

Managing successful change in the public sector: a view from the consultant's world¹

by

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ABSTRACT

Our paper presents the results of a survey on the perceptions of 680 Italian public sector consultants on the drivers of successful organizational change according to Fernandez and Rainey’s (2006) model. The results show that the consultants mostly confirm the model, though recognizing that the various drivers have different degrees of relevance. A clear vision and plan for change and the top-management’s commitment are seen as central in change processes, whereas interestingly, resource availability and a comprehensive approach to change appear to play a less relevant role.

Keywords: consultants, change management, organizational change, neo-Weberian, public sector

INTRODUCTION

Organizational change has been the subject of enduring interest in strategic management literature (for example, Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Burnes, 2004a). Interestingly, however, in the public sector, where significant processes of reforms have taken place over the last few decades, organizational change and change management appear to have attracted comparatively less attention (Vann, 2004; Kuipers et al., 2014). Similarly, while consultants have often played a major role in public sector change processes (for example, Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Lapsley et al., 2013), their views and perceptions of such processes have seldom been taken into consideration.

Most literature examining change in the public sector has focused more on the conditions under which reforms and innovations are adopted (for example, Berman and Wang, 2000; Hood and Lodge, 2004; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011) or on the unexpected and undesired effects of NPM reforms (Lapsley, 2009; Hood and Dixon, 2015; Humphrey and Miller, 2012; Broadbent and Laughlin, 1998; Liguori and Steccolini, 2014) than on the factors that ensure they are successfully implemented, i.e., that are conducive to successful organizational change. Not surprisingly, in a recent literature review on the management of change in public organizations, Kuipers and his colleagues (2014: 15) conclude that there seems to be ‘more interest in the question of whether the policy in itself is effective than in the question of how such changes are implemented in order to become effective’ and note that only 14 papers out of the 133 they reviewed are specifically about change management.

However, a few decades of public sector reforms have proven that the implementation of change can be crucial in ensuring the (non)success of reforms (Borgonovi and Fattore, 2000; Hood, 1995; Bogt and Helden, 2000; Connolly and Hyndman, 2006; Liguori and Steccolini, 2011, 2014) and that a stronger focus on the organizational aspects and conditions conducive to change is necessary from scholarly, policy and practical points of view. Among the studies that focus on the organizational conditions for ensuring successful change, Fernandez and Rainey’s (2006) has a

significantly high amount of citations and provides a comprehensive model of change management in the public sector. Drawing on organizational literature, it identifies normatively 8 factors that are considered relevant for ensuring successful change: *ensure the need, provide a plan, build internal support for change and overcome resistance, ensure top-management support and commitment, build external support, provide resources, institutionalize change and pursue comprehensive change*. In this vein, our paper aims to survey the perceptions of Italian public sector advisors on the drivers of change identified by Fernandez and Rainey's (2006) model. More specifically, the research presented in this paper is based on a survey of 680 consultants from three of the main public sector advisory companies in Italy (Deloitte, EY and KPMG). Overall, in Italy, these companies offer advisory services for all kinds of public administrations, from the central State to Municipalities, including a variety of government agencies. Each company has a "Government and Public Sector" Division that does not include healthcare. The three companies tend to be similar in their mission, governance, and the range of services offered to the public sector. All companies also provide non-advisory services in areas where public administrations lack internal expertise. Overall, the value of the services offered by these companies to the public sector amounts to approximately 180 € Million (2015 data).

The results of the analysis are interesting for several reasons. First, the analysis refers to a neo-Weberian context, whereas most articles about public sector change focus on the Anglo-Saxon world (Kuipers et al., 2014). Second, the analysis looks at those actors that are frequently involved in public sector change processes, but whose views have not often been taken into consideration in scholarly research. Indeed, in spite of their role being described in different ways (see Lapsley et al., 2013), consultants have been increasingly involved in public sector reform and change processes since the Eighties, re-orienting their activities and creating ad hoc divisions or units to support public sector entities (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Saint Martin, 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Sturdy, 1997a, 1997b; Howlett and Migone, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). As such, they have often been described as embodying those rational and managerial principles that were seen as initially lacking in the public sector and were subsequently put forward by NPM-type reforms (Christensen

