are a vital part of legitimacy management. How organizations communicate, how they listen to and involve stakeholders, and how communication is used as means of reaching specific goals affect the way the organization is perceived and whether it receives sufficient support. Thus, research on legitimacy judgements can provide useful data for managing strategic communication.

This Master's Thesis is a part of a research project conducted to gain insight into how people in Spain, Germany, and Finland evaluate and confer legitimacy to their governments. The aim of this study is to gain insight into how young, educated citizens grant legitimacy to the Finnish government's refugee policies. How do citizens judge governments' legitimacy and what are their expectations? The theoretical framework is built on Suchman's (1995) model on four legitimacy types (consequential, structural, procedural, and personal). The research explores whether the model applies to young, educated citizens in Spain, Germany and Finland. This paper reports the findings of Finland. One focus group session was held in Finland to identify young people's judgments and expectations, as well as their prioritization on the above four types of legitimacy. The main constructs were identified through a directed content-analysis.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Legitimacy and making legitimacy judgments

The theoretical framework of this research is built on legitimacy theory. Legitimacy can be defined as the conferred right to exist. It is the generalized perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate (Suchman 1995, 574). When it comes to organizational legitimacy, legitimacy is based on the organization's actions and how these actions relate to existing social norms and values (Metzler 2012). The concept of legitimacy is linked to the minimum accountability standards defining a particular type of organization. An individual compares his/her judgment to a preference point to decide if the subject is legitimate or illegitimate (Finch, Deephouse & Varella 2015, 267.) In other words, to be legitimate, the organization must meet the minimum standards of its field (King & Whetten 2008, 199.) Legitimacy is constantly under observation and it has to be earned time after time. Boyd (2000) notes that legitimacy is socially constructed and controlled by the organization's publics. In order for legitimacy to be obtained, a sufficient number of stakeholders must confer it to the organization (Boyd 2000).

2.2 Legitimacy judgment as a social process

Although legitimacy can be viewed as an asset that belongs to an organization (or some other actor), it is also a social evaluation made by others. Legitimacy does not exist on its own, instead it is an ongoing negotiation between an organization and its publics. The actual process of forming legitimacy judgments has become increasingly central with the development of digital communication and social media. Organizations can no longer control their legitimacy via communication activities. Instead, interest groups, social movements, and individuals use digital technologies to inform and persuade others regarding the legitimacy of organizations and their practices. A Facebook post or a tweet on Twitter can lead to a legitimacy challenge for even the most well-established organization. (Deepphouse et.al. 2016, 15).

Forming and maintaining legitimacy is a continual process, consisting of people's individual and social assessments and judgments (Bitektine 2011, Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006, 57). Evaluators make judgments about the social properties of an organization and, through their actions, generate positive or negative outcomes (Bitektine & Haack, 2015, 50). Legitimacy is maintained, challenged and defended in the interaction between the organization and its publics (Metzler 2012). In the legitimation process organizations are linked to a broader cultural framework of beliefs about social reality; of how things are, and how things should be (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006, 56). Legitimacy takes place when most people accept the object as legitimate (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006, 57) or when the object has reached a taken-for-granted character (Hannan & Carroll 1992, 33-34).

Much research has been conducted on legitimacy from the organization's point of view; on how legitimacy could be established and maintained by the organization. In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for knowledge about the actual formation process of legitimacy among publics (Bitektine 2011) - how people in fact judge something as legitimate. New theories on legitimacy judgment have been introduced by e.g. Bitektine (2011), Bitektine & Haack (2015), Tost (2011), and Finch, Deepphouse & Varella (2015).

2.2.1 A continuum from accepted to illegitimate

The complex and multi-dimensional nature of judgment formation calls for new ideas on the concept of legitimacy. The dichotomy of a subject being either legitimate or illegitimate has recently been challenged by researchers. Instead of being on or off, legitimacy can also be viewed as a continuum. Deephouse et al. (2016, 9-10) propose a view recognizing that there are four basic outcomes of legitimacy evaluations and hence four basic states of organizational legitimacy: accepted, proper, debated, and illegitimate.

When an organization is “accepted”, its legitimacy is based on more passive evaluations that reflect taken-for-grantedness. “Proper”, on the other hand, describe a more deliberative judgement on legitimacy. This distinction reflects that “accepted” organizations are those that are not, or have not recently been, actively evaluated, whereas organization deemed “proper” have been.

