

# 16

## Conclusion

### Directions for Future Research and Practice

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#### 16.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have focused on specific aspects of the management–public service performance relationship. In this concluding chapter, we zoom out and take stock of what we know as a basis for setting directions for future research and practice. Section 16.2 synthesizes what insights the chapters have provided into our central question, namely how management makes a meaningful contribution to public service performance. We also examine what is known about specific characteristics of the public sector context that play a role in achieving public service performance. Based on the insights gained and the limitations of existing studies, a research agenda is outlined that includes conceptual, theoretical, and methodological issues. In line with this volume’s purpose, we also outline implications for public organizations’ efforts to create public value.

#### 16.2 What We Know about Management’s Contribution to Public Service Performance

Before we can take stock of what is known about the central relationship studied in this volume, we must examine the key concepts involved. We then summarize what we know about how management contributes to public service performance, both directly and indirectly, taking into account the influence of specific characteristics of the public sector context.

##### 16.2.1 Key Concepts

###### 16.2.1.1 Public Service Performance

Public service performance is a multidimensional concept referring to the process and outcomes of public service provision. Boyne’s (2002) conceptualization, which

involves outputs, efficiency, outcomes/effectiveness, responsiveness, and democratic outcomes, provides a useful starting point for understanding public service performance. Chapter 2 argues that public service performance needs to be understood in relation to different stakeholders who value different collective social outcomes they want to achieve and prioritize different public values in public service provision. We contend that any measure of public service performance should explain which stakeholders' understandings are included, and whether stakeholders' criteria are measured directly or indirectly (i.e. through other sources). Employees are important stakeholders in public service provision, but their interests are included only marginally in existing measures of public service performance. Therefore, the construct of "employee outcomes" should be included in research to complement the "public service performance" concept (as per Brewer and Selden 2000, 689).

Although performance is recognized as a key concern of public management scholars, there is no common framework to guide researchers in their selection of measures despite earlier work on the issue (Boyne et al. 2006). Chapter 2 discusses nine studies illustrating a stakeholder perspective, and it shows that measures vary from the accomplishment of overall official goals to specific aspects of performance such as efficiency. A key observation is that stakeholder interests are typically not made explicit and measured directly. In this respect, Chapters 10 and 13 contribute by paying explicit attention to different stakeholders in their discussion of performance and public values. Chapter 10 argues that diversity management contributes to improving performance outcomes for disadvantaged groups and addressing inequalities in society. It also argues that the two major diversity paradigms are connected to different public values, with the discrimination and fairness perspective relating to equity and social justice, and the synergy perspective relating to organizational effectiveness and responsiveness. Chapter 13 discusses the value conflicts facing public service professionals. These conflicts arise from the differences between the personal and professional values they hold important and the values that are promoted by their organizations, managers, and other stakeholders such as citizens and service users.

Other chapters in Part II of the volume examine (organizational) performance mostly without further specification (Chapters 5, 9, and 11) or emphasize specific aspects of public service performance and/or measure them in specific ways. For instance, Chapter 6 understands performance as meeting the organization's goals and measures this as the percentage of ministerial targets met by central government executive agencies.

What holds for organizational performance also holds for individual job performance. Chapter 14 observes that the heterogeneity of conceptualizations and measures of different types of job performance is immense in the literature on public service performance. Studies focus on different dimensions of individual performance, including in-role and extra-role performance and performance directed toward individuals or society. Studies also use a variety of measures, such as supervisor ratings of employee performance, self-assessed performance, subjective willingness

to exert effort, and the number of specific tasks fulfilled. Obviously, this heterogeneity has made it hard to accumulate knowledge. While Chapter 14 argues that there is a need for a uniform conceptualization, it also recognizes that any definition of performance depends on the institutional context because of the value component of performance. The chapter illustrates this point with the telling example of teachers helping children with personal issues. This may or may not be considered performance, depending on what is institutionally appropriate.

### **16.2.1.2 Employee Outcomes**

When chapters in Part II discuss performance, they typically do not include employee outcomes. An exception is Chapter 9 which pays attention to potential trade-offs between organizational performance and employee outcomes. This chapter observes that high performance may well be achieved at a cost to employee well-being when work overload leads to anxiety, stress, burnout, and work–life imbalance, while high-commitment and high-involvement HRM systems may produce employee well-being alongside superior performance.