and Skærbæk, 2010; Christensen, 2005; Lapsley and Oldfield, 2001; Zito, 1994). Despite this prominent presence, much less attention has been devoted so far to considering the views of consultants on public sector change processes (for some partial exceptions, see Sturdy, 1997a, b; Ashraf and Uddin, 2013; Arnaboldi, 2013; Helden et al., 2010; Helden et al., 2012; Lapsley and Oldfield, 2001; Radnor and O'Mahoney, 2013). This study contributes to filling this gap. More specifically, this paper addresses three main questions: do consultants agree with Fernandez and Rainey in identifying and prioritizing the conditions for a successful change implementation? In their views, are these conditions present in the Italian public sector? What actions are needed, according to them, to improve the Italian public sector?

The paper is structured as follows. The next section briefly reports the relevant literature on change in the public sector. Section three illustrates the method adopted, and section four presents the results, which are further discussed in section five. Finally, section six draws some conclusions and discusses the implications of the research.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE VIEWS OF CONSULTANTS

A significant body of research has focused on public-sector reforms (Hood 1995; Barzelay, 2001; Hammerschmid and Meyer 2005; Kickert 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011), often looking at the contextual features that are more or less conducive to certain types of reforms, comparing reforms across countries, or highlighting the unexpected and undesired effects of NPM reforms (Lapsley, 2009; Hood and Dixon, 2015; Humphrey and Miller, 2012; Broadbent and Laughlin, 1998; Liguori and Steccolini, 2014). Surprisingly, however, less attention has been devoted to exploring how organizational conditions affect processes of change (Bogt and Van Helden, 2000; Connolly and Hyndman 2006; Liguori 2012a, 2012b; Liguori and Steccolini 2011, 2014).

Although public sector organizations are widely recognized as environments in which implementing change is particularly difficult (Isett et al., 2013), this dearth of research on

organizational change in the public sector is even more striking if compared to the width and variety of approaches to study change that have been developed in general management and organizational literature (Downs, 1967; Lawrence e Lorsch, 1967; March and Olsen, 1976; Williamson, 1981; Di Maggio and Powell, 1991; Greenwood and Hinings, 1993, 1996; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Burnes, 2004a).

A recent literature review about the management of change in public organizations (Kuipers et al., 2014) highlights interesting aspects of how it has been investigated so far. First, there has been more interest in understanding the potential impacts of policies rather than the conditions to make them effective. In fact, many studies focus on how public sector reforms influence specific organizations (De Boer et al., 2007). Less attention has been given to the processes and mechanisms through which organizations implement reforms (Butler and Allen, 2008). Second, most of the studies have an Anglo-Saxon origin and it is unclear whether the results of these studies can be extended to different economic, social, and especially cultural and legal contexts. Third, the dominant approach to explain change processes is the 'rational' one, whereby they are seen as 'planned' and top-down (Robertson and Seneviratne, 1995; Sminia and Van Nistelrooij, 2006; Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). Only a few authors underline the nature of these processes as non-linear and unpredictable (Kickert, 2010; Weick, 2000; Wollmann, 2000). Finally, a few scholars have tried to identify the factors that affect change processes, determining their successes or failures; however, as highlighted by Kuipers et al. (2014), this is an area of research that deserves further investigation, for example, providing details 'about the specific public characteristics related to change process'. As Rainey (2009) suggests, 'the evidence of successful change initiatives in public organizations illustrates the importance of how the members of an organization manage and implement change'. One of the most cited contributions related to public sector change is Fernandez and Rainey (2006)'s model (which has 671 citations in Google Scholar as of November 14th 2016), which normatively proposes a set of factors that from their point of view contribute to successful implementation of organizational change in the public sector. The eight factors are the following: (i) ensure the need – the need for change

must be communicated and disseminated; (ii) provide a plan – managerial leaders must have a strategy and specific programs to implement change; (iii) build internal support for change and overcome resistance – resistance to change must be minimized by sharing the change design; (iv) ensure top-management support and commitment – top-management must be committed and determined to implement the change; (v) build external support – managerial leaders must ensure support from political referents and external stakeholders; (vi) provide resources – resources must be available to implement change; (vii) institutionalize change – changes should be monitored and valued to consolidate them over time; (viii) pursue comprehensive change – change must be global and crosswise to involve the public organization as a whole.

