

**DEVELOPING PUBLIC MANAGERS
FOR A CHANGING WORLD**

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

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SECTOR MANAGEMENT VOLUME 5

DEVELOPING PUBLIC MANAGERS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

FOREWORD

It is obviously important, and especially so in difficult and uncertain economic times, that those in public governance positions and involved in the planning and provision of vital public services are suitably skilled and knowledgeable for their managerial and administrative responsibilities. In this respect, over the past two decades there has been considerable growth in the number of public servants undertaking university-based postgraduate-level programmes in public administration and public leadership. Indeed, there has also been considerable growth in the number of public bodies prepared to sponsor and support their aspiring and practicing managers on MPA and MBA-type programmes (Master in Public Administration or Master in Business Administration), particularly for study on a part-time basis, while continuing in their day-time work roles (e.g. with attendance for classes in the evenings or at weekends).

On the whole, the story from participants of such mid-career education and development programmes has been a very positive one, with the vast majority of mid-career practitioners viewing their experience in returning to study as having been intellectually stimulating and personally enriching. Besides the stimulus of fresh theoretical and conceptual perspectives provided in the classroom, most such practitioners greatly value the contact with other practitioners and the exchange of learning from their respective experiences across different public services, and often with private and voluntary sector organisations too. But while those who have the opportunity to return to study during their public service careers generally appreciate and mostly enjoy the experience, questions do need to be asked about the *impacts* of such programmes in facilitating demonstrable improvements in public leadership management within their organisations and, again, especially in financially difficult times, about the value for money achieved by public organisations through such sponsorship, and the associated investment of time and money.

Key to effectiveness of impact in this context is the degree of linkage between the curriculum and content of the academic programmes on the one hand and the work contexts and circumstances of the practitioner student on the other, or, in other words, the relevance and applicability of the subject matter learned on the programmes to the work settings and to

the scope of influence of the participants. Moreover, this issue is, of course, likely to be complicated by the likelihood of significant differences between participants within a single cohort or class with regard to the roles and responsibilities they respectively exercise. This means that the question of 'impact' needs to be considered often in quite individualistic and diverse terms, not just as a single common parameter.

However, beyond the issue of the relevance or otherwise of the curriculum and content of MPA and other such programmes, equally important in determining the impacts for practitioner students are the issues concerning the pedagogical design of the programmes and the value of the approaches and techniques adopted in delivering such programmes in ways that are stimulating and meaningful for each practitioner and their work context. In this respect, research has consistently emphasised the importance of teaching staff being able to create a learning environment that promotes multiple and thoughtful connections between the classroom on the one hand and management practice in the workplace on the other. To this end, learning and teaching strategies are all important and innovation and experimentation in this respect are always to be encouraged as we strive to find better, more impactful ways of developing practitioner students for enhanced effectiveness in their particular workplace roles.

This, then, is what provides the focus and rationale of this particular volume – titled '*Developing Managers for a Changing World*' because, in addressing issues of pedagogy and particularly the potential for innovation and experimentation in mid-career education and development programmes for public servants, it also builds on and responds to the effects of a significantly changed context and constantly evolving agenda of priorities for public services. All the chapters in the book benefit from the considerable experience of the authors in working to make strong connections between the classroom and managerial practice in their public administration programmes. As well as their own individually developing expertise as teachers and/or directors of different postgraduate programmes in various European institutions of higher education, all the authors have all spent much time together, over a number of years, pooling and exchanging their experiences and helping each other to learn through the annual workshops of the *Copenhagen Forum*, and together building shared understanding and insight through experimentation and innovation. In the chapter 'The Copenhagen Forum – 1996–2016: Odyssey of a Learning and Teaching Community in Public Management', J. C. Ry Nielsen and John W. Raine, respectively from Copenhagen Business School and University of Birmingham, provide a summary account of the work and achievements

of this Forum over its 20 year existence to date. Thereafter, the book is organised into two main parts: Part I exploring different strategies for facilitating public management and leadership learning, and Part II focusing more specifically on experimentation as a technique for public management learning.

Part I: Strategies for Facilitating Public Management and Leadership Learning

Seven chapters form the contents for this first part of the volume. In the chapter ‘Music in the Street, a Tuning-Fork for Mid-Career Teaching and Researching about Social Quality and Public Management?’, Ton Notten reflects on key lessons from his 25 years of experience in addressing urban problems in Amsterdam, Brussels and Rotterdam with his practitioner students of public administration, by highlighting the kinds of theories and approaches that have proved especially impactful and effective in inspiring action and responding to change.

Rotterdam is also at the focus of the chapter ‘Academic PA Education and Professional Practice: Innovative Methods for Linking Theory and Praxis’, written by Frans-Bauke van der Meer and Peter Marks. Here the authors consider two much-practiced pedagogical methods that aim to help students link their studies with their practice – compilation of personal learning agendas, on the one hand, and peer-to-peer coaching on the other. Both methods have been utilised with much success on the MPA offered by Erasmus University and the chapter discusses the added value they have been able to bring to the programme, especially in relation to the practitioner students’ professional contributions.

An intriguing and thought-provoking chapter ‘Civil Servants and ‘Scientific Temper’: Scholarly Competence for Enactment of New Realities in Professionals’ Practice’ by Michal Sedlacko from the University of Vienna then invites readers to think differently about the scientific knowledge base of civil servants as public administration practitioners. In this respect Michal argues for greater emphasis on scholarly competence within professional degree programmes and proposes the opening up of ‘spaces for reflection’ within the context of everyday professional practice. In this way, he suggests, the pitfalls of technical rationality are minimised and the stance of practitioners becomes more receptive to change, and to achieving new aims of emancipation and transformation.

