P03 / Implementing Digitalization in the Public Sector: Professionals' and Citizens' Points of View

Topic : POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS

Chair : Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Second Chair : Tanja Klenk (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Digitalization is now a feature of governments around the world. UNESCO defines digital government (DG) as: 'The public sector's use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent, and effective' (UNESCO 2011: p. 634, cited in Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). While digitalization may result in more efficient services, minimize red tape, enable input from citizens, and lead to more equal services, it could also hinder professional discretion, reduce the accessibility of some groups to services, and harm equality and the ability of service users to be heard (e.g., Larsson et al., 2021).

While it is clear that digitalization is here to stay, there are theoretical and empirical gaps in the literature on its implications for public services (Plesner et al., 2018; Lindgren et al., 2019). Our aim is to explore one aspect of digitalization: its implications for professionals and citizens. The digitalization of public services has changed the roles of professionals and citizens (service users), as well as the encounter between them, leading to a new kind of relationship (Lindgren et al. 2019).

The panel will explore and develop the theoretical and empirical implications of the implementation of digitalization for professionals and citizens and the encounter between them, based on public policy literature (e.g., street-level bureaucrats, Lipsky, 2010; institutional analysis and development (IAD) framework, Ostrom, 2011), to better understand the digitalization processes in public organizations. Embracing an inclusive standpoint, we would like to receive papers exploring the following questions, while remaining open to other possibilities:

1. What can public policy theory contribute to the understanding of the place of professionals and citizens in the implementation of digitalization in public organizations?

2. How has the role of professionals in public organizations changed because of digitalization?

3. How has the place of citizens in public organizations changed because of digitalization?

4. How has the relationship between professionals and citizens changed because of digitalization in public organizations?

5. Are there differences between different countries in the effect on professionals and citizens of the implementation of digitalization processes?

While we are happy to receive theoretical and empirical papers, we prefer comparative studies including more than one country. The abstract will be judged based on the clarity of the theoretical frame and the method.

References

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Journal, 39(1), 7-27.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Chair : Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Second Chair : Tanja Klenk (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg)

Session 1

Wednesday, June 28th 08:00 to 10:00 (JOR1043)

Discussants

Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Tanja Klenk (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg)

Algorithms [Rule-base VS ML-Base] - A Policy Instrument or Executives' Agent to Nudge and Control Street-Level Bureaucrats Decision-Making Practices - The Case of Child Welfare

Nazia Malik (Biden School of Public Policy and Administration)

Muhammad Daniyal (University of the Punjab)

Executives' quest for rational, objective, and neutral decision-making in public agencies and the political agenda to discipline and control bureaucrats are not new. This drive is rooted in classical economic models that see bureaucrats as rational actors who seek to maximize their self-interest and in theories of control of bureaucracy. However, behavioral economists and realists have given this agenda a new rationale by demonstrating that bureaucrats at times satisfice rather than being completely rational in their choices, and their decision-making can be flawed as it is bounded by cognitive and social biases and other individual, organizational, and environmental constraints. Traditionally, these goals were achieved using performance and monitoring controls, which were subsequently replaced by New Public Management (NPM)-based techniques that emphasized private sector-oriented efficiency. Today, under the banner of neo-liberalism, the same agenda has taken a paternalistic turn, utilizing nudges to shape bureaucrats' decision-making behavior. This systematic review is based on the premise that digitalization has played a crucial role in achieving these goals over time, previously to a lesser extent with the help of rule-based/knowledge driven[1] algorithmic tools, but now to a greater extent with the use of big data-driven machine learning (ML)-based[2] algorithmic tools, particularly in sensitive policy domains that had traditionally been at street-level bureaucrats' (SLB's) discretion, such as child welfare.

Child welfare agencies in most states have been using rule-based algorithmic tools since the 1990s in the form of general administrative systems for the purpose of collecting and storing data for administrative operations, actuarial tools for predicting risk, and structured decision-making (SDM) suite for overall case management including the modules for safety and risk assessment. Few jurisdictions have recently started using ML-based predictive risk modeling (PRM) tools for predicting child neglect and maltreatment risk to advise SLBs on child protection and welfare decisions (McNellan et al., 2022; Samant et al., 2019; Saxena et al., 2020). While much scholarly attention has been paid to the technical merits and ethical shortcomings of rule-based[3] and ML-based[4] algorithmic tools, little is known empirically about how these tools influence bureaucratic discretion and decision-making practices.

