
FOREWORD BY THE GUEST EDITOR

Significant changes in country public administration systems tend to occur at times of accumulating complexities and problems in the implementation of ongoing administrative activities. It is the need to adapt public administration systems to new circumstances that gives rise to reforms, so public administration reforms do not occur as a result of the emergence of new theories; rather, on the contrary, new theories accompany reforms as their reflection. This is the cyclical nature of public administration changes: reforms begin with practical needs and changes, then move to the plane of theoretical justification of reform practices, and finally, a justified practice emerges, which begins to be perceived as a new norm.

The experience of public administration reforms shows that the main objects of public administration reforms, no matter what these reforms consist in, are two main elements of governance: firstly, the civil service, since civil servants implement any reforms, and, secondly, those instruments of public administration that are inadequate to public needs and should be replaced by new instruments. Thus, in the Russian Federation in the early 2000s almost simultaneously passed meritocratic reform of the civil service (the first of the reforms) and administrative reform of the conversion of types of functions of state bodies into agency schemes, the elimination of duplicative functions, and the formation of the enormous massive of administrative regulations for the provision of public services (following the reform of the civil service).

New public administration reforms are emerging recently. The main difficulties of the countries public administration systems lie in their sluggishness and insufficient adaptation to the rapidly changing technological, social and economic conditions of turbulent development. These difficulties are most acutely felt by those countries that are just accumulating experience in the use of classical theories of public administration. Such countries cannot fully rely on existing theoretical approaches elaborated in developed countries, because the history, socio-economic and cultural traditions of developing countries are inherently different. In normal, non-turbulent conditions, it was acceptable to be guided by the developments of governance in Western countries, but if the approaches of leaders are no longer perceived as patterns or role models, if their developments do not cope with the challenges of turbulent development, it is more dangerous to follow them than in the era of stability. Developing countries feel the shortcomings of classical theories of public administration more acutely and are more prone to modify these theories; they are, paradoxically, on the frontier of theory development.

This issue of Public Administration Issues presents articles reflecting the experiences of developing countries in both elements of public administration reforms. These articles present possible theoretical implication of the current reform conditions of country public administration systems in key areas, namely public service and instrumental theories of digital technology application.

The most vulnerable classical theories in the field of public service have become prosocial motivation theories and meritocracy theories, which, as shown in a number of articles in this issue of the journal, cannot be regarded as autonomous, independent of other theoretical constructs. Thus, PSM theories are an intermediate link between organizational justice and organizational performance, between the declared missions of public bodies and the ethical climate in public bodies. This also applies to the meritocracy theory (recruitment and appointment according to merits), which, based on the requirements of proportional representation in multi-ethnic municipalities, turns out to be a middle ground between ethnic and tribal preferences for the formation of the state apparatus. Finally, theories of countering corruption in the state apparatus are enriched by schemes of countering coordinated fraud in public procurement.

Reform initiatives also lead to adjustments in theories related to the instruments of public administration. This issue of the Journal examines the modifications in theories related to the service functions of the state and data-driven governance. Service functions become most vulnerable in the era of government digitalization. In the classical sense, services should be administratively regulated by government agencies as stakeholders in governance processes, and the existence of exhaustive regulation is usually sufficient for services to be recognized as effective by citizens. However, the digitalization of services generates the phenomenon of poorly perceived services, which leads to distrust in services and reduces their quality. In particular, citizens demand that stakeholders fulfill the role of mediators rather than providers of poorly structured and difficult to perceive information. Similar demands are beginning to be placed on data-driven governance. Analytics based on open government data (OGD) cannot be introduced into the decision-making system automatically; it is necessary to take into account the Technology- Organization-Environment (TOE) triad, which includes the analysis of cost-benefit perspectives, organizational readiness, and external pressures in the context of the OGD approach.

Concluding the preface to this issue of the Journal, we can assume that in developing countries (Global South and BRICS) one can observe a change in the approach to classical theories of bureaucracy and instrumental theories of public administration: instead of independent theories, they become areas of assembly (meeting points) of several theories that significantly influence the content and limitations of applicability of classical and instrumental theories. This is a direct consequence of developing countries adopting new governance practices in the era of turbulent international development.

Issue Guest Editor
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