

## Public Management: a science free from the principles of private management?

The issue 2 of the 2017-2018 year of the journal «Gestion et Management Public» includes four articles that address a fundamental question: can the science of public management abandon the teachings of private management? Our editorial addresses the question of the paradigm of public management science.

Since the advent of the New Public Management, it is usual to consider that the main principles of the private sector and in particular those concerning the Management of Human Resources could and should be taken over by the public sector managers. Should the public sector simply copy in-extenso the management practices of the private sector? Is this mimetic logic justified? This phenomenon is frequently assumed to explain the adoption and diffusion of management practices. The neo-institutionalist theory (Dimaggio, Powel, 1983) explains, on the basis of the concept of legitimation, why organizations become more or less similar or isomorphs. This isomorphism can be the result of formal and informal pressures on organizations that come from other organizations, State, or society and its cultural expectations. The State exerts a coercive pressure with its administrative reforms. It can impose modes of organization (abandonment of the statute of civil servants for the contract of private law, abandonment of the idea of career and adoption of merit compensation system) similar to those of the private sector (use of the market to regulate the supply

of public goods and services, allocation of resources according to results). This isomorphism can also take root in the phenomenon of imitation, the public organizations search to imitate the behaviors of private organizations appearing legitimate in their field. In search of legitimacy, public organizations would be guided by the wishes of integrating institutionalized practices and procedures of private firms. The article of Céline Chatelin and Hamza El Kaddouri shows that the adoption of tools is facilitated when these tools come from the private sector. The private sector brings legitimacy in terms of management to the public sector. One of the public managers asked says that adoption of such private management tools allows to «benefit from what is applied in private firms». In this vision, public organizations are considered as social creations whose survival depends on their legitimacy. Legitimacy is defined by Suchman (1995) as a generalized perception or presumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, correct and appropriate within a system of socially constructed norms, values and beliefs. The intervention of consultants or professional associations that offer the same types of solutions to different companies partly explains this phenomenon of imitation.

However, public management research cannot simply explain the phenomenon of alignment of public and private practices without putting the following fundamental question on the agenda: a public organization should

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copy the principles of the management of private firms? Should it transpose and adapt them? And if we answer yes, how much should they copy it?

The article proposed by Sandrine Fournier, illustrates the phenomenon of transposition of private firm human resources management in the public education sector. She shows it is necessary to take into account the specificities of the public sector in the measure of performance. The article of Fanou Arsène Vigan, focuses on the measurement of public sector engagement. It highlights the need to adapt the measures of this concept to take into account the cultural context and the specificities of the public sector. The article proposed by Armand Brice Kouadio and Yves Emery addresses the question of anchoring the concept of engagement in the field of public thought and raises the question of public values.

The answer to these questions is, in our opinion, to find a new paradigm « the publicity» in order to be able to explain the fundamental differences between public management and private management. The specificity of the public management must be found in the articulation between public policies and the objectives of public organizations (chain of governance and democratic principles). It must be found in the values guiding public action (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000, Hal G Rainey, 2011, Chappoz, Côme, Dorbaire, Pupion, 2015) and in the aims underlying public activities (i.e. the general interest and the welfare of the people). These dimensions are integrated in the public service motivation and the wishes to participate in public policies. While the public sector has incorporated the values of efficiency, economy and efficacy advocated by the new public management, it nonetheless remains a base of traditional values coming from the history of public administration in the countries. In the French case, the base of the traditional values of the public services comes from the old regime and its principle of common good that the King had the charge to defend. These values have been completed by republican values, of democracy, of unity (the unitary state) of indivisibility, equality and secularism (law of 1905).

This specificity of the public management can be reinforced in many countries by a specific legislative and regulatory framework for public organizations. Similarly, the operation of public organizations can be financed by taxes and escape more or less from the market. This specificity takes root in the figure of the citizen-user-taxpayer whose three facets correspond to three forms of relationship between the individual and the administration. The citizen votes and can influence the public policy, the user

can benefit from public services; the taxpayer can more or less finance public services. This relationship is essentially different from the relationship between a customer and a private company built in a market.

Armand Brice Kouadio and Yves Emery in their article «Public Employees in Hybrid Environments: What are the anchors of commitment and HRM practices?» analyze the origin of the commitment to work among public officials. This research based on the study of the multiple anchors of the work relationship, provides a deeper understanding of the engagement of Swiss public officials in the post-bureaucratic context.

Céline Chatelin and Hamza el Kaddouri, in their article entitled «The establishment of legal audit in universities: what legitimacy(s)?», examine the question of audit appropriation using the analysis of legitimacy theory (pragmatic, moral and cognitive) of Suchman (1995). Based on a study of two universities, the authors show that legal audit limits the discretionary space of university leaders by reducing the asymmetry of information between leaders, the accounting agency and the board of directors. It offers managers some protection against internal and external political pressures, coming from the board of directors and other stakeholders.

Sandrine Fournier in her article entitled «Human Resource Management Practices in EPLEs and the Possible Effects on Institutional Performance» addresses the notion of performance in the public sector and more particularly in local public educational institutions. The article aims to determine the effect of human resource management practices implemented by school heads. The originality of this study is to show how the notion of performance is experienced by teachers and seemed opposite to pedagogues' spirit which is opposed to the consumerist and competitive principles.

Fanou Arsène Vigan in his article entitled «Can we talk about emotional commitment and calculated commitment among African public officials?» analyzes the relevance of the measurement of affective and calculated commitments of Meyer and Allen in an African context. The results of the study conducted on two samples of Beninese public officials show that affective commitment and calculated commitment are two relevant concepts. However, affective commitment is specifically composed of two distinct sub-dimensions: social attachment and attachment to organizational values.

## Key-words

*Public values, public management sciences, publicness, public policies, paradigm*

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