Research on public administration: Topics of interest

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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

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

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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 it's 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

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References


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