International Public Management Journal

VALEDICTORY EDITORIAL

FRED THOMPSON
WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

This issue completes my work as editor of the *International Public Management Journal* and Karen Piter's as managing editor. The next issue of the journal that arrives in your mailbox will have been put together entirely by the current editorial team of Steven Kelman, editor-in-chief, and Greg Dorchak, managing editor. Consequently, this for us a very special issue and we wish to take this opportunity to tell you about it, to thank everybody who helped us assemble the first seven volumes of the journal, and to deliver some unsolicited advice to the public management research community.

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 2

The greater part of this issue is devoted to a symposium on public ethics, edited by Denis Saint-Martin, senior policy advisor to the prime minister of Canada, on leave from the Université de Montréal where he is a professor of political science. The ethics symposium follows a pattern established by Michael Barzelay (2001) of the London School of Economics and Political Science, who edited the symposium in volume 6, issue 3, on the process dynamics of public-management policymaking. The ethics symposium looks at a topic of considerable interest to public management scholars from a comparative or international case perspective.

One of the strengths of this symposium is its tight focus, given the global spectrum of outlooks on public ethics and government corruption. All of the articles in the symposium concentrate on economically developed nations, with stable polities, traditions of popular government, legal systems grounded in common law, and relatively low levels of corruption. Moreover, they all deal with countries that to a greater or lesser degree have embraced the so-called New Public Management, which implies a degree of skepticism about the governance arrangements grounded in bureaucratic norms derived from the *rechsstaat* tradition. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they all deal with countries, which, as Denis-Saint Martin explains in his introductory essay, are increasingly distressed about the ethics of public officials despite a paucity of lapses on their part. This makes the case comparisons reported in the symposium especially telling: there is enough variance to be informative, but not enough to over determine the

Direct all correspondence to: Fred Thompson, Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Willamette University, 900 State Street, Salem, OR 97301. Email: fthompso@willamette.edu

International Public Management Journal, 8(2), pages vii-xii

ISSN: 1096-7494

findings. Consequently, what holds for one case may be reasonably presumed to apply to all.

Denis Saint-Martin asks why concerns over the erosion of public trust have led to the elaboration of formal standards and independent regulatory agencies to enforce them in some of these countries and not in others. He concludes that path dependence explains most of the variance. However, he hints that ethics regulation aimed at preventing the standard conflict-of-interest problems that arise wherever the public sector is large, contracting, purchasing, outsourcing, and public-private partnerships are extensive, regulation has major economic and commercial impacts, individuals move across the private/public sector boundary with relative ease, and parties need funding from private sources, even if effective, would not restore public confidence in politics.

David Hine examines codes of conduct for public officials in five west European countries: the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. He concludes that introducing common codes across such widely differing administrative cultures, particularly if all they would do is codify values that are, in practice, widely shared, makes very little sense.

Oonagh Gay, Andrew Stark, and Beth A. Rosenson all focus on formal ethics regulation and its efficacy. All three are skeptics. Gay and Stark conclude, however, that parliamentary ethics regimes might be well advised to emulate the American model. Rosenson puts paid to that notion, effectively arguing that the costs of American ethics regulation outweigh its benefits--too many butterflies are caught in its net, and no elephants.

Patrick Dobel implicitly accepts the dominant academic approach to applied ethics. This approach combines virtue ethics, with its emphasis on character formation, and moral reasoning, with its emphasis on individual decisions. When these approaches are brought together, what emerges is a view of ethical governance and leadership as good individuals trying to make good ethical judgments. This view leads to an emphasis on training, standards and procedures, and, ultimately, regulation. However, Dobel proposes a reformulation of what it means to make good ethical judgments to stress constructing sustainable legacies.

In contrast, the last two participants in this symposium, John Uhr and Colin M. Macleod, emphasize that governance is social process, which implies that, in this context, applied ethical reasoning should comprehend the objective of establishing and sustaining ongoing relationships between individuals with diverse values, tastes, and needs. Uhr argues that ethical governance means attending to the relational aftermath of complex decisions--the ways in which decisions and their execution affect and sustain social relationships. Mcleod argues that governance is concerned with mechanism and process, which implies that applied ethical reasoning in this context must not only confront certain stock issues--desirability, practicality, workability, freedom from greater evils, and best available alternative--but must also lead to widespread participation in decision-making processes. Viewed in this way, ethical governing means a respectful discourse involving the participation of all legitimate viewpoints. Absent a renewed commitment to this democratic ethos, he concludes that politics will remain a spectator sport, dominated by “sleazeball tactics and shrinking sound bites.”

Finally, the issue concludes with a review essay on the life and work of June Pallot by Susan Newberry, her friend and colleague at the University of Canterbury. June was one of the founders of the International Public Network and a co-editor of this journal. She will be missed.

