Harnessing the evolutionary advantage of emergent PM regimes: Strengthening accountability for challenges of modern public administration and governance

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Background

Performance management is still a maturing and ever-evolving field of research and practice. The dynamic complexity shaping organizations and society requires that the "lenses" needed for framing performance today may significantly differ from those which were successfully adopted two decades ago. This phenomenon is leading to the adoption of new performance management regimes in public administration and governance.

Although such changes have been particularly sustained in the last decade or so and have been affected by specific challenges in the public sector domain, they originate from earlier times. In particular, the need to deal with change and unpredictability, and to focus on how people and groups interact is not a new phenomenon in performance management and governance. More than 25 years ago, Otley (1994) recommended that management control systems should enhance learning processes that could lead to an organizational *evolution by design*, with a focus no longer confined within only the institutional boundaries. In this regard, a proactive feedforward performance management logic was suggested (Otley, 1999, p. 369). This implies that the emerging problems or opportunities from policy implementation at departmental level may suggest possible changes in the designed policies at both an institutional and

community level. This is the core of a strategic dialogue that would enhance decision makers' aptitude to promptly and selectively perceive weak signals of change and to properly respond to them, for enhancing resilience and long-term sustainability.

The roots of such perceived needs of innovation in performance management regimes date back to even earlier times. For example, Hofstede (1978, and 1980) observed that a condition under which a system is under control on paper (so called "pseudo control") often occurs when behavioral factors may diverge action, with respect to the standards set by cybernetic control mechanisms. Likewise, Ouchi (1979) recommended the need of also taking into account organizational control mechanisms, as part of the design process of a performance management system that could go beyond the use of bureaucratic and market mechanisms. Such extended perspective in performance management systems design may contribute to overcome the risk of an illusion of control (Dermer & Lucas, 1986; Hall, 2017; Otley, 2012) and of inconsistent policy implementation (Argyris, 1990).

The ongoing debate on how to cope with the unintended effects of human behavior associated with inconsistent design of performance standards, and the role that organizational control could play in fostering learning processes in dynamic and complex decision-making, has brought to a flourishing literature characterized by several interrelated research streams in public administration. Such emerging topics raise today new challenges for the design and implementation of public sector performance regimes.

The purpose of this symposium is to contribute to this broad research field, through evidence-based analysis adopting qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Literature

In the described domain, a rising research stream is behavioral public administration (Bhanot & Linos, 2020). By drawing from behavioral science (Simon, 1947) and social psychology – as opposite to rational choice theory – a growing number of scholars have been using behavioral public administration to study the effects of bounded rationality and cognitive bias on a wide variety of public policy and management issues. Among them: citizen assessment of government policies (Battaglio et al, 2019),

political decision making, public administrators' behavior, street-level bureaucracy behavior (Brodkin, 2008, 2011, 2012; Lipsky, 1980), relationships between elected officials and public administrators, government transparency, accountability, citizens trust and governance legitimacy (Grimmelikhuijsen et al, 2017), active citizenship, and public agencies' responses to performance feedback (Hong, 2018).

Related to the last application field, a research area highlighting innovative performance management regimes is associated with the behavioral distortions from using performance standards and governmental benchmarks (Eterno & Silverman, 2010; Henman & Gable, 2015; Honig, 2006; Hursh, 2005; Wiggins and Tymms, 2002), particularly by "street-level" bureaucracies (e.g. education, policing, healthcare, and courts).

Another innovative research area featuring interesting connections with behavioral public administration is collaborative performance management (Choi & Moynihan, 2019). This is an emerging field of research and practice, which combines different viewpoints – embracing performance management, collaborative governance, and systems theory – aimed at fostering a learning-oriented perspective in performance data use. In this regard, research has emphasized that implementing such innovative performance management regimes requires practicing "performance dialogue" through learning forums in boundary-crossing settings, also encompassing different organizations (Rajala et al, 2019). This research area can be considered as an evolution of outcome-based performance management (Wichowsky & Moynihan, 2008), and an innovative component of performance governance (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2007).

Scholars have remarked that the rising complexity associated with New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010, p. 9) requires extending the boundaries of performance evaluation from an organizational to an interorganizational dimension, and to involve different stakeholders in the planning process (Rajala et al, 2018). In the described setting, performance dialogue is expected to enhance the aptitude of key-actors to frame and manage the complexity of contemporary governance embeddedness (Moynihan et al, 2011; Rajala & Laihonen, 2018). Performance dialogue may enable a paradigm shift from performance measurement to performance management and governance (Moynihan, 2005). Failure in using performance data is a primary factor of poor organizational learning (Moynihan & Landuyt, 2009, p. 1097) and of

unsustainable performance outcomes (Bianchi, 2016; Bianchi & Rivenbark, 2014; Moynihan, 2005). To overcome such risk, learning forums may provide a venue for implementing performance dialogue (Laihonen & Mäntylä, 2017, p. 215), which enhances a use of performance information, based on social interaction within and across organizations.

