

BOOK REVIEW

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: PERFORMANCE, PROFESSIONALISM AND POLITICS

Author: Mirko Noordegraaf

Palgrave, 2015

Paperback, 277 pages: ISBN 978-0-230-24270-8

Pakpoom Mingmitr*

OVERVIEW

If you are interested in public management, and finding a way to make sense of the academic discourse and practical developments, to develop your own views of managing public organizations, and get things done, *Public Management: Performance, Professionalism and Politics*, written by Mirko Noordegraaf, is the right book for you.

Mirko Noordegraaf is Professor of Public Management at the Utrecht School of Governance (USG), Utrecht University, in the Netherlands. At USG, he is Chair of the *Executive Board of the Department*, and *Chair of the Research Faculty for Public Governance & Management (PGM)*. He studies organizations and management issues in the public domain, with particular emphasis on public managers, varying from policy managers to health care and school managers. He also analyzes organizational reform and managerial work and behavior, as these relate

to experts and professionals who develop policies and deliver public services.

The book contains eight chapters and broadly focuses on the fragmented field of public management. It explores various practical developments and how this field can be made-up of distinctive logics – *performance, professionalism and political logics* – that reflect various assumptions, values and approaches.

REVIEW

Chapter 1 is an *Introduction*. It presents three objectives: a) to describe the rise of public management and clarify why this can be interpreted as the rise of multiple logics, b) to describe the theoretical background of those logics, and c) to show how organizations can deal with these competing logics (p.4). Public organizations are drawn into organizational and managerial discourse when incidents occur and policies are tackled, or

*Pakpoom Mingmitr, Ph.D, is Director of Parliamentary Association and Association of Secretaries General of the Parliament, Bureau of Inter-Parliamentary Organizations, Secretariat of the House of Representatives, Thailand.

when services are delivered. It also provides a number of examples, illustrating that when organizations deal with issues like health care, crime, or financial market – managing itself becomes a crucial issue.

Chapter 2 is *the Rise of Public Management*. It explores public management in terms of its basic concepts, nature, evolution, the rise of new public management concepts, visibility of public managers and its institutionalization as a disciplinary field (p.16). It provides meaningful definitions for public management (p.17), and ends with public management as an academic field, seen through associations (research network, conferences), knowledge exchange (journals, textbooks, books and articles), educational programs (Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, executive programs, and training courses) and regulations (accreditation, awards and prizes).

Chapter 3 is *Competing Logics: Theories and Tools*. It explores the nature of public management theory, but not so much by elaborating theories through emphasis on academic disciplines, fields and communities that create the ground knowledge for public management studies. Mainly, it tries to reduce variation and theoretical fuzziness, by highlighting three basic logics that cover the various bodies of knowledge that have evolved over time (p.64).

Chapter 4 is *Managing Performance*. It highlights performance logic that concentrates on systematic, rational organizational improvement and systems optimization (p.70). Firstly, it focuses on public-sector reform, and efficiency-led management, and is aimed at better-performing organizations – following *businesslike, entrepreneurial* and *contractual principles*. Secondly, it shows

how concepts, ideas and insights have been combined to improve public performance. Lastly, it explores the values that are served by adhering to performance logic.

Chapter 5 is *Managing Professionalism*. This chapter highlights the importance of knowledge, expertise and professionalism in devising policies, regulating problems and rendering services (p.112). It identifies the challenges of managing knowledge workers. To this point, knowledge workers are known as “professionals”, who belong to a certain profession, such as the medical or legal profession (p.123). It basically looks at professionals from three aspects: content (p.124), control (pp.125-127) and conflict (pp.127-128).

Chapter 6 is *Managing Politics*. Here the controversial nature of many public issues are discussed, including the contested nature of dealing with such issues (p.154). It shows how politics pervades aspects of organization in the public domain. When issues occur, when stakeholders have different ideas and opinions, when situations are unpredictable, and when public organizations and their managers are expected to take action, the application of political logic is needed to manage an organization well.

Chapter 7 is *Public Management Practices*. Varieties of public management are conceptualized as activities or carriers (p.181). Three main points are made: a) the various logics are not equally valuable; it depends on the situation, tasks and services, b) the logics are always relevant as the organizations must serve multiple ambitions and audiences and c) dealing with multiple logics and practicing interplay calls for repertoires that enable managers to adjust their actions to multiple and shifting challenges.

Chapter 8 is the *Conclusion*. In public management, politicians and the public expect public organizations to be well-run with efficient structures and processes. They expect that public values are at the forefront when policies are made and services are delivered. These perspectives are important when it comes to managing public issues (p.229). After all, public managers must find their own unique added value and develop themselves to be more professional.

COMMENTS

It is good to see that this book moves away from descriptive accounts of conventional texts to provide systematic treatment of the three crucial logics which are needed in today's public management. Based on this systematic treatment, it is useful and helpful to public managers, allowing them to act professionally in their work.