Chapter 12, which opens Part III of the volume, examines employee well-being following Warr's (1987) definition of the concept as the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work. Well-being is regarded as a multidimensional concept. It involves psychological well-being (focusing on subjective experiences, such as job satisfaction and engagement), physical well-being (referring to bodily health and work-related illnesses, stress, and sick leave), and social well-being (involving interactions among employees and between them and their supervisors and including social support and trust).

Chapter 15 adds a relevant outcome of public organizations' HRM policies, namely employees' employability. Understanding the concept to mean that employees have fair chances in the labor market, Chapter 15 argues that being employable is an important employee outcome with a view to the ongoing changes in the public sector, and that investing in employees' employability is also in the employer's interest. Employability investments can be seen as part of a retention strategy that helps public organizations to match supply and demand in a labor market characterized by shortages of qualified employees. In addition, investing in employees' employability can be seen as public value creation because employers thus contribute to the collective outcome of sustainable employment.

### **16.2.1.3 Managing**

Many dimensions of managing for public service performance are examined in this volume. They include a variety of leadership behaviors: goal-oriented, relationship-oriented, non-leader-centered leadership (or expressed in related terms: transformational, transactional, and distributive leadership), and ethical leadership, as well as reputation management, people management, performance management, diversity management, and change management/leadership. Chapter 1 notes that the public management literature features a line of research concentrating on management

systems and another line on leadership. Both are represented in this volume. On the one hand, Chapters 8 and 9, respectively, examine performance management and human resource management systems. On the other hand, Chapters 5, 6, 10, and 11 examine leadership activities generally and diversity and change leadership specifically. However, all chapters pay attention to both management and leadership, thereby integrating different bodies of literature. For instance, Chapter 8 understands performance management as a system that integrates goal-setting activities, performance measurement, and the feedback of performance information into decision-making, and it supplements this with several leadership activities, such as creating learning platforms and facilitating open and purpose-driven dialogue about performance. Likewise, Chapter 10 shows that team diversity as such does not result directly in higher team performance but depends on leadership behaviors to achieve this positive effect. Some chapters, notably Chapters 3, 7, 10, and 15, focus explicitly on people management, involving the implementation of HRM practices and leadership behavior in combination. This resonates with a key point of Chapter 3, which discusses the HRM literature's call for the integration of management and leadership.

Chapter 3 argues that public management studies should not just concentrate on executive or senior public managers but should also study middle and frontline managers who are responsible for managing and supporting street-level bureaucrats and other public service employees. In this volume, Chapters 5 and 8) discuss public managers in general, although the examined types of leadership behavior are mostly related to senior managers. Other chapters make their focus explicit, such as Chapter 6 which concentrates on senior managers; Chapter 10 which pays attention to team leaders; and Chapters 7, 11, and 15 which distinguish explicitly between top managers, on the one hand, and middle and frontline managers, on the other. The value of these chapters is that they cover a range of activities of public managers and relate these to the roles and responsibilities of managers at different hierarchical levels.

### **16.2.2 The Public Management–Public Service Performance Relationship**

The chapters in this volume provide ample evidence for the management–performance relationship that is central to “managing for public service performance.” For instance, Chapter 5 concentrates on public managers’ goal-oriented, relational, and non-leader-centered leadership and discusses empirical studies that provide support for the contribution each of these leadership behaviors makes to performance. Likewise, Chapter 6 examines senior managers’ contribution to meeting the ministerial targets set for executive agencies, and Chapter 8 reviews the contribution performance management makes to performance.

### 16.2.2.1 Direct and Indirect Relationships

The chapters in Part II of the volume generally concentrate on the direct relationship between public management and public service performance. However, several chapters also report on evidence that supports an indirect relationship. For instance, Chapter 5 reports that recent studies of the leadership–performance relationship provide evidence of the effect of leadership on performance through employees' motivation and organizational commitment, and through employees' organizational citizenship and innovative behaviors. Chapter 9 builds on HRM research on the HRM–performance relationship and supports a multilevel model by including employee attitudes and behaviors as linking mechanisms. Different approaches to the HRM–performance relationship elaborate on employee attitudes and behaviors in different ways, including their abilities and motivation, organizational commitment, public service motivation, and job satisfaction. The chapter finds that the majority of empirical studies of HRM systems in the public sector provide evidence of employee attitudes and behaviors partly mediating the HRM–performance relationship. The chapter concludes that employees are not passive elements in the relationship but dynamic actors who influence the very nature of the relationship.

