P02 / Future of work in public policy and administration

Topic : POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS

Chair : Maria Gintova (McMaster University)

Second Chair : Mary Francoli (Carleton University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the way many public servants work. In a matter of days, many public servants had to transition to remote work and used technology to perform functions they would normally perform in person (for example consultations, policy development and in certain cases, public service delivery). In North America, the pandemic also highlighted existing issues within the public service: systemic racism (Blessett and Gaynor 2021), disproportionate impacts on front-line public servants who are mothers (OECD 2020), and institutional barriers for innovation (Clarke 2021). With governments coming out of the pandemic and being able to re-focus on longer-term initiatives, it is important to focus on the future of work in public policy and administration.

In Canada, much of the post pandemic debate focuses on transitioning to hybrid work arrangements and carrying on with the digital transformation initiatives (Lindquist 2022; Roy 2022). At the same time, there is a need for comprehensive analysis to understand systemic issues in the public service that hinder governments' transformation initiatives and public service reforms. It is also very important to look into the future of the public sector, post COVID-19 pandemic, to inform both government strategic and operational initiatives.

This panel will explore the future of public administration, existing transformation initiatives and their impact on public service, and will provide recommendations to inform government action. Specifically, the panel will discuss trends and developments (or lack of) in advancing digital government and other transformation agendas, systemic challenges and barriers faced by the public sector, and implications for policy-making and public service delivery.

References:

Blessett, Brandi, and Tia Sherèe Gaynor. 2021. "Race, Racism and Administrative Callousness: Using Critical Race Theory for a Race-Conscious Public Administration." Public Integrity, 23(5): 455–458.

Clarke, Amanda. 2021. One year into pandemic, federal government is largely business as usual. Policy Options: IRPP. Accessed online: https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2021/one-year-intopandemic-federal-digital-government-is-largely-

Lindquist, Evert A. 2022. "The digital era and public sector reforms: Transformation or new tools for competing values?" Canadian Public Administration: 1-22.

OECD. 2020. Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis. Accessed online: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a82

Roy, Jeffrey. 2022. "COVID?19, Digitization and Hybrid Workspaces: A Critical Inflection Point for Public Sector Governance and Workforce Development." Canadian Public Administration: 1-7.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel will only accept onsite presentations.

Governments find themselves at crossroads following the COVID-19 pandemic. On one hand, the pandemic highlighted that public sector jobs that do not require direct interactions with citizens can be done remotely and the public health crisis accelerated implementation of digital solutions and platforms that were not widely spread pre-pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic highlighted systemic issues that have already existed within the public service. These include systemic racism and employment barriers for racialized and Indigenous public servants (e.g. Blessett and Gaynor 2021; Ontario Government 2022), mistrust between politicians and public servants (e.g. Craft and Halligan 2020; Dowding and Taflaga 2022), institutional barriers for innovation and top-down control (e.g. Clarke 2021), and lack of experience of senior public service executives (e.g. D'Aoust 2020).

This panel calls for papers that explore transformation initiatives that are happening within the public service

and beyond. There are no geographical restrictions: we welcome papers that focus on public policy implementation and public administration initiatives in any country and/or level of government. Research questions can explore (but not limited to):

· What is the impact of recent transformation initiatives on public service?

· Are there any lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that will inform how governments will operate in future?

· What role does technology play in public sector transformation?

· What are the necessary competencies and skills that are public servants of the future are required to have?

· How public servants are engaged in planning for future of work?

· What are the existing barriers that racialized public servants' experience? Were these aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic?

· What are the ways of overcoming these barriers and meaningfully implement anti-racism initiatives within public service?

· What are the benefits, challenges and opportunities of remote and hybrid work in the public sector?

Papers can be theoretical or empirical in nature, and employ quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. We aim to stimulate the discussion about existing barriers and opportunities in public administration post COVID-19 and how these could impact the future of public administration. This will be an onsite panel to allow for in-person and virtual presentations.

