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Towards innovation in the management of local government

Introduction

The nature of perception of innovation in public organizations is well reflected in the widespread view that innovation in public management is an oxymoron, which consists of terms of opposite meanings. However, theoretical analysis and examples of practices make this an outdated opinion.

Several years of operation within the European Union resulted in the acceleration of changes in the management of public organizations. Their intensity and pace, and the spatial distribution is very diverse. Nevertheless, the focus on the changes, including innovative, is more often seen in daily practice of public organizations.

An aim of this paper is to understand the essence of innovative public management at the local level and its main circumstances, for which it was desirable to change the competence of managers and officials - independent experts to enable implementation of this model. The essence of public management was described on the basis of an analysis of concepts and models, showing different aspects of this management.

Then the specificity of public managers and officials-professionals supporting them was demonstrated as well as their interest in effective management in the context of cooperation with NGOs. These considerations illustrate the results of own research of 2010, devoted to various aspects of public management in Polish organizations, especially the orientation of the cooperation, as well as the results of research found in the literature of the field.

2. Innovation – the latest direction of change in management in public administration

In the current internal and external environment of public administration organizational changes in management become necessary and increasing the efficiency of management in public administration depends in particular on the changes that are innovative. Changes in the sphere of innovative management are characterized by: significant radicalism, the adequacy of the new theories and concepts, a technological breakthrough, ability to create effects corresponding with the modified mission.

Therefore, efficient management of contemporary public organizations is an innovative management. This regularity is shown in several studies of public administration systems [Verheijen 2006; Combe, Brown 2006; Brown, Silbergh, Sartorius, Combe 2006; Metcalfe 1994, Evans, Evans 2002].

The emphasis on the need for innovation in the context of the modernization of government has been known for a long time. In American literature innovation was considered in the context of theories and concepts of organizational change and policy interventions, as well as the conditions for the development of innovative public organizations, including public entrepreneurship. Also emphasized was the importance of decision-making processes in budgeting, results-based management and the role of innovation in the processes of reforming and governance.

Innovations in the management of public administration [Alberti, Bertucci 2006, p. 3-6] are defined as creative ideas put into practice as management solution to address the persistent problems of public management. Innovation, therefore, is the act of creating and implementing a new way of achieving concrete results and increased productivity. This may include new elements, new configurations of existing components, a radical change or moving away from traditional ways of doing things. It applies to new services, new policies and programs, new approaches and new processes.

Innovation processes taking place in public administration are similar, although specific, to the logic of the market for the products [Rothwell 1977 for Szatkowski 2001]. In the context of innovation in management we can talk about an innovative model of management in public administration and, more broadly, in the public sector. It shows some similarities with other recent public management concepts, such as relationship management of public organizations, public governance and a new public service, while different characteristics of their change and complexity can be observed.

The fundamental assumptions of the model of public management innovation stem from the theory of democracy, the concept of civil society, the concept of development based on knowledge and social capital, as well as approaches to organizational change management. There is a desire to balance the rationalities: political, economic and organizational.

The main category of this model is the public interest determined on the basis of public values shared by members of the public, and the conditions of its implementation are negotiated with partners and stakeholders. Citizens and self-organizing groups are recognized as strategic stakeholders.

The role of the state comes down to creating conditions for the functioning of all three socio-economic sectors, including the implementation of public interest and self-organization of society.

The primary mechanism for achieving the goals is to focus on innovation in:
– setting strategic goals;
– creating conditions for cross-sectoral and the inter-organization cooperation;
– coordination of public policies, programs and projects with various partners, also outside the public sector.

Desirable competencies of public managers

Managers of public organizations (Kożuch 2010, p. 347-351) represent different level managers whose primary responsibility is to effectively and efficiently manage organizations providing public services of high quality. These managers solve problems of management in accordance with the criteria of political rationality, taking into account the economic rationality of the appropriate market economy. They are different from managers operating in business. They have a distinct value system associated with the general attitude of cooperation rather than confrontation, which is more typical for businesses. While administrators concentrate on functioning of public organizations in compliance with the law, for business managers the efficiency of the organization is the most important.

