Results, Adaptability, Capacity and Engagement:

Narrowing the Implementation Gap

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CENTRE ON GOVERNANCE WORKING PAPER SERIES
NO. 03/20/EN

Centre on Governance
Centre d'études en gouvernance

uOttawa
Faculté des sciences sociales
Faculty of Social Sciences

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Centre on Governance Working Paper Series, No. 03/20/EN

October 2020

doi: 10.20381/jb3v-b851

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The production of this research paper was supported by the University of Ottawa's Centre on Governance. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the the Centre on Governance (University of Ottawa) or any collaborating actors and institutions.

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How to cite this article:

Champagne, Eric, Francis Gaudreault and Moira Hart-Poliquin (2020). *Results, Adaptability, Capacity and Engagement: Narrowing the Implementation Gap*, Centre on Governance Working Paper Series, No. 03/20/EN, October 2020, University of Ottawa. https://doi.org/10.20381/jb3v-b851

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Abstract - Résumé

English

Too often public policies are developed in an attempt to solve complex problems but once under implementation, fail to have the expected impact on those problems. In this paper, we define the “implementation gap” as the disparity between the desired outcomes set by public sector organizations and their actual performance on the ground. Approaches and tools to tackle the implementation challenges in complex situations rely on a new generation of principles that often imply the need for action-based, iterative and adaptive public management models. Drawing from the most recent body of knowledge in the field of implementation and the science of public policy delivery , this analysis has allowed us to create a model that highlights key drivers of implementation. This new governance model which aims to tackle the implementation gap in the public sector is called the RACE model-based on four components which are: driving Results, driving Adaptability, driving Capacity, and driving Engagement. This paper describes a range of implementation approaches that have evolved over the last decades and introduces the RACE framework as a way to narrowing the implementation gap.

Français

Trop souvent, les politiques publiques sont élaborées pour tenter de résoudre des problèmes complexes mais, une fois mises en œuvre, elles ne parviennent pas à avoir l'impact escompté sur ces problèmes. Dans ce document, nous définissons le "déficit de mise en œuvre" comme la disparité entre les résultats souhaités par les organismes du secteur public et leurs performances réelles sur le terrain. Les approches et les outils permettant de relever les défis de la mise en œuvre dans des situations complexes reposent sur une nouvelle génération de principes qui impliquent souvent la nécessité d’emprunter de nouveaux modèles de gestion publique fondés sur l'action, l’itération et l’adaptabilité. En s'appuyant sur les connaissances les plus récentes dans le domaine de la mise en œuvre et de la science de la prestation des politiques publiques, cette analyse nous a permis de créer un modèle qui met en évidence les principaux moteurs de la mise en œuvre. Ce nouveau modèle de gouvernance visant à combler le déficit de mise en œuvre, est appelé modèle RACE et repose sur quatre éléments : les résultats, l'adaptabilité, la capacité et l'engagement. Ce document décrit une série d'approches portant sur la mise en œuvre ayant évolué au cours dernières décennies et présente le cadre RACE comme un moyen de réduire l'écart de mise en œuvre.

Keywords: Implementation; Public sector; Complexity; Adaptability; Capacity.

Acknowledgement

On November 30th, 2016, the Centre on Governance and its partners assembled for a workshop confronting issues that arise when attempting to implement complex public sector policies and reforms entitled: The Drivers of Public Sector Implementation: Bridging Canadian and International Experiences. The conference intended to address the most recent and innovative body of knowledge in the field of policy implementation. The conference included academics and practitioners from Canada and from abroad. Approaches and tools to tackle the implementation challenges in the complex situations were presented. The drivers of implementation rely on a new generation of principles that often imply the need for action-based, iterative and adaptive public management models. This paper has been initially prepared as a discussion paper to that conference and was later updated from our research, experiences in the field of public sector reforms and the proceedings from that conference organized by the three of us. You can download the agenda, the PowerPoints and the working papers at:

https://continue.uottawa.ca/en/course/drivers-public-sector-implementation-bridging-canadian-and-international-experiences

The authors wish to thank the more than fifty speakers and participants who attended the conference along with the partners and sponsors: the University of Ottawa's Professional Development Institute (formerly the Centre for Continuous Education); the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (National Capital Region); the Government Technical Advisory Centre (South Africa); the World Bank's Global Delivery Initiative; Gelder, Gingras & Associates; and COWATER International (formerly CRC SOGEMA).

We also wish to thank four research assistants: Logan Turner, Darren Touch, Bruno Jung-Millen, and James Floch. These four undergraduate students (at the time) were participants in the Directed Research Course offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences. They provided useful assistance with the organization of the conference and more specifically they conducted literature searches, collected documents; compiled information; summarized documents; and they also helped with the proceedings. We are extremely grateful to all of them.

Content

Introduction

While public servants can quite easily develop public policies to address complex issues present within our society, the delivery and implementation of the policy are not as straight forward as it may seem. The key variable explaining the success or failure of public policy is not the policy design phase, but the ability of the public administration to ensure its delivery or to effectively implement the policy (Manning and Watkins, 2013).

