

EPSA

Workshop on Leadership and Management for Change

Opening Address

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What next?

How to trigger learning processes

- The consideration of best practices may contribute to the long-term development of the public sector, insofar that it triggers learning processes
- Learning processes in turn are the basis for innovation: thus improved quality, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as sustainability and equity
- But how to do it?
- The question becomes: how to 'extract' a practice and apply it to another context, in such a way that it produces similar (similarly positive) effects?

How to 'extract' a practice and apply it elsewhere

- Starting with a 'practice that works' (useful to solve a problem); how can it be employed in another context?
- I will suggest here a simple, but not naïve, 'reverse engineering protocol' (see next slide)
- A minor methodological note: yes, it is possible to learn from a single case study, *provided* the causal chain that leads from the practice to the effects is properly understood

A protocol (in five steps)

1. Identify the function to be performed: what is the function that the practice has made it possible to achieve
 - example: mobilise constituencies to support change
2. Define what *exactly* the practice is about
 - example: setting to work *loci* to empower communication channels between public sector organisations and stakeholders
3. Describe the practice by answering the following two questions:
 - 1. How does the system operate?
 - 2. How does the practice try to take advantage of the way the system operates (design and innovation dynamics)?

Protocol (continued)

4. Identify *all* the effects of the practice
 - 1. *Main* effects of the practice (Results)
 - 2. *Variations* of the practice (what accounts for unusually satisfactory performances; what accounts for possible breakdowns?)
 - 3. Possible *side-effects*
5. Define the key ‘process context factors’: under what conditions does the practice work?
 - ‘universal’ practices, independent of technical, political, and environmental context are very rare
 - The causal mechanisms that have made it possible for the practice to work in that specific context must be identified so that the practice may be geared to the recipient context

Some final reminders

- Good to focus on improvement and aim for top performance in key areas (particularly for those interventions that do not cover the whole of the organisation but only portions of it)
- Do not forget the basics:
 - the core (technical) content of key public services
 - The importance of minor but cumulative and continuous improvement
- Trigger the whole cycle: learning, innovating, improving performances (long-term performances)
- Good work!

Selected References

- Ongaro, E. (2009) *Public Management Reform and Modernization: Trajectories of Administrative Change in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain*. Cheltenham, UK: Elgar.
- Ongaro, E., Massey, A. Holzer, M. and E. Wayenberg (forthcoming) *Governance and Intergovernmental Relations in the European Union and the United States: Theoretical perspectives*. Cheltenham, UK: Elgar.
- Ongaro, E., Massey, A. Holzer, M. and E. Wayenberg (forthcoming) *Governance and Intergovernmental Relations in the European Union and the United States: Policy and Management*. Cheltenham, UK: Elgar.