Chapter 12 opens Part III of the volume, which deals with the mechanisms mediating the management–performance relationship and offers further support for the indirect relationships. Relating to Wright and Nishii's (2013) multilevel model of the management–performance relationship, several chapters discuss employees' individual job behaviors and job performance as an important link in the management–organizational performance chain. Chapter 13 argues that public service professionals, who face multiple public values and public value tensions, take decisions that are, to some extent, guided by the values they personally and professionally hold important. These values impact their job performance and ultimately the extent to which public value is created. Chapter 14, which discusses the relationship of public employees' motivation and their individual performance, holds that individual performance is related to organizational performance but that the strength of this relationship is unclear because many other variables impact organizational performance.

Regarding the antecedents of individual job performance, Chapter 14 concentrates on the contribution of PSM. Based on a comprehensive and systematic review of all relevant empirical studies since 1990, this chapter concludes that a convincing foundation of empirical evidence supports the direct effect of PSM on individual performance. Moreover, this direct effect does not disappear in studies that test for mediating and moderating variables. However, related to the earlier observation of the heterogeneity of measures of performance, it is unknown whether PSM affects different types of performance in different ways. While the results of studies of PSM's effect on in-role performance are mixed, the results of PSM's effect on extra-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior point unequivocally to a positive effect. Finally, Chapter 14 examines the size of PSM's effect on individual

performance and concludes that this is relatively small. However, the chapter argues that performance is a complex construct and it is unlikely that any single factor will explain a large amount of variance.

The volume also provides evidence that management contributes to employee outcomes. Chapter 12 discusses studies that corroborate the relationship between supervisors' support and implementation of some HRM practices (e.g. professional development, performance feedback, and financial rewards) and burnout and engagement among public sector employees. Chapter 13 reports on research showing that individuals who experience incompatibility between their own public service values and those promoted by their organization are more likely to report negative well-being attitudes (stress and quit intentions) than positive attitudes (job satisfaction and commitment). Reconciling such value conflicts is seen as a critical leadership task involving ethical or transformational leadership. Chapter 15 discusses studies that provide support for the contribution management makes to employees' employability by implementing training and development practices and stimulating employees' participation in development programs. So when it comes to employee well-being, human resource management systems (Chapter 9), line managers' implementation of HRM practices, and organizational leadership affect a variety of employee outcomes.

### **16.2.2.2 Contingency Variables**

A central feature of this work is the broad approach to the study of "managing for public service performance," which, as Chapter 1 argues, involves both contextual factors that are central to O'Toole and Meier's (2015) theory of the impact of context on public management and public values as institutional features of the public sector context. Chapter 4 elaborates on the public sector context as an institutional environment. This broad approach involves that the chapters in this volume follow O'Toole and Meier (2015) and pay attention to features of the external and internal organizational context, such as the complexity and turbulence of the environment as well as the multiplicity of goals, the degree of centralization, and red tape, which are typical of public organizations. In the institutional perspective, developed by Chapter 4, structural contextual factors are combined with normative and cultural-cognitive features to describe publicness as an institution that, on the one hand, influences public services, but, on the other, is itself reproduced and changed by the actions and behaviors of organizations and individuals. Questions regarding what publicness involves in different public services, what kind of public values are salient, and what their consequences are for public employees, public service performance, and employee outcomes are examined by several chapters.

Focusing on organizational performance, Chapter 5 regards not only senior managers' ability but also their discretion to make decisions and their capacity in allocating resources as variables that determine their impact on organizational performance. Chapter 5 proposes another moderating variable, namely organizational reputation, which is a result of achieving high performance previously and in

turn acts as a contingency variable affecting managers' efforts to increase performance. These organizational characteristics are supplemented by the public sector environment's complexity, which, as Chapter 11 suggests, affects management's success in leading organizational change. Chapter 11 regards this complexity as involving the degree of homogeneity and the concentration of stakeholder interests in how the organization operates and performs.

