The hybrid universe of public administration in the 21st century

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Hybridity: 'the hybrid nature of a being or thing.' Something is hybrid when it results from a cross or a mixture of different types, when it is composed of disparate elements that do not come from one single logic or one single genre.[1] The adjective *hybrid* struck us as the obvious choice to describe the world in which contemporary public administration operates at an international level. In fact, the last 20 to 30 years – given that the reforms inspired by the new public management movement varies were launched at very different times from one country to another (Giauque and Emery, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009) – have witnessed a far-reaching change in the administrative world. Long inspired by the Weberian ideal types (Weber, 1956), public organizations have been confronted with the need to perform, without endangering the democratic basis and the legality of their action (Guay, 1997; OECD, 1997). New management principles and methods borrowed from private companies have been set up within these organizations: reengineering, benchmarking, total quality management, outsourcing, cost accounting and strategic human resources management are only a few examples of these new practices that have a real impact on the everyday life of the actors (Bruno and Didier, 2013). A situation that has inevitably prompted some basic questions about the logics or values that underpin their legitimacy (du Gay, 2005; Emery, 2006; Fortier, 2010).

For those who operate within them, hybrid environments can lead to the best or the worst, as they borrow values, principles and rules of action from different, potentially conflicting, universes that are likely to influence and legitimize their behaviour (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). As these authors have analysed in their masterly demonstration of *Economies of Worth (Les économies de la grandeur)*, it is therefore the agreements that the actors are able to negotiate between them that allow them to overcome any contradictions between the reference universes. Does this brilliant theoretical demonstration have a unique field of

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application within contemporary public organizations? How do the women and men in the public sector respond to the multiple demands they face? How do they manage to reconcile expectations and injunctions issued by democratic ideals from the civic world and the laws of the market issued by the commercial world?

This special issue aims to contribute to the discussion of what some authors call 'post-bureaucracy' (Olsen, 2006), and others the 'neo-Weberian state' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), and others again the 'new public service' (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003), 'public value management' (Stoker, 2006) or 'new public governance' (Osborne, 2006). Indeed, the list of terms designating this new hybrid world is by no means exhaustive! By offering researchers involved in very different political and administrative realities the possibility of analysing the hybridity that characterizes the current public environment, this special issue intends to go beyond theoretical conjectures about post-bureaucracy to assess more specifically its effects on management systems and the behaviour of public actors at different levels of the hierarchy. We therefore invite the readers of this special issue to witness this hybridity *in action*. Its contributions have been taken from a symposium organized by the editors, who in 2011, under the aegis of the thematic research group HRM in the Public Services of the French-language Human Resources Management Association (HRMA).

The end of the bureaucratic monotype, and its destabilizing effect on civil servants

In most OECD countries, the management practices of public organizations and the conditions of employment of public officials have been seriously called into question by the rollout of new public management: we can mention in particular the abolition of the civil servant 'status' (Demmke and Moilanen, 2010), the introduction of performance-related pay systems (OECD, 2005; Norman, 2007), and the dissemination of new organizational values with the stress on quality, competition and public entrepreneurship, or even public leadership (Reichard, 2002; du Gay, 2005; Lawler, 2008). These changes are designed to influence the motivation and the behaviour of officials within public organizations that are themselves heavily managerialized through the introduction of tools from the private sector (see above). As pointed out in some of the contributions in this special issue, these different registers of public modernization have not always been implemented in a coordinated and meaningful fashion, far from it in fact, leading to gross inconsistencies in change management process (Pichault, 2007).

The recent economic crisis, with the questions it raised about the hegemony of the market model and the absolute primacy of the economy, contributes to this institutional soul-searching, prompts us to redefine the role and methods of intervention of the state, and challenges the widespread introduction of private management methods that often do not take sufficiently into account the specific nature of the *res publica, and* are based on a *context-free genericism* (Pollitt, 2011). The myth of the 'public service company' that models most of its operation on that of

the private sector is being followed by a less accurately defined version, which does not correspond to any type defined in the literature. Indeed, changes in public administration over recent decades have undermined the very foundations of the bureaucratic model in its different dimensions (Emery, 2013):

- Its legal foundations with the challenging of the legality per se, that many studies have denounced to illustrate to what extent *the spirit of the rule* could disappear in the face of a legalism that has become an end in itself (Friedberg, 1997; Dupuy, 1998).
- Its political and democratic foundations, putting into question the systems of governance that put the figure of the citizen at the heart of the political dynamic, overlooking other stakeholders legitimately entitled to intervene in a broader vision of governance (Osborne, 2006).
- The instrumental and functional foundations of the bureaucratic model, largely inspired by the Taylorist model, whose merits, but also whose limits, have been highlighted for a long time already (Le Menestrel and Schpilberg, 1999).
- And finally, the foundations formed by public sector values and culture. This angle of analysis has generated an extensive body of literature showing the delicate articulation, if not the clash, of values and registers of legitimacy that underline contemporary public policy (Meyer and Hammerschmid, 2006; Perry et al., 2010). A body of literature that questions the new contours of the *public ethos* (Fortier and Emery, 2012).

