

Call for Papers

Public Sector at “War” – Exploring Discourses, Practices, and Identities

CMS 6 Stream
The Sixth International Critical Management Conference

July 13-15, 2009
Warwick Business School,
The University of Warwick, UK

Convenors

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Stream description

With regard to the critical public sector management studies stream at the CMS5 conference, we carry on with the critical observation of the incorporation of private sector management practices into the public sector. Since the majority of public sector management studies has been referring to the public sector “as inferior, inevitably inefficient, tainted by closeness to suffering or transgressive bodies... [that] focus upon practices of care/cure/correction rather than the pursuit of profit“ (Currie *et al.* 2007) the “war on waste” (du Gay 2000) was declared towards public sector organisations. Efficiency is the key term in this “war”. Public sector is impelled to increase performance and quality, financial discipline, strategic behaviour and corporate goals in order to enhance “effectiveness” (Ferlie *et al.* 1996; Hebdon and Kirkpatrick 2005).

The notion of “war” implies that a proliferation of private managerial practices into the public sector goes along with a political, conflict-laden and contradictory process. The metaphor “war” coincides with a number of connotations: struggle, resistance, betrayal, regression, withdrawal, weapons, injuries (morally and physically), death, heroes, partisans, villains and, finally, the possibility of victory, and peace. Taking the metaphor seriously, a number of general questions arise: Who declares in whose name “war” and who answers? What are the “weapons” respectively tools? Which concepts of rationality, power and order can be identified and shape practices? How do the addressed subjects act and react?

We are looking for theoretical and empirical contributions which help to understand the complex interplay of discourses, practices and identities in public sector reforms. This stream therefore looks for three types of papers.

Firstly, our stream invites scholars who explore the *discourses* of this “war”. Research questions might be:

- How is the dualism of ‘public sector’ and ‘private sector’ constructed and discussed?

- What phenomena do studies actually refer to while discussing public sector as in need of reform?
- Which types of hegemonic discourses and related counter-discourses can be identified? How are they connected? How does ‘discursive closure’ succeed, *i.e.* exhaust the space of alternative discourses? How does it fail?
- How do public sector employees cope with different and contradictory discourses (*e.g.* Iedema *et al.* 2004)?

Secondly, we invite papers which discuss the day-to-day *practices* of public sector organisations. We are interested in deeper insights into different institutional logics of public sector organisations as well as in distinct *strategies* and *tactics* (de Certeau 1984) addressing this “war”:

- In which way can public sector organisations be differentiated from private sector organisations; are there different practices observable (Alvesson and Deetz 2000)?
- Are there different practices within the public sector distinguishable (*e.g.* between universities, theatres, public hospitals)?
- Which types of resistance, consent and silence with regard to the public reform process can be identified; how do they emerge, proceed or disappear?

Thirdly, we are interested in contributions which enhance our understanding of *identity*, *identity regulation*, and *identity related conflicts* (*e.g.* Alvesson and Willmott 2002). For instance, the recognition of being a professional, *e.g.* a researcher or medical practitioner, and behaving in line with professional standards are often crucial for building up a subjective satisfying identity (*e.g.* Henkel 2000; Doolin 2002; Hotho *et al.* 2006; Chreim *et al.* 2007). In this respect, possible research questions are:

- How does the “war” shape, transform or even destroy (professional) identities?
- Which “struggles for recognition” (Honneth 1996) can be identified?
- What are possible ways to redefine the role of professionals beyond the ‘good old’ Scylla of elitism and the powerful Charybdis of marketisation?

In general, we understand this stream as a critical plea to scrutinize the assumption of inferiority and inefficiency of public sector organisations. As academics we would like to promote an open discussion about the possible future(s) of public sector organisations and our role(s) within or outside these ambiguous paths.

Submissions

Please submit abstracts (maximum 1000 words, A4 paper, single spaced, 12 point font) by **1st November 2008** to Ronald Hartz (ronald.hartz@wirtschaft.tu-chemnitz.de) Notification of paper acceptance: **31st December 2008**. Full papers will be expected by **1st May 2009**.

References

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Contact Details and Profiles

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Andrea Fried, Dr. rer. pol., is Assistant Professor at the Department of Innovation Research and Sustainable Resource Management, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany. She functions as an organisation theory expert in research and teaching. Her research and publications encompass the management and measurement of intangible resources and their impacts on public and private sector organisations. Thereby, the incorporation of private sector management practices into public funded art and research institutions are of special interest.

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Ronald Hartz (lead convenor for administrative purposes), Dr. rer. pol., is Research Assistant at the Chemnitz University of Technology, Department of Organisation, Germany. He was engaged in a research project on the discursive construction of identity and consent in private and public organisations on the background of neo-liberal reforms in Germany. Moreover, his research encompasses organisational power and domination, labour process theory and studies of governmentality.

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Elke Weik, Dr. rer. pol., is a lecturer at the School of Management at the University of Leicester. She specialises in organization theory and social theory. Her major focuses of research are currently process theories of organisation and an empirical project on the institutional logics and identities of midwives and obstetricians.

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