



EGPA/IIAS

European Group
for Public Administration

2021

Annual Conference of the

***European Group for Public
Administration***

7-10 September 2021

PhD Symposium

7 September 2021

***Permanent Study Group III:
Public Personnel Policies***

Call-for-Papers

EGPA Permanent Study Group III on Public Personnel Policies

The importance of context for people management and public service performance

The research programme for the 2021 Annual EGPA Conference of the EGPA Study Group 3 Public Personnel Policies continues a research focus on the context of people management – public service performance relationship, including the influence of national, sectoral and organizational contexts as well as the impact of economic, social and political developments. The Study Group appreciates the diversity of research approaches and invites theoretical and empirical research papers, based on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research.

Research topics

For the 2021 EGPA Conference the Study Group invites papers that examine various aspects of the terrain laid out by the research program. Three core clusters of research issues are elaborated on below. These are intended as orientation for prospective papers. They do not limit or exhaust the range of research questions that papers can address.

People management

The role of the line manager in the implementation of personnel policies has increased throughout the public sector. The actual devolution of HR responsibility to the line has been accompanied theoretically by a conceptual framework that differentiates between intended personnel policies, implemented and perceived personnel (or HR) practices (Wright & Nishii 2013). It is recognized that managers may implement intended HR policies in different ways and that the ultimate effect, be it public service performance or employee well-being, of personnel (HR) policies depends on the perceptions employees have of the intended policies, the policies' aims as communicated by senior management and, most importantly, of their implementation by their own manager. A variety of factors may affect how line managers implement personnel policies, among them their knowledge and abilities, the support that HR staff offer to line managers, red tape and the discretionary room they have.

Over the past ten years, researchers have paid increasing attention to leadership in public organizations (see the 2014 special issue of ROPPA on Leadership in the public sector, edited by Vandenabeele, Andersen & Leisink, based on SG3 research). Leadership is conceptualized as involving not just the design of mission, vision and strategy at the top level of organizations, but also as the style of leadership that motivates employees to contribute to achieving public service performance. In the HRM literature, the term 'people management' refers to this dual aspect of the implementation of HR practices and leadership by line managers.

Recognition of the important role that public managers play at different levels calls for research that focuses on their very implementation of personnel policies and leadership, as well as research of the antecedents and consequences of their people management.

Public service performance

Public service performance research has produced important results over the past decade (see for instance Walker, Boyne & Brewer 2010; Song & Meier 2018)). At the same time the debate over what public value public organizations should create has not abated and impacts on the research of public service performance (e.g. Moore 1995, 2014; Talbot 2009, 2011).

The field of HRM research has produced studies that provide increasing recognition of a balanced approach to performance outcomes, reflecting various dimensions of performance and the interests of different stakeholders. This holds particularly for research of organizational performance in public sector organizations (Andersen, Boesen & Pedersen 2016). HRM research is particularly interested in the tensions and trade-offs that may exist between performance outcomes that are related to different stakeholders, such as between employee wellbeing and organizational efficiency, but also between distinct outcomes for one and the same stakeholder as may be the case when HR practices produce employee satisfaction but also risks of burn-out for public service motivated employees (Van Loon et al. 2015). This is why a balanced approach to HRM and public service performance is important. Such an approach will also stimulate attention for differences in employee outcomes between various categories of employees. The gains and losses in employee outcomes produced by personnel policies, for instance policies aimed at developing professional competencies, may differ substantially for high-skilled and low-skilled employees, for employees in permanent or precarious contracts.

These disciplinary lines of research are highly relevant for the study of recent developments in public personnel policies. For instance, it appears that governments take a growing interest in promoting the flexibility of public employees. An example is France where public sector employment has been characterized by the civil servant statute, which is about to be transformed by the French government's intention to create more flexibility by ending the statute. What are the performance outcomes that are aimed for by increasing flexibility? Improving the quality of public service to citizens? Increasing government efficiency at the expense of civil servants' employment security in the wake of post-austerity policies? Increasing the autonomy and functional flexibility for civil servants themselves?

This example illustrates that increasing flexibility may serve different public service performance outcomes, and that different stakeholders stand to gain or lose through the personnel policies that are implemented.

Context

Pollitt (2013) has characterized context as the missing link in public policy and management research. Relatedly O'Toole and Meier (2014) have developed a theory of context and how context affects the management – performance linkage. HRM researchers (e.g., Boxall, Purcell & Wright 2007) have called for balancing contextual relevance and research rigor. The central focus of this research programme on people management and public service performance requires research to be contextually grounded. There are significant differences between countries, as the traditions as well as changes in public management and public sector employment illustrate (Meyer & Hammerschmid 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). Sectoral contexts are important, not just in terms of differences in ownership – see for instance the differences between the healthcare sector in the UK and the Netherlands – but also in terms of the choice/voice position which the citizen/client has – see the differences between local

government and police on the one hand, and healthcare and education on the other.

Apart from the distinction between levels of analysis, societal developments impact on public organizations' capacity to align their public personnel policies with the meaningful public services they want to provide. For instance, the recent influx of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe will have a major impact on governments and public organizations that have to deal with an increasing diversity of citizens. Economic, ecological and demographic challenges affect all OECD countries (Lodge & Hood 2011) and confront public organizations with the need to change, which raises the very question again about the importance of leadership and management of change at all levels of public organizations.

Organisation of the research programme

Abstracts of proposed papers should be uploaded through the submission website by **April 30, 2021**. Abstracts should introduce the research question that the paper will address and briefly elaborate on the theoretical framework that informs the paper. In addition, abstracts should account for the research on which the paper is based, including research design and methods of data collection and analysis in the case of empirical research papers.

The decision about the accepted papers will be communicated no later than 25 May 2021. Papers that are accepted should be submitted by August 10, 2021.

A "Best Paper Award" will be granted to the paper designated as the most outstanding of the papers presented by a young researcher in Study Group 3. Papers (co-) authored by young researchers (younger than 30 years at the time of the conference) and by PhD students of all ages are eligible. Please include a note in the email containing the final paper to the study group governors about this if you want your paper to be considered for this prize. Only papers delivered on time are considered.

The aims of the Study Group convenors are to obtain refereed journal publications each year.

Practicalities

Important dates:

- ✓ Deadline for submission of Abstracts: April 30, 2021
- ✓ Deadline for notification to the authors: no later than May 25, 2021
- ✓ Deadline for online submission of full papers: August 10, 2021
- ✓ EGPA 2021 Conference: September 7-10, 2021

EGPA 2021 Conference Website: <https://www.egpa-conference2021.org/>

EGPA 2021 Conference Management System: <https://www.conftool.org/egpa-conference2021>

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