The objective of this systematic literature review is to synthesize and evaluate the existing empirical evidence on how and to what extent the deployment of rule-based and data-driven ML tools in child welfare agencies has shaped bureaucratic discretion and decision-making practices differently.

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were followed for the review. The relevant studies were identified using online searches in three broad multidisciplinary scholarly databases and repositories, namely the Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Multiple queries using Boolean operators and advanced search features resulted in two sets of studies, i.e., the use

of rule-based and ML-based decision aids or algorithmic tools by child welfare frontline workers (SLBs). Both sets of studies were then screened based on defined inclusion and exclusion criteria in a three-stage process: (i) initial screening; (ii) abstract scanning; and (ii) complete paper scanning. The whole search and screening process took place between March 2021 and February 2022, and the results were updated regularly until October 2022.

The review contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the use of algorithms in child welfare by bridging the gap between theory and empirical evidence and proposing a conceptual model that explains how SLBs' discretion and decision-making practices change when algorithms enter their decision-making domain as advisors or agents. This is accomplished by drawing on the rich knowledge base of public administration and management concerning SLB discretion, bureaucracy control and decision theories, agency theory, and the nudge theory, mapping them onto existing limited empirical evidence from child welfare, and making inferences to develop a framework for understanding SLB decision-making practices in an algorithm-assisted environment.

[1] A rule-based or knowledge-driven decision-making tool follows "explicit instructions based on human-defined knowledge that encodes domain expertise into systems of logical rules," referred to as "pre-programmed rules." It uses a "programmed process" that "classifies data by defining a series of rules to automate decision-making" (Wang et al., 2023, p. 1,2).
[2] “Data-driven or machine-learning tools train historical data to infer relationships between data without receiving explicit instructions” using algorithms such as decision trees, random forests, neural networks, and other complex models. (Wang et al., 2023, p. 1,2).
[3] Most research on the deployment of actuarial and SDM risk assessment tools in child welfare revolves around the benefits of using such tools and assessing them on validity, reliability, and equity criteria (Ægisdóttir et al., 2006; Baird et al., 1999; Baird & Wagner, 2000; Baird, Wagner, Grove et. al 2009; Coohey et al., 2013; CRC, 2008; D'Andrade et al., 2008; Dankert & Johnson, 2013; Dawes, 1988; Dawes, Faust, & Meehl, 1989; Grove et. al 2009; W. Johnson, 2004; W. Johnson et al., 2015; W. L. Johnson, 2011; Lee, 2015; Mendoza et al., 2016; M. Wells & Correia, 2012; Russell, 2015; Schwalbe, 2008; Shlonsky & Wagner, 2005)
[4] Studies discussing ML-based tool’s technical merits (Ahn et al., 2021; Chouldechova et al., 2018; Church & Fairchild, 2017; Cuccaro-Alamin et al., 2017; Menon et al., 2021; Schwartz et al., 2017; Shlonsky & Wagner, 2005; Teixeira & Boyas, 2017; Vaithianathan et al., 2013, 2017, 2019); Studies discussing ML-based tool’s ethical de-merits (Abdurahman, 2021; Cheng et al., 2021; Coulthard et al., 2020; Dinh, 2021; Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2018; Eubanks, 2018; Keddell, 2019; Landau et al., 2022; Lanier et al., 2020; Moon, 2022; Stapleton et al., 2022)

(Virtual) Does the Response Strategy Work? The Gap Between Government Response Attitude and Citizens’ Perceived Attitude

Ruoyun WANG (The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology?Guangzhou?)

Corey XU

E-participation, as a key element in E-Governance, has been identified as an important way to fulfill transparency, accountability, and equity. Studies have shown that government response is key to the success of E-participation system, as it increases citizens' satisfaction and trust in government (Kim and Lee, 2012; Sjoberg et al., 2017). In democratic regimes, governments need to satisfied citizens’ preferences by improving responsiveness (Dahl, 1971,p.1). Increasing studies prove that authoritarian regimes may also response to citizens’ demands for maintaining the legitimacy and stability of the political system (Stockmann, 2013; Weller, 2008). In recent year, Chinese government of different levels are also found to respond to public’s needs and complaints through different online channels(Chen et al., 2016; Distelhorst & Hou, 2017).

Existing literature has mainly used survey to capture overall citizens' satisfaction on governments' response. There is a lack of understanding on what factors contribute to citizens' satisfaction when participating through digital government platform. A common strategy adopted by the government is to use polite and positive language. This study adopts theories from the emotional intelligence literature to help understand whether positive emotions on government feedback will lead to citizens' satisfaction on governments' response. We collect data from Chinese People's Daily “Message Board for Leaders”, which is a nationwide online platform for citizens to request government services in multiple areas. Among 1.3 million requests between 2006-2021, about 370,000 are rated by citizens on their satisfaction on governments' response.