According to Fernandez and Rainey, each factor affects the implementation of change at different stages of the process and contributes to its success ‘by adding to the effects of the other factors’. This suggests a rational view of change processes (Kotter, 1996), whereby if each factor is taken into account, change will be successfully implemented (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006; Kickert, 2010; Kuipers et al., 2014).

Kickert (2013) qualitatively tests a slightly modified version of such a model. In particular, he combines the conditions proposed by Fernandez and Rainey with those suggested by Kotter (1996), referring to private-sector commercial firms. Analysing six case studies of ministerial reorganizations, he showed whether the success or failure of change implementation could be explained by the presence or the absence of the conditions he identified, drawing on Kotter (1996) and Fernandez and Rainey (2006). Even though Fernandez and Rainey built a normative model specifically referring to public organizations, Kickert (2013) concluded that a few conditions that were claimed to be pivotal in that model, such as *provide a plan*, *provide resources* and *pursue comprehensive change*, did not seem to be necessary to ensure change, as, according to his analysis, the conditions related to *ensuring top-management support* and *building internal and external support* were the only ones that proved to be necessary for success. In addition, Kickert suggested that a few of the success conditions should be further investigated and clarified. For example, it is not

clear whether building external support refers to political or external stakeholders' support. Finally, he highlighted that in some cases change could be implemented even in the absence of a plan, as incremental and gradual change processes appeared to be more effective than visionary and grand ones and there may be a hierarchical order of importance of the eight conditions.

This study explores the perceptions of 680 public sector consultants on the relevance of Fernandez and Rainey's factors for successful change. There has been increasing recognition of the role of public sector consultants in public sector reforms and change, especially under the NPM movement (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Saint Martin, 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Sturdy, 1997a, 1997b; Howlett and Migone, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Lapsley et al., 2013). Despite this prominent presence, public sector consultants have attracted only limited scholarly attention. Some authors have noted that consultants have been responsible for providing skills and competencies that were lacking in the public sector (Saint Martin, 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Lapsley et al., 2013), importing private sector practices and values, economic and managerial rationality in the public realm (Lapsley et al., 2013; Christensen and Skærbæk, 2010; Christensen, 2005; Lapsley and Oldfield, 2001; Zito, 1994; Sturdy, 1997a, b) and in some cases replacing or complementing a shrinking public sector workforce (Lapsley et al., 2013; Howlett and Migone, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Others have highlighted that, while data on expenditures on consulting activities are available, much less evidence can be found on their effects (for example, Lapsley et al., 2013; Howlett and Migone, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). However, interestingly, an important body of research on consulting in the public sector refers to policy consulting or the impact of consultants on policy (Saint Martin, 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Sturdy, 1997a, 1997b; Howlett and Migone, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), especially in the UK, Canada and France. Much less attention has been devoted so far to considering the views of consultants on public sector change processes (for some partial exceptions, see Sturdy, 1997a, b; Ashraf and Uddin, 2013; Arnaboldi, 2013; Helden et al., 2010; Helden et al., 2012; Lapsley and Oldfield, 2001; Radnor and O'Mahoney, 2013).

The empirical setting of this study is Italy, where public administration is widely recognized as underperforming and was involved in a number of legislative initiatives in the last 25 years, aimed at increasing efficiency and accountability and mainly inspired by NPM ideas. These attempts have been mainly on paper with modest substantial changes (Capano, 2003; Mele and Ongaro, 2014); more recent attempts to contain public spending have also reduced the flow of fresh resources to the public sector and have imposed major restrictions on hiring new personnel. In this context, professional consulting provides specialized work and expertise under flexible arrangements. Currently, consulting companies play a major role in staffing administrations for innovative projects and in areas where adequate competencies are lacking.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

In this paper, we draw on the Fernandez and Rainey model to explore how public sector consultants view the drivers of successful organizational change. More specifically, this paper addresses three main questions: do consultants agree with Fernandez and Rainey in identifying and prioritizing the conditions for successful change implementation? In their view, are these conditions present in the Italian public sector? What actions are needed, according to them, to improve the Italian public sector?