Chapter 9 draws on institutional theory to argue that involvement-HRM and commitment-HRM systems fit the public sector context, but that a high-performance HRM system does not. The basic people-management philosophy underlying the involvement and commitment-HRM systems fits the employee well-being-oriented model of public organizations and their humanist ideals. On the contrary, the high-performance HRM system is based on high management control and low trust, which does not fit the values characteristic of the public sector context. So rather than emphasizing specific variables, Chapter 9 proposes a sort of configurational approach to HRM systems and analyzes their underlying logics in relation to the logic of appropriateness that the authors consider distinctive of the public sector context.

Focusing on individual performance, Chapter 14 discusses several variables that moderate the PSM-individual performance relationship. One of these variables is public managers' transformational leadership. Other variables are the public organization's mission valence and the fit between the employee's and the organization's values. Public values stand out as institutional features that impact the PSM-individual employee performance relationship.

Concentrating on employee well-being, Chapter 12 refers to the generic job demands-resources (JD-R) model and person-environment (P-E) fit model to discuss several variables that impact well-being. Regarding the PSM-employee well-being relationship, Chapter 12 argues that the effect of PSM on employee well-being tends to be positive, but it can also be negative under certain conditions.

### 16.2.2.3 Conclusion

Overall, the evidence highlights public management's contribution to public service performance and employee well-being. However, this relationship involves multidimensional concepts, different organizational levels, and a vast array of mediating and moderating variables, many of which are not (yet) supported by solid evidence. The systematic study presented in Chapter 14 on the state of the art of the PSM-individual performance relationship stands out as a positive example. That exercise is feasible because it concentrates on a specific, much researched relationship. Even so, the authors note several limitations.

Despite such honest reckoning, motivated by the rigorous nature of scientific inquiry, the evidence reported in this volume indicates that management contributes to organizational performance both directly and indirectly, in many micro-level relationships and on the whole. The indirect mechanisms covered by this work involve public employees' attitudes and behaviors. That is how people, both public

managers and employees, make a difference, as our volume's subtitle highlights. From extant studies, we know that public managers contribute indirectly to performance through their influence on, for instance, organizational culture, performance management, management strategy, and rules and red tape (Andersen and Moynihan 2016; Andrews et al. 2012; Brewer and Walker 2010; Gerrish 2015; Walker et al. 2012). The chapters in this volume also provide evidence that management impacts individual job performance and employee outcomes, notably through middle and frontline managers' implementation of HRM practices and their leadership behaviors. There are good theoretical arguments and solid empirical evidence that confirm the influence exerted by the public sector context, including studies that show how public values make a difference.

## 16.3 Directions for Future Research

The individual chapters have discussed the limitations of existing research and the consequent agenda for future research pertaining to their chapter's topic. Here, we will build on these reflections for an overall discussion of the directions for future research on "managing for public service performance." We will cover several issues, namely the state of different theories in ongoing research, the development of more comprehensive models, the relevance of generic theories and the public sector context, and the call for methodological rigor. We conclude this section with a critical reflection on the relevance of research on "managing for public service performance" in light of public service provision's increasing dependence on networks involving multiple organizations.

### 16.3.1 From Theoretical Fragmentation Toward an Integrated Theoretical Framework

Section 16.2 summarized the evidence regarding the management–public service performance relationship. An obvious question is: How are these relationships theoretically explained? Chapter 9, which examines the relationship between different HRM systems and organizational performance, observes that studies tend not to expend much effort on elaborating on the underlying theories of the models they use. We agree that theorizing relationships is definitely an issue for the future research agenda.

The chapters in this volume refer to a vast array of theories to explain the specific relationships on which they focus. Going through the chapters, one comes across institutional theory, leadership theory, attribution theory, self-determination theory, motivation crowding theory, social exchange theory, resource-based theory, HRM systems' strength theory, identity theory, and theories underlying the AMO (Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity to perform), JD–R, and P–E fit models. Obviously,



these theories are not just alternatives to explain the same phenomenon. Some theories such as institutional theory and resource-based theory are more adequate to deal with macro-level and organizational-level phenomena, while others such as leadership theory, social exchange theory, and attribution theory can more adequately deal with interpersonal phenomena at the micro level. Some of the mentioned theories concern a specific phenomenon such as people's motivations, their likely antecedents, and consequences. Overall, the situation of public management research resembles the field of organization theory. To the question of why there are so many organization theories and why it is so difficult for organization theorists to converge on a common theory, Scherer (2003, 311) answers that the spectrum and variety of topics make it hard, if not impossible, to integrate these into one grand theory.

