

Research on public administration: Topics of interest

Donald Moynihan



Robert M. La Follette
School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Three questions for public administration

- Who do we study? (Administrative burdens)
- How do we study? (Performance management)
- How do we communicate? (Reaching practitioner audience)

WHO WE STUDY?

Bureaucrats or citizens?

- In public administration and management, imbalance of attention to public employees vs. citizens
 - Under-theorized role of citizen-state interactions

How do citizens experience the state?

- To answer, first need concepts
- Administrative burden
 - Experiences teach them about standing as citizens
 - Burdens affect take-up of programs, and whether programs are reaching desired group

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Administrative Burden: Learning, Psychological, and Compliance Costs in Citizen-State Interactions

Donald Moynihan, Pamela Herd,† Hope Harvey‡*

**University of Wisconsin–Madison; †University of Wisconsin–Madison;*

‡Harvard University

Defining the concept

- *Learning Costs*
 - Engaging in search processes to collect information about public services, and how they are relevant to the individual
 - Example – learning that a program exists, whether you are eligible, how much it might benefit you, how to apply
 - Such knowledge is not innate

Defining the concept

- *Compliance Costs*
 - the burdens of following administrative rules and requirements
- **Examples**
 - Completing forms
 - Providing documentation of status
 - Frequency of re-certification
 - Money spent (e.g., fee for services, hiring legal help)

Defining the concept

- *Psychological costs*
 - stigma of applying for or participating in a program with negative perceptions
 - a sense of loss of personal power or autonomy in interactions with the state
 - the stresses of dealing with administrative processes.

Research Agenda

- Why do burdens exist? Accident or political choice? (Moynihan, Herd and
- Who is targeted with burdens? Who has the resources to overcome burdens?
- What are effects on citizens?
- Practical: how can we measure, manage and reduce burdens?

HOW WE STUDY

Performance management

- One area of study but typifies evolution of field
- 1990s: dominated by case studies
 - Good on documenting reform processes, not effects
- 2000s: better problem definition
 - Performance information use
 - Link to performance
 - Enables behavioral approach (often surveys)

Current era

- Further step towards behavioral approach
- Cognition of performance information use
 - Public say they prefer statistical information over anecdote, but...
 - Find anecdotal information more memorable, and more emotionally engaging (Olsen 2015)
 - Negativity bias: public, bureaucrats, and politicians respond more to negative information than positive (Olsen 2014; Boyne et al. 2009; Nielsen and Moynihan 2015)
 - Ideology: political preferences shape how we use data (Lavertu, Lewis & Moynihan 2013)

Current era

- We know a lot about what doesn't work, but what works?
- Design: how changes alter performance management
 - Does new hiring authority increase leadership attention to performance data? (Calmar Andersen & Moynihan 2016)

Current era

- Huge growth in experiments
- Survey experiments to test cognitive claims
- Field experiments (rarer & harder) to test design questions – need more
- Surveys that include objective data and multiple data sources

HOW WE COMMUNICATE?

To an academic audience

What should an abstract do?

- In the simplest language:
 - Your topic, why its important, and what you found
- Avoid:
 - Cliffhangers
 - Too much on methods or what you did
 - Having multiple ideas

Introduction: essential components

- Why topic is important; what is the puzzle
 - Can talk about gap, but has to be important
- What are research questions
- What are contributions
 - Theory is most important, more practical things (e.g. new data, methods) of lesser value
- Map of the paper

What should introduction do?

- Situate paper: your field and contribution
- No longer than 2-3 pages, but whole paper
- By end, want reader to be interested, rooting for your paper
- Reviewers will have largely made up their mind based on intro – might become more negative, not more positive

Broader community

- Our credibility comes from scholarship, but want to make a difference
- Make sure it is easily accessible
- Have summaries
- Promote on social media
 - but also in person
- Find bridge organizations

Other thoughts?

Conclusion

Welcome your feedback and questions

dmoynihan@lafollette.wisc.edu



@donmoyn



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School of Public Affairs**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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