In the last few decades, public sector reforms have increasingly relied on results-based management and most recently on deliverology (Barber, 2007; Barber et al. 2011) to improve implementation capacity. However, these management tools are often less effective in the face of complex and wicked problems. Simple-linear problems can often be solved by traditional policy design and conventional project management tools. Whereas, impact and results from the use of traditional tools for large complex projects or reforms in unstable, culturally, politically charged contexts, are much more difficult to achieve.

Reviewing the literature on public policy or management, it appears that the concept of "implementation" is not getting enough attention from scholars and practitioners these days. This paper seeks to highlight new approaches to complex and wicked problems faced by society and the public sector. It also draws from recent knowledge in the field of implementation including a new generation of principles that imply the need for action-based and adaptive policy and management models to tackle the gap between the public policy design and the real implementation on the ground (Fixsen and al. 2005; Aarons et al. 2011; Bertram and al., 2015; Gonzalez De Asis and Woolcock, 2015).

Approaches and tools to tackle the implementation challenges in complex situations rely on a new generation of principles that often imply the need for action-based, iterative and adaptive public management models. Drawing from that most recent body of knowledge in the field of implementation, the goal of this analysis is to create a model that highlights key drivers of implementation. This new governance model which aims to tackle the implementation gap is called the RACE model based on four components which are: driving Results, driving Adaptability, driving

Capacity, and driving Engagement. We present and introduce the RACE framework as a way of narrowing the implementation gap.

1. The Implementation Gap and Complexity

In this study, the concept of implementation is based on the works of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), Havelock (1973), and Rogers (1983) that generally agree on the fact that implementation is complex, more so given the policies, programs, procedures, techniques, or technologies that are a part of the implementation process. However, it is important to note that there is no agreed-upon set of terms for implementation: instead, there are few organized approaches to implementation practice and outcomes (Fixsen et al 2005). From the different models of implementation that exist, it is possible to notice a few strong shared commonalities among them. Notably, the idea that implementation may not always move linearly through the components indicated along with the relative lack of evidence yet available to identify which variables play a key role in the success of the implementation.

The concept and the issues related to the implementation gap have surfaced initially in developing countries where state capacity is often weak. In these countries, solving social problems or stimulating economic development and investments is difficult and challenging. The wicked problem of corruption, for instance, is creating all sorts of development constraints. Political instability also has several negative consequences on how governments and private sectors can operate within the system. Conflict and post-conflict countries are paying a massive toll on economic, political and social disintegration. In these kinds of complex environments, the question is how to operate to adapt the systems to restore confidence to garner confidence and support to development in the social sectors such as health, education and poverty reduction?

Complex and wicked problems are also present in developed countries. Several sectors and issues demonstrate glaring gaps at the implementation level such as the European refugee crisis, public safety, and terrorism issues, immigration reforms, the challenge of funding new and old infrastructure, climate change, aging population and its consequence on social services, economic

development in periods of recession or pandemic, delivering new social services (such as daycare; affordable housing), etc. are just a few examples of complex problems that require a new generation of approaches. In Canada more specifically, the geographic scope, intergovernmental arrangements, regional political dynamics and cultural diversity constitute a challenging policy environment that fosters many complex and wicked problems.

Today's public sector operates in an increasingly complex environment whereby traditional policy designs and conventional management tools are no match for the challenges they face from taxpayers and customers alike. Globalization is often considered as one of the main factors of complexity. Erosion of boundaries, liberalization, movements of capital, people and knowledge are creating a need for innovative management approaches and new types of knowledge and skills. But globalization is not the only driver of complexity. Diversity, organizational interdependencies, mass and flux of information also contribute to generating complexity within and without organizations.

In response to these challenges, the public sector has had to use concepts commonly employed in the private sector in the much more multifaceted public sector (Piercy et al 2013). Alongside traditional bureaucratic structure, the private sector is increasingly involved in the public sector through direct privatization, public-private partnerships, and outsourcing. This shift has resulted in a move from a legalistic, rule-driven, and bureaucratic form to solving problems to one that is focused on performance management and market-based standards. The public sector is expected to achieve outcomes and find solutions in an efficient manner (Newswander et al 2012).

Public reforms have often been guided by the need to begin identifying the shortcomings in results, and subsequently the search for pragmatic solutions that would be applicable (Manning et al 2013). There have been several public sector reform initiatives that are focused on results; however, they have largely remained unmet due to a variety of reasons ranging from political process or shift in priority and resources to the difficulty in measuring success. In the public sector, the consequences of failed delivery are less obvious than in the private sector, and stakeholder goals or motivations are often not transparent. Nonetheless, the basic goal of the public sector is to ensure that high-priority objectives are implemented and have the greatest possible impact.