The competence of public managers includes: possession of knowledge used in the work of management, as well as experience, skills and abilities necessary to achieve the goals of the organization, professional ethics, cultural values and social sensitivity. (Lane, Wolf 1990, p. 61; Kozuch 2004, p. 225; Virtanen, 1996, p. 56).

Professionalism of a public manager is connoted with the ability to set objectives and formulate measures to ensure public programs that provide implementation of the policy adopted by the legislative bodies. Hence the importance of specialized knowledge and skills of cooperation in the areas of policy, power and conflict. In the light of the cited studies the most desirable competencies of public managers include:
1. self-awareness of features and competences of public managers;
2. ability to determine strategic goals under conditions of considerable diversity of stakeholders and the implementation of these objectives to the public benefit;
3. proficiency in creating conditions for inter-organizational and cross-sectoral cooperation;

4. ability to coordinate public policies, programs and projects implemented with various partners, also outside the public sector;
5. ability to participate in social life, understanding the relationship between public management and leadership in public service,
6. having motivation to take action for others.

Thus, the matching of public managers and officials - independent professionals and the need of implementing innovative public management covers three areas:

I. the specificity of public managers and officials-professionals;

II. public strategic management;

III. organizational collaboration.

Significant positive changes in these three areas correspond to higher quality of human resources in public organizations.

Effectiveness of innovative public management in the light of empirical research

Studies involving specific qualities, skills and motivation of public managers and key areas of change in public management at the primary level were conducted in 2010 in 34 municipalities and cities, whose executives were interested in participating in the research. The respondents were mayors or office clerks and people dealing with staff matters, as well as officials responsible for issues related to direct interaction with NGOs. A total of 112 public managers and those in positions of civil servants were surveyed. Some issues are present in all the questionnaires, e.g. the advantages of creating strategies and methods of task assessment. Some questions were answered by mayors and specialists in human resources or mayors and specialists in collaboration with NGOs. Other questions were about the characteristics of managers, mayors and opinions expressed by HR workers and specialists in cooperation with NGOs. Other questions relate directly to typical ranges of activity on the test sites. For a concise illustration the reasoning carried out in this paper is focused on the analysis of selected responses. It was considered that the opinions of respondents on the following issues allow to initially illustrate the necessity of changes in the characteristics and competencies of the implementers of public management:

1. need to have a strategy,
2. specific qualities, skills and motivation of public managers,
3. leadership for inter-organizational collaboration.

In recent years, a view often presented by theorists and practitioners is that public organizations need the same solutions as those that can be applied in business management. The mayors and HR-workers, as the people involved in solving human resource management problems, were asked for verification of this type of opinion.

Table 1.A need to have a strategy in the opinion of the respondents

Specification	Number of answers			
	mayors	HR-workers	Collaboration workers	Total
is not needed at all	0	0	0	**0**
is needed, because it is expected by its associated organizations (eg. banks, funds, NGOs)	9	11	8	**28**
is needed, since it enables the consistent pursuit of its objectives	28	25	29	**82**
is needed, because it shows what are the aims for the local government and what there is to achieve	22	16	20	**58**
is not needed, since the direction of the organization is sufficiently determined by the provisions of law	0	0	0	**0**
is needed because it facilitates the creation of the office's image in the environment	8	11	10	**29**
is needed, because existing ethical rules can be defined	0	0	0	**0**

Note: respondents selected no more than 3 replies

Source: developed on the basis of own studies in 2010

The data contained in Tab. 1 indicate that all respondents - regardless of their position - recognize the importance of strategic management in the area of contemporary public affairs. They clearly recognize that the directions of the organization are not sufficiently defined by law. The most important attribute is assigned to increasing the efficiency of the organization by consistently striving for goals (82 responses), and awareness of the mandate of the organization (58 responses). To a lesser extent the strategy is appreciated as a tool for creating lasting relationships with stakeholders and public communication (respectively 28 and 29 responses). However, quite surprisingly, especially when we take into account numerous public declarations of local communities, it turned out that there was not a single answer concerning ethical principles in the current strategy. Respondents also saw the need for changes in planning. Mainly mayors stressed

the need to change the time horizon of strategic plans (14 responses), increasing the autonomy of the management agencies in determining courses of action (11 responses), and also reducing the impact of environment on the process of planning in the office (10 responses). A slightly different distribution of answers was observed when respondents were HR workers. They stressed changing of the time horizon of strategic plans (17 responses), and the inclusion of external experts in the planning process (10 responses). The analysis concerning the strategic management points to a greater focus on the inside of offices rather than openness to stakeholders.