References:

Blessett, Brandi, and Tia Sherèe Gaynor. 2021. "Race, Racism and Administrative Callousness: Using Critical Race Theory for a Race-Conscious Public Administration." Public Integrity, 23(5): 455–458.

Clarke, Amanda. 2021. One year into pandemic, federal government is largely business as usual. Policy Options: IRPP. Accessed online: https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2021/one-year-into-pandemic-federal-digital-government-is-largely-

Craft, Jonathan and John Halligan. 2020. Advising Governments in the Westminster Tradition: Policy Advisory Systems in Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

D'Aoust, Robert. 2020. Federal Public Service Management Reforms Consolidated Views and Results: Improving Performance and Productivity. University of Ottawa. Accessed online: https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/public-management-policy/sites/socialsciences.uottawa.ca.public-management-p

Dowding, Keith, and Marija Taflaga. 2022. "Procedural Rationality in Westminster Systems: How De?Separation Affects the Decision Premise." Public Administration Review : 82(5): 920–930.

Ontario Government. 2022. Ontario Public Service anti-racism policy progress report. Accessed online: https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-service-anti-racism-policy-progress-report

P02 / Future of work in public policy and administration

Chair : Maria Gintova (McMaster University)

Second Chair : Mary Francoli (Carleton University)

Session 1

Wednesday, June 28th 10:20 to 12:20 (JOR440)

Adapting to Change in the Public Sector: A Study of Remote and Hybrid Work

Zachary Spicer (York University)

The COVID-19 pandemic forced governments of all shapes and sizes online. Public servants supported programs and initiatives designed to ensure public health throughout the pandemic remotely, largely from their own homes. These working conditions have, in some cases, continued past the peak of the pandemic, leaving many to wonder what the impact of remote and hybrid work may be on the long-term productivity and well-being of public servants. This study convenes a panel of 50 public servants from across Canada, who interacted with a unique productivity and mental health mapping application called UpBeing for a 90 day period. Throughout the study, participants detailed their workday, working conditions and mood daily, while the app ubiquitously captured information on their productivity and work-based distractions. Participants also regularly completed surveys throughout the study, providing a fascinating view into the daily opportunities and challenges brought on by remote and hybrid work. Ultimately, the study finds that remote and hybrid work creates new flexibility for public servants to manage their professional and personal lives, ultimately lengthens the workday and creates new stress induced by collaborating on projects at a distance.

Understanding public servants' perspectives on return to office and the future of work in the public sector: lessons learned from Canada

Maria Gintova (McMaster University)

In Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the way we work: to comply with the public health measures, workers deemed "non-essential" found themselves working remotely for the most part of 2020 and 2021. With the public health measures being lifted, many employers and employees explore how their pandemic experiences will impact their future work arrangements. Governments as employers are no exception. As the Canadian federal public service with over 245,000 employees and Ontario Public Service (OPS) with over 60,000 employees are among largest employers in Canada, not only they are exploring the future of work post-pandemic, they also set an example for other employers in Canada.

While some employers have decided to commit to full-time remote work (Howington 2022), public servants across Canada were informed they had to transition to a "hybrid" model where they alternate between working from home and office (May 2022a; Williams 2022). However, the way the transition was carried out created significant controversy and rebellion on social media (May 2022b; Williams 2022). In Ontario, public servants learned about their employer's plan to transition to three days in the office from the news (Williams 2022). Following a challenge from its employees, OPS offered a more gradual approach to transition to the three days in the office model and promised a comprehensive future of the workplace plan. Government of Canada took a different approach in July 2022: individual government departments and agencies could decide on work arrangements that best fit their operational needs (May 2022a). However, this arrangement was challenged due to lack of "system consistency", and in December 2022, Treasury Board of Canada introduced a new approach where all federal public servants have work from the office two to three days, making this similar to the existing OPS arrangement (May 2022b).