2. The Adaptive Response

While technical answers such as performance management are still much widespread in most of the countries in the world, we live today at a time where individuals, organizations and States are facing more complex, profound and difficult challenges; and for this reason, it is no longer possible to view problems in the public sector through traditional means. Rather, the world of policymaking and the public sector must now be viewed as a holistic system with complex relationships and dependencies. To accommodate this view, there has been the emergence of new theories to address the growing implementation gap in the public sector, which may be called collectively complex systems thinking. Complex systems thinking focuses on the understanding of the wicked and complex contexts in which public policies and programs are implemented. It focuses on the dynamic interplay between the public sector environment (internal factors) and the social environment (external factors). It takes into consideration, among other factors, leadership, stakeholder capacities, engagement and readiness, political environment, and information and communication.

As a result of the new and complex challenges that face governments across the world, public sector managers are under intense pressures which come from a variety of issues: structural or relationship challenges, lack of complete knowledge or program resources, and time pressures. These conditions tend to encourage agencies to be risk-averse rather than open to innovation and competent to undertake productive adaptation to the new challenges (Head, 2010). Managers and public sector leaders often talk about the importance of the 'big picture', however too often they employ myopic strategies and policies looking for short-term benefits, rather than looking for high leverage areas for system-wide redesign and improvement (Kim and Senge, 1994). For this reason, public sector agencies, departments and organizations must begin to understand and employ complex system ways of thinking. But what exactly is complex system thinking?

System thinking is a relatively older theory coming from the field of life sciences as scientists in the 1930s and 1940s began to understand that to truly study a system, they needed to take a holistic view of the entire structure, and not just focus on individual constituents. From the field of sciences, systems thinking extended to countless disciplines, from general management to logistics to cybernetics (Zakaei et al., 2010). In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in the

application of complex systems thinking to social sciences, public administration and service industry management.

That being said, before moving forward on defining complex system thinking, it is important to define a system as any kind of entity that is made up of parts that interact. Together, these parts and their interactions create a whole, which in turn produces some sort of result (Lovato et al., 2014). Using systems thinking approach to strategic management is important because it helps us understand what helps or hurts the workings of a system by looking at the whole system of parts and interactions, rather than just focusing on one specific part. As such, complex systems approaches focus on understanding the whole of a complex system (Kroelinger et al., 2014). The rationale behind complex systems thinking is that to identify the effect of a specific intervention on the system, one often requires a larger understanding of how the system functions. Indeed, as Kroelinger et al. explain, the effect of any given factor may depend on the state of its relationship with other factors in the system which also may be affected by feedback loops and dependencies. Contrastingly, linear cause-effect approaches, often present in other strategic management theories, tend to lose focus on a greater range of issues within the complex system. Instead, to better understand the system in a more holistic manner, one must look at interventions, policies, structures, patterns and norms in the broader structure. This will allow managers and leaders to strategically consider other values, perspectives and relationships between the above-stated factors which could relieve or resolve key problems (Lovato et al., 2014).

Foster et al. contend that public sector organizations are being asked to deliver more complex projects to the public. Yet, these organizations often find themselves in a bind because current forms of management result in increased levels of failure as managers try to avoid experimental programs whose potential failure could cost significant amounts to public taxpayers. However, these authors suggest that leaders in the public sector manage complex projects in a way that enables innovation, which they propose will reduce project failure, improve organizational success and capability, while also rendering the organization more resilient and able to adapt to uncertainty (Foster et al., 2015).

Specifically, they claim that innovation provides a unique response to problems and improves effectiveness, but also that without it organizations become unable to meet demand which

consequently develops a larger performance gap. Garud et al. (2013) also contribute to this in identifying four complexity and innovation related constructs that must be employed to sustain innovation: being evolutionary (feedback), relational (social, environmental, and technical), temporal (nonlinear and dynamic), and cultural (context). Another author, Maria Kapsali (2011), also adds to this idea of the necessity of innovation in systems thinking by saying that the consistently high level of failure in publicly-funded innovation suggests the presence of something wrong with the planning and control methods of the programs. Rather than seeing one universal managerial methodology, she suggested that different methods are appropriate in different contexts and for different ends. For her, system thinking is a conceptual framework that permits the use of different theories, tools and techniques to help construct holistic, contingent perspectives and practices (Kapsali, 2011). By understanding the relationships between the different parts of the holistic system, one can then identify appropriate intervention points to address the problems and to anticipate the potential impacts of a new project when it is introduced into a specific system (Kroelinger et al. 2014). For Zakaei et al. (2010), a key feature of the systems thinking approach is its emphasis on effectiveness thinking as opposed to efficiency thinking. This is important because it suggests that the quality of service is of more immediate importance than simple cost-cutting or streamlining procedures, which are typical processes in classical performance management theories.

It is mostly as an alternative to typical performance management ideas and practices that systems thinking and complexity theory in the public sector has risen to prominence within academic circles. Kapsali has two main concerns with conventional project management as it currently exists: both the theory and practice treat a project as atomistic and unconnected to other programs and policies within a complex system, and there is problematic change management coming as a consequence of tight operational control over scope creep (2011). The study provided empirical evidence concluding that conventional project management methods such as detailed planning and tight controls stifle innovativeness and communication, restricting managerial action to handle contingencies and change. However, systems thinking can contribute to planning for innovation, complexity and uncertainty by embedding flexibility in managerial activities.

