Editorial

Robert Fouchet and Marcel Guenoun*

Université Paul-Cezanne Aix-Marseille III
Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance
21 rue Gaston de Saporta
13625 Aix-en-Provence Cedex 1, France
E-mail: robert.fouchet@univ-cezanne.fr
E-mail: marcel.guenoun@univ-cezanne.fr
*Corresponding author

Biographical notes: Robert Fouchet is Professor in Public Management in Paul Cezanne University (Institut de Management Public et de Gouvernance Territoriale). He created the CESMAP (Research Center in Public Management) and developed many researches focused on public organisations performance, measure of public policy, and management in public sector. He organised many international seminars, and actually hosts the annual conference of EFMD in public sector management development. He is an active member of other international research groups like EGPA, EIASM, and EUA.

Marcel Guenoun is Assistant Professor at the Public Management Institute in Aix-en-Provence, Paul Cezanne University, Aix-Marseille III, in France. His teaching and research initiatives focus on the areas of performance management in local governments and marketing approach of local public services. His most recent studies focus on the benchmarking of local performance management systems. He has taken part in various collective books and academic conferences. He is member of the Public Management Research Network (RECEMAP).

1　Introduction

Competence is at the center of a significant number of research projects and initiatives in public organisations these last few years.

This has given rise to a lot of challenges. In addition to various instruments of competence planning and rewarding, a competence management system also consists of principles regarding its design, implementation and development in a sustainable manner.

Traditionally, there are three ways of analysing public service professions. One way is to classify and analyse professions by different locations and roles. A second way is to analyse changing relations between the public service professions and more demanding service by users. A third way would be tracking the evolution of professionalisation projects, often aimed at moving from a gentleman amateur tradition to a professional civil servant [Ferlie and Geraghty, (2005), p.423].

The aim of this issue is to look further into this last prospect, by identifying the characteristics and determinants of the competence and the incompetence of the public

managers. Those were the subject of a voluntarist policy within the framework of the New Public Management (NPM) oriented reforms.

With the rise of NPM practices, public leaders face both stronger internal accountability, and public perception and approval measurement. But, do competence oriented-tools designed in the public sector fit with the competence model developed in private organisations?

Currently, the concept of competence includes three dimensions: knowledge (to know), practice (know-how) and attitudes (know-act) [Durand, (2006), pp.278]. The word 'competence' is multifaceted which makes it possible to integrate alternative definitions. But in all the cases, it is about a cognitive approach which presupposes that competence is constituted by addition of knowledge in a broad sense. Jeannot recognises a first drift of this notion as it crosses the borders from private to public sector management. From a lexical standpoint, he notes 'the proscription of the attitudinal side, which is quite frequent normally in private sector references' (Jeannot, 2005).

The competence model is based on involving and mobilising wage-earners' values cooperation, autonomy, and responsibility. It centers on the problem of evaluation: by workers, of the way the firm appreciates their qualities; by the firm, for the evaluation of wage-earners, and individual performance. When examining how the competence model has been implemented, Paradeise and Lichtenberger noticed its uses lying in-between two competing types of evaluation, i.e. a fully individualised evaluation of competence and an evaluation of the competence of a group considered as a whole, . The latter type is not the cause of possibilities for upward mobility in the firm (Paradeise and Lichtenberger, 2001).

This model presupposes, at the same time, new requirements towards public managers and a modification of the system of incentive and support by the organisation in the idea that 'an individual becomes qualified when the company gives him the necessary means' (Dumont, 2000).

A second factor of differentiation of the devices of management of competences in the public sector is due to their perimeter: the practices diffused by the NPM concern primarily senior officials; two-thirds of the OECD countries having set up performance-related pay in their administrations; and in the private sector, the model applies to all hierarchical levels and is meaningful mostly as it gets nearer to concrete operations [Paradeise and Lichtenberger, (2001), pp.37].

The new requirements are materialised by the renewed forms of control going from the executants to the executives via the devices of individual evaluation, while the requirement of mobilisation goes down from the executives to the executants (Paradeise and Porcher, 1990).

Organisational design is, on the other hand, expected to swap control for trust in working relationships. Organisational forms are to be seen as processes that build and secure the employers' trust in employees' competences. Structural rigidities must give way to learning organisations; while competences lean upon technical capacities, they are relevant, reliable, and valid only in action. [Paradeise and Lichtenberger, (2001), pp.38].

This approach calls into question the design of public organisations: do they generate a systemic organisational incompetence rather than an individual one?

