

BOOK REVIEW

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Laurence J. O'Toole Jr., Kenneth J. Meier (2011) *Public Management. Organizations, Governance and Performance*. United States of America, New York: Cambridge University Press, 331 pp., ISBN: 9781107004412, 1107004411

Students and practitioners of public management wishing to gain a thorough understanding of link between public management and performance, the theories that underpin them, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, need to look no further than to *Public Management. Organizations, Governance and Performance*.

This book, signed by **Laurence J. O'Toole, Jr.** (he is the Margaret Hughes and Robert T. Golembiewski Professor of Public Administration and a Distinguished Research Professor. He serves on the editorial boards of seven scholarly journals and co-edits the Johns Hopkins Studies in Governance and Public Management) and **Kenneth J. Meier** (he is the Charles H. Gregory Chair in Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University, College Station. He is also Professor of Public Management at Cardiff Business School. He is editor-in-chief of *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* for which he previously served as associate editor and co-editor) provides important new insights into the impact of public management on organizational performance.

Academic discipline require a point of reference, a major work that establishes their most salient point and that provide important insights and set the stage for future work. The book has produced a seminal contribution to the discipline.

The book is very well documented, the databases employed by the authors compile information from about 1000 organizations and provide to the reader essential information for understanding current problems such as networking, managerial quality and personnel stability in public organizations.

The authors' approach consisting in the formalization of the five underlying principles (public organizations are autoregressive (or inertial) systems; public management can be divided into two broad parts: managing within the organization and managing the organization's relationships with the environment; external management can be divided, at least theoretically, into efforts to exploit opportunities in the environment and efforts to buffer the organization from threats that the environment might generate; the relationships between variables – that is, management, stabilizing

elements such as structure, and the environment – are nonlinear (p. xii-xiii)) by means of a mathematical model which will be tested in the chapters of the book.

The authors of this book have proposed to provide answers to a series of fundamental research questions in theoretical and practical terms as well: How effective are public managers as they seek to influence the efforts of public organizations to deliver policy outputs and outcomes? How, and how much, is management related to public program performance? What aspects of management can be distinguished, and can their separable contributions to performance be estimated? How do managers deal with internal operations, opportunities in the environment, and threats or shocks from outside the organization? Can the networking behavior of managers and the networked structures in which many public organizations sit shape policy results – for good or ill? (p. xi)

The structure of the book is organized around these research questions, each chapter providing an answer to one of them.

The book has preface, eight chapters, and a list of figures, a list of tables, a glossary, references and an index.

The book's first chapter "Public management and performance: an evidence-based perspective" sets the scene, outlining the theoretical perspective on public management and performance.

The second chapter "A model of public management and a source of evidence" introduces the author's theory on public management and its formalization in terms of mathematical modeling. The model is described and presented in comparison with other recently developed models in the field.

Chapters 3 through 7 provide coverage of the management–shapes–performance evidence. Each chapter concentrates on an aspect of management, with the major managerial functions carved from the general model for focused attention.

Chapter three, "Public management in interdependent settings: networks, managerial networking and performance" presents important themes of networks and managerial networking with other interdependent actors.

Chapter four "Managerial quality and performance" presents the qualitative managerial measuring instrument developed by the authors and estimates the impact of quality on the public program. The analyses in this chapter offer three principal contributions: 1. the development and application of an uncommon measure of public management quality; 2. the research offers the fullest rigorous test to date of the proposition that public management quality contributes positively to performance and 3. managerial networking contributes positively to performance, but the returns diminish at higher levels of networking. This chapter, therefore, offers an innovative, albeit indirect, overall measure of public management quality.

Chapter five, "Internal management and performance: stability, human resources and decision making", examines three elements of internal management: creating stable personnel, managing an organization's human resources, and making decisions in the face of a significant budget. Resulting from these analysis: human resources and managerial consistency lead to managerial performance. Better internal management can handle major events (such as budgetary cuts) which may affect the overall coordination, results and performance of the organization.

In the chapter six “Nonlinearities in public management: the role of managerial capacity and organizational buffering” the authors demonstrate the importance of managerial functions of protection and nonlinearity impact of leadership in handling turbulence sources such as budget cuts and natural disasters. The conclusion is that capacity and buffering provide additional aids as public organizations and their managers seek to deliver results.

Chapter seven, “Public management in intergovernmental networks: matching structural networks and managerial networking”, presents an initial foray into the distinction between behavior and structural networks. The authors use as a measure of structural networks a set of intergovernmental fiscal relations and explore the way in which the sources of their funding from government could shape the results, then, show how the network behavior and other management aspects can affect performance in different types of structural networks.

The last chapter, the concluding chapter, “Public management and performance: what we know, and what we need to know”, neatly ties the book’s findings, what we have learned about public management and performance and offers insights on possible future research efforts.

The chapters not only provide an excellent overview of the literature, a perspective, a model, and a large set of empirical findings but also offer innovative ideas in understanding how public managers shape agency and program performance.

The book has a number of strengths. Its vast and varied bibliography is composed first of all on general studies but also on specialized papers authored by renowned scientists in the field. Very well written, its language is in the same time specialized but accessible, which could render the book attractive in the eyes of the reader. Both students and practitioners will find important lessons learned for the public organizations everywhere seek a more solid footing to deal with today’s turbulent socio-economic circumstances. Its main value consists in expressing many original ideas which would deserve extensive debate in the academic spheres.

Although the book was launched in 2011, its theories and research have propelled its authors as citing sources, their ideas being transposed in other papers but in a manner that is more or less obvious to the reader.