Next, Chrissie Oldfield argues, in the chapter ‘In Favour of Co-Production’, from her experience in leading the MPA at London South Bank University for the development of a model of tutor-student interaction that builds on the concept of ‘co-production’ which has been much in vogue in public service arenas in recent years. The chapter also outlines an approach in which programme participants’ work-based experiences are used to inform programme content, so increasing the currency and value of the classroom time as well as inspiring further developments in the workplace.

Then, in the chapter ‘Leadership in Search of Public Value: Hybrid Practices and Explorative Learning’, Dorthe Pedersen from the MPA at Copenhagen Business School picks up on another much-discussed concept in public administration in recent times – that of ‘public value’ – and discusses the potential of its creation as providing an appropriate focus for contemporary public management and leadership development programmes. This is especially valuable, she argues, at a time and in a context when public administration is becoming increasingly hybridised.

The chapter ‘Management Education – *For, about, with* Public Values’ also draws on the concept of ‘public value’, in this case with Bríd Quinn from the University of Limerick, Ireland, using it as a key idea in response to questions about the purposes of public management education. Her contribution focuses on the ways in which management education has been responding to that changing context and set of priorities and she concludes by exploring the philosophical and practical impact of a public value(s) approach to contemporary public management programmes.

The chapter ‘Experiential Learning and Teaching at a Distance: How Distinctive an Experience?’ then rounds off Part I of the volume by offering some reflections from experience in the design and delivery of an online public management programme. In this respect, Abena Dadze-Arthur and John W. Raine discuss strategies for addressing three particular challenges that they encountered in the process of preparing and presenting the first module of the University of Birmingham’s MPA programme: the challenges of achieving a ‘learner-centric’ online design; of facilitating effective communication within the student group and between staff and students; and of building an effective online learning community.

Part II: Experimentation as a Technique for Public Management Learning

The second part of the book, comprising six further chapters, each, as indicated, with a focus on experimentation for public management learning,

commences in ‘Managination’ with a fascinating discussion by Niels Thygesen and Tine Hansen of Copenhagen Business School of their work on ‘Innovative Laboratories’ as learning environments for addressing real-life strategic problems. They explain how, in such laboratories programme, participants reformulate problems and explore and assess different solutions through a process they intriguingly summarise in their metaphoric title.

Then in the chapter ‘Experimenting with Practice – A Monstrous Pedagogy’ Hanne Knudsen and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen of Aarhus University in Copenhagen draw on data on the pedagogical value of experiments to participants of their public management programmes, finding them to be generally very useful especially in identifying the key challenges inherent in participants’ own practice. While, as they suggest, such experiments will not necessarily solve all the tensions between theory and practice, they do at least provide fresh insights, surface new dilemmas and uncover potentially helpful opportunities and challenges.

In not dissimilar vein, in the chapter ‘Moderate Bravery: Learning through Mundane Experiments and Storytelling’, Klaus Majgaard of Copenhagen Business School discusses the value of what he calls ‘acts of moderate bravery’, particularly the use of storytelling and other such narrative techniques, to enable students to focus on and understand better some of the real problems of their daily practice. He finds that such acts can inspire a less idealised perspectives on the paradoxes of management and that they can foster a nuanced, pragmatic and reflexive approach.

Next, in the chapter ‘Institutional Constraints of Experimental Learning Formats in Professional PA Master Programmes’, Monika Knassmüller and Sylvia Veit from the University of Vienna discuss how experimental learning might usefully be designed into MPA-type programmes, especially when circumstances are such that the amount of personal contact between tutors and students is very limited and/or when cooperation on the part of the students’ employers is less than whole-hearted. Their programme is based on principles of blended learning and thus a significant amount of online teaching is involved.

Poula Helth, from Copenhagen Business School, and author of the chapter ‘The Audience Wheel as a Technic to Create Transformative Learning’, then offers an inspiring case study in the use of aesthetic performances, combined with reflections, as a technique for exploring the nature of leadership and how it might be transformed through a less individualistic, more collective approach. She argues that the inevitable divide between teaching in the classroom and practice in the workplace is helpfully

diminished when programme participants learn through the very practical techniques of aesthetic performance and reflection.

Then Part II concludes with the chapter ‘Thinking-Space as Research Creation: The Opportunity for a Qualitative Better Welfare Just Like That’ from Christa Breum Amhøj, also of Copenhagen Business School, who discusses an experiment entitled ‘*The Future Public Leadership Education Now*’ which has been developed in response to growing criticism that traditional centers of education have developed too much of a McDonald’s culture and, as such, struggled to connect passion, sensitivity and intuition with knowledge. For Christa, the priority in experimentation within public administration programmes is to shift the focus ‘from thinking *about* open spaces to intensifying *thinking-spaces*’ that are able to generate increased opportunities for better public welfare provision.

Finally, the threads of the volume are brought together in an ‘Afterword’ composed by Bríd Quinn, a stalwart member of the Copenhagen Forum from its early stages. Her piece is entitled ‘From Frenetic to Phronetic? Developing Public Managers for a Changing World’, and in it she reflects on the much changed context and priorities both of public management activity and modes of operation on the one hand and of the education and development processes for its leading practitioners on the other. She concludes by challenging management educators as to the importance of reconfiguring their programmes and pedagogies to meet changing societal, personal, professional and practice-related needs – a challenge, that as Bríd herself would acknowledge, has been taken up with zeal by all the contributors to this volume from the Copenhagen Forum over the past two decades.

Klaus Majgaard
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John W. Raine
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Editors