Recent failures in the US and in France (e.g., the response to the hurricane Katrina disaster, French CPE…), show that one can argue that individual incompetence and scapegoat hunt are solely justified by the need of governments and administrations to maintain long-term legitimacy, reputation, and political continuation. On the contrary,

five characteristics of the NPM are likely to be at the origins of public managers' incompetence. They are:

- Hollow state governance. The term 'hollow' refers to the empty space inside governments and public organisations that is created by excessive outsourcing, rendering those public administrations empty and echoing networks of administrative structures. Public managers incompetence is fostered further by inadequate principal-agency relations embedded into NPM reforms (Ferlie et al., 1996), which is inadequate for emergency situations. This proposition is sustained by concurrent research from Christensen and Lægreid (2001) which suggests that excessive contractualism fosters political control in NPM infrastructures.

- Perception management and leaders' procrastination to act. With the rise of NPM practices, public leaders face both stronger internal accountability and a public perception and approval measurement. The intimation of 'perception management' contingencies encourages public leaders to procrastinate intervention.

- Political neutrality and political correctness. Political neutrality is at best a chimera as implementations usually require political trade-offs and rooting to reach efficiency. Rohr (1998) sees in this constant dilemma a recurrent source of incompetence of public leaders, as it leads to mid-range interventions and compromises that impede efficiency. Excessive attention given to political neutrality and correctness encourages public managers to sacrifice competence for the sake of long-term political survival and sustainability.

- Lack of incentives for 'transversal unlearning' in public organisations. Most public managers are surprised when condemned for wrong-doing because they do not perceive themselves as having acted with incompetence. As Kruger and Dunning (1999) observed, incompetent people are clueless about their own incompetence. Instead of blaming scapegoats, public organisations ought to investigate the dynamics of their learning over time so as to discover potential blind spots in their learning systems. In particular, we argue that the current transformation of public organisations into not-so-interdependent jurisdictions creates 'empty intersections' that eventually lead to public managers' incompetence and failure to act.

- Oversight due to increasingly complex inter-organisational dynamics. Public managers are constantly faced with a duty of accountability to public law goals and the need for flexibility in order to maximise the utility of private sector involvement. In particular, public law makes clear distinctions between the institutional level of governance (e.g., state), the managerial level of governance (e.g., 'prefect', cities, transport administrations, etc.), and the technical level of governance (e.g., emergency services), that private organisations do not distinguish (Lynn, 2001). Furthermore, performance evaluations and criteria for their measurement greatly differ between public and private organisations.

This last point is thus, crucial in the analysis of the practices of management of competences which has already been evoked and rests mainly on a modification of the modes of evaluation. Indeed, they suppose the passage of personalisation to the impersonality of the rules of evaluation. The model of competence poses the problem of the relation between competences exerted in situation and evaluated performance

[Paradeise and Lichtenberger, (2001), pp.39]. If competences are assessed in situ, nothing guarantees any longer the irreversible advantages acquired during a career, even more so as this model weakens the employees' traditional public sector code inscribed in normalised industrial relationships. Are public organisations up to facing this challenge?

2   Organisation of the issue

The first two contributions will question the means of adapting the Human Capital Management (HCM) model in the public sector. These articles not only present precisely the content and the implications of the system of reference, they also underline their effect in the US and examine how useful their diffusion would be in other administrative contexts.

The first article is concerned with the use of the HCM model to evaluate not only the personnel, but also their needs. L. El Baradei and K. Newcomer propose a new evaluation model of the training and development needs based on the HCM model. If we accept that most of the personnel reforms carried out in the public sector fit this model that focuses on the reality that people are critical to mission success, they suggest that implementing HCM in the public sector requires different knowledge and skills than are needed to manage employees in the private sector. Their research is therefore aimed at providing an operational model of HCM that has been developed through research and tested in three US federal agencies, and using it to identify leaders' training and development needs in three Egyptian public organisations. Their analysis will allow a hierarchy of employees' needs to be set up using Maslow's model and propose to reformers to address the lower order needs before dealing with higher order needs.

In the second article, H. Getha-Taylor and J. Lee try to understand how the development of e-government and information technology (IT) is transforming human resource management in US federal organisations. The HCM has become a key element of the President's management agenda. HCM and IT are strongly linked because IT permits a quick sharing of a large amount of information, and consequently, the improvement of the collaboration between the agents and the stakeholders. Their research uses data from two Federal Human Capital Surveys (2004, 2006) in order to examine the degree to which e-government development is related to effective HCM. The results show considerable variation among US federal agencies with regard to the degree of IT competence among employees. Finally, IT applications may be limited to enhancing knowledge competence by creating and sharing knowledge among employees. Even though IT-enabled knowledge management systems is considered as a means of creating and sharing knowledge effectively, it is difficult to successfully realise the benefits of knowledge management systems in practice. E-government development seems to have reinforced senior leaders' IT competence rather than lower-level employees. This seems like a necessary first step to broad transformation. As organisational leaders develop e-government competence, they may be more likely to model and incite associated behaviours that will lead to e-government competency development throughout the organisation.

