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9 Public Management: The Rise, Progress and Future of a Dynamic Research Field

The birth and rise of public management research: from infancy to maturity

Public management as a research field has evolved dramatically since the 1970s. Although the term "public management" was mentioned in the literature between the 1940s and 1970s (e.g., Morstein, 1940; Parsons, 1957; Burgess, 1975; Bower, 1977), it was not until the early 1980s that it gained substantial attention in research and scholarly publications. A quick search in the Social Sciences Citation Index reveals more than 66,000 studies using this term over the years (increasing from 36 in 1984 to more than 8000 in 2019–2020), and around 4800 dealing with it as a main concept in the title (increasing from 36 in 1984 to 440 in 2019–2020).

The infancy and roots of scientific public management can be traced back to the distinction between two proximate terms or fields of research: administration and management. As I have mentioned elsewhere (Vigoda, 2002; Vigoda-Gadot, 2004), since the late 1880s political scientists seemed to have had a monopoly on the term "administration", relating it to state policies, government actions and the bureaucratic system. "Management", on the other hand, belonged to a different realm, dominated by business, organizational psychology and economic jargon, ideas, and theories. Scholars such as Goodnow and Wilson regarded administration as the institutional power of the state, the executive branch of government, and a unique ruling mechanism with a strong constitutional, political, and public interest orientation. Management, on the other hand, referred to a more industrialized, business-like, economic oriented arena where concepts of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy took the lead. Consequently, conservative administrative science focused on analysing institutional and policy-oriented dynamics, rather than the individual behavioural insights related to the dynamics in large bureaucracies and governmental agencies. Management, as a seemingly distinct arena, remained the separate practice of running organizations, empowering people and groups in various social spheres. It remained the art of handling manifold organizational resources to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in the process of producing goods or services.

However, terms, concepts, and paradigms shift over the years, and at times even become closer to each other. The conceptual progress has both analytical and practical meaning and the interchange between paradigmatic evolution and governance in action is tight. When Western governments in Europe, the United States and other parts of the world faced a financial crisis during the 1970s (largely because of post-World War II reforms aimed at expanding the welfare state in Europe and elsewhere), some remedies for the urgent problems of governments and administration were suggested in the "old" school of management studies. The analytical distinction between administration and management blurred and the new creation of "public management" (re)emerged. Rainey (1990) explained this process lucidly. He suggested that the 1960s and the 1970s were characterized by the introduction of unsuccessful public policies in Europe and America. At least some of these unsuccessful experiences were due to the lack of reliable analyses of the needs and demands of the public. Other failures were caused by incorrect assessments regarding the power of bureaucracies. Over the later years, efforts by governments to create extensive changes in education, welfare systems, health programmes, internal security, and the control of crime were widely criticized for being ineffective and unproductive and for misusing public funds. Responsiveness to the real needs and demands of citizens was poor. Thus, alongside the rise of democratic trends and movements, management became more important than ever for public administration.

Studies in public management advanced analytically in many directions, yet all progressing towards one aim – the useful integration of managerial knowledge (i.e., in organizational behaviour, leadership, performance, human resource, etc.) into government decisions and practice. Analytical models differentiated the management of public agencies from business firms by stating the final goal of the former in citizenry and democratic terminologies. On the practical end, the crisis in the practical implementation of public policy, together with the

increased cynicism and lack of trust of citizens in government and public administration systems, generated rich scholarly activity aimed at creating useful alternatives for improving policy in various social fields. Voters expressed their dissatisfaction with elected officials, and hand-in-hand with the academic community who provided analytical tools for theoretical models and explanations of "black-holes" in knowledge, demanded extensive reforms in government. This was the call for managerial rethinking and reforms that intensified dramatically during the emergence of the technological and digital revolution from the late 1980s and through the 2000s. It produced a large number of working papers, articles, and books that proposed extensive analytical and explanatory models, as well as practical administrative changes focusing on individuals and the management of public agencies. Although the seeds of the conceptual and analytical public management revolution were planted more than a decade earlier in the minds of theoreticians and practitioners, one of the most inspiring works, Osborne and Geabler's *Reinventing Government* (1992), is frequently mentioned as the unofficial starting point of such managerial reforms, later known as (New) Public Management (Vigoda, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot, 2004).

