

CONTRADICTIONS IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT MANAGING IN VOLATILE TIMES

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XVI IRSPM Conference

Contradictions in Public Management: Managing in volatile times

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Panel Title: **Good Governance: Managing Contradictory Public Values**

Chair(s):

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Four key words that capture its essence:

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| 1. Good Governance | 2. Value Management |
| 3. Public Values | 4. Public Management |

A short description of the proposed panel (maximum 500 words):

Values are important in public management, as also acknowledged in the recent body of literature on “good governance.” Both in academics and in popular discourse, good governance receives more and more attention, in a slightly broader fashion that used to be the case during the last two decades. Traditionally the concept was merely associated with developmental issues and countries. Yet, increasingly, good governance is also applied to the realm of modern nation states, struggling to find new (multi-actor and multi-level) approaches to public governance. It is those shifts in governance that may explain the recent growth of scholarly interest in a wider application of the good governance concept. As the traditional institutions of government no longer define ‘what works’ and ‘what is right,’ questions on the quality of governance automatically return to the centre of public and academic attention. These questions touch upon the effectiveness and efficiency of governance, but also upon ethical aspects, democracy and legitimacy of public management.

The good governance concept is both appealing and annoying. It is appealing because it widens the scope of public performance evaluation. Whereas the new public management school mainly focuses on questions of (output) efficiency, the good governance literature sketches a much richer and more extensive landscape of relevant public values and performance parameters. This, however, is also annoying, for it is not easy to use this multitude of good governance criteria in practical assessments and evaluations. After all, who can be against values such as transparency, lawfulness, incorruptibility and effectiveness? However, often scholars discover that there are many intrinsic tensions between the different values involved, for instance between efficiency and legitimacy. As broad and divided as the literature on good governance is, it generally subscribes to the idea that focusing on results increases the risk of neglecting other relevant dimensions, such as the integrity of administrative action.

As Kettl states (1993), government's fundamental challenge in serving the public interest is to balance the pursuit of different inevitable contradictory standards. Trade-offs between valued principles are thus an ineluctable fact of any designing process (LeGrand 2007). For instance, services that are fully responsive to the needs and wants of some individuals may not be very efficient in terms of the interest of the wider community. Besides, ideas of effective operational structures could be in breach of the law. In short, especially in volatile times that are characterized by budgetary restraints, managers, administrators and politicians are faced with trade-offs between conflicting and contradictory public values and interests. Reflections on the concept of good governance may be helpful to interpret these trade-offs. Following recent studies on the concept, good governance may be defined as the generally valued criteria of what government should bring about. In other words, using recent discourse, good governance is all about *managing tensions between potentially conflicting or contradictory 'public values'* .

We invite papers that deal with the issues above in the broadest possible sense, including intrinsic and fundamental questions about which values are (and should be) most important in constituting 'good' governance in general as well as specific contexts, management strategies with regard to how to deal with tensions, contradictions, and conflicts between values, differences and similarities between political and administrative views on good governance, value tensions on the public-private interface, differences in what can be considered good governance in public, private, and third sector settings, etc. The panel theme fits perfectly the overall conference theme:
Contradictions in Public Management: Managing in volatile times