To answer these questions, we designed a web-based survey divided into four main sections (see also the questionnaire in the Appendix). In the first section, we asked a set of questions about the profiles of the respondents. In the second section, we operationalized the eight factors proposed by Fernandez and Rainey (2006) by asking respondents to rate the relevance of each factor to promote successful change in the public sector on a seven-point Likert scale. We also added three possible relevant factors stemming from Kickert (2013); specifically, graduality of change, citizens' involvement, and the role of leadership in affecting the success of change. In the third section, respondents were asked to rely on their own experience to rate the relevance of the possible factors

hindering successful changes in Italian public administration. In the final section, respondents were asked to prioritize the possible interventions aimed at improving Italian public administration.

The survey was designed by the authors and discussed and revised with the leaders of the Government and Public Sector divisions of the three consulting companies. It was then pre-tested on a sample of 30 consultants, and subsequently changes to the questionnaire were made. We ran the main survey between December 2014 and January 2015, ensuring full confidentiality of responses. To encourage consultants to contribute, the message containing the link to the questionnaire was sent directly by the three consulting companies and two reminders were sent. This led to a very high response rate, ranging from 73% to 84% of the consultants of the three companies. At the same time, the endorsement by the consulting companies may have had an influence on the responses, as respondents may have felt compelled to answer according to their leaders' expectations. To avoid this, however, they were granted anonymity and the individual data on responses were not shared with the consulting companies.

RESULTS

Out of the 680 consultants who answered the survey (table 1), 53% were male and 73% were less than 40 years old. The majority of respondents work in the central Italian regions (59%) and in Ministries or national agencies (54%), whereas only 6% work in local authorities (municipalities and provinces), and 26% in regional authorities. All levels of organizational seniority were well represented in the sample, and most consultants reported having a degree in management, economics, or engineering (74%), with other degrees being significantly less represented. Only 4% of respondents had a degree in law, the traditional educational background of those holding top positions in the Italian public administration. Professional consulting appears to provide complementary expertise and fresh resources to the public sector and is likely to bring cultural beliefs and attitudes shaped by the private nature of their employers and the influence of the business industries in which they operate. In the following sub-sections the results are presented, discussing how the Fernandez and Rainey model

finds support in the views of consultants, the extent to which these conditions are present (or absent) in the Italian context, and which actions are recommended to improve the Italian public sector.

Table 1 here

Do consultants agree on the conditions for success proposed in the Fernandez-Rainey Model?

Overall, the results show that respondents provided support to the Fernandez and Rainey's model and observed all the 8 factors as very important, although with some variations (table 2). According to respondents, the two most important factors leading to successful changes in the public sector, both getting a rating higher than 5 out of 7 and with the lowest standard deviation, are the commitment of top-management (mean = 5.3) and the provision of a plan for change (mean = 5.09). These factors highlight the crucial role of top management's will and competence in fostering change. The two factors focusing on 'building external support for change' and 'institutionalizing it through monitoring, feedback and persistent tension' follow with rates above 4.8. However, the other four factors also show high rates (means above 4.5). Out of the 8 factors proposed by Fernandez and Rainey's model, the one rated as the least important by consultants was 'change process should be global and crosswise to involve the public organization as a whole' (mean = 4.51).

Interestingly, the three factors we added to the model based on Kickert (2013) were rated by consultants as consistently less important, and with a higher variance, than those in the original model.

Table 2 here

We performed a number of subgroup analyses to detect differences across the three consulting companies and some characteristics of respondents (table 3). One company (A in the table) presents a lower score for the overall model. For all the 8 variables, respondents from this company scored

lower values than those of the other companies, although differences are statistically significant at the conventional 95% level only for “provide a plan”, “provide resources” and “build external support”. Though the sizes of the differences are modest (on average, .2 points out of a scale of 7 points), these results suggest that the consultants of one of the companies are less convinced of the validity of the Fernandez and Rainey’s model. While we could not detect any difference concerning geographical areas and type of public administration, we found that senior consultants, compared to junior ones, offered higher scores for “provide a plan” and lower values for “build external support with seniors”. Overall, however, seniority does not lead to a difference in the overall score of the model.

Table 3 here

Are Fernandez and Rainey’s conditions for change available in the Italian context?