However, some theories could well complement each other in explaining the same phenomenon. For instance, self-determination theory, social exchange theory, attribution theory, and institutional theory, to name a few, shed different light on behavior in organizational settings. Yet in practice, researchers often have their favorite theories and do not make use of complementary theories to reach a more comprehensive explanation for the phenomenon under study. The consequence is theoretical fragmentation, which thwarts the growth of knowledge. This is not to say that theoretical pluriformity is not worthwhile. On the contrary, theories that offer competing explanations for the same phenomenon—for example, as rational choice theory and institutional theory do in explaining behavior as a result of the pursuit of rational interests or as a result of following appropriate routines and conventions—should be welcomed. Different meta-theoretical perspectives that researchers have in terms of research purposes and methods can also be a source of pluriformity (Scherer 2003), but it does not seem to explain the array of theories we observe in this volume. A situation of theoretical fragmentation rather than of deliberate pluriformity is not fruitful. Therefore, a definite priority on our research agenda is to elaborate more profoundly on the theoretical assumptions of the models used to study certain phenomena, as well as to develop more integrated explanations by making use of complementary theories.

### 16.3.2 Developing More Comprehensive Models

A variety of issues are relevant for future research on “managing for public service performance” as a multilevel, direct, and indirect relationship that is affected by distinctive public sector context characteristics. We will first reflect on the multidimensional nature of the key concepts involved and then explore more comprehensive models.

Recognizing that the key variables in the management–public service performance relationship are multidimensional concepts, several chapters call for studies that examine the gap in existing research, namely how different dimensions of a construct relate to each other when linked to another variable. Focusing on the

independent variable, Chapter 5 calls for more research on the effectiveness of different leadership behaviors independently or in combination. Chapter 11 reiterates this call regarding the effect of different forms of leadership in relation to the implementation of organizational change. Chapter 6 calls for the study of how senior managers' publicness fit and other dimensions of managerial fit moderate each other's effect on organizational performance. Chapter 8 calls for research on how performance management systems can be integrated with various leadership behaviors that shape employees' perceptions and motivation and that facilitate organizational learning.

Focusing on the dependent variable, Chapter 2 emphasizes the need for future research to incorporate multiple stakeholders' views and interests regarding public service performance explicitly. Regarding individual job performance, Chapter 14 argues that we need to study what effects different dimensions of PSM have on specific types of individual performance. Noting that employees' employability is positively related to performance, Chapter 15 suggests that future research examines how different dimensions of performance are affected by employability. Concentrating on employee well-being as the dependent variable, Chapter 12 calls for more research on dimensions that are currently understudied in a public sector context. These involve aspects of psychological well-being such as engagement, absenteeism, resignation, and burnout, and the social well-being dimension involving relations with co-workers and supervisors.

Another type of future research priority concerns the variables linking public management and public service performance. Chapter 9, which studies HRM systems and performance, Chapter 10, which examines diversity management and performance, and Chapter 14, which studies PSM and individual job performance, note the dearth of studies examining the full multilevel chain that links management strategies and systems to individual employees' job performance, work unit, and organizational performance. This multilevel chain is generically theorized by Wright and Nishii (2013), but there are few studies that have attempted to provide empirical evidence in a public sector context.

### **16.3.3 Attention to the Public Sector Context and the Use of Generic Theories**

A prominent issue for future research is the full and systematic study of the impact of the public sector context. This call for future research comes in two forms. First, there are calls for integration of specific public sector variables. This call is clearly motivated by the attempt to develop more comprehensive models, as discussed in Section 16.3.2. For instance, Chapter 7 argues that we need more research on how the conflict between different values affects line managers' people management performance. Chapter 13 adds to this by observing that values are not necessarily explicit and calls for studies that examine what the implications of implicit value

conflicts are for employees' job performance and well-being. Other chapters argue that future studies should pay attention to the impact of red tape on employee well-being (Chapter 12), on employee job performance (Chapter 14), and on employees' employability (Chapter 15).

Second, several chapters call for systematic research comparing public, non-profit, and private sector organizations when studying particular phenomena. Chapter 6 does so with regard to the question of how different dimensions of managerial fit, including publicness fit, moderate each other's effects on organizational performance. Chapter 12 encourages scholars to investigate differences in employees' well-being between public, non-profit, and private sectors and within subsectors of the public sector. Likewise, Chapter 15 calls for studies to investigate possible sectoral differences in the factors that are likely to impact employees' employability and its outcomes.

