New perspectives on public governance: challenging issues and emerging solutions

Public sector is worldwide constantly seeking for improving effectiveness and performance (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Hood, 1991; Noordegraaf and Abma, 2003). The aim of reaching these results is strictly related to the need of offering high-quality services to citizens and to be accountable for their actions (Hood, 1991).

Main critics moved to the public sector, often reported by literature, practitioners and public employees, are related to bureaucracy, alienation, turnover, work to rule, low motivation, etc., leading to the failure under many points of view (economic, social, organizational, institutional) (Knott and Miller, 2006; Magone, 2011; Meyer et al., 2014; Rothstein and Downer, 2012).

In order to overcome these hurdles, academics, policy makers and public managers are always in search for new solutions. These solutions should necessarily take into account two key concepts (Tomo, 2018). First, public organizations, as any other organization, rely on individuals and groups, whose actions are highly influenced by affective relations and by their motivation (e.g. Houston, 2000). Second, public organizations act in complex and high institutionalized contexts, where other public organizations, private organizations and citizens, at same time, represent a source of resources, interactions and pressures on their actions (Meek, 2010).

To develop a new and more accountable model for public organizations, academics, policy makers and public managers should (re)discover the prominent role of leading, not only managing, people inside the (public) organizations toward an enhanced performance and a high-quality service for the public.

The purpose of this special issue was to focus on new challenges and solutions within the public sector. More in detail, the question raised is related to those still unsolved issues that limit an effective administrative action within public organizations.

We invited papers challenging the following areas:

1. interactions and relations inside and outside the public organization;
2. public employees and managers’ motivation;
3. performance measurement systems and their impact on individuals; and
4. change management in public organizations.

In more detail, we proposed some research questions tackling prominent issues in the public sector, such as the following:

RQ1. How do relations, interactions and conflicts influence organizational performance?

RQ2. Which kind of relation exists between motivation and performance measurement systems?

RQ3. What are possible models for an effective change management in a public organization?

RQ4. How are possible motivating public employees in the process of organizational change?

We received many papers responding to the call and accepted the four most interesting papers, providing both theoretical and empirical insights into the different aspects of the...
public sector, considering not only classic public administrations, such as local
governments, but also healthcare and higher education systems.

In “Transformational leadership for public service motivation,” de Gennaro (2019)
proposes a theoretical analysis to understand the behavior of public leaders working in
changeable and uncertain contexts. Drawing on public administration and organizational
behavior literature, the study by de Gennaro examines whether the lack of continuity
and long-term planning is significantly associated to public service motivation for
public management. The paper also considers prominent issues such as the extrinsic
and intrinsic motivation of public servants in carrying out their job in a constantly
changing scenario. In doing so, the study has interesting implications for those who are in
charge of governing public structures. From a theoretical point of view, it suggests that it
is important to consider new methods to increase public service motivation and thus make
public administrations more efficient. Instead, from a practical point of view, it suggests
the importance of implementing concrete actions to address the inefficiencies of the public
sector due to the strong discontinuity of the political system.

Spanò et al. (2019), in “Performance measurement design: a contingency perspective from
the Italian regional healthcare services,” analyze key design characteristics of the
performance management system (PMS) that may be effectively adopted and deployed by
management to enable assessment for a health system improvement. The paper aims,
through a qualitative approach across the case study method, at understanding the role of
different contextual factors and their impact upon the design of PMS. The findings put the
emphasis over two key aspects: the need for improving the information systems within the
healthcare organizations and increasing transparency about the assessment procedures. In
doing so, the paper contributes to the debate on factors that can influence the design of PMS
in healthcare. Relying on a contingent approach, the authors put forward the need of a more
comprehensive and integrated framework encompassing organic conception of PMSs, as
well as of the interdependencies among their components.

In “Contextual and individual characteristics effects on students’ corruption perception
and behaviors in higher education,” Tomo et al. (2019) provide an analysis of the
effects that the perceived corruption has on students’ behaviors and explain how
individual and contextual variables in the higher education influence students’ behaviors
and corruption perception. The study advances a framework explaining this influence
and presents interesting implications for academics, practitioners and policy makers on
the impact that students’ corruption perception has on the whole higher education system.
In doing so, the paper takes the context of higher education as an example of how
the pressures on the public sector may lead to different responses and reactions to change.

In “Analysis of oscillations in continuous expenditures and their multiple causalities: a
case study,” Telles et al. (2019) tackle the question concerning the need for research and
monitoring the causes that generate continuous expenditures in the complex chain of events
involving the State Government of Paraná (Brasil), as a way for better understanding the
control over the allocation of public money and the return of productivity in the form of
better public services to the population. The article has interesting implications for policy
makers and public managers as it deepens issues concerning the management of public
administrations and public utilities.

We think that this special issue could be of support for better understanding specific
issues and dynamics useful for reducing deficiencies and improving the management of
public administrations.

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from many individuals. We thank all the authors who submitted papers to this special issue.
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and professional way. We thank all the administrative staff for their valuable assistance.
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**References**


