EDITORIAL PREFACE

Citizen Participation Embedded in Public, Private and Hybrid Organizations

Jari Vuori, Department of Health Policy and Management, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland

During the past decade, the idea of hybrid organizations has been globally celebrated as a solution for failures in typical government reforms. Therefore, “hybrids” as well as “partnerships” are widely-used terms in the literature of public/private management. At times, it can be difficult to determine the definitions of these terms. Exact definitions cannot be found in the fields of management, social, or health sciences research. Partnerships, hybrids, or even New Public Governance can be easily interpreted more by policy language-game-playing than evidence-based management or policy science. However, it is fascinating to find ourselves confronted by the fact that the past paves the way for the future. In other words, some fads have manifested themselves in scientific research and provided a foundation for innovative and rival options for researchers.

But what is a hybrid organization? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its etymology derives from the Latin word hybrid, meaning the “offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar”, “child of a freeman and slave”, and so forth. The term most common refers simply to a combination of the two highly different organizations, A and B. The combination generates mutually constructed unparalleled networks that cannot be reproduced by single organizations. In a metaphorical sense, hybrid organizations can be seen as any offspring resulting from the mating of two genetically distinct species.

Why should citizen participation, willingness to involve in decision-making in organizations and services, not be ignored in the future studies of public-private management? In short, hybrid organizations believe that citizens’ participation can more likely avoid the dysfunctional power of institutional structures in management and be more efficient, flexible, and dynamic in their actions. Citizen participation provides two or more distinct power sources to manage hybrid organizations (cf. hybrid cars).

The hybrid reforms of service systems and governance structures is due to rapid demographic changes occurring in most western countries. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the power of the citizens’ voice, embedded in
citizens’ individualistic westerner behavior. To be more specific, the citizen is, more or less, the individual confronted with the life situation requiring a choice, often supported by family members, partner, and spouse or significant others involved in decision-making. Elements of citizens’ participation in decision-making require that the co-produced services are followed by the rule of power-with, not power-over. Unfortunately, most of the reforms in social and health care have been implemented by dominant doctors and accepted by passive patients. On the other hand, consumerism in health care, as an extension of individual autonomy, has not been the solution. The voice of citizens is a mixture comprised of individualism, egalitarianism, fatalism, and hierarchism. Thus, the public/private distinction, found on a basic lack of definitions, manifests itself in the shape of hybrids.

Arguments against the following are hard to find: all organizations, both tax-based and market driven, are expected to start quickly, act decisively, and run efficiently. Thus, tremendous problems of defining effectiveness of new organizing forms are not likely to dissolve. According to complex theorists, the main reason could be that there are not enough studies of how relationship between citizens’ participation and service provides give rise to the collective behaviors of a system. A possibility exists that hybrids are constructed by the system that interacts and forms relationships with its environment. Again, this raises the question: Are hybrids always more anchored by institutions than citizens’ involvement and participation?

However, the studies of public/private distinction are still fueled by the relative productivity and efficiency of public versus private provision of organizations. Likewise, “public” and “private” have long served as key organizing categories in management and policy studies. For this reason, future research must beyond of either/or categories and take into consideration the importance of citizens’ participation *an sich*. We must admit that any notion of “public” or “private” makes sense only as one element in paired opposition, but our categorization must be based on understanding of these basic concepts of western thought. Only a few systematic and comprehensive studies have been conducted in which the action of organizations and politics is anchored by citizens’ public and private in social life. “Public” and “private” embraces many sub concepts that would be interesting to apply in organization, management, and policy studies. These concepts do not manifest themselves in the “non-profit” characteristics of the public sector or complex and ambiguous tasks. Therefore, it makes sense to exploit the following ideas in organization, management and policy studies:

“The argument that adopting a public life forfeits a private life is ridiculous. So too is the arguments that, it is reported, many journalists use to establish a public interest: ‘anything may be relevant to assessment of a person’s character’. True. Anything may be relevant to a person’s character, but not everything relevant to a person’s character is of public interest” (James Griffin, On Human Rights, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 240-241).

*Jari Vuori*
*Editor-in-Chief*
*IJPPHME*
Jari Vuori is a professor at University of Eastern Finland. He is currently Head of Health Management Sciences at the Department of Health Policy and Management, where he is responsible for research and the program of Phd students. He has been a visiting lecturer and scholar in Europe (University of Warwick), USA (Georgia Tech), and Japan (Nihon University). His research focuses mainly on the differences between public and private organizations and sectors at macro-and micro levels. His research group, PUBPRI, focuses on comparative issues concerning public, private, and non-profit service delivery, efficiency, and effectiveness. In addition Dr. Vuori is interested in comparative public policy issues and their methodological configuration in the global setting. His educational and scientific background stems from public management, business administration, and economics.