These calls for future research raise the broader question of the validity of the assumptions underlying generic models. Chapter 12 addresses this question as it concludes that the generic job demands–resources model is appropriate for explaining employee well-being in the public sector. The JD–R model can be used to study the effects of public sector employees' job demands and job resources. However, when it comes to operationalizing the generic concepts of job demands and resources, Chapter 12 argues that it is necessary to pay attention to specific variables that the public sector literature considers relevant. Here, the chapter refers to red tape as a hindrance demand and PSM as a resource. In a similar way, Chapter 7 makes use of the generic AMO model to explain individual performance to examine the antecedents of public sector supervisors' people management performance. Chapter 7 uses insights from the public management literature to operationalize the *opportunity* variable in a public sector-specific way by including red tape, which is regarded as a constraint on managerial autonomy. Adding these public sector-specific variables is an example of what Knies et al. (2018a) regard as advanced contextualization that may affect the generalizability of research for other private sector contexts.

However, both Chapters 7 and 12 live up to the requirement set by Knies et al. (2018a) that this kind of contextualization be evidence-based. Chapter 12 discusses empirical studies that show, for instance, that the job resource PSM has contradictory effects, begging the question of what contextual variables can help explain this deviance from the generic model. The chapter suggests that other job demands such as role conflict and role ambiguity also require further study because public sector employees are potentially more prone to these phenomena. This reasoning illustrates the kind of theoretical argument and empirical evidence that Knies et al. (2018a) require to balance rigor and relevance. The public management and organization literature (e.g. Rainey 2014) holds several characteristics of the public sector context as distinctive. Systematic comparative research using generic models can help provide evidence for these theoretical assumptions and help build the argument for contextualizing future research.

### 16.3.4 Methodological Rigor

While there are concerns about the increasingly tougher requirements for methodological rigor (Boxall et al. 2007; Knies et al. 2018a), this should not be understood as implying that the methodological rigor of public management research itself is not an issue. Several chapters raise concerns about endogeneity problems related to cross-sectional designs and omitted variables confounding the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Chapter 5 discusses these problems regarding the relationship between management and organizational performance, Chapter 14 regarding the relationship between PSM and individual job performance, and Chapter 12 regarding the relationship between leadership, person–organization (P–O) fit, and employee well-being.

In response to these concerns, future studies are advised to consider several options that contribute to causal analysis. One is to join the recent growth of studies that make use of experimental designs and randomized controlled trials. Bellé's (2013; 2014) studies of the effects of PSM and leadership on job performance stand out as a prime example. Another option is to make use of opportunities for longitudinal research when and where they exist. This is particularly relevant, as Chapter 11 observes, when one wants to study large-scale reforms and the leadership that goes with them, which have their effects in terms of organizational change and public service performance over a long period of time. One example of such a longitudinal study is the study by Day et al. (2016) of the effect of school principals' combination of different leadership strategies on student outcomes.

These suggestions deserve serious consideration. Yet the state of the art in the study of the relationship between PSM and individual performance, which is the most advanced in terms of rigorous research to date, indicates how difficult it would be to apply these suggestions to the field of management–public service performance research. In addition, ethical and practical reasons may make experimental manipulation inappropriate or impossible. Discussing this situation with respect to the PSM–performance relationship, Chapter 14 suggests a valid non-experimental alternative involving meta-analysis and replication studies. The chapter admits that the feasibility of these alternatives is seriously affected by the number of studies available (for meta-analysis) or the need for a concerted effort by multiple teams (in the case of replication through multiple independent studies). Thus, there are no easy solutions. For management–public service performance research, the best possible way forward seems to involve improving the rigor of existing research designs by applying the suggestions made for more comprehensive models, by avoiding the use of self-reported performance data or the same data source to measure management and performance (e.g. instead using register data or assessments done by other stakeholders), and by controlling for possible factors that may influence both the independent and dependent variables.