According to consultants, virtually all the factors identified as important in the model are lacking in the Italian public administration: the absence of all factors is rated above 4.7 out of 7 (table 4). The most highly rated factors that can hinder change are ‘the lack of awareness of the need to change’ and ‘the absence of a vision’. Interestingly, the factor receiving the lowest rating is the ‘lack of resources (financial, professional, technological) to implement the change’, which was deemed important at very different levels across the sample (SD 1.35). These results suggest that consultants perceive multiple factors as hindering change in Italian Public Administrations, but mainly highlighted those related to the lack of commitment and of an overall vision.

Table 4 here

The consultants of the three companies appear to have similar views on the lack of conditions to change the Italian public administration; for all the conditions except two no differences were detectable. For the “lack of top-management commitment” and “political proactivity to promote

change” Company C had slightly higher scores than the other two, suggesting that its consultants see the lack of will to change the Italian public sector as particularly problematic. Modest differences were also detected across types of administration (with those being more exposed to Ministries than to other administrations giving more importance to the “absence of vision and monitoring tools”) and according to the seniority of consultants. Although these subgroup analyses do not show large differences, they suggest that awareness of the need for change and a lack of a vision to lead such change were perceived as more crucial by consultants with more experience and those predominantly working with the central administration.

Table 5 here

By combining the answers on the importance of the 8 factors and their presence in the Italian context, it is possible to identify those factors that appear particularly strategic, e.g., those that are most important and most lacking (figure 1). The most crucial factor in Italy appears to be ‘the plan for change’, as it is rated as the highest critical factor in both dimensions. Consultants suggested that efforts to change the Italian public administrations have taken place without a clear plan and that such a plan is essential for successful changes. Other factors such as ‘ensure top-management support’ and ‘institutionalize change’ appear highly critical. Being comprehensive and gaining additional resources appear to be considered to be the least strategic factors.

Figure 1 here

Which interventions are needed to improve the Italian public sector?

In the last part of the survey consultants were asked to prioritize the possible interventions needed to foster change in Italian public administrations. ‘Reinforcing the systems of performance

measurement and employee incentives' was given the highest priority followed by 'further exploiting the best practices and solutions from consulting projects' and 'adopting private sector management tools'. The lowest priority was given to 'strengthening forms of citizens' involvement and participation' and 'strengthening competition in service delivery'.

Table 6 here

In this part of the survey consultants revealed a strong belief that the development of management systems is the most needed intervention in the Italian context. At the same time, less relevance was recognized for strengthening accountability systems through competition and citizen involvement.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Most literature examining change in the public sector has focused more on the conditions under which reforms and innovations are adopted or on the unexpected and undesired effects of NPM reforms than on the factors that ensure that organizational change is successfully implemented. Interestingly, consultants have played and continue to play a major role in public sector processes of reform and change, and while a number of studies, especially focused on Anglo-Saxon countries, have looked at their roles in such processes, less attention has been devoted to investigate their own perceptions and views on how change processes occur in the public sector, and what the drivers of successful change are.

This paper addresses such gaps by exploring the views of public sector consultants on the drivers of successful organizational change, drawing on Fernandez and Rainey's model. More specifically, it presents the results of a large survey on public sector consultants in a neo-Weberian context.

Our results show that, according to the consultants working with the Italian public sector that answered our survey, successful change requires a strong commitment and sense of direction, suggesting that change may be predominantly a matter of will. This appears to confirm the relevance of Fernandez and Rainey's drivers of successful change. However, it must be noted that not all such drivers are given the same emphasis by consultants, as, for example, availability of resources or comprehensiveness of change are seen as slightly less important.

Moreover, it is worth noting that our results show that consultants would only partially agree with Kickert's critique of the model of Fernandez and Rainey on the conditions to foster successful change. Indeed, the 8 factors proposed by this model were all rated as more important than the three factors derived from the contribution by Kickert (2013), which were all rated as significantly less important. This appears to further confirm that, at least according to consultants, a rational, top-down view of organizational change is crucial.