When “debated”, the legitimacy of the organization’s actions or fundamental values is being actively questioned and challenged. Finally, “illegitimate” reflects the assessment that the organization is inappropriate and has lost its legitimacy, and that it should be radically reformed or cease to exist. (Deephouse et.al. 2016, 10.)

2.2.2 Propriety and validity

Individuals are seen as the microlevel foundation of legitimacy (Finch, Deephouse & Varella (2015, 265), forming social judgments of organizations. Tost (2011, 689) names the individual and social levels of legitimacy judgments propriety (referring to an individual’s own judgment of whether an organization is appropriate for its social context) and validity (referring to a general consensus that the organization is appropriate for its social context). Thus, one of the basic sources of validity cues for individuals making judgments is majority opinion (Bitektine & Haack 2015, 50-51). Bitektine (2011, 156) uses the concepts of cognitive legitimacy, in which the evaluation stops when the organization is classified as a typical representative of its field, and sociopolitical legitimacy, where the evaluation continues and the organization is scrutinized and questioned to find if it’s beneficial to society.

The concepts of propriety and validity prove useful in studying legitimacy judgments times of change or crisis. Under stable societal conditions, the legitimacy process is dominated by top-down influences which reinforce validity and inhibit the public expression of deviant or minority opinions, whereas new validity can be constructed in times of change (Bitektine & Haack 2015, 68). Individuals make their judgments either on an active, evaluative mode when the attempt to create a legitimacy judgment is deliberate, or a passive mode, when individuals either use validity cues as cognitive shortcuts or passively assume the legitimacy of entities that conform to cultural expectations (Tost 2011, 696).

2.3 Suchman's four subtypes of legitimacy

Suchman (1995, 577-584) divides legitimacy into three types: pragmatic, moral and cognitive.

- Pragmatic legitimacy rests on self-interested calculations by audiences and on exchanges between the organization and its publics. Legitimacy is conferred when the publics feel the organization serves their interests. In turn, the organization gains trust from publics.
- Moral legitimacy is based on conscious evaluations about whether an organization's actions are culturally valued and accepted. Legitimacy is granted when publics feel the organization is doing the right thing morally. Organizations can acquire and maintain moral legitimacy by showing social responsibility. (Suchman 1995, 578-579.)
- Cognitive legitimacy is conferred when an organization's actions are seen as necessary and indispensable. These actions meet expectations that are taken for granted in society (Hannan & Carroll 1992, 33-34).

This study looks more closely at moral legitimacy and its four subtypes: Consequential, procedural, structural, and personal legitimacy (Suchman 1995, 580-582).

1. Consequential legitimacy refers to consequences: It is granted when the outcome of an action is viewed as favorable.
2. Procedural legitimacy refers to processes: An organization's procedures and techniques are viewed as morally favorable and

socially accepted. Procedural legitimacy becomes significant especially in actions with no clear, visible outcomes. The organization can still demonstrate a good-faith effort and proper means with a positive moral value in its procedures.

3. Structural legitimacy refers to organizational structures. Audiences see the organization as valuable and worthy of support when they find its structural characteristics as morally appropriate. Procedural and structural legitimacy somewhat merge, but as the former focuses on processes viewed in isolation, the latter is concerned with entire system of recurrent activities: whether “this is a right organization for the job”.
4. Personal legitimacy refers to a well-known person representing the organization. It rests of the charisma of individual organizational leaders and tends to be transitional.

Suchman (1995, 579) draws these types of moral legitimacy on Weber’s (1978) idea on legitimate authority. (Table 1)

Table 1.

Suchman	Weber
Consequential legitimacy	Legal-rational authority, instrumentally rational: based on the pursuit of goals
Procedural legitimacy	Legal-rational authority, value-rational: based on the fulfillment of rules of proper behavior
Structural legitimacy	Traditional authority, based on the idea that certain types of actors are worthy of exercising certain types of power
Personal	Charismatic authority

A specific question for the communication of legitimate governments is how the perceived features of an organization are processed by the person who judges (Canel & Luoma-aho 2015, 7). The question of which aspects or dimensions of the organization’s activities, structure, or outcomes the

audiences use in legitimacy judgment is critical for determining the overall legitimacy of the organization (Bitektine 2011, 156).