### 16.3.5 Is Management–Public Service Performance Research Still Relevant?

How relevant is research on “managing for public service performance”? A key reason for questioning its relevance could be the criticism that the management–public service performance relationship is based on assumptions related to the NPM model, which do not fit governance approaches labeled as new public governance (NPG) or public value management (PVM) (Bryson et al. 2014; Osborne 2010; Osborne et al. 2013; Stoker 2006). These NPM assumptions involve the primacy attributed to market-like logics, a preoccupation with performance management and output control, a focus on unit costs, efficiency, and outputs versus the primacy attributed by NPG/PVM to collaborative governance, inter-organizational networks, co-production, and the importance of traditional democratic and constitutional values, as well as new public values such as public service quality, transparency, and accountability.

Focusing on the aspect of the collaboration of multiple actors in the provision of public services, these actors may be organizations, as in the case of the government’s public service delivery through private and non-profit organizations or organizations and citizens in co-production (Alford 2009; Alford and O’Flynn 2012; Loeffler and Bovaird 2018). Co-production as seen by Loeffler and Bovaird (2018) goes beyond citizens as service users and involves public organizations working with citizens in discussions about strategic issues such as the prioritization of outcomes and the redesign of services, as well as actions aimed at implementing service–delivery improvements. The reasons for the increased interest in inter-organizational collaboration and co-production are basically the same. These involve the belief that the quality of public decisions and services will benefit from making use of the collective knowledge and experience of organizations and users–citizens, the concerns about the legitimacy of public decisions and the low level of trust in government and public services, and the costs of public service provision which may be affected by pooling resources and citizens’ contributions. Another reason for inter-organizational collaboration is that this may be the only way to tackle wicked problems, such as climate change and poverty (Geuijen et al. 2017; Roberts 2000).

In our view, this volume’s perspective on “managing for public service performance” remains highly relevant. Its assumptions do not coincide with the NPM model. Our understanding of public service performance emphasizes a plurality of public values and different stakeholders, which is similar to NPG/PVM’s emphasis on stakeholders. An essential feature of our perspective is the requirement to make explicit which stakeholders’ understandings of public service performance are included and excluded. In addition, public service performance is understood as a multidimensional concept that includes both service performance outcomes and the

public values that are considered important for the process of public service provision. This understanding combines the publicness and service approach to public service provision that, according to Osborne et al. (2013), is essential to public management theory in the NPG era.

Future research on managing for public service performance can make a significant contribution to understanding what this means in the context of NPG/PVM. The literature on public value creation in collaborative governance tends to focus on the interaction of government organizations with voluntary organizations, community activists, social entrepreneurs, media, and others and concentrates on deliberation and agreeing on common goals (e.g. Bryson et al. 2017; Lewis 2011). This literature gives less attention to public servants and the issues involved in the joint delivery of public services, although there are multiple issues that require further research. For instance, as Loeffler and Bovaird (2018) argue, achieving the potential advantages of co-production requires specific staff skills, professionals' trust in the ability of service users and communities to co-produce better outcomes, and change management to deal with likely resistance from professionals and managers.

The issues that should feature on the agenda of managing for public service performance in a collaborative governance context have begun to attract attention (e.g. Alford and O'Flynn 2012; Bartelings et al. 2017; Cristofoli et al. 2017; Maccio and Cristofoli 2017; Steijn et al. 2011; Zambrano-Gutiérrez et al. 2017). One issue is the importance of building trust, which may be undermined by public servants not having sufficient autonomy and by typical public sector features such as accountability obligations (Alford and O'Flynn 2012, 128–33). Another issue is the complexity of interactions related to differing interests and levels of knowledge and capability among the network members. Alford and O'Flynn (2012, 203) emphasize the importance of network leaders establishing a shared vision or common purpose while recognizing the differences between the various parties. Several studies provide support for the important role of a network manager. Bartelings et al. (2017) show that the activities performed by a network manager partly fit the managerial roles described by Mintzberg (1973) but differ from traditional managerial work by a set of activities that they label “orchestrational work.” This refers to the integration and fine-tuning of activities that are executed by network partners from various organizations to jointly deliver services.

The literature on collaborative governance and public service delivery by organizational networks is rich in the kind of issues that require further research. Managing for public service performance in a collaborative governance context opens up a direction for future research that can build on the insights that our organizational view of “managing for public service performance” has produced and that will extend the present body of knowledge significantly.

## 16.4 Implications for Public Management Practice

The conclusion that management matters for public service performance and employee well-being in a variety of ways is practically relevant. It indicates that it is worthwhile for public organizations to invest in equipping management with good service provision policies and the conditions to implement these.