OUR THANKS

We wish to thank the many individuals who have helped us put this journal together over the past eight years. First, thanks to the folks who have shared the masthead with us: Michael Barzelay, L.R. Jones, Kuno Schedler, Mark T. Green, Sonia Ospina, Elke Loeffler, and Raquel Gallego Calderon. Without their support this enterprise would have been impossible. Second, thanks to our publisher, George Johnson, and the staff of Information Age Publishing, who have kept us on schedule and provided us with first-rate service. Last, thanks to our referees. They performed an unrewarded task with distinction. A journal, of course, can be no better than its reviewers. Ours have been exceptional. Indeed, the best thing about being editor is participating in the private discourse between authors and reviewers. That discourse was occasionally more enlightening and often far more entertaining than the articles we published. These thanks go to our board of editors, but also to several occasional referees, all of whom took time from their busy schedules to participate in this private discourse. In the latter category, we would like to acknowledge the following:

Perri 6
Peter Abell
George Abonyi
Erik Albæk
Matthew Andrews
Robert N. Anthony
David Arellano-Gault
Jostein Askim
Christopher Avery
John Bartle
Tony Bovaird
Otto Brodtrick
John M. Bryson
Gerald Caiden
Tyrone Carlin
Jeanne Marie Col
R.K. Common
Patrick Connor
Dan Cothran
Glenn Daley
Masako N. Darrough
Melvin Dubnick
Anna Fosdick
William R Gates
Eleanor D. Glor
Elizabeth A. Graddy
George Guess
W. Bartley Hildreth
Michael Howlett
Joanne Kelly
Anne M. Khademian
Bob Klitgaard
Rob Laking
Laura Langbein
Ira Lewis
Elliot Maltz
Peter A. Mameli
Nick Manning
Rodrigo Mardones
Steve Maser
Rebecca Menes
Bryane Michael
Peter Miller
Don Moynihan
Ken Murphy
Richard Norman
Rosemary O'Leary
Laurence O'Toole
Debra J. Ringold
Alistair Roberts
Denis Saint-Martin
Carlos Santiso
Kenneth Alan Smith
Keith Snyder
William Stanbury
Jeff Straussman
James R. Thompson
Kurt Thurmaier
G.J. van Helden
Aidan Vining
David Leo Wiemer
Graham K. Wilson
Hellmut Wollmann

UNSOLICITED ADVICE

Under our management the journal focused on the formulation of public management policy, public management innovation, reform, change, and accountability, and comparative and international management. While the journal's editorial focus will not change, the new editor-in-chief, Steve Kelman, is committed to enhancing its academic rigor and distinction. Steve defines rigor in terms of formal modeling and empirical testing of organizational processes and mechanisms.

I think it is likely that formal modeling of organizational processes and mechanisms is premature, at least insofar as our ends are fundamentally managerialist in nature. I once believed that a good normative model was merely a good empirical model run backwards. I also tended to believe that we could rely on linear models in which $y = f(x)$. That is, given condition set x, outcome y will occur all other things equal; absent set x, y will not occur. Hence, if you want y, do set x.

One of more the insightful discussions on this perspective is Larry Lynn's (1996) reworking of Simon's "Proverbs of Administration" (1946), which distinguishes between proverbs or principles and rules. Principles are universal truths; they always apply, but are largely devoid of specific content. Thus, pay attention to people. Do first things first. Do what has to be done. In contrast, rules are contingent propositions: if you encounter a problem of the form A, do A*. But don't do A* if the problem is B, because it won't work. In other words, rules are based on robust distinctions. Lynn further argues that the formal models help us to deduce distinctions; we do empirical work to test their validity with real data; and then we teach the resulting rules to our students, making certain that, if they are curious, they can find out how the rules were produced. His conclusion is that what we need are diagnostic and prescriptive tools, enabling students to tell A from B and to know what to do, A* or B*, or what questions to ask, in each situation (presuming that we can first sort out the rules).

I am now inclined to question the practicality or feasibility of this agenda. Perhaps we should seek out proverbs of administration rather than try to deduce rules from first principles. Good clinical analysis is the better way to find principles. Once one has good principles to work with, good theorizing can (and probably will) follow.

Let me draw an analogy with corporate finance. We started with a principle generally acknowledged to be true: the best way to get rich is to buy low and sell high. V.A. Dodge transformed this principle into a set of rules for portfolio balancing in the 1930s. Clinical research in the ′50s showed that mutual funds that followed Dodge's rules, on average, outperformed other investment strategies. Modern portfolio theory derives from a rigorous analysis of those rules. I have heard that option pricing has a similar etiology. Financial managers started with a principle: run your gains, cut your losses. A couple of them (I have heard names mentioned, but I don't remember them) developed some rules for puts and calls that best-practice research in the ′60s showed worked. Black and Scholes (1973) formalized those rules and integrated them with the body of financial theory. The point is that even where we have first-rate management theory, we started with proverbs or principles, the managers who transformed those principles into rules based on robust distinctions, and evidence of the efficacy of those rules--in other words, clinical research.