2.4 Political communication and the legitimacy process

Politics and political communication are a significant part of society and face the need to adapt to changes that are taking place. The criteria of good communication practices in general have been challenged. The demand for interactive, involving, and proactive communication styles concerns western governments like any organization. As Koc-Michalska & Lilleker (2017,1) point out, the conditions for and circumstances of political participation are adapting.

2.4.1 Deliberative democracy

Democracy is said to rest on the power of people. These people come together to solve collective problems or, more typically, select representatives who develop solutions for their societies (Koc-Michalska & L 2017, 4).

More specifically, deliberative democracy is a school of thought in political theory that claims that political decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion and debate among citizens. Through deliberation citizens can come to an agreement about a procedure, action, or policy for the public good. Deliberation is a necessary precondition for the legitimacy of democratic political decisions. (Eagan 2017).

The idea in of coming to an agreement through deliberation may be considered more optimistic than realistic on a societal level. However, the ideas of deliberative democracy can support the thought that public opinion is significant in the legitimation of governmental decisions. According to Habermas (2006,418) considered public opinions set the frame for the range of what the citizens would accept as legitimate decisions. Bohman (2007, 348) points out that the theory of deliberative democracy demands much of citizens and institutions, but “should these demands be met to some approximate extent decisions made under these conditions will be more likely not only to be fairer but also to be better informed and well-reasoned”.

In today's digital era and with people's participation in social media, more deliberative and engaging forms of politics may be emerging in online and offline public spaces and this may encourage people to become active (Koc-Michalska & L 2017, 4).

2.4.2 Governments and legitimacy in the digital era

The current times in European communities do not spare national governments from being judged by publics. Previous studies in Spain have shown that when assessing governments, people are increasingly less influenced by ideology or party identification, but base their judgments more on the political and economic situation (Canel & Echart, 2011). On EU level, citizens who feel they are part of the EU system and can have an influence on its policy-making are more likely to support it (Mcevoy (2016, 1163). The more feelings of trust and perception of fairness of governmental processes citizens have, the more likely the EU is to receive support (Mcevoy 2016, 1171).

As the legitimacy of governments is no longer self-evident, governments, as well as other public organizations, are impelled to legitimize their activities to preserve existence (Canel & Luoma-aho 2015). People's expectations matter; public image is a combination of they tell people they do, and what they really do (Canel & Echart 2011, 121). As Habermas (2008, 418) points out, political power requires legitimation and this legitimation process must pass through a public sphere that has the capacity to foster considered public opinions.

As the criteria of good communication have developed along with digitalization and the social media, it is worth noting that legitimacy judgments are also formed online to a growing extent. Digital technologies offer pathways to participation which takes place in the "electronic republic" or "digital agora" (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker 2017, 1). In these arenas expressions of opinion or attitude, including political ones are circulated.

Koc-Michalska and Lilleker (2017, 4) point out that further research is needed about the conditions in which citizens are politically activated through their use of social media. Also, research is needed about the levels of engagement and participation: for example, how much of online engagement is

superficial or meaningless, and to what extent it can lead to a wider democratic engagement.

2.4.3 Governmental communication in Finland

The Finnish governmental communications are rooted in the today's practices and western societal values: democracy and equality, the freedom of speech and the right to be involved and influence society. One of the basic citizen rights in Finland is the right to gain information about public decision making. (Valtionhallinnon viestintäsuositus 2010, 11.)

In addition to these core societal values, the guidelines of Finland's governmental communications are based on recent research generally accepted views of good communication. The government has published recommendations for communication in 2010 and in 2016. Since this research took place before the newest recommendations were published, the government's actions during the refugee crisis were weighed up mainly based on the 2010 recommendation. Some comparison was made to the new version.

Interaction, co-operation and coordination are some of the core values of governmental communication in Finland. In the world of two-way communication, it is vital for the government to work closely with its stakeholders, the media, and experts on different fields. New forms of media create new possibilities for involvement and interaction between Finnish citizens and the government. The government and its employees are encouraged to carry on open and active communication with the Finnish people. This includes taking into account the feedback received from stakeholders in decision making. (Valtionhallinnon viestintäsuositus 2010, 7, 17.)

To meet societal values and legal prerequisites, governmental communications should be active and based on the needs, rights, and interests of the citizens. Communications serve as a tool to create a culture in which the citizens, as well as other actors like organizations, are involved in decision-making. Good governmental communication is interactive, open, independent, reliable, equal, and prompt. (Valtionhallinnon viestintäsuositus 2010, 13-14.)

