

Advancing a Behavioral Approach for Studying Public Administration

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Abstract

This paper aims at providing a conceptual framework to analyze the public sector through a behavioral approach. The paper relies on the framework provided by Huse (2007) to study the behavioral approach in the private sector and employs a systematic literature review to adapt this framework to the public sector.

The findings enable the application of the behavioral approach to the public sector through four main areas of discussion: human resource management, interactions, organizational climate, and culture leadership and structure.

Literature on public sector has less regarded this dimension despite behaviors may affect both individual and organizational performance. Thus, this paper has manifold interesting implications, especially with reference to an effective change management in the public sector.

Keywords: public management, individual behaviors, behavioral approach, change

1. Introduction

The paper is grounded in the awareness that public sector has too often shown inefficiencies despite the bloody costing measures undertaken, and from manifold perspectives such as the economic (Rothstein and Downer, 2012), social (Knott and Miller, 2006), organizational (Meyer et al., 2014), and institutional ones (Magone, 2011). Behind these failures it is possible to recognize the decadence of the classic bureaucracies, historically affected by long-settled problems among which the questions relating the “work to rule” (Blau, 1955) and the “displacement of goals” (Merton, 1940), not to talk about the obsessive focus on rules and procedures leading to proceduralization rather than fostering substantive changes.

Significant research after the mid-2000s pointed out a series of unsolved contradictions in the New Public Management (NPM) approach, arguing that NPM failed to deliver better value, since proponents underestimate the complexity permeating the public sector (Lapsley, 2009). An alternative perspective is that new forms of governance were superseding managerialism (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). Osborne (2010) put new public governance (NPG) at the center of a post-NPM debate, based on involving more actors (both public and private), creating more consensus and voluntary participation in decision-making processes, and establishing collaborative relationships and networks. However, according to Noordegraaf and Abma (2003), it should be acknowledged that trends such as NPM (Hood, 1991), “performance-oriented management” (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000), and the rise of the “audit society” (Power, 1999) indicate that the world of public management has now become a world of measurement (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). Along with this issue, the literature (e.g., Klijn, 2008; Meek, 2010) still acknowledges that public systems are strongly anchored to an ancient tradition of bureaucratic, standardized, and repeated activities characterized by high rationality (Meek, 2010), thus highlighting that the path toward a broad improvement of the quality of public services for stakeholders, is still far from reaching.

In particular, a lack of attention emerges toward individual behaviors in the public service environment, though behaviors may affect individual and organizational performances. With specific reference to the public sector context, this might represent a critical aspect in delivering a high quality service in the public interest, also given the multi-stakeholders nature of public administrations (Gnan et al., 2013). This is a key aspect to be considered, as behaviors shape, and are shaped by, personal qualities, interpersonal relationships, and context-related

variables.

Thus, this paper aims to put forward a theoretical framework to advance the study of the behavioral approach within the public sector, based on antecedents and effects on individual behaviors. To this aim, the framework introduced by Huse (2007) to study the behavioral approach in the for-profit sector is adapted to the public sector by analyzing extant literature on “public sector and behaviors”, emerging from a research on the ISI Web of Knowledge research engine.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The second section addresses the debate on the behavioral approach building on the framework provided by Huse (2007) within the literature grounded in the for-profit sector. The third section deepens the discussion on the behavioral approach in the public sector by employing a research on the ISI Web of Knowledge research engine. The fourth section, building on previous contents, and moving on from the framework advanced by Huse (2007), builds an adapted theoretical framework, showing the main implications for the public sector. The fifth section explains how the behavioral approach should be located within studies on the public sector, highlighting its key features and the steps introduced with respect to the previous approaches and models of public administration. The last section presents conclusions and future research directions.

The paper offers manifold academic and practical implications, by contributing to the literature on public management and to the debate on the necessary development of a new and more practical approach to study, analyze, and manage public administrations.

2. The Behavioral Approach in the Private Sector

In the literature grounded in the for-profit sector an interesting analysis of the behavioral approach is that of Huse (2007). Huse (2007) delineated four dimensions to analyze organizations under a behavioral approach: board members, interactions, structures and leadership, and decision-making culture. The framework is shown in Figure 1.