These changes increasingly bring public employees face-to-face with managerial logics that are laden with contradictory demands and injunctions (Emery and Giauque, 2005), which refer both to the civic world and the commercial world (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991): for example, ensuring equal treatment while at the same time providing a customized service to citizens, now referred to as 'clients' (Frederickson and Ghere, 2005; Martin and Cullen, 2006; Trevino et al., 2006). Compliance with the law and administrative rules are no longer the only criteria by which the behaviour of public officials are assessed. Efficiency, quality of service, openness, flexibility and speed of execution have emerged as competing standards in the administrative world, contributing to the perceived legitimacy of public policy (Girard, 2002; Piron, 2002; Chanlat, 2003). However, contrary to the hypotheses put forward by many authors when new public management first emerged, these new standards have not ousted the traditional logics of the public administration but have been added to them without ever addressing the question of their articulation with each other, whether by the political authorities or by the public managers (Wyser, 2010).

It is not surprising therefore that civil servants, sometimes renamed 'public employees' where the civil service system has been abandoned, are in search of new means of anchoring their identity and motivation, somewhere between the classic civil servant carrying a public ethos and a form of public service motivation (PSM) and a private sector employee, embodying in a stereotypical manner,

performance and entrepreneurial spirit (Rondeaux and Pichault, 2007). The post-bureaucratic world is seeing the rise of professional (Kirkpatrick et al., 2005) and managerial logics (Bezes, 2003) that bring with them new identity anchor points for the public employees who do not necessarily recognize themselves in the name of 'civil servant' or who even seek to clearly distance themselves from it (Emery and Martin, 2010) – while stressing their belonging to the public sector. This behaviour may seem paradoxical, but it is probably typical in a hybrid environment that reveals potentially conflicting facets, as several of the contributions in this special issue will illustrate.

Emergence of hybrid administrative forms

Publications are increasingly likely to try to dissect the public nature (publicness) (Bozeman, 2007) of the administration and to isolate the founding body of public values (Jorgensen, 2007). The revival of a hybrid bureaucratic model (Emery, 2009) is shattering the conventional binary types to give rise to a variety of organizational forms that are becoming difficult to classify other than by adopting a 'private–public' continuum. A continuum on which, according to various criteria such as the degree of public financing, management autonomy, the degree of openness to competition in the markets in which they operate, and so on, they can subsequently be positioned. An analytical model that has been around for many years (Santo and Verrier, 1993), but that the current methods of public governance tend to render obsolete. Indeed, collaborations between public and private actors are increasingly required for the implementation of public policies. A growing number of 'public' services are thus provided by private organizations or associations. Hence the renewed interest of the scientific literature in recent years in partnerships of all kinds (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Bovaird, 2004; Weihe, 2006; Skelcher, 2007; Giauque, 2009) that are spurring public organizations on towards change because they are faced with different logics of action.

The boundaries between public and private organizations are therefore tending to become blurred, even if the tasks and objectives of the private and the public differ fundamentally (Allison, 1987), which sometimes leads to conflicts of interest, as demonstrated by certain political scandals, in Europe, in particular. It should be noted that private companies seeking a renewed legitimacy are adopting the semantic repertoire of the public sector (corporate citizenship, social responsibility, and so on) to improve their image, which produces another form of hybridity, which we will not attempt to analyse in this special issue, given that our starting point is the public sphere.

Therefore, how is this new hybrid perceived and experienced by the public officials involved? What are the adaptive strategies, the behaviours actually adopted, and what are their underlying motivations and identities? This special issue aims to answer these questions from an international perspective by using different and complementary frameworks of interpretation and by focusing on different organizational levels and therefore on different types of actors.

De Visscher and Randour afford an initial insight into the reform of the Belgian federal government, under the evocative name of 'Copernic'. The article measures to what extent the introduction of a managerial approach geared towards improving the independence of senior civil servants is countered by the persistence of traditional control processes, resulting in a form of disillusionment of the managers concerned, and the emergence of inconsistencies in the dynamics of change. To do so, the authors use the theoretical framework of the Public Service Bargain to show that its evolution towards a more managerial logic is by no means simple in practice.

The French and Anglo-Saxon sociological traditions show, each in their own way, that public officials are not neutral receptacles of modernization reforms, as the administrative actors embrace them, handle them and sometimes interpret them in quite a surprising way (Bernoux 2004; Alter 2005). In the same vein as the previous article, but based on a different theoretical framework – the strategic analysis of the actors – the article written by Göransson seeks to identify and analyse the different strategies implemented by the stakeholders, the politicians, the cabinet members and senior officials around their respective margins for manoeuvre. The underlying rationale for their behaviour makes it possible to understand the observed resistance and the difficulties of managerializing a system that is strongly influenced by the rule of politics.

The actors in the field are often faced with dilemmas arising from the various administrative reforms currently underway. Feelings of identity and belonging are particularly put into question in organizations that have a private status, but whose missions are mainly public, that is to say, based on public laws. Buffat illustrates how the actors in the field, or the 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980), experience hybridity in their everyday environment. It emphasizes that the identities and affiliations are complex and result in strategies rolled out by the actors and organizational strategies. In this case, while the actors roundly deny that they are part of the 'state', so as not to be equated with 'civil servants', they put the same vigour into defending the 'public service' missions that characterize their professional activities. The article thus aims to illustrate the construction, hybridity and multiplicity of markers of belonging within a Swiss public unemployment insurance fund.