The 2016 version of the recommendations for governmental communications brings more focus on digitalization, social media, and their effects communication. As producing and sharing content has become a natural part of people's behavior online, the emphasis of governmental communication must follow the trend: digital communication requires even more attention on timing, interaction and usability. (Valtionhallinnon viestintäsuositus 2016, 12.)

2.5 Issues management

The situation European governments faced dealing with refugees could be described as an "issue". An issue is a condition or an event which, if it continues, will have a significant effect of the functioning or performance of the organization or on its future interests (Jaques 2007, 147). It is perceived to have the potential to affect an organization's performance (Dutton & Ottensmeyer 1987, 355). An issue can be either internal (coming from inside the organization) or external (coming from the environment). Luoma-aho and Vos (2010) suggested the term "issue arena" to describe the real or virtual places of interaction in which ideas and issues are discussed between an organization and its stakeholders. Issue arenas are dynamic and the participants more or less active, depending on the case. (Luoma-aho & Vos 2010, 319).

Issues have the potential to affect not only an organization's functions, but also its legitimacy. Sethi (1979, 65) used the term "legitimacy gap" which refers to the space between public perceptions of what an organization is doing and what is expected of that organization. A legitimacy gap indicates that issues that threaten the organization's well-being have arisen, and the gap links closely with discrepancies between an organization's identity and its image (Roper & Toledano 2005, 480).

Aspects of legitimacy and legitimacy judgments are worth exploring when considering issues and how they could be managed. Due to their potential to affect organizations and create legitimacy gaps, issues need ongoing attention and should not be neglected, but managed. Issues management typically involves the proactive identification, and subsequent defusing, of problems before they escalate into crises (Roper & Toledano 2005, 480). With proactive identification of issues, the character of possible legitimacy challenge should be recognized.

As Ansoff (1980, 140) suggests, issues can be assessed based on two perspectives: urgency and impact. The more impact the issue potentially has on the organization and the more urgent the matter, the more essential it is to react and respond without delay. On the other hand, in case of issues with less impact and urgency, little harm is done by doing nothing.

To assess the urgency or the impact, it is useful to recognize the character of judgments being made by publics on issue arenas. The legitimacy continuum (Deephouse et.al. 2016, 10) can be utilized as a clue about the state of organizational legitimacy - if the legitimacy is being questioned and to what extent:

1. Accepted: The legitimacy judgment is based on more passive evaluations and taken-for-grantedness. The amount or intensity of debate on issue arenas is likely to be low and not pose an immediate threat to legitimacy.
2. Proper: The more active evaluations are being made on issue arenas, the more deliberative the legitimacy judgments are. Thus, it is more possible for the issue to have more impact or urgency on the organization. The legitimacy is no longer taken for granted and needs attention.
3. Debated: The legitimacy of the organization's actions or fundamental values is being actively questioned and challenged. This situation can be viewed as a threat to legitimacy which calls for active issue management.
4. Illegitimate: As the worst-case scenario of organizational legitimacy, being judged as illegitimate calls of immediate action to manage the damage done by the issue.

3 Research questions and methods

3.1 Research questions

The research questions were:

1. How do young, educated citizens in Finland judge the government's legitimacy?
2. What are young, educated citizens' expectations toward the government?

The aim of this research was to gain insight into how young, educated citizens in Finland evaluate and confer legitimacy on the Finnish government's current immigration policies and what their expectations are. The interest was in the legitimation process – how people make judgments, what insight can be gained from observing and interpreting this process, and how this insight could be utilized in considering the elements of future governmental communications.

3.2 Data collection method: Focus groups

The research was conducted using the focus group method. Focus groups is a qualitative method and a specific type of group interview. Developed originally for media audience research (Kitzinger 1995), the method has been used on several different fields during the past centuries, including communication, sociology, health studies and marketing (Morgan 1996, 132). Focus groups are used to collect data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan 1996, 130). It engages a small number of people in an informal group discussion, focused around a particular topic or set of issues (Wilkinson 2004, 345). Depending on the research topic and goals, the typical group size is 6-8 members, and the number of groups usually varies from 4 to 6. The discussion on a group session is conducted by a moderator whose level of involvement varies (Morgan 1996, 144-145). The moderator introduces and directs the discussion of topics and encourages participation in the conversation. It is essential that the moderator introduce

topics and guide the discussion in an unbiased manner (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981, 444). Participants are chosen from some specific target group whose opinions and ideas are particularly germane to the investigation (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981, 444).