We first use text analysis to analyze the characteristics of government’s response in the Message Board. Then we establish the evaluation metrics for government’s EI based on existing literature. For data analysis, 1,000 messages are selected and then manually coded. We then use machine learning to train a model and

predict 370,000 government responses. We then test whether government's EI management affect citizens' satisfaction with the response attitude.

Our research is among the first to use text analysis and machine learning to objectively examine the EI of government's behavior and investigate the relationship between government's response and citizens' satisfaction of its response attitude. It provides an empirical basis for the role of emotion management on public sector performance and offers a methodological innovation for evaluating government EI. This paper also contributes to understanding the interaction between public sector and citizen in digital era.

(Virtual) Digitalized Command Systems for Frontline Accountability

Srinivas Yerramsetti (KIMEP University, Kazakhstan)

Digital technologies are widely recognized to have transformed the relationship between top tiers of organizations and frontline bureaucracies. Scholars have noted that administrators consider rule-based command systems more convenient than incentives in securing compliance. Public organizations and the public officials who engage in managerial roles in such organizations often harbor a view that the frontline staff is 'essentially lazy and self-interested' and those command systems, i.e., directives from above to monitor and ultimately sanction the behavior of frontline staff - can serve as extrinsic motivating factors (Bøgh Andersen et al., 2015, p. 484), whether as a carrot or stick. India's bureaucracy has, in recent times, attempted to use digitalizing technologies such as facial recognition to establish digitalized command systems to strengthen frontline accountability.

Large bureaucratic organizations increasingly operate along the lines of screen-level and system-level bureaucracies (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002). Zouridis et al. (2020, p. 314) have theorized that this shift has led to a change in 'the basic principle of 'unit production,' which previously involved 'human judgment for each individual case,' towards 'continuous process production.' Therefore, human judgment is gradually being moved away from the frontlines to higher organizational levels and, in some cases, substituted with automated decision-making systems. Hupe and Hill (2007) have formulated the 'accountability regimes framework' in which they distinguish between three types of accountabilities as identifiable 'regimes' with their own action prescriptions: public-administrative accountability (formal rules), professional accountability (standards from one's occupation), and participatory accountability (expectations from society). This accountability regimes framework is extended with customer-/shareholder-oriented accountability as a fourth accountability regime by Thomann et al. (2018).

In this context, through an interpretive case study using qualitative interviews, this research explores how the deployment of mobile apps to monitor school activities affects the commitment of government schoolteachers in India. It also examines how the deployment of mobile apps alters the nature of work tasks and the relationship of frontline work vis-à-vis the higher levels of the school system. Finally, the research explores, using a socio-materiality perspective, how various forms of accountability, such as politico-administrative, professional, participatory, and customer- and shareholder-oriented accountability, are negotiated through the mutual shaping of the affordances and constraints imposed by mobile apps, by government schoolteacher and the higher levels of the school system. The findings of this qualitative research will draw evidence from books, journal articles, government reports, interviews with administrators, and governance actors from both the public and private sectors, including teachers who are the objects of such top-down surveillance. The findings of this research can inform the theory and practice of the changing nature of work for frontline bureaucrats in the twenty-first century.

(Virtual) Understanding policy implementation: A practice-based approach to study the transition from "Health Sub-centres" to "Health and Wellness Centers" in India

AREIBA ARIF (Jindal Global Business School, OPJGU)

GEORGE KANDATHIL

In 2018, the government of India launched a national health reform to provide comprehensive primary healthcare by revamping the existing public health facilities. Under this nationwide scheme, over 150,000 existing primary care centers are planned to be transformed from catering to mainly maternal and child health care services to offering a broader package of services under its new nomenclature of "Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres" (AB-HWCs) (NHSRC, 2018). This transition involves significant changes related to infrastructure and technology upgradation, appointment and functioning of the health workforce, and expansion of service packages, as envisaged in the new health policy. Digital transformation at HWCs introduces new practices related to record keeping, population empanelment, maintenance of

health records, and teleconsultation. A new supervisory role, “Community Health Officers” has been added to the organizational hierarchy. To perform the new roles and learn new practices, health workers are expected to attend a new set of diverse pieces of training. The policy also has set some new performance-related targets for the health workers, which further determines their incentives and salary. As workers struggle to learn and enact new practices, there is a continuous flow of instructions from the higher authorities, which these health workers must follow since the new policy is being implemented in a phased manner. Complicating the daily practices of health workers is the increased demand on them due to the covid crisis.