The third contribution concentrates on the central management competence concept in the public sector, i.e. the administrative leadership. The authors, N-M. Fernàndez, A. Rafart Serra, A. Bikfalvi, and M. Muñoz-Soler, have collected qualitative and quantitative data from the non-political head of Girona office of the Autonomous

Government of Catalonia (Spain). The main purpose of this study is to analyse the relationship between leadership patterns and levels of importance placed on values in recruiting and selecting employees in the public-sector regional government. Special interest is placed on values such as ethics and professional responsibility. Personal and professional profiles, as well as leadership styles of the target population are analysed. Results show that the guiding values in the recruitment process are responsibility (94%) and professional ethics (93%). Other important factors in decreasing order are: being able to work in a team (80%), the capacity for communication and empathy (79%), commitment (77%), the capacity for managing others and showing initiative (76%) and negotiation skills (74%). This suggests that a strong affinity with the transformational model of leadership exists. One interesting finding in this research is that the criteria for selecting personnel are aligned with the managers' own perception of their leadership style (the criteria for selecting personnel are linked to the style of management leadership adopted). In this study, leaders have defined their style of leadership as being more transformational than transactional. Interestingly, this self-perception of transformational leadership is higher for managers who give more importance to aspects including negotiation skills, the search for consensus during conflicts, a more participative and democratic style of leadership, and the need to listen to others. In sum, their style is more conciliatory and resolution-based. The importance attached to professional ethics confirms the idea that leadership criteria in the public sector differ from those in the private sector.

The fourth article replaces the competence notion into its institutional context. S. Hernandez shows that public or public-service organisations vary between two archetypes: bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic management. Post-bureaucracy is often defined by reversing the stereotypical images of the creaking, paper-driven, inflexible and inefficient bureaucracy. For instance, this notion is seen as a 'trend' including 'a range of organisational changes which have as their espoused aim the erosion or dismantling of bureaucracy'. In this perspective the author questions to what extent this cohabitation between two archetypes in a public service organisation affects the management system and the human resources system. How do the personnel feel about these changes? And what is the role played by organisational values? Her research in the French postal company shows that the company reconcile certain aspects of the two des deux archetypes. Nowadays, the company has both bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organisational characteristics. But the case is significant insofar as it involves the deliberate rebureaucratisation of some parts of management, rather than the debureaucratisation of the whole company. Earners are suffering from the consequences of the tensions between the two archetypes.

Finally, the last article written by H-B. Chittoo and N. Ramphul shows that improvement in competence is not necessarily the factor that explains changes in the field even when the HCM model is used. The authors have studied management performance in the hospital sector in Mauritius. This sector has been the subject of a lot of complaints from citizens on the performance of public sector hospitals in terms of timely and good quality provision of services. All hospitals have come up with a citizen charter (it has a different name in Mauritius) but in most cases, it is deliberately set so low that it does not change anything in terms of post-charter implementation. It seems that it is just an exercise in public relations more than anything else. This case is a first-class example of the difference between performance measurement and the inertia of the organisational

processes. The only competence change appears in the form of rhetoric in the capacity of reverting to managerial discourse on an international level in order to make institutional stability more convincing.

References

Christensen, T. and Lægreid, P. (2001) 'New Public Management: the effects of contractualism and devolution on political control', *Public Management Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.73–94.

Dumont, A. (2000) 'Un individu devient compétent lorsque l'entreprise lui en donne les moyens', *Personnel*, No. 412, pp.25–29.

Durand, T. (2006) 'L'alchimie de la compétence', *Revue Française de Gestion*, Vol. 1, No. 160, pp.261–292.

Ferlie, E. and Geraghty, K.J. (2005) 'Professionals in public service organizations: implications for public sector 'reforming'', in The Oxford Handbook of Public Management, Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr., L.E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York. p.423.

Ferlie, E., Pettigrew, A., Ashburner, L., and Fitzgerald, L. (1996) *The New Public Management in Action*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Jeannot, G. (2005) 'De la gestion prévisionnelle des effectifs des emplois et des compétences (GPEEC) aux cadres statutaires : la progressive émergence de la notion de métier dans la fonction publique d'Etat en France', *Revue Française d'Administration Publique*, Vol. 4, No. 116, pp.595–608.

Kruger, J. and Dunning, D. (1999) 'Unskilled and unaware of it: how difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 77, No. 6, pp.121–134.

Lynn Jr., L.E. (2001), 'Globalization and administrative reform: what is happening in theory?', *Public Management Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp.191–208.

Paradeise, C. and Lichtenberger, Y. (2001) 'Compétences, compétences', *Sociologie du Travail*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp.33–48.

Paradeise, C. and Porcher, P. (1990) 'Le contrat ou la confiance dans la relation salariale', *Travail et Emploi*, No. 46, pp.5–14.

Rohr, J.A. (1998) *Public Service, Ethics and Constitutional Practice*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, p.208.