3.2.1 Interaction as the source of information

One of the key elements of focus groups is the use of group interaction as the source of information. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and is used to examine not only what people think, but how and why they think (Kitzinger 1995). The goal is to create a fairly unstructured, informal, and permissive atmosphere in which a dynamic group interaction develops. In open conversation each participant may comment, ask questions, or respond to comments by others, including the moderator (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981, 444). This is significant compared to other types of group interviews, like nominal groups or Delphi groups, which do not allow interactive discussion (Morgan 1996, 130).

A unique strength of focus groups is the ability to observe the extent and nature of agreements and disagreements within the group (Morgan 1996, 139). Interpersonal communication can also highlight (sub)cultural values or group norms (Kitzinger 1995). As a result of intragroup stimulation, a group discussion with ten participants yields much more and richer information than ten individual interviews (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981, 445).

Focus groups are a good choice of method when the purpose of the research is to elicit people's understandings, opinions or views; or when it seeks to explore how these are advanced, elaborated and negotiated in a social context (Wilkinson 2004, 347). As legitimation is a social process with the microlevel foundation of individuals, focus group research can elicit data about both individual opinions and the process of working as a group.

3.3 The focus group session in Finland

In Finland, one focus group session was conducted as part of the international research project. Six students of Organizational Communication and PR discussed the topic of the Finnish government's immigration policies.

Students of Organizational Communication and PR, Speech Communication, and Journalism were invited to join the focus group research by email. The aim was to have three focus groups and compare their results, which was the initial plan for all the countries involved in the research (Spain, Germany, and Finland). However, very little interest was shown by students to participate and it was decided to run only one group session.

The conversation was structuralized and led by a moderator (researcher), including open questions and a group assignment. The conversation's structure, questions, and assignment were identical to those used in Spain and Germany, only translated into Finnish. The questions and statements about the topic, the open questions, the assignments and methods, as well as the session's structure were designed by the international research team. The whole session was built on Suchman's (1995) four types of legitimacy, which were also later used as the foundation of analysis.

3.3.1 The Q-method

The Q-method was used to collect data during the first and the third phase of the group session. In a Q-methodological study people are presented with a sample of statements about a topic and asked to rank-order the statements from their individual point of view, according to some preference, judgement or feeling about them. (van Exel & de Graaf 2005, 4.) It is a suitable methodology for exploring and explaining patterns in subjectivities, generating new ideas and hypotheses, and identifying consensus and contrasts in views, opinions and preferences. Q methodology combines qualitative and quantitative aspects. (van Exel & de Graaf 2005, 17.)

3.3.2 The group session

The focus group session of about one hour was organized in a meeting room at the University of Jyväskylä. The participants signed a consent form stating the following:

- Taking part in the research is completely voluntary
- Participants are allowed not to answer any of the questions during the group session
- Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any phase

- The session is recorded with 2 smartphones. The recordings are kept strictly confidential and used only within the research team
- In the final reporting, parts of the conversation may be used, but no information by which an individual could be recognized will not be included

The session was divided into three phases and was recorded with two smartphones for transcription. The recording was stopped during phase 3 while both the groups were sorting cards, and restarted when they introduced the choices they had made about ranking statements as a group.

1. First, each participant was asked to sort 12 cards with statements in order from the most important to the least important according to their personal opinion, and then asked to put aside the three least important ones. This phase took about 5 minutes. (Table 2.)

2. Then, a discussion with open questions was carried out. The discussion was led by the moderator and it proceeded question by question. This phase took less than half an hour. (Table 3.)

3. The participants were divided into 2 groups of 3 for a group assignment. Each participant was asked to bring the 9 cards they had selected in phase 1 to the group. The aim was to come up with legitimacy judgments as a group. Both groups carried out an informal discussion to collectively pick out the nine cards they thought represented the most important topics. The decision was made between the 3 people on each group. They sorted cards in the form of a 5-level diamond: The most important statement on the top or level 5 (1 statement), important statements on level 4 (2 statements), quite important statements on level 3 (3 statements), less important statements on level 2 (2 statements) and the least important statement on the bottom or level 1 (1 statement). (Image 1) After the sorting both groups introduced their diamonds and the choices they had made about ranking the statements as a group. This phase took less than half an hour.

