

INNOVATION AND UNCERTAINTY

Alex Murdock and Stephen Barber

EDITORIAL

The diverse nature of the articles contained in this latest IPMR nonetheless indicates that amid the uncertainty and volatility of the period through which we are living, the response of public administration is to innovate. This is true of theory, practice and indeed education.

The hard truth is that public services and government have little choice but to carry on and to adapt amid a rapidly changing environment. As we commemorate the tenth anniversary since the beginning of the credit crunch, it is worth reflecting upon not only the impact this 'lost decade' has had upon public finances across developed economies but also the response of public administration to innovate and to change. Moreover, there is a reflection upon the state of politics today, polarized and divisive, which surely can trace its roots to the dissatisfaction and disillusionment caused by the great recession.

The great recession and its aftermath represented a permanent loss of output and in human terms, real term wage cuts or freeze for many people for a prolonged period. Meanwhile, public sector spending, which had enjoyed a bumper decade in the previous ten years, suffered a long squeeze with the inevitable impact upon the very people who were feeling the effects of recession. Ten years on and there is little indication that economies anywhere will return to the alacrity of the very recent past. Spending remains under tight control across Europe and even as economies emerge reformed and more adaptable, sovereign debt looms large over the plans of any pragmatic government. This is perhaps one very compelling explanation for the rise of so many less than pragmatic political figures in recent years.

That public administration responded so forcefully explains why the once clear distinction between public and private sectors is today more fuzzy and fluid than ever. It is why civil society has a greater place in discourse and delivery. It is why public services are no longer attempting to adopt commercial practices but rather why public and private sector organizations are simply more similar.

And one cannot help but lament the polarized nature of public debate across so many countries from Sweden to Italy to Spain to the UK and United States. It has meant political disruption and uncertainty as a period to follow the economic uncertainty which preceded it. The presidency of Donald Trump and Brexit are perhaps the starkest examples of this phenomenon and which have the potential to cause repercussions far and wide.

Nevertheless, such volatility only serves to underline the importance to public administration of organizations like IPMN and outlets like this journal. Networks serve as a short-cut of best practice and shared latest thinking. It allows for this knowledge to find

its way back into the classroom through MPAs and other executive courses. It is why this journal and the network it serves have a duty to engage in pedagogy as the conduit through which that understanding is shared with practitioners and their experiences is reflected back on the academic subject.

In its small way, this edition of IPMR does that with articles reflecting localized innovation across different countries and spheres, which nonetheless have the capacity to be adapted and reimagined elsewhere.

About IPMR

IPMR The International Public Management Review (IPMR) is the electronic journal of the International Public Management Network (IPMN). All work published in IPMR is double blind reviewed according to standard academic journal procedures.

The purpose of the International Public Management Review is to publish manuscripts reporting original, creative research in the field of public management. Theoretical, empirical and applied work including case studies of individual nations and governments, and comparative studies are given equal weight for publication consideration.

IPMN The mission of the International Public Management Network is to provide a forum for sharing ideas, concepts and results of research and practice in the field of public management, and to stimulate critical thinking about alternative approaches to problem solving and decision making in the public sector.

IPMN includes over 1300 members representing about one hundred different countries, both practitioners and scholars, working in all aspects of public management. IPMN is a voluntary non-profit network and membership is free.

ISSN 1662-1387