John Seddon, a respected authority on the problems of performance management and deliverology, is highly critical of these conventional methods. He introduced the idea of economies of scale as a pillar of many modern management principles, in which it is seen to be good economics if more units of a good or service can be produced on a larger scale with lower input costs (Seddon 2003; 2008). However, economies of scale, Seddon argues, should not be easily transferred over from the manufacturing industry to the service industry. The archetype for service design offers a view of management which views personnel and their activities primarily as a cost; and in trying to achieve an economy of scale attempts to reduce costs (Seddon, 2003; 2008; Seddon and O'Donovan, 2013). However, as referenced by the title of their 2013 article, Seddon and O'Donovan (2013) make the revelation that industrialized designs in the service management sector have an unexpected "Achilles heel", being that trying to manage costs in fact, creates more cost. In explaining this phenomenon with the employment of a 2005 attempt by English local authorities to centralize call centers, they found that the blind focus on transaction costs led English practitioners of performance management to be blinded to the rise in the volume of transactions and therefore costs, as the new system failed to provide a functional service for the customer (Seddon & O'Donovan, 2013). Indeed with this study, it is well-demonstrated that the concept of complex systems thinking, and viewing the system as a web of interconnected parts, rose from the inability of performance management to improve quality of service while reducing costs.

In a similarly-minded paper, Gwyn Bevan and Christopher Hood (2006) explore the deliverology of Tony Blair's New Labor government of the 2000s, which adopted a system of performance management that introduced government-wide performance targets and a central monitoring group working directly for the Prime Minister. They claim that governance by targets rests on the assumption that such targets can change the behavior of individuals and organizations while minimizing gaming (the idea of 'hitting the target but missing the point' or of reducing performance where there is no explicit target) (Bevan & Hood, 2006: 521). However, their study concluded that with the strict regulation of targets in the public health care system, certain indicators—such as the often-cited wait times—appeared to improve dramatically. Yet, upon further investigation, it was found that gaming increased and measurement standards became more ambiguous and overall deteriorated. Thus, while it appeared that performance improved, this method of deliverology did

not create genuine change. This can likely be attributed to the fact that any solutions introduced were done simply to meet the target, rather than being done after a thorough analysis of the entire complex health care system in Britain.

As opposed to traditional performance management and deliverology strategies, which often focus on strict standards and "universal" measures, complex systems thinking promotes the adaptation of solutions that are unique to local contexts and situations. System dynamics is one such tool, and it is an approach that aims at understanding nonlinear behaviors of these complex systems over time through the use of stocks, flows, internal feedback loops and time delays (Kapsali, 2011). Similarly, a system diagram is a tool to help managers understand how a change in one factor could lead to an impact elsewhere in the complex system. The third selected tool is a causal loop diagram, which aids in visualizing how different variables in a system are inter-related. These three visual tools, amongst others, are helpful for individuals trying to visualize and better understand the nature and complexity of systems.

In addition to these tools, Lane et al. (2016) highlight two concepts that are key to the idea of complex systems thinking. The first one is "requisite variety", which suggests that complex situations can only be effectively managed when one has access to a variety of possible actions. The second is the "group model building technique", which is a participative approach to map creation in which several agents throughout an organizational hierarchy work together to form a consensus in the identification of the problem to allow them to share thoughts and feelings about different policy and intervention options.

While systems thinking has been growing in popularity and support in many public sector organizations to reduce the implementation gap there are nonetheless some limitations to the concept. The main challenge that faces systems thinking is the actual difficulties of implementing effective systems approaches (Trochim et al., 2006). There is a vast literature existing on systems thinking with countless concepts and tools attached to this way of thinking, which can make it incredibly difficult to determine which systems approach one should use to improve an organization or resolve a problem. Additionally, while the concept of thinking about a system in holistic terms is novel, it can often be quite difficult to determine all of the factors and parts of a system as well as