The session proceeded quite easily, and the topic didn't seem to be particularly difficult for the respondents. At an earlier stage of the research, when inviting students to participate, it was noted that the invited students had very little interest in taking part. The research team came to the conclusion that the topic may have seemed demanding or difficult, as it concerned politics. However, the people who did participate, some of them

invited face to face, handled the topic with no problem. No single phase of the session was more difficult than the others. During the open questions, the first 1 or 2 questions raised less active discussion than the following 2. All in all, there were no silent moments, everyone expressed opinions and was thus involved in the process.

Table 2.

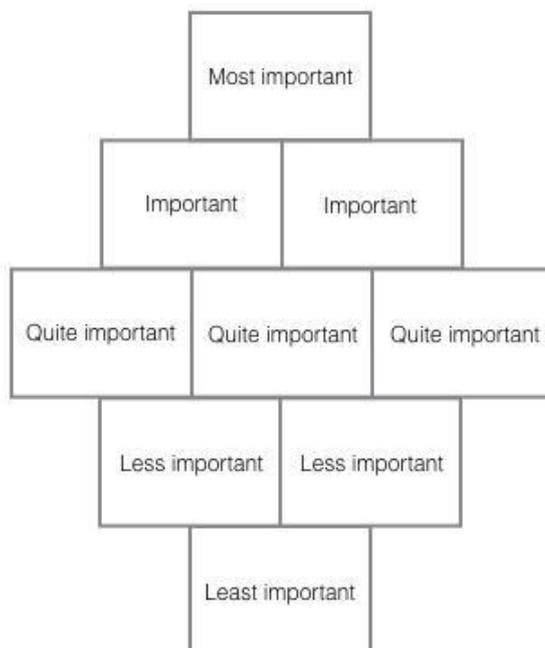
Legitimacy type referred to (Suchman 1995)	Statement on card
Consequential legitimacy	<p>CONBALANCE Governments should find a way to maintain balance in society despite the refugee crisis</p> <p>CONSOLVED As long as the crisis is solved somehow, the government is allowed to say whatever necessary</p> <p>CONRESULT Achievements and results are more crucial than the process followed by the government)</p>
Procedural legitimacy	<p>PROOPINION The government should listen to citizens and civil society before committing with other governments about the issue</p> <p>PROTRANS Transparency with citizens about Government negotiations is more important than the final outcome</p> <p>PROCONSEN The government should try to reach consensus in parliament before</p>

	making decisions
Structural legitimacy	<p>STRMINIST The ministries and public organizations involved in the refugee issue should be are qualified to solve address this challenge</p> <p>STRGOVERN The government should have the necessary resources and policies to address this challenge</p> <p>STRSYSTEM The political system in Europe has been established to solve such problems</p>
Personal legitimacy	<p>PERMINISTER The top individual politicians are competent to address the issue</p> <p>PERDEDICA The top individual politicians working with the refugee problem do so with their whole hearts and dedication (empathy, Bentele dimensions of trust)</p> <p>PERETHIC The top individual politicians should operate according to ethical principles to solve the issue</p>

Table 3.

Open questions
What do you think about the government policies about refugees? Are you happy with it, or not? Why/why not? Are there aspects which you particularly like, or dislike?
How do you see the handling of the government? What has been done wrong? What has been done right?
Who comes to your mind when thinking about the way Finnish/Spanish/German government is handling the refugee crisis? Which characteristics you like in that person? What do you approve? What you don't like? What do you would like to be improved by that person?
If you were the government what would you propose?

Image 1.



3.4 Data analysis method: Directed content analysis

The recording made of the session was transcribed. The transcription was and the analyses were carried out anonymously. The focus group session was analyzed using directed content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2013, 113). As Suchman's (1995) theory had already been the foundation of the group session, it was also used as the basis of the analysis. Recurring themes were identified and reflected on Suchman's four legitimacy types: consequential, procedural, structural, and personal.

As the focus group session had been divided into 3 phases, each phase was analyzed separately.