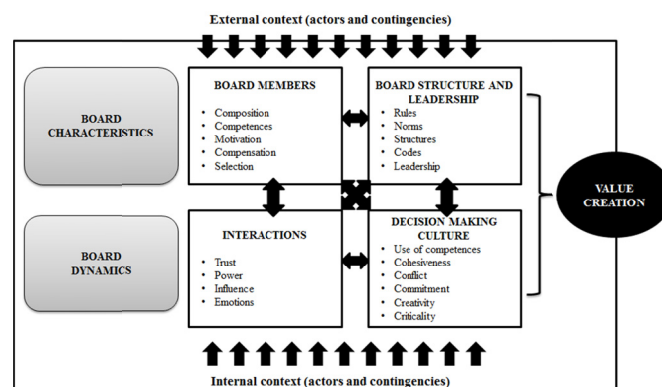


Figure 1. Framework proposed by Huse (2007)

Source: own re-elaboration of the framework by Huse (2007).

2.1 Board Members

The first block includes four main concepts: board demography and composition, competences, motivation, and compensation.

Board composition is usually defined in terms of numbers of board members, the insider–outsider ratio, board tenure, and diversity (Finkelstein and Mooney, 2003). These elements could influence the capability of board to carry out its tasks in various ways (Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007).

Within this area are also the competences of board members, referring to the presence of required knowledge, experiences, and skills: the background of each board member and their combination comprise a relevant element in performing the various tasks assigned to the board (Hillman and Dalziel, 2003).

Moreover, the board dynamics may benefit from motivated individuals (Steel and Konig, 2006): professional standards, reputation, and awareness of liability are labelled as intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Even compensation and incentives issues have also received considerable attention in the literature (Deci et al., 1998; Erez and Somech, 1996).

All these characteristics make possible the existence of a “market” of board members, for their election or selection.

2.2 Interactions

According to Huse (2007), interactions are the more relevant issue in understanding the human side of corporate governance and in explaining board dynamics. Studies on board behavior argue that interactional difficulties – between board members, the top management team, and various other actors, both inside and outside the boardroom – prevent boards from achieving their full potential (Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Gibson and Earley, 2007).

Power is another important issue in board dynamics (Mintzberg, 1983; Pearce and Zahra, 1991): through the exercise of power, board members may contribute to strategizing in the boardroom (Johnson et al., 2003; Ravasi and Zattoni, 2006). Additionally, power as a relation between actors is linked to the concept of influence (Huse, 2007; Pettigrew and McNulty, 1998).

To understand relationships among actors, and behaviors more generally, the role of trust is also an essential element (Bromiley and Cummings, 1995; Korsgaard et al., 1995). Most studies of boards and governance distinguish between competence-based trust and integrity-based types of trust (Sapienza et al., 2000). In this area, Huse (2007) also refers to emotions: these could be manifested with different degrees of intensity during working processes; they may reflect rationality or irrationality; they evolve during time; they may restrain or drive behaviors (Brundin, 2002; Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008).

2.3 Structures and Leadership

The third block refers to all the elements that constrain, empower, or facilitate actions and behaviors within the boardroom. First, the presence of formal and informal rules and norms may moderate the dynamics among board members (Ocasio, 1999; Westphal and Zajac, 1998) and provide some recommendations regarding behaviors of actors within the boardroom (Monks and Minow, 2004; Roberts et al., 2005). Norms, rules, and codes could reflect both the needs and requests of internal and external actors (Westphal and Zajac, 1998). According to Jonnergard and Stafstuddthe (2011), an interplay of cognitive and political factors is fundamental in not only generating but also maintaining the rules and routines that structure behavior.

Board structures and leadership also contribute to explaining this block (Finkelstein et al., 2008), as they refer to the roles, attributes, and styles of the board chair (Osterloh and Frey, 2004; Roberts et al., 2005).

2.4 Decision-Making Culture

The last area of interest in studying board dynamics concerns the decision-making culture, characterizing the board as a team (Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Leblanc and Gillies, 2005). The decision-making culture is defined using several concepts, such as cognitive conflict, cohesiveness, commitment, creativity, and criticality.

The definitions of tasks elements, such as strategy or policy development and implementation, access both the affective reactions of decision makers and cognitive processing (Gibson and Earley, 2007; Huber and Lewis, 2010). Decision-making processes involve not only board members, but also internal and external actors, in relations that could be characterized by several kinds of conflict. First, cognitive conflict refers to judgmental differences about how best to achieve organizational objectives; it is based on technical disagreements regarding how information might be interpreted (Berg, 2007; Higashide and Birley, 2002). In addition, both personal incompatibilities and different preferences or values determine the development of affective conflict, which tends to be emotional and more ideological in nature (Berg, 2007).