During the days when public management matured, Lynn (1996: 38–39) highlighted six differences between the "old" conservative public administration and the newer concepts of public management, which later became a standalone field of study and practice: (1) the inclusion of general management functions such as planning, organizing, control, and evaluation in lieu of simple discussions about social values and the conflicts of bureaucracy and democracy; (2) an instrumental orientation favouring the use of the criteria of economy and efficiency in lieu of equity, responsiveness, or political salience; (3) a pragmatic focus on mid-level managers in lieu of the perspective of political or policy elites; (4) a tendency to consider management as generic, aimed at minimizing the differences between the public and private sectors in lieu of accentuating them; (5) a singular focus on the organization where external relations are treated in the same rational manner as internal operations in lieu of a focus on laws, institutions, and political bureaucratic processes; and (6) a strong philosophical link with the scientific management tradition in lieu of close ties to political science or sociology. A look into these differences from the stage of the third decade of the twenty-first century allows some balance between the old and the new types of public administration. Whereas the old and the new indeed differ, they may be better seen as more complementary rather than different from each other. The progress and evolution from the "old" to the "new" type of the discipline created a richer understanding of how public management as a research field grows gradually alongside social, technological, and cultural change in governments worldwide. In fact, one may argue that public administration of the old style was an essential pillar for building the upper floors of analytical paradigmatic building, those represented by modern public management. These upper disciplinary levels must lean on elementary knowledge in public policy, public law, and public organizational theory.

Moving from old to new resulted in other dynamics as well. For example, the development of public management also benefited from the new democratic ethos. Managing nations became more than simply managing public organizations. The need to balance effective bureaucracies with open democracies made public management a powerful instrument in the hands of policy makers. The dance between contradictory values such as goal-oriented management and democracy, efficiency and justice, order and flexibility, responsiveness and fairness, and innovation and accountability caused significant theoretical confusion. An inevitable outcome was the extension of the government's interactions with a handful of old and new stakeholders, beyond merely governmental ones. These stakeholders included citizens as customers or partners, civic society, policy entrepreneurs, private sector players, investors, investment and financing figures, donors and, in the digital era, virtual players, bots, and artificial intelligence as well (Etscheid, 2019).

A handful of good illustrations for such transitions can be given. Democratic ideas gradually spread to the post-Soviet Union, Eastern European, Asian, African and Arab worlds, South America, and other parts of the world during the 1980s and 1990s. A growing number of political scientists at that time regarded public administration as a stagnant, declining discipline that could benefit from and be revitalized by new and talented managerial leadership.

These new conductors were expected to reorganize the helpless governmental orchestra, develop new and realistic goals, and lead public service to new heights by improving coordination and harmony. To do so, research in public administration, governance, and political science increasingly made use of concepts such as managerial leadership, liberalism and free markets, participation in decision-making, public service motivation, innovation and entrepreneurship, co-production, and new governance. Evidence for this attitudinal shift appears in the transformation of many schools of public administration into schools of public management during the 1980s and 1990s (Rainey, 2003). Looking for alternative ideas, management theory was proposed as a source of paradigmatic renewal, providing a fresh perspective in public spheres. One suggestion for overcoming some of the inefficiency plaguing government was the use of public management instead of public administration.

Hays and Kearney (1997) found that most of the studies on New Public Management (NPM) mentioned five core principles of this approach. Therefore, they concluded that these five principles represent the most important aspects of the philosophy of the discipline: (1) downsizing – reducing the size and scope of government; (2) managerialism – using business protocols in government; (3) decentralization – moving decision-making closer to the service recipients; (4) debureaucratization – restructuring government to emphasize results rather than processes; and (5) privatization – directing the allocation of governmental goods and services to outside firms (Weikart, 2001). All of these principles are mutually related and rely heavily on the theory of the private sector, business philosophy, financial management, marketing, political economy, and organizational behaviour. Whereas NPM aimed at minimizing the size and scope of governmental activities, public management canons simply preached about the need for better management of the modern state.