1. Individual card sorting: The discarded 3 cards the participants evaluated as least important were calculated to see which statements had been excluded, how many times, and which type of legitimacy they fell into (Table 4). The emphasis of the sorting was in the latter group assignment and the aim was to come up with legitimacy judgments as a group. Therefore, no analysis was performed of this phase of the session on the 9 cards individually sorted from most to least important.
2. Discussion on open questions: The discussion was transcribed. Expressions referring to Suchman's four legitimacy types were recognized and categorized. Colors were used to code the legitimacy types. Also, each statement was given a valence - positive, neutral, or negative (Table 5). The total number of statements in each legitimacy category, as well as the valence of statements was calculated. In addition, themes in statements made in each legitimacy category were identified.
3. Group assignment: The diamonds were photographed. The number statements belonging to each legitimacy type were counted. Colors were again used to separate the legitimacy types. Each statement was given points on the basis of the level it had been ranked on: Level 5 equaled 5 points, level 4 equaled 4 points and so on. The importance on each legitimacy type was evaluated by multiplying the number of statements belonging to a legitimacy type by the points. (Table 6)

Table 4.

Number of times excluded	Type of legitimacy	Statement
5	Consequential	As long as the crisis is solved somehow, the government is allowed to say whatever necessary
5	Structural	The political system in Europe has been established to solve such problems
2	Consequential	Achievements and results are more crucial than the process followed by the government
2	Personal	The top individual politicians working with the refugee problem do so with their whole hearts and dedication
1	Personal	The top individual politicians are competent to address the issue

Table 5.

Valence of statements made by category	
Consequential legitimacy	Positive: 0 Neutral: 2 Negative: 0
Procedural legitimacy	Positive: 4 Neutral: 0 Negative: 3
Structural legitimacy	Positive: 0 Neutral: 1 Negative: 12
Personal legitimacy	Positive: 1 Neutral: 2 Negative: 1

4 Results

4.1. Individual card sorting

The statements participants put aside individually represented consequential, structural and personal legitimacy. Procedural legitimacy was not excluded by any participants. The statements most often excluded were “As long as the crisis is solved somehow, the government is allowed to say whatever necessary” and “The political system in Europe has been established to solve such problems”.

The task was to rate the statements according to personal opinion and discard the 3 least important ones. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the discarded statements represent themes that the participants appreciate or trust least. Based on this interpretation, least appreciation was shown on the idea of the government saying whatever necessary and least trust in European political structures. Consequential legitimacy was ranked high in the latter group assignment, but on individual card sorting participants seemed to agree on certain moral principles on governmental communication: the government is not allowed to say whatever necessary. This could be viewed as reflecting the values of a democratic society: democracy and equality, the freedom of speech and the right to be involved and influence society. A government acting against these commonly shared values would not be appreciated.

4.2. The group discussion

Throughout the whole group session, and specifically during the open discussion, Europe’s political structures raised the most concern and expressions of opinion. The theme found could be capsulized as “The governments in Europe were not sufficiently prepared for the crisis: more international co-operation and coordination is needed”. In more detail, participants shared their opinions about

- The need for more effective procedures in handling the refugee crisis in EU

- The need for more precise agreements internationally
- The need to come up with new solutions
- The need to pre-evaluate refugees' situations before they enter Europe

Other themes or typical expressions of opinion could be capsulized as “The government is doing its best in a difficult situation and showing professionalism” and “No one really knows the outcome of the actions yet”. Even though the political structures in general were criticized on the EU level, participants expressed understanding and trust toward the Finnish government processes. The expressions included the following points of view:

- The government has acted promptly but remained calm in a difficult situation
- The government has raised a positive attitude towards refugees arriving

On the other side, it was questioned within the group whether the government had listened to people and their fears about refugees. A need for a more open interaction with citizens was brought up.

As for valence, most opinions with a positive valence were expressed about governmental processes. The most negative valence was expressed about governmental structures. (Table 5.)

4.3. The group assignment

The diamonds formed during the group assignment showed most appreciation towards consequences and processes and the least toward individual politicians or persons. Consequences were selected as most important by both groups, but the overall, importance of processes received the most emphasis on selections. (Table 6.)

Table 6.