Individual chapters have shown the importance of internal management activities, which involve performance management, human resource management, and diversity management, to help public organizations achieve public service performance and employee well-being. Making such contributions requires that performance management and HRM are aligned with the organization's strategic goals and with the underlying human resource philosophy. Chapter 9 argued that public organizations' adherence to humanist ideals and a model employer oriented on employee well-being is not compatible with high-performance management models based on management control and low trust but instead benefits from high-involvement models.

It is important to emphasize that the organization's mission should be the focus of performance management and HRM strategies. The multitude of performance targets and quality standards that have grown over time in the public sector tend to have a life of their own in guiding organizational strategies, but in the end, ticking the box does not mean that the organization's mission will be accomplished and the intended public value will be created (Knies et al. 2018b). Starting from the organization's mission, it is important to establish what employee behaviors are required to achieve the intended outcomes so that the strategies and their implementation by managers can be geared toward those behaviors. For instance, as Chapter 8 illustrates, performance management involves setting relevant goals as well as an implementation approach that motivates employees and stimulates their participation in learning platforms.

Diversity management adds to HRM. Targeted recruitment and selection as well as training, development, and team-building can help create inclusive organizations that support the belongingness and uniqueness of employees. In addition, diversity management practices and leadership are needed to facilitate a productive team diversity, which contributes to the performance outcomes that team diversity can potentially help deliver through its contribution to organizational learning and innovation.

Therefore, senior managers who are responsible for organizational strategy are well advised to ensure that performance management, HRM, and diversity management strategies are aligned with the organization's mission and strategic goals. Senior managers will also need to attend to the creation of the conditions for managers at various levels of the hierarchy to take their crucial role in strategy implementation. These conditions involve, first, that the selection and appointment of managers are made dependent on candidates' leadership competences. It is relevant to make this observation because, as Chapter 7 argues, there is a tendency in public organizations to select the best professional employee without assessing leadership competences or

potential. Second, public organizations are advised to invest in leadership development programs. Chapter 5 shows that leadership can be learnt and that leaders benefit from developing several types of leadership behaviors. Third, senior managers have a special responsibility for creating the opportunities for managers at all hierarchical levels to do a good job. These opportunities involve practical facilities such as time and financial budget. It is also important that managers have the autonomy to take decisions and act effectively. This refers to both senior managers (see Chapter 5) and middle and frontline managers (see Chapter 7). The autonomy of public managers in developing and implementing personnel policies is a special case in point. This is often seen as limited due to government directives. However, it is worth scrutinizing the efficacy of rules that internal management has imposed with the objective of management control (Bozeman and Feeney 2011; Van Loon et al. 2016).

Most of what has been observed with the objective of achieving public service performance holds for achieving employee well-being as well. Managers need good HRM policies to support their employees' well-being. Their leadership behaviors are also important as Chapters 3, 7, and 12 argue. Leadership support in itself is one of employees' core job resources that contributes to their well-being. In addition, managers can contribute to employee well-being by paying attention to the balance between job demands and job resources and being aware of the inherent risks of stress and burnout for employees, as Chapter 12 observes. Having resourceful and challenging jobs is also an important factor that contributes to employees' employability (Chapter 15). The different areas of management support for employee well-being underline the importance noted earlier of outlining a clear profile of people management competences to guide the selection and development of public managers.

The presumed shift toward NPG/PVM and the related importance of inter-organizational collaboration and co-production in delivering public services has profound implications for management practice, as we discussed above. One concerns the activities and abilities of managers and public servants who are involved in the joint delivery of public services. Their support by HRM policies requires a reorientation away from the traditional organization view based on internal management control. The implications also concern institutional features of public organizations' *modus operandi* such as their accountability obligations and the related consequences for managerial and professional autonomy. These are difficult to adapt. However, an awareness of the impact that the public sector context has on organizational collaboration would help managers and professionals communicate and collaborate with others involved in the joint delivery of public services.

These implications for managerial practice are not meant as best practice advice. The idea of "best practice" neglects the relevance of context in public policy and management. Rather, this summary of practical implications represents the insights of key factors and mechanisms involved in the delivery of public service that need to be contextualized when they are applied. They are based on both firm evidence from scientific research and on the experience gained by the authors from their involvement in public management practice as advisors. This involvement has enriched our



understanding of managing for public service performance, which we hope will contribute to our purpose: improving the delivery of public service and the creation of public value.

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