Furthermore, the rise of public management (and NPM) is frequently related to the increasing impact of positivist behavioural science on the practical study of politics and government (e.g., Lynn, 1996; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017). Practical public managers, as well as political scientists, refer to the difficulties in policymaking and policy implementation that faced many Western societies in Europe, America, and elsewhere during the 1970s. These practical difficulties are viewed today as an important trigger for the development of public management and of NPM. Reviewing two books on NPM (Aucoin, 1995; Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996), Khademian (1998: 269) argued that American and Westminster advocates of the field find common ground in explaining why such reforms were necessary. The problem of an inflexible bureaucracy that often could not respond efficiently and promptly to public needs contradicted basic democratic principles and values in these countries. Similarly, Aucoin (1995) identified a "trinity" of broadly based challenges with which Western democracies have coped and with which they will probably continue to struggle in the future, partly through management reform: (1) growing demands for restraint in public sector spending; (2) increasing cynicism regarding government bureaucracies' responsiveness to citizen concerns and political authority and dissatisfaction with programme effectiveness; and (3) a growing international, market driven economy that does not defer to domestic policy efforts. The challenges have led many governments in America, Britain, New Zealand, Canada and later also in Asia and post-Soviet East European countries to the recognition that major managerial reforms and changes in public service should be adopted. And they were indeed adopted, sometimes in their entirety and with enthusiasm.

This process expanded during the early decades of the twenty-first century, even if with ups and downs. We witnessed a long intellectual and practical tango reflecting the extensive search for a balance between reliable administrative and flexible management; a balance between regulatory administration and responsive management; a balance between the focus on individuals as citizens or as clients/customers, between the interests of the people and those of communities and states, as well as between bureaucratic efficiency and democratic fairness. On this road, models of "good governance" (e.g., Kaufmann and Lafarre, 2020), "new public governance" and the co-production of services (e.g., Sorrentino, Sicilia, and Howlett, 2018) were suggested, trying to walk the fine line between economic rationality and democratic correctness. And then, during early 2020, almost out of nowhere, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged.

The future of public management research: complexity and uncertainty in digital governance of post-COVID-19

Since early 2020, much of the world's economy, transportation, commerce, and development progress has been frozen, or minimized to a level we could not have imagined just a while ago. The hazards of the health threat imposed on us by COVID-19 cannot be fully understood at the current point in time. Whereas public management is probably here to stay, post-COVID-19 governance will not be similar to what we knew before the pandemic entered our lives. Like many other scientific fields, governance and public administration are reconsidering their approach and attempting to deal with the global shock waves. The future of public management in post-traumatic public administration is yet unclear. Policies and the management of public services in a world of global trauma, crisis, and emergency will have to recalculate their strategies, human training, integration of knowledge, and new methods for dealing with catastrophes. To meet these goals Ansell, Sorensen, and Torfing (2020) suggested six major approaches: *Scalability* – the flexible mobilization of resources across organizations; *Prototyping* – creating new, adaptive solutions to problems; *Modernization* – creating solutions with flexible modules to deal with different aspects of a problem; *Bounded autonomy* – better involvement of regional and local actors in the implementation of government policies; *Bricolage* – flexible integration of ideas, tools, and resources to fashion workable solutions in the face of turbulence; and *Strategic polyvalence* – deliberately designing solutions that can be taken in new directions and serve new purposes depending on situational analyses of demands, barriers, and opportunities.

Moreover, it is already obvious today that major drawbacks in public management theories and knowledge have affected and intensified the global coronavirus pandemic crisis (e.g., Young, Wiley, and Searing, 2020). Examples include the miscalculation of the potential risks and lack of strategic plans for dealing with epic crises, the underestimation of the threats to democracy and governance in turbulent times and during a digital revolution of new and fake news, the incorrect preparations of policymakers and lack of international coordination and collaboration, and the overall cognitive bias in managerial decisions before and during the battle for public health. Consequently, almost all democracies face an unprecedented decline in public trust that endangers the basic pillars of democracy. Given this situation, future public management will have to deal with the intellectual and practical challenges of building new mindsets and upgrading the skills of policymakers to avoid future disasters created by people or nature. One of the greatest missions of future public management will therefore be improving the organization of individuals, communities, organizations, and strategies. Public management should strive to become more influential and relevant as a science, as well as effective and modern as a profession. Doing so requires better financial, organizational, and psychological preparations for emergencies, more wisdom in dealing with crises and uncertainties, and faster recoveries from them to minimize social and economic damage. Future public management can become a tool for building robust governance. But on the road to such robustness, governments and citizens need better collaboration and talented leadership.