Therefore, defining board tasks, and interpretation of political, and social issues activates and motivates the protection of power and resources by board members, predicting both cognitive and affective conflicts (Jehn, 1997; Thomas et al., 1994).

An important element in the resolution of conflicts could be the way in which board members use their knowledge and skills, in terms of sharing ideas, suggestions, and points of view (Cadbury, 2002; Shropshire, 2010).

Commitment can be defined as the board members’ expectations concerning the intensity of individual behavior (Forbes and Milliken, 1999). Board cohesiveness refers to the degree to which board members are attracted to each other and are motivated to remain on the board (Forbes & Milliken, 1999; Huse & Soldberg, 2006). It is also expressed by a good atmosphere during work meetings; indeed, cohesiveness captures the affective dimension of members’ inclusion on the board and reflects the ability of the board to continue working together. Creativity is the ability to find creative solutions to problems or to innovate in working practices in the

boardroom (Huse, 2007). Finally, criticality is about the real independence of each board member in behavior, and consequently in decision-making processes (Huse, 2007).

3. The Behavioral Approach in the Public Sector

The previous section, building on the framework provided by Huse (2007) and on the literature grounded in the for-profit sector, has shown that many studies have discussed the behavioral approach in the private sector. Indeed, the literature grounded in the public sector literature presents few studies examining behavioral issues (Hinna, et al., 2010).

As Skelcher (1998) pointed out, it is expedient to carry out an in-depth analysis of public administrations' internal and external functioning, while few years later Cornforth (2003) asked for a deeper understanding of competencies, skills, abilities, and behaviors of public administrations, as could be found in the literature on corporate governance.

The literature on the public sector has mainly concentrated on aspects related to governance, with a specific focus on the analysis of expectations concerning boards' tasks in public administrations, providing evidence related to strategic tasks (Jørgensen, 1999; Sullivan et al., 2006), control tasks (Hood et al., 2000; Sanderson, 2002; Smith and Beazley, 2000), or networking tasks (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Lowndes and Wilson, 2003).

Few scholars investigated human aspects, although some considered boards of directors as unit of analysis (Boyne and Dahya, 2002; Greer and Hoggett, 2000). Indeed, as recently pointed out by Cornforth (2012), even if the governing body has the main responsibility for carrying out governance functions, the organizational system is wider than this, and includes the framework of responsibilities, requirements, and accountabilities within which public (and non-profit) organizations operate. Moreover, it also includes other actors within organizations, such as managers, members, and other groups that may contribute to carrying out governance and management functions.

This opens up the scope of research examining the behavioral implications for public administrations in managing the system of relationships, focusing on the relationship between internal and external actors (stakeholders), and the relationship between the management and other public employees (Gnan et al., 2013). In this regard, recent literature is arguing that behavioral, human, and psychological aspects must be integrated in the study of public administrations (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Meynhardt & Bartholomes, 2011).

Aiming at understanding in what terms, if any, literature on public sector has faced issues concerning individual behaviors, a specific research has been conducted. This research employed the keywords "behavior AND public administration" to search the ISI Web of Knowledge research engine. A further selection was made according to the following criteria: document type "article," language "English," research area "public administration," topic "individual." This selection resulted in the identification of 41 papers. Of these, 14 papers were found not to be coherent with the aim of this research, while 4 papers focused on existing bias in the methods used to analyze behaviors in the public sector domain, and one paper focused on the need to study public employees' behaviors through a psychological lens.

The remaining 22 papers were labeled as in Table 1.

Table 1. Studies emerging from the research

Label	N
Behaviors related to issues concerning HRM (such as selection, motivation, competences, incentives, personality, gender)	9
Behaviors related to issues concerning organizational structure and culture (such as rules and norms, culture and values, structures and task characteristics, leadership, ethics, and integrity)	7
Behaviors related to issues concerning interactions (such as trust, power, emotions, influence)	3
Behaviors related to issues concerning organizational climate (such as conflict, commitment, job context)	3

As can clearly be seen from the table, a major focus has been devoted to aspects concerning the "hard" part of the organization, such as human resource management and structure, culture, and values, while less attention is paid to "soft" aspects, such as individual interactions and organizational climate.