Considering the tight potential interactions between the AB-HWC policy as it is implemented by the health workers and their work practices, we adopt a “practice-based approach,” (Schatzki 2001) to study the practices of health workers as they implement the AB-HWC policy in their work context. This perspective focuses on understanding human activity and organizations as the policy contexts in which policy implementers act. We use interviews and participant observation in order to understand the constitution of practices of policy implementers and how they vary across time and space. The study thus contributes to policy implementation studies by addressing the need for empirical studies focusing on studying the practices of policy implementers. Further, this study explores the theoretical and empirical implications of various policy interventions, such as digitalization, for local implementers in public organizations, thus helping us to understand policy implementation in public organizations better.

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Session 2

Thursday, June 29th 08:00 to 10:00 (JOR1043)

Discussants

Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Tanja Klenk (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg)

(Virtual) The Janus face of data agency in personal and policymaking contexts

Dale Mineshima-Lowe (Parami University, Myanmar)

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The Janus face of data agency in personal and policymaking contexts

Wide-spread (personal) data collection and use through digital apps and platforms raises questions around the ability of citizens to both keep some of their information private as well as have agency in how this information is used for (public services). We contrast the digital vision and design of personal apps, such as digital identifiers to use public services or civil society for organizing collective action, with the information of use and privacy citizens have. There is an assumption that the use by citizens of various apps in their personal, private spaces as consumers creates a different relationship in terms of regulation and agency over data perhaps, as compared to those apps and digital platforms created through policymaking for access to public services.

We use critical theory in this paper to identify underlying power structures and the role of agency in data use and re-use in these different applications. The applications we are identifying for this study include: X DIGiD [NL, public service]; Transparency Watch [North Macedonia, corruption monitoring platform and app]; Fitbit [health and fitness app]; and Flo.health app [ovulation and period tracker app]. These digital apps and platforms will be analyzed in terms of the design and useability scenarios of the apps in contrast to the level of information of data that is collected and how much control citizens have over the data collected and its use and sale. The paper develops a matrix of apps that citizens use - provided by both private and public providers - in order to map the data agency, they provide. Here, we are defining data agency as a cross of awareness and informed levels of data to be collected and for what purposes with the level of control over the data once collected – in terms of use, reuse, and sale.

[Figure 1. Matrix to map data agency (based on level of information and control over data collected = data agency)]

The value of the research is to build a framework for understanding data agency of citizens in relation to data ‘voluntarily’ shared and how this data is then used, reused or sold. In particular, the issue is of relevance as we see more government agencies globally begin to consider the embedding and development of digital applications and platforms for instance, as part of digital health innovations to streamline and address shortages in healthcare capacities. Similarly, governments and private companies are looking at the expanded use of apps by citizens and how this data may also be used for multiple purposes…everything found within the fine print of the digital apps’ conditions of use and rarely read from cover-to-cover.

(Virtual) Overcoming the E-Government Barriers: Towards a More Comprehensive Transformation in Egypt

Shady El-Sherif (Information and Decision Support Center)

The adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) along with the rapid diffusion of technological communications devices, such as computers and the Internet to provide public services to citizens has made the Electronic Government (e-Government) a heavily-researched governance model nowadays. The waves of promising benefits of the model were recently hitting some obstacles that range from organizational, technological, legislative, resource, and cultural barriers which impede the smooth transformation of current public sectors mostly in developing countries to the e-Government model. Egypt has been investing enormous efforts and money in speeding that transformation as recent official statements reveal that direct investments in the ICT sector will reach 67.1 billion EGP in the 2022/2023 fiscal year plan, compared to 58.2 billion EGP for investments expected by the end of the previous year 2021/2022, with a growth rate of 15%. However, a recent study that used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) on the Egyptian case shows that Egypt might be lagging behind in its e-Government program implementation in comparison to other Arab countries, in addition to little progress has been made in the digitally-supported participation features in processes between the Egyptian government and the citizens. Therefore, this paper mainly uses a mixed-methodology approach with Egypt as a case study to explain possible barriers for Egypt to realize a smooth and successful e-Government transformation, and based on the current socioeconomic indicators, the paper is providing a simple action plan that is recommended to overcome these barriers to have a comprehensive digital transformation for the government.