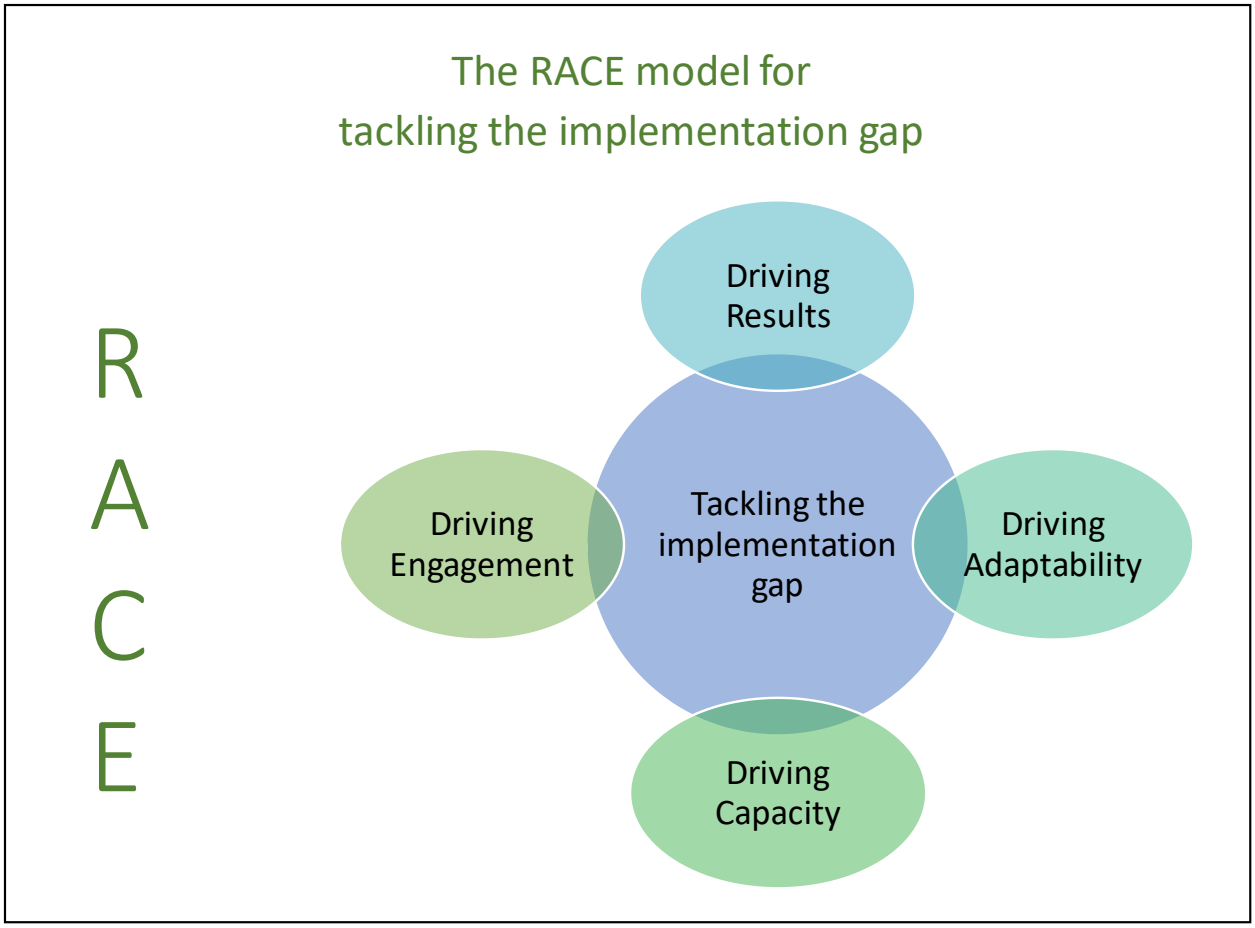
all of the relationships and dependencies that exist between them. Therefore, while a systems thinking does appear to be an ideal way to evaluate organizations and resolve problems, it does not necessarily account for the difficulty of deducing all of the parts that make up the entire system.

3. The Drivers of Implementation

Today's public sector operates in an increasingly complex environment whereby traditional policy designs and conventional management tools are no match to address the complex policy problems within our society. With ever-rising expectations from citizens, the public sector has had to respond under pressure to deliver results in public services and ensure that tax dollars are spent appropriately and effectively. This has pushed the public sector to adapt its reform to the rapidly changing environment. In response to these challenges, the public sector has had to look outside the regular public organization procedures (legalistic, rule-driven, and bureaucratic form of problem-solving) and borrow new concepts and approaches to manage public sector performance and policy implementation.

The analysis of these different approaches and tools for implementation has enabled us to develop a model which encompasses what we call "the drivers of implementation"[1] This new governance model to tackle the implementation gap is called the RACE model because of its four components which are: driving Results, driving Accountability, driving Capacity, and driving Engagement (Champagne, 2016; Champagne 2017). Given the difficulty to navigate through the different approaches, the RACE model offers a simple but comprehensive governance model for countries willing to close in the implementation gap and provide better results in their public sector and thus service delivery.

[1] Some of these ideas were developed in the context of an international conference on The Drivers of Public Sector Implementation: Bridging Canadian and International Experiences, held at the University of Ottawa, November 30, 2016. https://continue.uottawa.ca/en/course/drivers-public-sector-implementation-bridging-canadian-and-international-experiences



3.1. Driving Results

Driving Results is one of the four central features allowing proper implementation in today's public sector. Within this view, it is necessary to build and develop a "result-driven organization". In today's complex world characterized by ever-growing social pressure to generate results, a result-driven organization is necessary to reassure citizens that they receive high-quality public services in return for their taxes. A public service that is run by results and measurability of the output allows the government to be sure that its public administration is effective, efficient and equally provided. Whether public services are centrally managed and financed, or subject to local control, performance measurement is inevitable and, when done properly, can be extremely valuable.