Table 2 Diversity of qualities, skills and motivation of public managers in the opinion of the respondents

Specification	Number of answers		
	mayors	HRM	total
Different characteristics of public managers	22	25	**47**
No different characteristics of public managers	0	6	**6**
Different skills of public managers	20	21	**41**
No different skills of public managers	9	10	**19**
Different motivations of public managers	25	30	**55**
Different motivations of public no managers	3	4	**7**

Note: some respondents did not reply to this question
Source: developed on the basis of own studies in 2010

The responses illustrate the notion of the existence of specific public managers. Interviewees drew the greatest attention to the differences in the motivation of public managers and those operating in business (55 responses). Then they emphasized the diversity of characteristics of these occupational groups (47 responses). Also, most respondents, but with a smaller majority, expressed the opinion that the skills of public managers and business ones are different. Thus, practitioners' opinions of management are well illustrated by the view expressed by some public management theorists who argue that public managers are characterized by qualities, skills and motivations other than in the case of business managers. Interesting results are in the section on key management activities (Table 3).

Table 3 The most important management activities in the opinion of the respondents

Specification	Number of answers	
	mayors	HRM
delegating powers to lower levels of management	3,48	6,87
reward for specific achievements	4,89	4,97
assigning of clearly formulated tasks	2,10	4,77
formulation of objectives to mobilize joint action	3,76	4,70
application of penalties for specific offenses	7,04	4,19
evaluate subordinate staff work results	4,34	3,90
advising employees and helping them in carrying out tasks	4,41	3,58
feedback to workers on the implementation of their tasks	4,48	2,32

Source: developed on the basis of own studies in 2010

The analysis of the data from Table 3 shows that opinions on the most important management activities vary depending on the position. Mayors primarily advocate the use of penalties for specific offenses, and - to a lesser extent - rewarding for concrete achievements, giving the staff feedback on the implementation of tasks, advising employees and providing them with assistance in performing tasks. Management of this type is characterized by elements of the authoritarian style with a touch of democratic one. However, HR-workers concentrate on delegation of powers to lower levels of management, rewards for specific achievements, assigning of clearly formulated tasks and formulating objectives to mobilize joint action. The results confirmed their preference for a democratic management style.

A questionnaire for chief executives officers also included questions about the core competencies of the modern public manager and their opinions on the nature of public managers (Fig. 1).

The following competencies of managers connected with their characteristics, education and experience turned out to be of great importance: consistency in action (average 4.68, similarly hereinafter), the ability to organize and to lead their group (average 4.57), truthfulness in all activities and relationships (4,50), emotional stability (4.36), having experience directly related to the current role of occupational roles (4.21). Interviewees attributed less importance to: above-average intelligence (3.82) and a high level of motivation and the pursuit of purposes, including follow-up or professional degrees, certificates, awards, etc.