The use of learning forums in an interorganizational setting has also been defined as an example of "hybrid" performance regimes (Douglas & Ansell, 2020). In such contexts, boundary-crossing performance dialogues involve representatives of both public and private sector organizations, aimed at improving local area performance. This configuration of performance governance provides the field for *collaborative platforms* (Ansell & Gash, 2018, p. 23). These are learning vehicles that, through the support of facilitators, may help stakeholders create shared meaning and understand other perspectives, to foster a common shared view of the feedback structure behind social "wicked" problems (Ansell & Miura, 2020; Bianchi et al, 2019; Crosby et al, 2010, p. 205).

Research challenges

Our world is increasingly characterized by political polarization and directional shifts that challenge the performance management enterprise to remain responsive and relevant. The rapid transmission of information, algorithmic computer-based decision making, and values-tested decisions are just the tip of the iceberg. To this end, a number of interesting research challenges emerge that are increasingly ripe for exploration in light of the current context.

- How can we move performance management towards an inter-institutional domain?
- How can we ensure consistency between performance management at organizational level and performance governance at interorganizational level?
- How could performance management & governance systems deal with the challenges of framing the effects of public policies on residents' satisfaction and trust?
- How could such systems support policy makers in addressing public values?
- How might we link institutional resources to confront inter-institutional goals?
- How should we improve the capability of performance management systems to deal with delays and to support decision makers in framing cause-and-effect relationships?
- How can we foster joint accountability?
- How might we incorporate intangibles in performance management systems?
- How can we enhance and leverage leadership through performance management?
- How should we link non-financial and financial performance metrics?

- How can we detect distortions in human behavior caused by the performance standards used in budgeting and evaluation and then redesign performance management systems that might fix such problems?
- How can we consistently design performance management systems into the wider context where they are expected to operate (e.g.: culture and relational systems, career and reward systems, communication systems, institutional systems)?
- How can we design performance management systems that support decision makers in dealing with social and "wicked" problems requiring an aptitude by organizations and local areas to be resilient and to pursue sustainability under multiple perspectives?
- How should we embody trade-off analysis, in both time and space, into performance management?
- What role can performance management systems play in supporting decision makers to learn from failures?
- How can we enhance the aptitude of performance management systems to implement effective performance dialogue?

And, finally,

- How can we better integrate accountability efforts such as evidence-based decision making, strategic planning and program evaluation with performance management systems?

The described challenges provide the basis for this symposium. The spectrum of expected contributions may also cover topics beyond the examples and issues previously discussed.

Studies comparing regions by context and characters (e.g. urban vs. rural, nation vs. nation, intergovernmental) are relevant for this symposium. Another relevant contribution area is the role of leadership in implementing desired change through the transition to performance management in collaborative governance. Also, studies linking performance management to other management practices (including strategic planning, evidence-based practice, program evaluation, etc.), and other disciplinary fields are welcome.

Contributions involving comparative studies on performance paradigms from different contexts, and based on a real case discussion, are encouraged.

Submission process

Authors should submit an extended abstract of no more than 1,000 words, including references, to Carmine Bianchi (bianchi.carmine@gmail.com) by email within June 4, 2021. If accepted for development after a desk review by the guest editors, full papers are due by December 1, 2021 and will be subject to an independent double-blind

review process as required by *Public Administration Review*. Therefore, an acceptance of proposal is a commitment to review rather than an acceptance for publication. The blind review process will commence on March 4, 2022 and final accepted papers are due by November 18, 2022. Online first publication is targeted for December 5, 2022 with print publication following soon thereafter.

Timeline

February 2021: Call for Papers

June 4, 2021: Extended abstracts to guest editors

July 2, 2021: Selected authors invited to proceed to submit papers

October 2021: TENTATIVE symposium workshop in Palermo or virtual, TBD

December 1, 2021: Deadline for full papers to guest editors

February 4, 2022: Selected authors invited to proceed to submit papers to *PAR* for peer review

March 4, 2022: Deadline to submit papers to *PAR*.

June 3, 2022: 1st round blind review process completed

September 2, 2022: Revised papers due deadline

November 4, 2022: Second round blind review process completed and symposium composition determined

November 18, 2022: Submission of manuscripts to Wiley

December 5, 2022: Online publication of special issue, with hard copy publication following in approximately 1 month.

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