Papers that can be ascribed within the first category contend that employees' behaviors are affected by personal motivation (Chen & Hsieh, 2015; De Simone et al., 2016; Harari et al., 2017; Homberg et al., 2015; Piatak, 2015, 2016; Van Witteloostuijn et al., 2017), core personality traits (Van Witteloostuijn et al., 2017), and gender (Nielsen, 2015). Public service motivation (PSM), in fact, has been found to influence job satisfaction and

engagement (De Simone et al., 2016; Homberg et al., 2015); it has also been found to influence civil servants' interest in policy making and commitment to the public interest (Chen and Hsieh, 2015), thus influencing in turn their behaviors. Nielsen (2015) has found that street-level bureaucrats' behaviors vary depending on personal characteristics such as gender, even if the effects of these behaviors are conditioned by the regulatory institutions of the specific task to be carried out. Van Witteloostuijn et al. (2017) find that PSM is strongly influenced by core personality traits. In particular, affective motives of PSM—compassion and self-sacrifice—are positively influenced by the personality traits of honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness, and negatively by conscientiousness. In contrast, non-affective PSM motives—attraction to policy making and commitment to the public interest—are positively associated with the openness to experience trait.

Papers that can be ascribed within the second category contend that employees' behaviors are affected by aspects related to organizational structure and culture, such as rules and norms (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015), culture and values (Wright, 2015; Wynen & Verhoest, 2015), structures and task characteristics (Anton et al., 2014; Tummers et al., 2015), ethical leadership, ethics and integrity (Kolthoff, 2016; Svava, 2014). Authors highlighting the role of rules and norms (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015) raise the issue of the need to “guard the guardians,” that is, the problem of monitoring public officials' behaviors when judging their peers. Cabral and Lazzarini (2015) highlight that in certain situations, public officials often turn a blind eye, thus refraining from punishing their peers.

Culture and values are linked by Wright (2015) to behaviors, on the assumption that public administration is plagued by three interrelated problems (culture, values, and behaviors). The reason for this assumption is that it has always been argued that public administration could establish a set of principles that would have universal validity, independent of moral or political ends, individual human differences, or social influences. This concept seems to be related strictly to the presumption of perfect rationality and to the lack of recognition of a bounded rationality (Simon, 1956), which has driven (and still drives) politicians and bureaucrats.

Structures and task characteristics have been found to determine public employees' efforts and behavioral intentions, as task characteristics that lead to work alienation result in less effort and greater intention to leave (Tummers et al., 2015), while the perceived usefulness of structures and technologies among employees influences their behavioral intentions (Anton et al., 2014).

Authors addressing the key role of ethics and integrity, and the need to develop ethical leadership (Kolthoff, 2016; Svava, 2014), highlight that a code of ethics is required within public organizations, as is a broadening of the awareness of the ethical responsibilities of all public administrators among society (Svava, 2014). Based on the same precept, Kolthoff (2016) contends that ethics and integrity are fundamental instruments against white collar unethical behaviors, and to prevent and control organizational crime and human rights violations.

Papers that can be ascribed within the third category contend that employees' behaviors are affected by aspects related to individual interactions, such as trust and emotions (Chen et al., 2014; Ko & Hur, 2014), and power and influence (Vandenabeele et al., 2014). Workplace trust and behaviors are the result of human interaction and personal choices, which in turn have a bearing on individual motivation (Chen et al., 2014). Again, trust and procedural justice have an impact on the relationships between employee benefits and work attitudes (Ko & Hur, 2014). Also, power and influence are found to affect individual behaviors: Vandenabeele et al. (2014) highlight the role of transformational leadership in promoting public values and in developing PSM; in particular, the authors found that a positive relation between leadership and PSM exists and that it is moderated by a set of basic psychological needs (autonomy and competence).

Papers that can be ascribed within the last category contend that employees' behaviors are affected by aspects related to organizational climate, such as conflict, commitment, and job context. Oldenhof et al. (2014) highlight the role of compromise in solving conflict. In particular, the authors assert that managers have to perform continuous “justification work” that entails not only the use of rhetoric, but also the adaptation of behaviors and material objects; by this means, managers are able to solidify compromises, thereby creating temporary stability in times of organizational change.