Among other things, it has the advantage of providing useful information and support innovation when it does not become part of a heavy-handed central control that represses development (Pidd, 2012). Performance measurement is, therefore, a vital part of any attempt to continually improve public services. While it is not the only way to improve an organization, it is, in fact, the best way to have an idea of how well the services are provided.

Following Bernard Marr's account, it is possible to underline a few technical and adaptive principles of performance management and result-based management include of course performance measurement which starts with agreeing on strategic objectives and priorities. To provide value to customers and deliver the best performance, government organizations need to agree on deliverables—or targets—and then create plans that will enable them to deliver these deliverables most effectively and efficiently. (Mar, 2009). However, these deliverables must be associated with the internal competencies and resources required to deliver them as strategic objectives without the capacity to deliver it is simply a waste of time. Another important aspect of managing and delivering performance is making sure everyone involved in the execution of the strategy is engaged and understands the strategic context so that organizational performance becomes everyone's everyday job (Marr, 2009). In other words, developing a common understanding of the organization's direction is one of the most valuable and useful exercises which allow aligning organizational activities and projects with this strategy.

Once the objectives or targets are set, it is necessary to establish performance measures or indicators. As said before, measurement facilitates progress by allowing us to understand where we are even if, sometimes, in the public sector it might feel like it reduces human and social complexities to hollow numbers that increase administrative measurement burden. Indeed, in the past, some documented cases have produced counterproductive behaviours by some employees that were only looking to meet performance measures and targets. According to Bernard Marr (2012), measuring performance should mostly serve for learning and empowerment, and not simply for controlling behaviour or external compliance which often get in the way of real performance improvements. Measures should be used to empower employees and to equip them with the information they need to learn and make decisions that lead to improvement. This sort of performance measurement is

about the systematic collection of information to enable the employee to evaluate performance and gain insights. This way, measures can be used as evidence to inform future management decisions and continuous learning and improvement.

Of course, one has to be careful with the measurement as not every number can provide an impartial and rigorous picture of reality. This is especially the case in the public sector organizations that tend to be intangible in nature and consequently challenging to simply count. Nonetheless, public sector organizations have to rely on indirect measures which often capture only a fraction of the desired measurement—for instance, to measure poverty we use the number of people on permanent welfare (Boyle, 2014). That being said, performance indicators, while imperfect, continue to be the closest thing to provide some sort of objectivity to replace personal trust and the most useful way to monitor improvement in public organizations.

The other step to establish a result-driven organization is managing the performance. Identifying and agreeing on what are the right management information to collect is certainly important, however, what is more, important is to turn this management information into insights that can help deliver results in line with the strategy and make a better decisions in the future (Marr, 2012). Indeed, after measuring performance, it is essential to properly manage performance. To do so it is necessary to create the right organizational context and the appropriate processes that help to turn information into significant insights and learning opportunities. To successfully manage performance, organizations need to create the right organizational culture, one which is much more adaptive than the traditional "command and control" approach and which involves and includes everyone in the organization. To accomplish this, the emphasis can be put on learning and improvement are central to build a performance-driven culture where employees know what they are expected to accomplish and are emotionally committed to organizational success and its mission (Risher, 2007). In sum, to create a performance-driven culture in an organization, the key tools are a reward and recognition system that allows to celebrate and recognize good performance; a strong performance-driven leadership throughout the entire organization; appropriate reporting and communication of performance information; suitable interactive performance review processes

that engage people in a dialogue about performance and lead to learning, decision making and performance improvements (Marr, 2012).

To conclude, driving results through performance and result-based management plays an essential role in public organizations. In light of the larger literature, and concerning to our RACE model, we believe that "driving results" is one of the four drivers of implementation which bring positive change in the public sector.

3.2. Driving Adaptability

The second driver of implementation in the RACE model is a feature highly discussed in contemporary literature: adaptive management. Indeed, we believe that to answer today's complex problems; management should be adaptable and flexible. Any implementation teams, in the public or private sector, are almost certain to encounter challenges and unexpected complications. In that case, it is necessary to step back, reflect, learn and adapt, or the team will persist with interventions or strategies that are not adapted to the new situation (Gonsalez, 2015). To avoid repeated failure, teams must be ready to adapt promptly to the experiment and notice what works and integrate feedback into implementation. The incorporation of an organized "rapid feedback loops" is also crucial to allow team members to learn how to find a response to ongoing challenges. Adaptive organizations have mastered the different ways to experiment rapidly, frequently, and economically in almost all aspects of the implementation and strategy.

