



EGPA Annual Conference, Malta, September 2-5 2009

Call for papers

“Leadership, Professionalisation and HR Strategies”

At the Madrid 2007 EGPA conference the Study Group started a new research programme on ‘Leadership, Professionalisation and HR Strategies’ for the period 2007-2009. The Madrid sessions in 2007 provided for a broad survey of topics, while the 2008 conference in Rotterdam focused on more specific issues. This call for papers first presents the general description of the three-year research programme and then outlines the themes for the 2009 sessions of the Study Group which relate ‘leadership, professionalization and HR-strategies’ to wider social issues inspired by the general conference theme ‘reinventing government in the information age’.

In recent years there has been a surge in literature on transformational leadership, emphasising the visionary leader who is capable of transforming traditional cultural patterns by reframing experiences and communicating a vision that helps to give direction in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity. The OECD sees leadership as the key to steering public organisations in the twenty-first century and most governments now include leadership as a core competency for their higher civil servants. This type of visionary leadership, however, may not be the most relevant model for the new system of governance in which public organisations are working in partnership with private and voluntary bodies and are also committed to citizen engagement in public policy processes. Here models of collaborative, informal, dispersed, distributional and emergent leadership may be more appropriate.

The debate about NPM may have abated, as it is no longer new, but the skills and competences required of effective managers and leaders still preoccupies the modernisers and reformers of public services. On the one hand there is the call for creating a more professional managerial cadre of civil servants and public officials and, on the other hand, the demand for reinstating the traditional public professions, which have been displaced by new public managers. Furthermore, there is a concern about the impact of these changes on the identity of



public officials and public servants as the boundaries between the public and private sectors have blurred. Are people still drawn towards public service and if so what is it that motivates them?

Finally, the role of human resources management (HRM) is central to these issues. These include thinking about ways to recruit, train, develop, appraise and reward leaders and professionals in government; how to improve individual, corporate and public sector performance; and how to transform the cultures of public organisations to meet the changing role of the state and those who work within it – all these raise strategic HR issues. They are on the agenda of the personnel/HR departments in many public sector organisations.

The Public Personnel Policies Study Group's (SG3) programme for the period 2007-2009 focuses its activities around the following major themes:

- 1 Leadership and public management reform.
- 2 Developing collaborative leadership in the new systems of governance.
- 3 Professionalism in public service.
- 4 HR strategic responses to issues of leadership, professionalisation and modernisation.

The work of the Study Group at the Malta 2009 conference will concentrate on the three themes of 'Leadership, Professionalisation and HR strategies', with the aim of deepening our understanding and analysis of each. In addition, the Study group invites papers that address the Malta EGPA conference theme of 'Reinventing Government in the Information Age'. Each sub-theme will provide for one or two sessions, depending on the number of papers submitted and accepted. Some of the issues that might be considered are outlined below.

Sub theme 1: Leadership

- Reinventing government in the information age is said to be about adopting an outward-looking approach (see description of EGPA Conference theme 2009). Do we see public sector leadership actively engaging in collaboration with stakeholders to deal with major social issues? At what levels of government (national, regional, local) and in



what domains (for instance infrastructure, public safety, environment) do we observe new forms of governance beyond formal procedures of consultation? Do nation states differ in the social capital that public leadership can draw on to feed shared sense-making about the direction of collective action?

- What public issues are included in leadership development programmes, or are these programmes concentrating on an inward-looking approach to technically perfecting service delivery?
- (How) are stakeholders involved in leadership development programmes to facilitate an out-ward looking approach?
- When public sector leadership requires networking with other organisations that operate in the same public service delivery chain – for instance police, schools and youth work to prevent and signal early risks of youth delinquency – how do public managers deal with competing values in different settings (in joint multidisciplinary meetings, in their own management team, vis-à-vis their political superiors)?
- Increasingly diversity in (top) management is seen as a top priority, both because this reflects in itself a responsiveness to the diversity of the wider environment and because a more diverse composition of management teams is believed to provide for deliberation and decision-making that takes more points of view into account, is not only sensitive to dominant views in society, and helps to prevent groupthink. What are the results so far of public organizations' activities to increase the diversity in (top) management? Do management and HR-staff collaborate effectively in pursuing this goal? Do the deliberation and decision-making activities of management provide evidence to support the presumed benefits of diversity?

Sub theme 2: Professionalisation

- Does ICT assist in the professionalisation of public services? How do ICT applications influence the tension between professional autonomy and control over professional actions? For instance, do electronic health records improve or constrain/restrict professional actions?
- How do professionals cope with the increasing media interest when these question professionals' actions as failing to live up to public interests? For instance, when medical specialists' lack of



collaboration causes medical mistakes or even casualties, or when youth care workers do not register domestic violence or child abuse at home early enough to protect children? What do the professionals' actions say about the way they deal with the tensions between professional autonomy and responsibility? What actions do public organizations initiate to engage with these tensions and deal with them more professionally? What role do professionals themselves and HR-staff have in this?

- How much social responsibility can public professionals take in addition to their core task? For instance, school teachers face contradictory appeals from some politicians who call upon schools to take all sorts of pedagogical/social responsibilities (such as compensating for parental failures, teaching children respect for concrete forms of diversity such as homosexuality) and others politicians who argue that teachers fail their prime responsibility in teaching children reading and arithmetics. Another example could be the police, which are called upon to engage in community activities but at what cost for 'catching thieves and solving murders'?
- How do professionals cope with the tensions between professional standards, management' focus on performance targets and public expectations?

Sub theme 3: HR Strategies

- Is ICT helping public organizations to professionalize its personnel services? What purposes is ICT application in personnel policies serving? Do ICT applications concentrate on employee self-service administrative information or do they support the professionalisation of employees for instance through competency assessment tools, information about development and job mobility?
- Is professionalisation/talent development age-biased in the sense that HR-activities concentrate on recruiting young professionals and high potential trainees? What about the talents of older employees?
- What role do line managers have or take in carrying out HR-strategies aimed at professionalisation?
- What role do HR-strategies in public organisations have in mind or provide for line managers? Do line managers take this HR-responsibility?

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- Does the idea of public sector leadership involve a role for line managers in HRM?

Abstracts of proposed papers, no more than two sides of A4 in length, should be sent by email to the Study Group Convenors listed below and the EGPA Secretariat by 1 May 2009. Papers that are accepted should not exceed 6500 words in length and should be sent by email to the Convenors and EGPA by 3 August 2009.

The aims of the Study Group convenors are to obtain refereed journal publications each year around the sub-themes and the conference papers and to produce a monograph/book at the end of the third year.

Convenors

Professor Peter Leisink p.l.m.leisink@uu.nl

Professor Annie Hondeghem annie.hondeghem@soc.kuleuven.be

Dr Sylvia Horton sylvia.horton@port.ac.uk

Professor David Farnham david.farnham@port.ac.uk

EGPA Secretary

Dr Fabienne Maron maron@iiasiisa.be

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