Hénaut, Kletz and Sardas continue the analysis of the forms of hybridization of public activity, drawing on the example of cultural facilitation professionals in France, illustrating the clash of cultures between professional and managerial/organizational logics of action, to then develop an analytical framework to overcome these antagonisms. They also offer an innovative avenue for the professionals concerned to experience the hybridization process not as a programmed and inevitable deterioration of their working conditions, but as a global dynamic of evolution serving as a lever of professionalism and recognition. In doing so, the performance logics introduced into public organizations can find their place and establish their legitimacy by reinforcing professional dynamics.

Rondeaux helps us to better understand the identity dynamics that thrive in a changing professional environment, using the concepts of institutionalized

organizational identity and alternative organizational identities to show the role of *enactment* of the context that the actors involved help shape. This social-constructionist analytical perspective is another response to the question of how hybrid environments can be perceived and experienced daily in a register which goes from congruence to dissonance. States of identity that must be considered as scalable, as both the organizations and the individuals influence and change each other.

While there is a dense body of literature on PSM, few studies attempt to assess to what extent the hierarchical position exercised may be associated with different types of PSM. Desmarais and Edey Gamassou draw their findings from two studies, one quantitative in the tradition of research into PSM, and the other qualitative, to dissect aspects of the PSM that are particularly important for public officials employed in operative functions without hierarchical responsibility, in France. For the latter, the existence of elements of PSM alongside instrumental motivations illustrate a hybrid form of motivation that makes it possible to go beyond the literature comparing extrinsic recognition systems and those enhancing intrinsic motivation, such as pro-social behaviour.

The various articles presented here highlight the importance of an approach inspired by the sociology of organizations, strongly rooted in the French tradition of the analysis of public organizations, which sets out to give voice to the actors to better identify the organizational and managerial implications but also the consequences this new public organizational hybridity have for identity and values. Thus, in the articles that make up this special issue, the authors propose different and complementary sociological readings of contemporary public administrations and of their actors. They mobilize, among others, the contributions of neo- institutionalism to emphasize that the reforms are facing strong institutional 'constraints'. The latter then constitute 'paths of dependence' that often only allow incremental organizational arrangements, instead of the organizational changes that 'reformists' are calling for. Institutions are more stable and anchored than they appear and this partly explains why organizational hybridity is the norm rather than the exception in the context of contemporary administrative reforms. In other words, administrative traditions are important explanatory variables in contemporary administrative dynamics (Kuhlmann, 2010; Painter and Peters, 2010; Kickert, 2011). Moreover, if it is difficult to model the institutions, then this is also true for the actors. Many of the articles published here underscore how important it is to consider public officials (whether senior civil servants or street-level bureaucrats) as strategic actors. The organizational rules are always collective constructs, the fragile result of power relations between the different actors who are involved in a collective project, in constant reconstruction. Thus, the strategies are deployed around the definition of the new rules of the game, but also around the organizational resources that can be mobilized. Some actors resist, others are enthusiastic about the new management principles and practices, while others again give up the fight and resign themselves to the new rules without necessarily playing along. The analysis of player's strategies also helps clarify

why organizational hybridity is becoming widespread in contemporary administrations with several of the authors asked to participate in this special issue making use of this theoretical perspective (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977; Friedberg, 1993).

The strategies of the actors are also deployed in connection with aspects relating to the culture, values and identities within the organizations. These issues are very much present in any attempt at modernization. Moreover, the architects of the administrative reforms have frequently aimed to transform the culture of public administrations (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). However, these cultural changes are not automatic, far from it. The actors also grapple with these issues when discovering these new management standards that are offered to them or imposed on them and that challenge their professional identity. The literature abounds with examples of how administrative reforms also relate to the conditions of 'living together' (Sainsaulieu, 1987; Alvesson, 2002; Gregory, 2002; Dingwall and Strangleman, 2007; Du Gay, 2008). In this special issue, several articles cover these debates by also highlighting that the organizational hybridity may be the result of tensions relating to culture, identity and values and any reform inevitably helps revive these tensions. The organizational hybridity found in contemporary public administration is thus explained in several ways, depending on several variables examined by the researchers.

Finally, this special issue on hybridity asks questions that are both contemporary and original. While hybridity has long since been pinpointed by the literature, the organizational and human consequences of the latter are still, from our point of view, largely neglected by the scientists. The plurality of views and approaches makes it possible, in our view, to better define the phenomena behind institutional hybridity without it being possible to isolate a single explanatory factor, as well as their impact on the people in place. It is our hope that this special issue can contribute to the broadening of the debate on issues relating to institutional hybridity, by deepening the understanding of the mechanisms via which the actors deconstruct and reconstruct their working environment.

Note

1. Larousse: http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/hybride/40717, consulted on 30 September 2013.

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