With two exceptions, subgroup analyses suggest the existence of modest differences across the three consulting companies and according to major geographical areas, ministries versus other administrations, and seniority of consultants. The first exception concerns the respondents of one of the three companies who agreed less than the other two with the Fernandez and Rainey model; overall their score was approximately 4% lower than those of the other companies. Although we see this difference as rather modest, we have investigated whether the characteristics of the company might explain such a difference. One possible explanation is the focus of this company on IT strategic projects that may lead its consultants to give higher weight to professional and "hard" expertise, rather than to "management" conditions as postulated by the Fernandez and Rainey model to promote change. The second result obtained in the subgroup analyses is that consultants with more seniority appear to share a view of change as less top-down and "rational" than their junior counterparts. They tend to insist more than their junior colleagues on the importance of providing widespread awareness of the need to change, are less concerned with tools to guide and monitor change, and, in the current situation of the Italian public administration, highlight more the lack of internal support rather than

the need to provide a clear plan. Overall, in a context where a rational and top-down view of organizational change is dominant, most senior people appear slightly less confident on the virtues of such an approach.

When asked to refer to Italian public administrations according to their professional experience, consultants reported that all 8 factors are lacking to a similar extent. This provides a rather negative view of the Italian situation, suggesting that only major interventions addressing all drivers of change systematically may lead to positive results. In other words, consultants view Italian public administrations as lacking urgency to change as well as internal and external support for major change management initiatives. They also point to the absence of practices to implement change such as producing general visions and plans, monitoring and communicating results and ensuring additional resources. Provided that the Fernandez and Rainey model is valid, the results suggest that, according to consultants involved in public sector change processes, Italy appears to be still far behind in promoting the conditions for successful changes in its public administrations. The popular narrative of a nation that is mainly constrained by a weak State and its administration appears to be confirmed in the views of consultants (see, for example, Fukuyama, 2014).

The views of consultants support extant literature on the modest change produced by reforms in neo-Weberian countries such as Italy (Capano 2003; Kuhlmann 2010; Ongaro 2011; Liguori et al., forthcoming), where a comprehensive ‘paradigm shift’ from the Weberian bureaucracy to the NPM-inspired administration has never occurred. Despite a number of “managerialist” reforms of the public administration approved by the Italian Parliament, previous studies suggest that the hegemonic Weberian paradigm has survived, whereby major innovations inspired by NPM ideas have been put forward in laws and decrees by different political coalitions, but they have been minimally implemented. (Capano 2003; Ongaro 2011; Liguori et al., forthcoming). When asked to prioritize needed interventions, consultants revealed a clear penchant for NPM-like ones. In their view Italian public administrations need to adopt business-like management systems and tools, and among the top rated interventions, they highlighted the development of performance management measures and

reward systems. This is to a certain extent to be expected, given that the sample mainly consisted of consultants trained in economics and management. It is instead surprising that this sample gave low priority to interventions aimed at creating additional pressure to change, such as more competition in service delivery and more citizen involvement, given that introducing competition in the public sector was a major element of NPM. Consultants appear to trust those tools that they probably know and handle better more, i.e., managerial tools and practices, and thus insist that changes can occur if these tools and practices are really implemented.

Overall, this first survey conducted on the Fernandez and Rainey model provides positive empirical evidence on its validity according to the view of consultants. However, it is important to highlight that this evidence is interpretative in nature as it comes from the views of actors who are expected to have specific cognitive and professional identities, probably different from those of academics, policy makers or civil servants and that may be significantly affected by their (mostly managerial) background. Indeed, international literature has suggested that consultants are responsible for diffusing managerial culture and rationalism in the public realm (Christensen and Skærbæk, 2010; Christensen, 2005; Lapsley and Oldfield, 2001; Zito, 1994). Still, the generalized belief that these factors are all important and that other factors are significantly less important confirms the validity of the model, which captures the views of an important professional group of actors increasingly engaged in supporting public administrations' development. Clearly, in the future it would be desirable to gather evidence from PA employees, and in particular, from those at higher organizational levels as well as policymakers or academics. The model may also be further tested by investigating the relationship between the presence of these factors in practice and successful change.

This paper shows that Italian consultants substantially agree with the logic of the Fernandez and Rainey model and see the problem of successfully reforming Italian Public Administrations as mainly managerial. Our study confirms that, according to consultants, NPM ideas and prescriptions have not been implemented in Italian public administration. Rather than showing unexpected or

unintended effects of NPM reforms, our study suggests that, in their views, these reforms have been mainly nominal and have not substantially changed the way public organizations operate.

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