To achieve these goals, leaders must learn how to manage better. It is clear to those dealing with public policy, governance, and public administration that managing the world of tomorrow has become a much more complicated task. In the post-COVID-19 world we will face new, unfamiliar problems resulting from one of the greatest natural social experiments of the twenty-first century. Public managers will have to adjust and improve accordingly. We will need to redefine public management and reconsider our expectations from public servants. Individuals, communities, cities, and modern nations will need to adjust to issues such as social distance, remote learning, rapid economic change, global financial breakdowns of unprecedented size, mass global unemployment, and difficulties in social welfare that our nations have not experienced in ages. We will also need to analyse public management vis-à-vis the democratic challenges of privacy, human rights, e-participation, news reporting and the spreading of fake news, all in a rapidly expanding digital era. As Skelcher (2007, p. 61) suggested, perhaps "the next big step in public management research is to move beyond the question of whether management matters to answer the question: does democracy matter?"

These are only a few of the terms and problems we will need to add to our disciplinary vocabulary and practical guidebook to improve public management. To help us on this path, twenty-first century governments will need to employ new and innovative managerial skills and strategies, comparative knowledge (e.g., Kim, 2020), and digitized capabilities to find remedies and vaccines not just for the current coronavirus-related problems, but also for the new post-virus world order.

In this post-pandemic era, public management must deal with several challenges: (1) educating and training skilful public managers and preparing them to deal with problems during emergencies; (2) using interdisciplinary knowledge to better handle complex questions and policy problems; (3) promoting new technologies and incorporating them into future managerial endeavours; (4) leveraging the new tools of the digital era, including big data sources, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to maximize managerial potential in governance by increasing the managerial collaboration among agencies and stakeholders; (5) extending managerial wisdom to democratic arenas by the improved operation of open societies; and (6) making better use of comparative knowledge and experience in Western democracies, Eastern cultures and other regions to develop their own approaches to dealing with the fuzzy problems of the modern world.

Summary

Clearly, the road to the better integration of wise managerialism in governance begins with open minds and the willingness to innovate, emulate, and integrate excellent managerial knowledge, vision, and practice into the public sphere. This approach relies on a strong comparative and international spirit, clear criteria for evaluation, and a robust empirical approach to validating ideas (Levi-Faur and Vigoda-Gadot, 2004; Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot, 2015). Public management research that incorporates models of good governance from various nations and cultures, promotes an interdisciplinary approach using experience from business, psychology, economics, and new technology will be a vital tool. This challenge is formidable in normal times. It becomes even more daunting during emergencies. Public management has already spread into many other scientific fields such as studies in policy, not-for-profit organizations, public human resources, local government, public budgeting and economics, environmental policy and designs, and many other subfields of the social sciences, natural sciences, and technology. Together, they all enrich and advance our understanding of the larger puzzle: how to make governmental craftsmanship better for the citizens it serves. Public management research has played a major role in the current discourse about public sector modernization and its invigoration. Its greatest contribution is the state-of-the-art managerial ideas, epistemological framework, methodological coherence, and unique code of operation it has shared (e.g., Vigoda-Gadot and Vashdi, 2020). The public administration archives of past ages already offer a rich bank of knowledge, experience, and insights that is precious. It is thus the responsibility of public management scholars of the future to better understand them, and of public management practitioners of the future to apply them wisely using the advanced technologies and methods of the digital governance era.

ERAN VIGODA-GADOT

See also

Politician–Bureaucrat Relations, Accountability and Responsibility of Public Managers, Behavioural Strategy in Public Administration, Collegiality in Public Management

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