Diamonds
5 = top level of diamond 4, 3, 2 = middle levels of diamond

1 = bottom level of diamond	
Group 1	Group 2
5 Consequence	5 Consequence
4 Process, Structure	4 Structure, Structure
3 Person, Process, Consequence	3 Process, Consequence, Process
2 Structure, Process	2 Person, Process
1 Person	1 Person
<p>The order of overall importance of legitimacy types selected by the groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Procedural legitimacy 2. Consequential legitimacy 3. Structural legitimacy 4. Personal legitimacy 	

4.4 Results: both trust and criticism

The main findings indicate both trust and criticism towards the Finnish government's actions. Young, educated citizens who participated in this research valued the process on which the government handled the refugee crisis and the outcome of these actions. They showed less trust in governmental structures and how these structures support the ability to face crises on an international level, as well as individual politicians' role in the process. They shared an expectation for the Finnish government and the European political system to function effectively during times of change or crisis.

This particular study provides information on young, educated citizens' judgments about the Finnish government's legitimacy. The results indicate a remaining trust on governmental actions despite the fact that trust in public organizations in general is lower than before. The opinions shared during this study expressed a willingness to grant legitimacy to the Finnish

government on the grounds of processes they use to achieve their goals. The refugee crisis is challenging, but the participants showed understanding: the government has done its best. The goals of governmental actions were also appreciated: a good outcome is worthy, yet not at any cost: The of the most abandoned statements on cards was “as long as the goal is achieved, the government is allowed to say whatever necessary”.

5 Discussion and conclusions

People’s expectations and assessments play a crucial role in the formation of an organization’s legitimacy (Bitektine 2011, Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006, 57). This applies also to governments and other public organizations who can no longer trust to be legitimate in the eyes of public no matter what. In general, research has provided important data on how to reach out to diverse publics in times of both stability and change.

5.1 Legitimacy in times of change

A time of change is critical for the legitimation of organizations. The value of being perceived as legitimate might be becoming a crucial factor for the survival of public organizations in a context of crisis of trust (Canel & Luoma-aho 2015, 6). As old rules no longer apply, organizations must conform to new demands. Under stable times in society, maintaining legitimacy is to some extent in the organization’s hands, since the top-down influences reinforce validity (Bitektine & Haack 2015, 68) and, to be legitimate, it may be enough to comply with national laws as citizens’ expectations are fairly homogenous and stable (Palazzo & Scherer 2006, 71). Change and crisis challenge legitimacy, which may have to be re-negotiated with publics.

The Finnish government is obligated to follow international laws and agreements. Finland acts as a part of the EU and considers that it is important to cooperate with the entire international community (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2016). In this study educated citizens showed

their understanding and respect towards this. Yet, the most criticized part of the legitimacy puzzle was governmental structures - specifically on the international level. Governments both in Finland and in EU were expected to be more prepared to handle refugee crises.

5.2 Communication and interaction with citizens

When considering governmental communications as means of maintaining legitimacy, it may be beneficial to communicate more openly about international co-operation in the future. As discursiveness is essential for success in today's communications and trust in public officials is no longer self-evident, listening to and involving citizens in decision making is recommended.

It is crucial for the government to hear and try to meet citizens' expectations to avoid a gap between what they say and what the people really expect. Support and dialogue need to be prioritized to involve individuals in the processes of public organizations (Canel & Luoma-aho 2015, 4). Governments should not only act and inform, but engage in active problem solving. They must tailor communication to contextualize citizens in different competences and governmental layers (Canel & Echart 2011, 120). This might be useful in building trust between the government and groups of citizens. As was brought up during the focus group session, there are divergent opinions and possibly fears among Finnish citizens about refugees and immigration. It is possible that some citizens' fears were left unheard during the refugee crisis.

5.3 Limitations

The most significant limitation of this research is the limited amount of research material and data. Only one group session was carried out due to the difficulty to find participants who were students of organizational communication and PR. Another limitation has to do with the sentence structure on statements used on sorting assignments. Some statements were structured as "should be" instead of "is". For example, there is a difference of meaning between the statements

“The government should listen to citizens and civil society”
 and
 “The government listens to citizens and civil society”

The sentence structure was brought up by some participants after the group session. They had wondered why some statements had the “should” word and some did not. It is possible that this limitation affected some of the rankings made.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Considering the recent public discussion on immigration it is worth noting that this study only involved a sample of master students of communication. It was also noted during the focus group discussion that the participants seemed to represent the more tolerant or government-supporting part of society. Underneath still lies a variety of opinions and judgements about the government’s refugee policy. Future research could provide valuable data on how the government’s legitimacy is assessed by e.g. citizens who oppose immigration. Also, the effects of a more involving communication style about governmental actions on European level in a long run could prove worth exploring.

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