Figure 1. Specificity of public managers
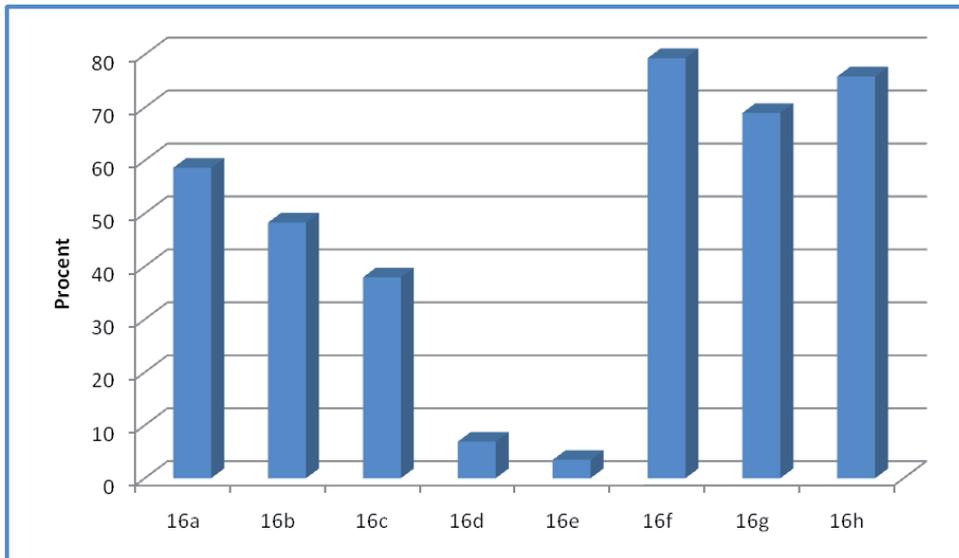
a) internal conviction of rightness of organizational goals; b) developing instruments of more effective management; c) appropriate use of own competencies, d) skills in finance; e) effective building of own position; f) inter-organizational collaboration; g) observance of principles of honesty and justice; h) good interpersonal skills.
Source: own research

Respondents correctly noted the ability to interact with different organizations, the ease of establishing contact with citizens and other clients of offices and application the principles of fairness and justice in the planned and ongoing activities. In other words, they appreciated the importance of the inter-organizational collaboration, establishing relationships with stakeholders and communication with them. From the characterization made by the respondents emerges a picture of a specific model of public managers, whose existence has not been confirmed in the responses to other questions of the questionnaire. Therefore one can think that opinions on specific competencies and public managers are more declarative in nature.

Opinions of respondents about their preferred type of leadership can be inferred on the basis of answers to the questions about the assessment procedure of the tasks (table 4).

Table 4. Procedures for assessing the implementation of tasks in the opinion of respondents

| Specification | Number of answers* | | | |
	mayors	HR workers	Collaboration workers	Total
no assessment procedure	12	15	13	**40**
there are procedures to assess the quality of execution of tasks, including standards, action plan, procedures for evaluation of the expenditure	8	8	8	**24**
there are procedures to improve the quality of the tasks of which consumers and citizens are informed	2	2	1	**5**
there are procedures to improve the quality of performance of tasks that are part of a public debate	2	0	0	**2**
There are other procedures	6	7	3	**16**

Note: respondents selected more than one answer.

Source: developed on the basis of own survey in 2010

The self-assessment made by the respondents that rated it, so often declared, is one of the weak points of implementers of public management competencies. Much of the survey indicates a lack of interest in assessment procedures (40 responses) or considers customarily accepted unstructured methods of assessment to be procedures (16 responses). Some respondents acknowledge that there are procedures to assess the quality of execution of tasks, including standards, action plan, procedures to assess expenditure (24 responses). Moreover, the results clearly outline a tendency to focus on the inside of the office without crossing its borders and, therefore, without informing or enabling citizens to assess the degree of implementation of public tasks. This illustrates maladjustment of management practices to implementation of innovative public management, including public governance. Hence it can be concluded that the function of leadership focuses more on interaction and cooperation of officials within the office than on the conducting of the territorial community.

Conclusions

The above considerations allow us to say that organized activities in the public interest (and not for profit) can be a criterion distinguishing public

organizations, while they also determine the nature of their relationship with the environment, as reflected, among others, in cooperative behaviour as an attribute of public sector institutions. Implementation of an innovative model of public management which is oriented to simultaneous formation of internal relations and external matching competencies required of public managers to the new rules. In particular, in relation to the management of local government the important issues are:

1. proper setting of strategic objectives, including development of abilities to create the results corresponding to the modified mission of an organization;
2. creating conditions for inter-organizational and cross-sector cooperation;
3. effective coordination of projects, programs and public policies, implemented in collaboration with various partners, also outside the public sector;
4. modern human resource management aimed at attracting and retaining high quality of these resources.

In behaviour of public managers necessary is the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic style, and then to a participatory one, and then - the move away from directing managers attention mainly to the inside of the organization with a tendency to underestimate external relations.

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