This paper aims to unpack public servants' perspectives on return to office and the future of work in the public sector. Building on the literature review on the future of work in the public service, it will explore public servants' perspectives on return to office initiatives shared on Reddit - a social media platform where participants can anonymously discuss different topics in specialized communities (subreddits). According to May (2022a), public servants used Reddit to mobilize against hybrid work arrangements proposed by government employers and to discuss their needs and perspectives on future of work. Therefore, by

analyzing Reddit data from two subreddits – Canada Public Service and Ontario Public Service – this paper will unpack what public servants think about transitioning to hybrid work arrangements and offer important insights on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nature of work in the public sector in Canada.

References

Howington, Jessica. 2022. “25 Companies Switching to Permanent Remote Work-From-Home Jobs.” https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/companies-switching-remote-work-long-term/

May, Kathryn. 2022a. “Top bureaucrat urges summer test drive of hybrid public service workforce.” Policy Options. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2022/top-bureaucrat-urges-summer-test-drive-of-hybrid-public-service

May, Kathryn. 2022b. “Government Orders Public Service Back to the Office.” Policy Options. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2022/public-service-ordered-back-to-office/.

Williams, Robert. 2022. “Ontario delays return-to-work plan for provincial government staff, now encouraging masks.” The Record. https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2022/03/18/ontario-delays-return-to-work-plan-for-provincial-gove

Upscaling towards more local digital capacity

Inke Torfs (Universiteit Gent)

Ellen Wayenberg (Universiteit Gent)

The importance of a strong digital government is recognized worldwide for its benefits in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, citizen satisfaction and budgetary performance. Especially after the covid-19 pandemic, governments are challenged by all kinds of stakeholders (raging from citizens to intergovernmental organizations) to (further) digitally transform. However, such a digital transformation is not equally obvious for every government. Local governments, for example, are often confronted with limited digital capacities to implement such innovations. This not only concerns the availability of objective information technologies (e.g. software and hardware), but also the way in which those technologies are applied and by whom. In recent years, a solution to this limited capacity has been sought in municipal mergers. They are used as an instrument to increase the (digital) capacity of local governments. Supporters see it as an opportunity to boost financial resources and professionalization. But municipal mergers can also be associated with more negative effects. Opponents mainly emphasize the risks of the process as a radical change in political and administrative structures, systems, and procedures. The problem is that both the arguments in favor and against municipal mergers as instrument for digital capacity are primarily based on assumptions. After all, empirical research on this matter is limited and its findings are mainly inconclusive up until today.

Therefore, our research seeks to better understand “what effects do municipal amalgamations have upon their digital capacity?”. We answer this research question by means of comparing two similar cases in Flanders, based on data collected through content analysis and surveys. We choose to study (within) Belgium’s northern region because its government strongly supports municipalities to merge alongside numerous other measures to increase local (digital) capacity. The research allows to discover the barriers and opportunities local governments are facing when building their digital capacity, and whether municipal mergers are a good instrument to remove those barriers. In addition, through the focus on digital capacity as one element of local capacity, we also contribute to more unequivocal insights about its relationship with municipal mergers.

Sample supporting literature

Mergel, I., Edelmann, N., & Haug, N. (2019). Defining digital transformation: Results from expert interviews. *Government Information Quarterly, 36*(4), 1–16.

Margetts, H., & Dunleavy, P. (2013). The second wave of digital-era governance: A quasi-paradigm for government on the Web. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society Publishing, 371*(1987), 1–17.

Fountain, J. (2005). Central Issues in the Political Development of the Virtual State. In M. Castells & G. Cardoso (Eds.), T*he Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy (pp. 149-181)*. Massachusetts: Center for Transatlantic Relations.

Tavares, A. (2018). Municipal amalgamations and their effects: A literature review. *Miscellanea Geographica, 22*(1), 5–15.

Ebinger, F., Kuhlmann, S., & Bogumil, J. (2019). Territorial reforms in Europe: effects on administrative performance and democratic participation. *Local Government Studies,* 45(1), 1–23.