Adaptive management implies looking for solutions through active experimentation and learning. In other words, answers should not be pre-planned or developed by specialists applying knowledge from external contexts; it should be found within the local context through active engagement and learning (Andrews at al., 2016). This does not mean that ideas from outside or so-called best practices are not to be considered, but that everything should be built carefully within the context. The problems addressed should thus be the "locally perceived problems" and not those perceived from the outside (Greenwood et al., 2002). The Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach, for instance, is a flexible way to find solutions to a problem. PDIA advocates trying more than one new idea at a time in any change context and later discuss which one was the best and

more adapted to the situation—just like two climbers would try different routes to get past a mountain they have not yet bypassed (Andrew et al. 2015; Andrew et al., 2016). According to Andrew et al (2016), this process yields positive and negative lessons from each idea and helps to provide a different and better idea. In turn, these lessons bring new hybrids, or locally constructed solutions blending different elements from experiments of ideas. Just like the Rapid Results-type interventions experienced in Burundi for instance (World Bank, 2007), it is often better to empower officials to come up with creative latent ideas to solve challenges through different attempts and experimentation. These kinds of initiatives have for advantage to be motivating and empowering for local agents who get to see their achievements in short periods. The ideas that emerge from these rapid initiatives can also become the basis of more permanent solutions to future problems and, importantly, new sources for learning (Andrew et al., 2016).

Learning is also a crucial factor in allowing adaptive management. Leaning is essential to build capacity and to adapt to the new situations and understand the complexities of reality in the public sector. States need information and knowledge to build their state capability and this is why public services should be in the constant learning process. Some have called for “action learning” as the best way to provide feedback. Action learning is the process of learning through experience or by doing, which involves the learner actively in the process of learning of trying something and then reflecting on the experience, instead of being a passive recipient of knowledge without using it (Senge 1990, Bamford et al. 2015, Andrew et al., 2016). While experimentation necessarily produces failure, it is the learning that follows which is the most important. Adaptive organizations are very tolerant of failure, and sometimes even embrace it. As a major tech entrepreneur, Scott Cook said, “It is only a failure if we fail to get the learning” (Reeves and Deimler, 2011).

Also, in addition to experimentation and learning, the adaptive organization has a much more flexible structure than classical organizations. One powerful lever to increase adaptability is the dispersal of decision rights which, over time, allow more decision making down to the front lines where it is easier to detect changes and respond quickly and proactively (Reeves and Deimler, 2011). This, in turn, allows implementation teams to revise the implementation plan by adding unforeseen activities and dropping others. It is, therefore, necessary to “learn as we go” to adapt in real-time,

and this requires following the four simultaneous steps of change: implementation, monitoring, learning, and adapting. These steps are to be undertaken simultaneously and not sequentially as the responsibility for monitoring should not be handed over to structurally separate functional units far removed from operational delivery and implementation (Armstrong et al., 2013; Teskey, 2018). Of course, creating such decentralized, fluid, and even competing for organizational structures destroys the advantages of a rigid hierarchy which allows everyone to know precisely what he or she should be doing. Consequently, it is important to create some simple, generative rules to "facilitate interaction, help people make trade-offs, and set the boundaries within which they can make decisions" (Reeves and Deimler, 2011). That being said, becoming an adaptive organization is not an easy task for large public sector organization as these organizations are typically characterized by hierarchical structures and fixed routines which lack the diversity and flexibility needed for rapid learning and change. Nonetheless, incremental change towards a more adaptive organization is necessary for an era of globalization, new technology and greater transparency.

3.3. Driving Capacity

Historically, public organizations have treated complex problems with top-down and highly hierarchical approaches. Capacity development issues have also generally been treated with the same formula. These approaches have also tended to strip away context and freeze problems in time to analyze and address it. However, we believe that there is no universal solution and, most importantly, that it is mostly the context that can shape the solution.

One of the most important aspects to consider when building capacity in a public organization is to develop a system that can handle a changing environment and one that welcomes the opportunity to learn from failed programs instead of just dismissing them or avoid riskier projects. Capacity development and learning need both experimentation and adaptation (Armstrong et al., 2013). Most of the time, when small parts of a system change they do not survive because their adaptations are not appropriate for the environment. To make progress in resolving problems and achieve change, the change agents who lead the change process need to create an environment in which the system has the freedom to experiment with different, and sometimes riskier approaches and then aggressively focus on learning about what worked, what didn't and why (Armstrong et al.,

2013). Classical organizational cultures are generally intolerant to failure and avoid it at all cost, instead of considering it as a positive event contributing to systemic learning and capacity development. Increasingly, in contemporary organizations, a higher degree of risk and failure is considered as central to encourage learning and innovation. Indeed, according to the majority of the literature on innovation, leadership must give the initiative back to a highly distributed structure to create space for implementers to experiment and learn from both successes and failures. To innovate and change, an organization must move out of its comfort zone. The role of the change agent is to get the adaptive system to move into a "productive zone of disequilibrium", but this risk comes with much higher pressure and anxiety on the implementation team which must be dealt with by the change agent (Armstrong, 2013).Also, in a highly distributed structure characterized by a dispersion of decision-making, cooperation becomes necessary and brings many advantages. A wider network and more diverse knowledge are involved in the diagnosis of the nature of the problem and its underlying causes, which facilitate the flow of information. Ultimately, that collaboration helps to agree on provisional solutions which require adaptation along the way and create better relationship facilitating further mutual adjustment (Armstrong et al., 2013)

This approach is built within action learning which is often considered the most efficient method to problem-solving, change and capacity development, motivation and talent liberation. It is also an adaptive method that builds on principles of adult learning and transformative learning by putting equal emphasis on action and learning. Action learning is also context-based as it depends on natural messy contexts to develop approaches, reflects on outcomes, and then generates new action possible experiments. Action learning demands a broad systems perspective on problem-solving and creates an environment where double-loop learning can occur (Armstrong, 2013). The essence of action learning is based on the fact that to learn and grow, individuals must act in the real world, reflect on the consequences of their actions, and then act again to understand and learn how to change work in their social context.

