



PMA 2014 Conference
Designing the High-Performing Organization

THE SERVICE OF PUBLIC SERVICES PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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Presentation

1. Research interest: PM of public services
2. Methodology: Conceptual analysis of rationales
3. Findings: Contested rationales of public service PM

1. Research interest

What is the “service” of public services PM?

- › The literature offer a range of contradictory propositions about the impact of public services PM
 - Public assurance
 - Cost reduction
 - Service improvements
 - ...

Ad.1. What we know

Public service PM is spreading with increasing focus on efficiency, effectiveness, outcomes (TQM/NPM)

- › Contradictory propositions about the actual impact of public services
 - A. Proponents highlight a range of potential benefits (public assurance, cost reduction, service improvement)
 - B. Critics highlight a range of concerns about the costs (unrealistic expectations, distorted goals, conformity)

“Self-serving rituals of verification”

Power (1999, 2003)

“Distract middle- and upper-level officials, create massive paperwork, and produce major unintended effects.”

Hood & Peters (2004:278)

2. Methodology

Conceptual study of the main rationales and rationalities in public service PM

- › Analysis of the discourse on public service PM
 - Theoretical rationales: Positive impact
 - Critical concerns: Negative impact

Ad.2. What we did

Meta-theoretical lens

- › Discourse analysis of rationales and rationalities in organizational theory (Townley, 2008, a.o.)
 - Rationality is a fundamental concept that is often assumed rather than debated
 - Rationality is not a unitary measure of behaviour, but has multiple dimensions

“[R]ationality has been foundational to definitions and historical analyses of organizations, defining the subject of its study, the rational organization. [...] A focus on reason allows us to decentre an analysis that takes as its starting point different ‘isms’ informed by different schools or paradigms: positivism, symbolic interactionism, structuralism, deconstructionism, critical realism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and critical theory.”

Townley (2008:2-5)

3. Findings

The “services” of public service PM

- a. Public assurance
 - A bureaucratic rationale
- b. Economic efficiency
 - An economic rationale
- c. Service improvement
 - A technical rationale

Ad.a. Public assurance

A bureaucratic/formal rationale

- › PM is a means for ensuring minimum standards
 - Political "control from a distance" (Hogget, 1998)
 - Accountability (Davies & Martin, 2008)
 - Predictability (Smith, 2007)
 - ...

Ad.b. Economic efficiency

An economic/instrumental rationale

- › PM is a means for ensuring efficient service provision
 - Compensate for absence of competition (Ammons, 2002)
 - Benchmarking (Smith, 2007)
 - Efficiency (Martin, 2010)
 - ...

Ad.c. Service improvement

A technical rationale

- › PM is a means for ensuring improvement in public services
 - Innovation (Boyne 2003)
 - Technological development
 - Evidence-based practice (Boyne et al., 2010)
 - ...

Ad.3. What we found

Public services PM may serve several purposes

- › A range of "universalist" rationalities (Townley, 2008)
 - a. Bureaucratic/formal rationality
 - b. Economic/instrumental rationality
 - c. Technical rationality

Ad.3. What we also found

Critique of public services PM

- › Public services PM has failed to live up to its promises
 - Irrational expectations
 - Distorted operational goals
 - Creative reporting of measures
 - Routinization of measures with little impacts
 - Conformity rather than learning and innovation
 - "Cook book" mentality rather than professional judgment
 - ...

Ad.3. What we also found

Public services PM is being criticized for being counter-productive (has failed to fulfil its promises)

- › From a range of "contextual" rationalities
 - d. Limited/ing measures & practices does not take into account specific cultural norms regarding public service (institutional rationality, fx. Townley, 2008)
 - e. Fixed, non-flexible measures/practices does not take into account professional judgment (situational rationality, fx. Schön, 1987, 2010)

Contribution

Public services PM involve several rationales

- › Public services PM potentially involves irreconcilable conflicts of rationality
 - In-between positive rationales
 - a. Bureaucratic/formal rationality: Accountability
 - b. Economic/instrumental rationality: Efficiency
 - c. Technical rationality: Improvement
 - With critical rationales
 - d. Institutional rationality: Cultural norms
 - e. Situational rationality: Personal judgment



THANK YOU

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