The Effect of Local Policies Interventions on Subjective wellbeing: Evidence from NRTC Program

David Okereke (Virginia Tech , United States)

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that crawled across the nation highlights the level of inequality and the melee faced by all levels of government in the United States trying to meet the basic needs of their residents, as residents' lives and livelihoods hang in a terrible imbalance. It exposes the long decades of America's prolonged socioeconomic disparity in inner cities. It is more evident when considering the pertinent question: whether local policies are designed to help foster residents' well-being, especially those living in inner cities. The question creates a significant gap in understanding how policies such as neighborhood revitalization interventions matter to both scholars and non- scholars in the field. Yet scholars and policymakers alike typically have not examined whether residents agree. That is, do neighborhood residents perceive that such programs have relatively positive influences on their quality-of-life (that is, their subjective well-being).

This study seeks answer to a new question: whether there is a relationship between NRTC policy and the subjective well being of neighborhood residents? In particular, I hypothesize that tax incentive programs will be positively related to residents' subjective well-being across the selected neighborhoods. To fully explore this question, the study applied a mixed-methods approach in analyzing both secondary and primary data collected from neighborhood residents, who reside, work or own local businesses across low-income communities to examines the relationship between tax credit incentives, neighborhood revitalization, and residents' subjective well-being (SWB) in distressed neighborhoods across multiple low-income communities. Findings from the study would provide new ways to analyze and understand the relationship between local policy intervention programs on subjective well-being of low-income community residents in the United States. It will also explain how the patterns of individual interactions with public policy at the local level shapes their quality of life experience.

The Digital Era in Public Health Sector

Rasleen Grover (University of Delhi)

Pragati Hebbar (University of Maastricht)

Introduction - New technology and a global pandemic have been the two most defining characteristics of the 21st century. The former serves to elevate global communication and democratize information, the benefits of which must be leveraged. The latter has disrupted equilibriums and exposed fault lines in our societies, the impact of which must be mitigated. Technology has been playing an increasingly important role in transforming the public health sector. The digital era has revolutionized the public health sector by enabling new ways of sharing knowledge and promoting collaboration among professionals. Communities of practice (CoP) have emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing digital public health initiatives. CoPs bring together individuals with common interests, experiences and goals, to exchange information, experiences and best practices, as well as to engage in joint problem-solving and continuous learning. This paper aims to explore the various ways technology is being used to transform public health in the context of policy implementation.

Method: We mapped relevant stakeholders and engaged with them to explain the study purpose. We conducted two regional consultations— one held fully online and another incorporating hybrid participation in-person in Raipur, Chhattisgarh and Indian state and some stakeholders participating online. After liaising and obtaining consent from interested actors a community of practice of tobacco control implementers was set up as part of an ongoing implementation research study. A case study of this CoP is being presented here

Results: The consultations brought together stakeholders from health, food safety, police and relevant departments, independent researchers, and members from civil society organizations from 19 states and union territories working in the field of tobacco control and public health. After organizing two regional consultations we launched the initiative communities of practice (CoPs) essentially to bring people together and share best practices, challenges and sustainable solutions for better COTPA implementation. The most accessible, utilized and simplest channel of communication was utilized to set up the CoP which was in the form of a WhatsApp group to disseminate information. We conducted monthly sessions, disseminated monthly newsletters, designed and implemented a short survey and prompted discussion by sharing relevant news articles and developments in the field in this group. The group had 30 members from 12 departments and witnessed the minimal exchange and discussions virtually. Participation in the monthly

sessions was modest with few regular participants and many apologies owing to last minute meetings being called for within their government offices. While the one-on-one interaction with the coordinator was present, the group momentum and dynamics anticipated by the research team were not catalyzed.

Conclusion: Supporting policy implementation through a CoP in the digital era is a powerful tool for addressing communication barriers and intersectoral coordination. However, researchers should reevaluate how they could use digital tools and approaches to better collaborate, avoiding duplication of efforts, bringing in a suitable cadre of officials, finding a balance between too much and too little interaction and catalyzing and sustaining momentum within the CoP.