Kim et al. (2015) argue that increased responsibility and commitment are central to understanding individual and collective behaviors and performance. The authors contend that increased commitment leads to higher levels of PSM, and thus employees are much more motivated to engage in prosocial behaviors that benefit others. Due to the impact of commitment on PSM and on employees' behaviors, Kim et al. (2015) suggest attention to job characteristics and the dynamic nature of PSM is important in particularly stressful front-line professions.

Finally, stressing the importance of the job context, Campbell (2017) highlights how job context characteristics, and especially hierarchical position, shape the effects of transformational leadership on employee rule perception

and on their consequent behavior. In greater detail, the problem of organizational red tape is emphasized, defined as “rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden, but do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve” (Bozeman, 2000, p. 12), the perception of which may be influenced by transformational leadership. Thus, according to Campbell (2017), a better understanding of how the organizational context shapes employees’ perceptions of rules can help leaders promoting positive work attitudes and performance.

4. A Proposed Framework for Studying the Behavioral Approach in the Public Sector

It is worth noting that Huse (2007), not only refers to the private sector, but predominantly to the board of directors; thus, additional effort is made in this section to adapt the framework to the whole organization, rather than narrowly focusing on directors.

Starting from the results emerging from the aforementioned research in the previous section, a tentative approach may be made in building a framework that integrates the aspects highlighted. Thus, the proposed framework brings together hard and soft aspects of organization, delineating four main blocks. In greater detail, hard aspects may be recognized as those related to human resource management and to the characteristics concerning organizational structure and culture (also including managerial/leadership styles). Soft aspects may be recognized as those concerning individual and organizational dynamics, such as interactions and features influencing the organizational climate.

Figure 2 shows Huse’s framework adapted to incorporate the aforementioned aspects with a view to being useful in comprehending and analyzing behavioral factors within public administrations.

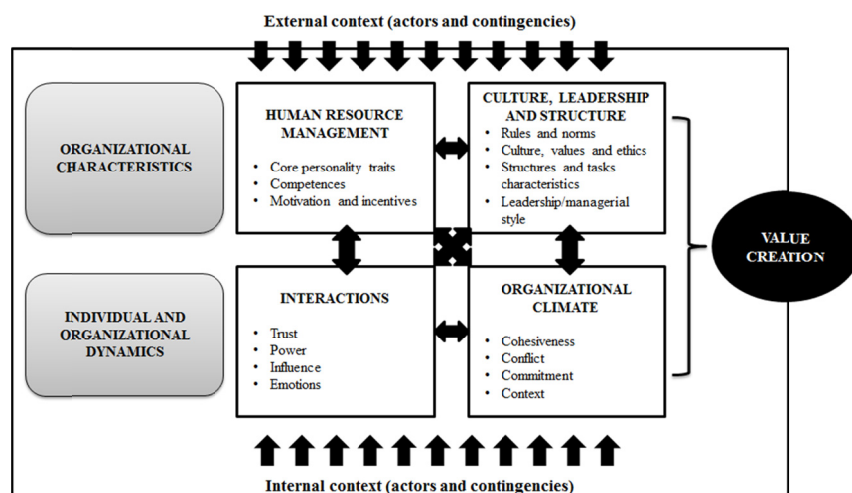


Figure 2. Proposed framework for the adoption of the behavioral approach in public administrations

Source: own adaptation of the framework by Huse (2007) to the public sector.

4.1 Human Resource Management

The first block includes the main concepts related to human resource management: core personality traits, competences, motivation, and incentives. Personal characteristics and traits have been found to influence individual behaviors (Nielsen, 2015; Van Witteloostuijn et al., 2017); thus, in selecting employees there is the need to verify, initially and periodically, the alignment of their personalities with organizational targets and values. Examples of sensitive issues concerning employees’ selection are traits such as gender, and characteristics such as honesty, humility, emotionality, agreeableness, and openness (Van Witteloostuijn et al., 2017). These characteristics are influenced by the specific tasks to be carried out, but they may simultaneously influence the way in which tasks are carried out.

The *competences* of members refer to the presence of the *knowledge, experiences, and skills* required: the background of each individual and their combination are relevant to optimal performance of the tasks assigned (Hillman and Dalziel, 2003). This is key in consideration of the particular attention that has to be paid to the correspondence between job position and personal characteristics and competences.