3.4. Driving Engagement

In every public organization and especially in lower capacity public service, engagement and commitment from all actors and including upper echelon stakeholders are crucial. Indeed, even if

driven by results, adaptability, and capacity, public sector reforms are generally faced by one important barrier: the lack of commitment. This barrier generally resides not only in the leadership level but in those very individuals actively involved in the change process (Baraldi et al., 2010). It is therefore, for this reason, that commitment and engagement to change has been described as "the glue that provides the vital bond between people and changes goals" (Conner, 1992), Therefore, the engagement from the implementation teams is often considered as the central ingredient which allows for proper implementation and change (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002). To be fair, accepting and providing support to change is often the most challenging dimension of public sector reforms as it requires broad stakeholder ownership and engagement. If the heart of public sector reforms revolves around culture change (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), one important element that implementation leader scan bring to facilitate change is certainly the engagement and commitment to change.

To drive engagement, the leaders at the top of the hierarchy must have a clear idea of the implementation targets and objectives. As it is specified and practiced in "deliverology", elected officials must identify clear objectives which are in direct line with their political platform. However, for the goals to be implemented, the leadership must move on to the actors who have the actual power and capacity to implement. In other words, this has to go from top leadership to the lower levels of leadership which are doing the work on the ground. In the case of the deliverology approach and other top-down performance management frameworks, there are, as always, pros and cons. The benefits of top-down performance management frameworks are notably their ability to steer public organizations towards government priorities which in turn make public sector organizations more focused on the needs of citizens and therefore bring value-for-money in the public sector. On the other hand, the limits of top-down performance management frameworks are linked to the fact that it generally follows a linear cause-effect logic which removes the complexity from the equation and therefore tends to be risk-averse and limit innovation. To make sure that such limits are diminished, it is important to make sure that the top leadership is engaged with the lower leadership which implements the actual policies with proper communications between the two along with the policy and implementation cycle. In other words, to make sure that implementation is driven by engagement, leadership should be "pluralistic".

Such “pluralistic leadership” is often seen in the principles of the Coaching for Results approach which engages the whole chain of actors in a learning and implementation cycle. These are the two concepts that are crucial and certainly inter-related: to learn is to implement and to implement is to learn. To understand pluralistic leadership, one must first accept that leadership is more about groups than individuals. This is because there are likely to be multiple people exercising leadership in any successful change situation. Contrary to what is often said, “Leaders” are more often identified because of their functional contribution to change than by their traits or authority (Andrews et al., 2010). For a leader to contribute to change it is therefore important to build “change space” where leaders nurture acceptance for change, grant authority to change—although with accountability—and enable the abilities which are necessary to achieve change. The “change space” is also especially enhanced when leadership facilitates open access societies and learning organizations in which members within groups are encouraged to pursue change through problem-solving. The key characteristics of leadership that enable engagement are plurality, functionality, problem orientation, and change space creation (Andrews et al., 2010). In sum, pluralistic leadership is the key to drive engagement and therefore enable change and promote development. It should focus not on the individuals but on building functional groups of leaders and change space which builds coalition and networks to solve problems. Also, to be driven by engagement, this leadership should always refer and consider the context within which implementations take place. Indeed, it is only fair to say that change is difficult everywhere and solutions should never be assumed as obvious and simple. A thorough understanding of the political economy of a particular context is essential in order to overcome political resistance and to build support with every stake holder for the right interventions. Therefore, to build engagement and commitment for every player leadership should not be considered the action of a single person, but rather a process of bringing together coalitions to support selected interventions which can help improve implementation and confront political obstacles (Gonzales, 2015).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that there exists a wide range of solutions that have been put forward over the years to close the implementation gap. More recently a new generation of principles has been developed that often implies the need for action-based, iterative and adaptive public management models. In this paper, we have identified new avenues to address complex and wicked problems in order to contribute to the theoretical debate on implementation gap.

We have seen that these comprise the "technical approaches" which includes notably performance management frameworks (performance management, result-based management and deliverology) and the adaptive approaches. The exploration of critical elements of these two different approaches commonly used to reduce the implementation gap in public services has led to an integrated perspective which we call "the drivers of implementation": the RACE model. This model of governance has four interconnected components: driving Results, driving Adaptability, driving Capacity, and driving Engagement. Given the difficulty to navigate through the different approaches, the RACE model which was presented in this paper, offers a simple but comprehensive governance model for countries striving to narrow the implementation gap and provide better results in their public sector and service delivery. The RACE model is therefore offering a holistic and systematic way to understand and begin to tackle today's public sector problems, and more specifically, the implementation gap.

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