Of course, clinical research does not have to mean sloppy research. (Womack, Jones, and Roos' *The Machine that Changed the World* [1990] is an example of superior clinical research). However, clinical analysis is more like practical decision making--identify the key attributes of the problem (assessment of signs and symptoms), match the problem to others with known solutions (diagnosis), apply known solution to existing problem (prescription), check to see if the situation improves (monitoring)--than positive research. It is hermeneutic in nature. People figure out what do by interpreting situations, deciding which facts are important, searching memory for similar fact patterns with known solutions, matching those known solutions to their interpretation of the situation, and applying the best solution to the problem at hand. If that does not work, they start over. Clinical practice increases one's ability to perform these steps and, on reflection, to appreciate them.

Clinical research can illustrate consequentialist relationships; it can suggest hypotheses about relationships; it cannot test relationships. For that, comparative statics are required, ideally in the form of a controlled experiment, quasi-experiment, or econometric analysis. From this perspective, clinical methods are neither conclusive nor robust, although carefully matched case comparisons may approximate the results of other approaches to comparative statics. The fundamental conceit of clinical research is that the important concepts of management cannot be grasped if treated in merely formal relationship to one another. As Karl Weick explains in *Making Sense of the Organization*: "Typically, environmental change is viewed as something largely outside the influence of organizations. The position we are developing suggests a different conclusion. Justifications, assembled into paradigms, can be enacted into a changing environment, thereby imposing some stability on it. Perception guided by a coherent paradigm can prefigure an environment. And confident action based on that prefiguring can actually move the environment in the direction of those paradigmatic preconceptions. That possibility is the important design point that is implicit in serial self-fulfilling prophesies" (2001, 80).

My experience suggests that there is a fundamental truth embedded in this conceit. When management principles become the objects of commitment and action, consequentialist relationships--responsibility and authority, knowledge and organization, incentives and cooperation--look different from the way they do in the doctoral seminar room. To understand relationships of this kind, perhaps, one must experience them--either directly or indirectly through a narrator's ability to make sense of a particular time and context and convey that sympathetic understanding to the reader.

The possibility that organizational processes are not in fact straightforward consequentialist relationships implies the rebutable proposition that clinical research is a better way to study them than are methods based on comparative statics. Take the design of organizational interventions. Much of the literature on this topic has focused on identifying change rules, but this technique-oriented literature has one serious limitation: it is not really clear what social mechanisms and processes are supposed to be activated through the initiating and follow-through action by authority figures. That is precisely the kind of question that narration lends itself to.

Consequently, I accept the core of the argument that any serious attempt to move from principles to practical reasoning requires a conceptual frame. Clinical research is especially in need of sound conceptual frames. But, the developmental arc of my thinking about public management research goes in precisely the opposite direction of most public administrationists. I was trained in positive science and methodological individualism, empirical testing of carefully specified models derived from first principles--that is the kind of research I used to do (occasionally, still do). Experience leads me to conclude that it is not a practical way to go about answering the kind of questions about public management we would like to be able to answer--at this time.

Perhaps my newly found appreciation of narrative methods is ingenuous, reflecting my inexperience with them. There is a big difference between reading about, or even teaching something, and doing it. I confess my concluding methodological inferences here are largely conjectural. Ultimately, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The only unqualified advice I would presume to offer the prospective contributor to this journal is: Do good work! Interest, delight, persuade, and amaze us. Remember that every kind of discourse has its rules. Abide by them. Cultivate a richer appreciation for alternative discourses and a shared sense of our subject matter, the boundaries of which are probably a greater source of conflict within the field of public management than are rules of discourse.

REFERENCES

Barzelay, Michael. 2001. *The New Public Management: Improving Research and Policy Dialogue*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Black, Fischer, and Myron Scholes. 1973. "The Pricing of Options and Corporate Liabilities." *Journal of Political Economy* 81:637-54.

Lynn, Laurence E. 1996. *Public Management as Art, Science, and Profession*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House.

Simon, Herbert A. 1946. "The Proverbs of Administration." *Public Administration Review* 6:53-67.

Weick, Karl. 2001. *Making Sense of the Organization*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Womack, James P., Daniel T. Jones, and Daniel Roos. 1990. *The Machine that Changed the World: Based on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology 5-million Dollar 5-Year Study on the Future of the Automobile*. New York: Rawson Associates.

Direct all correspondence to: Fred Thompson, Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Willamette University, 900 State Street, Salem, OR 97301. Email:fthompso@willamette.edu