Clearly, the organization may benefit from *motivated individuals* (Steel and Konig, 2006): within this category

are both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, considering all approaches related to the needs and aspirations that drive individuals' motivation (Alderfer, 1969; Lock and Latham, 1990; Maslow, 1954; McClelland, 1961). The theme of motivation in the public sector is particularly sensitive and has prompted an intense stream of research (e.g., Crewson, 1997; Moynihan and Pandey, 2007; Perry, 1996, 1997). This is especially due to low motivation and other negative effects, often associated with the standardized tasks to be carried out within bureaucracies.

However, *incentives* and *compensation* issues have also received considerable attention in literature (Erez and Somech, 1996). According to Huse (2007), the most common thinking is that while high fixed compensation is an incentive, performance- or activity-based compensation serves as a greater impetus for working. This is the key aspect upon which the NPM approach relies, namely by providing "rewards" for individual performance. The concept is primarily related to the aforementioned problem of low motivation associated with repetitive tasks; thus, to avoid alienation and turnover, the general idea is to increase incentives related to—sometimes easily reached—specific goals.

On the basis of these elements, a selection process that finds the right balance should be carried out. This process may clearly encounter difficulties in those countries where selection is related to a system based on public bids. This obviously guarantees the respect of criteria such as transparency and meritocracy, but at the same time it represents a limit on the managerial actions of selection, evaluation, and promotion, leading to reduced possibilities for managers to choose employees and resources freely for their teams.

4.2 Culture, Leadership, and Structures

The second block, "culture, leadership, and structures," refers to all the elements making up the organizational structure and superstructure that may influence individual behaviors, such as rules and norms, culture and values, ethics and integrity, structure and task characteristics, leadership and managerial styles.

The presence or the creation of formal and informal *rules and norms* may regulate, moderate, and influence individual dynamics (Ocasio, 1999; Westphal and Zajac, 1998). This is particularly true of public administrations, in which the bureaucratic imprinting on the tasks to be carried out strongly influences the way in which employees work and interact by engendering situations such as alienation and turnover.

Norms, rules, and codes could reflect both the needs and the requirements of internal and external actors (Westphal and Zajac, 1998). While norms and rules may predominantly regulate life within organization, codes (such as those of ethics or those establishing organizational values and culture formally or informally) regulate not only the way in which individuals behave within the organization, but also their behaviors as representatives of the organization in the external context. This, of course, should be especially true for public sector organizations as these are multi-stakeholder structures with a main objective to manage and gain legitimacy through public consensus (Gnan et al., 2013). In this regard, culture and values, as well as ethics and integrity, are fundamental instruments against white collar unethical behaviors, and in preventing and controlling organizational crime and human rights violations (Kolthoff, 2016). Establishing a code of ethics within public administrations thus becomes a prominent means of broadening awareness of the ethical responsibilities and accountability of public administrators in terms of the public interest (Svara, 2014).

Also, structures, task characteristics, and leadership/managerial styles contribute to explaining the block "Culture, leadership, and structures" of the framework. In particular, the idea of leadership refers to the roles, attributes, and styles of managers (Roberts et al., 2005). The way in which managers behave influences the way in which employees behave: unethical behaviors, unfair leadership/managerial attitudes, and lack of accountability have a similar effect on different forms of integrity violations, including corruption and human rights violations (Huberts et al., 2007; Kolthoff, 2016).

Structures and task characteristics are key in determining public employees' effort and behavioral intentions, since task characteristics that lead to work alienation result in less effort and greater intention to leave (Tummers et al., 2015), while employees' perceptions of the usefulness of structures and technologies influences their behavioral intentions, their work performance, and the quality of the tasks they have to carry out (Anton et al., 2014).

4.3 Interactions

Interactions are among the most relevant issues in understanding the human side of organizations and explaining individual dynamics. Studies of individual behaviors argue that interactional difficulties often affect individual work performance and threaten the achievement of the full potential in the task to be performed (Forbes and Milliken, 1999; Gibson and Earley, 2007).

