

Panel 13: Change management in the public sector

Chaired by: Prof. dr. Walter Kickert (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Prof. dr. Malcom Higgs (University of Southampton) and Dr. Ben Kuipers (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

In the field of comparative politics and administration (Otenyo and Lind, 2006) the issue of reform is seldom addressed from the viewpoint of successfully managing the change process. In the international comparative study of public management reforms by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) an entire separate chapter is devoted to the trajectories of modernisation and reform, but it is not a processual analysis of the change process from the viewpoint of how to manage such reform processes in order to achieve successful outcomes. No reference is made to the broader management literature on change management. On the other hand the management and organisation science literature on change management (e.g. Burnes, 2009; Carnall, 2003) is almost exclusively devoted to the private sector of commercial business firms. Notably a recent literature review on organisational change within the public sector (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006) barely contained any literature references that explicitly dealt with public sector organisations. With the notable exception of Norwegian political and administrative scientists, who are well connected with organisation science (March and Olsen, 1989; Christensen, Laegreid and Roness, 2009), the two worlds of political and administrative sciences on the one hand and management and organisation sciences on the other, seem to be far apart. Thus when addressing the topic of change within the context of public administration there appears to be potential benefit from engaging with the learning from change management experiences and research from other sectors.

However, when reviewing the broader change management literature it is evident that change is a multi-level and multi-faceted phenomenon. It is equally clear that existing frameworks for managing change and associated research studies largely fail to address this level of complexity. A further notable feature of the majority of the change literature is the dominant focus on commercial organizations and the relative paucity of work that addresses the specific issues and challenges that face public sector organizations in change implementation.

In this panel we wished to focus on the issue of change management in a public sector context; how are public management reforms managed, how is the implementation process of policy changes managed, how do public organizations organize for change, what are the specific characteristics relevant to change management in a public environment, etc? Both conceptual and empirical work, dealing with such issues were relevant for the proposed panel. We sought to attract both empirical and theoretical papers that either provide support for existing conceptual frameworks or challenge the paradigms encountered within academic debate in this arena. Furthermore we would particularly welcome contributions that showed how learning from the experiences of other sectors can inform the debate within the arena of public administration.

The proposed panel theme had linkages with the changing nature of each of the three NIG research programs and specifically addressed the implementation issues of new government roles and public administrations.