

BOOK REVIEW

Corina-Georgiana ANTONOVICI¹ (LAZAR)

National School of Political Studies and Public Administration

Bucharest, Romania

corina.antonovici@administratiepublica.eu

Cayer, N.J., Baker, D.L., Weschler, L.F. 2010. *Public administration. Social change and adaptive management*. Third Edition, Birkdale Publishers, San Diego, ISBN13:978-0972441957, ISBN10: 0972441956

Subject and explaining the central concept:

The answers to the public administration problems cannot only appear from one direction. Public administration needs a distributed management, because the solutions to the problems they are facing come from many directions. The administration should learn from experience. The adaptive management is learning by doing.

In the specialized literature, specifically in natural resource management, "adaptive management" term was developed in the mid 1970s. The adaptive management has been used for several areas; therefore its definition is closely related to the field in which it was applied. For example, for forest land managers it may indicate "the development of predictive tools that can be used for the management of a specific location". In socio-political context, policymakers tend to perceive the adaptive management as a process that allows a person to see the overall impact of policies and thus, emphasizes the need to develop large models (Halbert, C. 1993, p. 268). Adaptive management has emerged in response to highly fragmented institutional arrangements, full of gaps, overlaps and inconsistencies, so that the ecosystem health does not appear clearly as an objective within a confused group of discrete regulatory objectives (Kärkkäinen, BC 2003 , p. 946). For this reason, the adaptive management is considered to be deeply different from the regulatory approaches established in resource and environmental areas.

What's new in this text and how it solves the theoretical dilemmas imposed by other authors?

The authors try to make a picture of the whole public administration system: context, actors, activities and niche issues. In the first two chapters, the authors analyze the public

¹Scholar within the project "Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships for young researchers in the fields of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and Sociology" POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134650, financed through the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund.

administration and the services provided to direct beneficiaries, but also the American political context compared with the general "administration". The third chapter deals with the bureaucracy: as an ideal, rational form of organization for accomplishing any goal is contrasted with the reality of bureaucratic behavior. In the fourth chapter, it analyzes the theories of organizations, are used to illustrate problems in organizational behavior. In chapter 5, it looks for ways bureaucracies use planning, budgeting, and evaluation to facilitate administration. In the last two chapters, it tackles the management and public organizations issues in the light of new theories and theoretical trends. All these chapters are presented in an adaptive approach.

The development environment of the public administration activity was compared with the life in the swamp, because of the uncertainties they are facing. In the swamp, the legs are uncertain, the direction is unclear, the land is constantly in motion, and the alligators are hungry (Cayer, NJ, Baker, DL, Weschler, LF 2010, p.1). Alligators, metaphorically called, are represented by the political, economic, institutional, technological and social issues that affect the government activities.

In such a changing and unstable world in environment, to be efficient and to respond to problems, the public administration must rely on the adaptive management, because its actions are not static, but adjusted according to the combination of new social and economic information, in order to improve the management, learning from previous problems.

Both the needs of public services beneficiaries and budget limits imposed by reducing the size of the administration may affect the partial or complete service delivery. To avoid this to happen, public sector administrators must find a way to adapt, to find ways to form and structure a new management model.

In this case, we can talk about the management effectiveness and an adapted management style. Each leader adapts his style according to the structure and situations in which they operate, which is the adaptive management. By using the adaptive management, managers try to anticipate external events, to take advantage of them, to predict and to counteract negative events. While doing this, they try to adapt the internal practices and their organization behavior to overcome the inertia and to enhance the organizational capacity to absorb adverse shocks (Cayer, NJ, Baker, DL, Weschler, LF 2010, p. 190).

To survive the unpredictable environment, public administration and managers must be inventive, innovative, flexible and adaptable. In this situation, planning, resource allocation and human resource management are based more on intuitive and contingent approaches, on the application of adaptive management, rather than on traditional public administration theory.

Public administrators will continue to change as new concerns face citizens and other actors in the political system. Public Administrators conduct their activities through organizations, and the public and elected representatives expect results from those organizations. In order to produce results, public agencies need resources and processes to assist them (Cayer, N.J, Baker, D.L., Weschler, L.F. 2010, p. 136).

Although the 7 chapters address different issues, they meet in a single point: Social Change. And public organizations are complex social systems with well-defined and rooted procedures, processes and patterns of interpersonal relationships. Minor changes that require only small adjustments are easily assimilated. The social foundation of the public administration, such as organizational and structural arrangements, generates both direct and indirect effects, and changes in this framework have high propagation implications.

The adaptive management is an approach that helps the public administration to make progresses in the face of challenges.

As a critique of the adaptive management promoted by our authors, we identified its application risk, given that it does not involve a standardized model, adapting being entirely pragmatic, unconscious and sometimes not well thought out.

The purpose of the book is to indicate the approaches, the steps that must be followed by public administrators under public administration values, maximizing their chances of success and minimizing risks. Therefore, the book *Public Administration. Social change and adaptive management* is a practical book, applying in our times.

References:

- (1) Halbert, C. 1993. "How adaptive is adaptive management? Implementing adaptive management in Washington State and British Columbia". *Reviews in Fisheries Science* 1(3):261-283.
- (2) Karkkainen, B.C. 2003. "Adaptive Ecosystem Management and Regulatory Penalty Defaults: Toward a Bounded Pragmatism" 87 *Minn. L. Rev* 943 – 948.
- (3) Cayer, N.J, Baker, D.L., Weschler, L.F. 2010. *Public administration. Social change and adaptive management*. Third Edition, Birkdale Publishers, San Diego.