From physical assets to digital services: The digital transformation of public road organizations in Europe

Sebastian Kussl (University of Agder)

To realize their objectives, public organizations develop products and services for individuals, companies, institutions and public organizations. At the same time, public organizations strive to improve their product and service delivery in order to be more efficient in achieving their objectives. Key strategic objectives include more user-centricity and better citizen involvement. Digitalization changes how public organizations exchange products and services and the internal structures and value-creation processes of an organization.

While considerable progress has been made, some sectors are lagging behind in their digital transformation. One of the lagging sectors is road transportation, the biggest and most important transport mode. Unfortunately, we currently have limited empirical knowledge on the implications of digitalization in this sector – including knowledge on how to increase user-centricity and citizen involvement in the design of new transport infrastructure and services.

Traditionally, a public road organization (PRO) is responsible for delivering and managing a safe and reliable infrastructure that responds to the users' needs while at the same time safeguarding financial, environmental, and social interests. Road infrastructure has been considered a physical asset, engineered and constructed to a technical requirement. Despite decades of policy development towards digital and sustainable road transport solutions, environmental issues persist, and digitalization is low compared to other sectors.

The digital governance literature has not yet had an explicit focus on the empirical context of road infrastructure and PROs. This may not be intentional, as there has been limited interaction between PROs and citizens. Moreover, PROs are commonly defined as "public construction clients" as they focus on commissioning projects towards the construction industry. Disruptions in citizens' transport demand and behaviour request a provider of infrastructure and transport services that support more digitalized, user-centric, smart, and sustainable mobility solutions. The role of the PRO in promoting an increasingly smart and sustainable mobility transition may touch on a broader range of responsibilities and consequently

require more direct interaction with the citizens. This has not been addressed by the digital governance literature.

This study explores the implications of digitalization on PROs, especially the roles of professionals and their ability to adapt to changes in citizen transport demand and expectations. This is done using a qualitative case study methodology, including public and semi-public PROs in Scandinavia and Central Europe.

Preliminary findings of this study indicate that increased citizen involvement depends on the degree the PRO is exposed to changes in the organizational environment and that an adequate response becomes a strategic imperative. PROs with a broad responsibility, top-management engagement and already existing (commercial, digital) relationships with the citizen may have an advantage. Digitalization led by the IT function is rare in PROs, which expect professionals in the PROs (primarily engineers) to take roles and responsibilities outside their "traditional" functions. Even though this is not expounded as a problem by themselves, silos between the business functions tend to be reinforced, the pace of digitalization efforts is reduced, and the full potential of digitalization may not be identified.

(Virtual) Did the government match word to deed or interact with public participation: Empirical evidence from 309 regions based on the PVAR model with panel data of public service departments

Tianxiang Wang (Tsinghua University)

The activity for citizen participation builds a bridge between government attention and performance in digital governance. It has important practical implications for a systematic and in-depth understanding of local authorities' digital governance behaviors. This paper utilizes text analysis to excavate local government work reports and messages as well as replies from the leadership message board in China. Constructing balanced panel data on 276 cities in China from 2019-2022, we measure the public service attention, citizen participation, practical reply, and scientific reply from government response. The PVAR model is applied to empirically test the mechanism of government-citizen interaction under the topics that the public care most about. Research findings indicate that the government’s attention on public services facilitates citizens’ public participation (contacting government behavior) and make the government’s responses more scientific and practicable. These findings are insightful for understanding the relationship between government and citizens.

(Virtual) The autonomy unexploited – the role of public servants in the Digitalization in Germany

Maximilian Nagel (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg)

There seems to be a window of opportunity for street-level bureaucrats to have a huge impact on the digitalization in Germany. The German Onlinezugangsgesetz (OZG – Online Access Act) legally obligates the public administration in Germany to provide most of its services digitally. In many digitalization projects public servants, who interact with citizens daily, are invited to bring in their knowledge and experiences to develop more citizen friendly forms and applications. Thus, they have the chance to change the way citizens interact with the state. Against this background, public servants have (to some degree) an autonomy and can influence how certain policies are made and implemented, they can even raise issues and make federal ministries aware of things, that are no longer suited for a digital world.

Even though there might be a window of opportunity for change and even though there might be room for autonomic behavior, street-level bureaucrats might not embrace the opportunity that the OZG is offering, at least when they are collaborating with higher level public servants. This being the case the present paper poses the question why public servants in Germany (with a focus on street-level bureaucrats) don’t make use of the window of opportunity.

The public policy literature provides several explanations that we would like to explore. The explanations can for instance be divided into two main groups: individual and organizational.