Another good point can be seen through the variety of examples considered. In *managing performance*, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is one example used to describe good management that ensures an empowered civil service, providing services in a cost efficient manner (p.35). In *managing professionalism*, the examples cover a wide range from policing, administering justice and education where service-delivery processes depend on knowledge workers (p.132). When *managing politics*, it is required that managers cope with the causes and consequences of issues, which may comprise *politicized issues* (building airports), *ambiguous circumstances* (safety) and *dynamic processes* (rising of social media), in order to manage the situation (p.157). To this point, public managers can

learn from their experiences to become considered as “*managing well*”.

APPLICATION

According to Kevin Parry (2017), the business environment can shape one's perceptions of how organizations should be managed and is embedded in the organizations (p.213). The essence of the three logics in this book can be applied to non-Western countries, accordingly. As the book stresses the importance of linking logics (based on theories) to acting on and dealing with those logics (in practice), it shows readers how to apply theories, and logics, and provides a set of insights, skills and experiences for use in everyday situations.

Hospitals, as an example, are in institutional surroundings in the healthcare context. In *institutional contexts* (p.188), it shows how *healthcare delivery* can be managed. The applicability of management logics and approaches are *playing fields*, *positions* and *powers*. These *contexts* are related in a way that they are *institutional environments* that affect management in three dimensions – *production* environments where public managers are responsible for producing goods and services that are consumed by the public (performance logic), *service* environments where public managers contribute to service delivery, aiming at servicing specific client needs (professionalism logic) and *policy* environments where public managers will enable choices and make decisions aimed at solving problems that may be causing turbulence (political logic).

In *organizational settings* (p.191), hospitals rely on *standards*, *cultures* and *loyalties*. These affect the nature of public

management in three dimensions – *integrated* organizational environments will create consistency and uniformity (performance logic), *differentiated* environments create strong sub-cultures and dispersed loyalties (professionalism logic) and *fragmented* environments will bring about fuzzy and ambiguous organizational conditions and processes (political logic).

In *management situations* (p.192), there is a need for different management situations, even when working in the same hospital. Public managers must bear in mind that each working method depends on the nature of the medical guidelines and innovation. To understand this, three components are relevant – *different services*, *different projects* and *multiple challenges*. These can be linked to three situations – *known situations* where many things are clear and much is measurable (performance logic), *unknown situations* where things are difficult to measure and it is difficult to reach a consensus on projects (professionalism logic) and *ambiguous situations* where tasks and outcomes are equivocal and challenges provoke much dissent (political logic).

The above mentioned example of health care management can be practically applied to the case of the *Thailand 4.0* policy¹, in which one of the targeted industries is medical services. Policymakers believe that this strategy will result in the Kingdom graduating to the status of high-income country. To this point, it is useful for public managers to apply theories, logics, and repertoires to diagnose real practices, determine the appropriate course of action, and determine success. The given example of health care management in this book can be a useful guidance for public managers in hospitals to identify appropriate

courses of action by their own approaches.²

BETTER TO READ

In a similar vein, it is better to read this book because it is the most comprehensive book, which helps readers, especially public managers, to understand and contribute to today's public management. It is much better in terms of attempting to avoid academic capture, but profits from a huge number of academic debates and practical experiences by emphasizing and explaining three logics, and discussing critical examples, which can be illustrated for various public managers, including the specific circumstances that have never been taken into account. The book focuses on either performance management, managing professionalism, or managing networks and creating public value, stressing various components of public management, written in a way that is hardly found in other books in the same field.

CONCLUSION

In modern society, public management is here to stay. A number of unavoidable issues in the public organizations cannot be managed easily, systematically and completely. Many public organizations fail to deal with business like approaches, but they are expected to deliver and produce values for excellent services in accountable ways. To make sense of this role, public managers must add value by seeking for appropriate combinations of *performance*, *professionalism* and *political logics*, stressing the importance for interplay. They can intrinsically learn from the given examples for illustrative purposes, teaching them to tolerate or seek stability and change

in management. Most importantly, they have to find their own added value and develop themselves to be more professional.

REFERENCES

- Noordegraaf, M. (2015). *Public Management: Performance, Professionalism and Politics*. London: Palgrave.
- Parry, K. (2017). “Managing Change in Asia and the West: Different windows, different views”, in Coleman, S. and Thomas, B. (2017). *Organizational Change Explained*. London: KoganPage.
- Seangpassa, C. (2019). “Medical price control plan looms over private hospitals”, *The Nation*, January 11th, 2019, accessed on January 15th, 2019, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30362020>

(Footnotes)

¹ The 20-year national strategy, launched by the government, designed to promote and support innovation, creativity, research and development to accelerate the Kingdom’s long-term development.

² Readers or public managers might further apply *appropriate* course of actions to the case of the hospitals in Thailand, in which the government tries to manage “medical-price control plan” that relevant to the three logics. See more depth in details at the given link: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30362020> in *The Nation*, January 11th, 2019.