As public administrations are made up of a multitude of actors and encompass the interests of multiple

stakeholders, in this discussion we consider them to be open systems characterized by interactions among these actors (board members, managers, officers, employees, the community, and other public stakeholders) participating in different ways in the life of the public organizations (Pettigrew, 1992). In this context, behaviors are affected by aspects related to individual interactions, such as trust and emotions (Chen et al., 2014; Ko and Hur, 2014), power and influence (Vandenabeele et al., 2014). The role of trust is an essential element in understanding relationships among actors and behaviors more generally (Bromiley and Cummings, 1995; Korsgaard et al., 1995). Workplace trust is at the base of individual interactions: the lower the trust between two individuals, the lower the level of interaction between them. The same can be shown in the case of emotions as they may be considered the engine that boosts positive or negative reactions to counterparts' behaviors. In addition, emotions can be manifested with different degrees of intensity during work processes; they may reflect rationality or irrationality, they evolve during time, and they may constrain or drive behaviors (Brundin, 2002; Brundin and Nordqvist, 2008).

Power and influence are also important issues in individual dynamics (Mintzberg, 1983; Pearce and Zahra, 1991). Indeed, power as a relation between actors is strongly linked to the concept of influence (Huse, 2007; Pettigrew and McNulty, 1998). These variables also explain the political dynamics within organizations, leading to the creation of alliances or contrapositions among different groups or individuals (Ocasio, 1999).

Through the exercise of power and influence over others, individuals can assure the achievement of their goals. Such power and influence can be exerted in both direct and indirect ways, sometimes assuming the features of suggestions, especially when an informal relationship exists between two people. In this way, it is possible to influence people to do things, thus not necessarily having recourse to a coercive approach. Power and influence are thus at the core of individuals' relationships; they are also a fundamental part of individuals' needs to be achieved to increase personal motivation (McClelland, 1961). On this basis, power and influence strongly affect individual behaviors: Vandenabeele et al. (2014) highlight the role of transformational leadership in promoting public values and in developing PSM; in particular, the authors find that there is a positive relation between leadership and PSM, and that it is moderated by a set of basic psychological needs (autonomy and competence).

4.4 Organizational Climate

The last area of interest in studying individual behaviors is related to the organizational climate. Organizational climate is greatly affected by several variables concerning the way in which individuals behave and interact with others, such as the degree of conflict, the degree of individual commitment, the degree of cohesiveness, and other contextual factors.

The degree of conflict characterizing a specific context, might influence not only the way in which employees carry out their activities, but also the informal relationship with others (Gibson and Earley, 2007; Huber and Lewis, 2010). This in turn might create a loop that leads to an increasing level of conflict, negatively affecting overall organizational performance.

As previously highlighted, conflict may be cognitive and affective with regard to the different situations that lead to its emergence. Both cognitive and affective conflicts are important topics of investigation with regard to the public governance debate (Tomo et al., 2016), as public administrations face specific challenges related to multiple, conflicting, and ambiguous goals.

Therefore, in defining tasks, political and social issues should be considered, especially in terms of possible consequences due to interpretation, and the protection of power and resources that might activate employees' reactions, by this means trying to predict both cognitive and affective conflicts (Jehn, 1997; Thomas et al., 1994).

An important element in the resolution of conflicts could be the development of *negotiation skills*, especially for public managers. This point is key in establishing instruments useful for reducing the level of conflict, or avoiding its emergence. In this regard, the study by Kahnemann (2011) on how people reason and react to specific situations might be of great support.

Reducing or avoiding conflict positively influences the level of *commitment and cohesiveness*, and supports a good atmosphere in the work context, capturing the affective dimension of members' inclusion and increasing the ability and the willingness of people to continue working together.

5. Locating the Behavioral Approach in the Evolution of Public Administration

This section aims to clarify how the behavioral approach might be located within the studies on public sector administration. With this aim in mind, the study by Geddes (2012) provides an interesting review of the previous models of public administration: Public Administration (PA) (Taylor, 1947; Weber, 1922); New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992); Collaborative Public Management (CPM)

(Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Kickert et al., 1997).

Geddes (2012, p. 951) provides a table that summarizes the different public administration models, based on 11 management dimensions: performance, accountability, community engagement, values, leadership, employment relations, management tasks, decision making, structure, processes, and change. The author, through her study, delineates the prevailing management model for each dimension. Geddes' Table 2 (Geddes, 2012, p. 953) is adapted here to highlight the potential contribution of the behavioral approach to the picture of public administration studies.

While one could agree or not with the results emerging from Geddes' research, here the aim is to provide possible solutions based on the behavioral approach applied to previous models' inefficiencies.

Table 2. Solutions proposed by the behavioral approach

Management dimension	Prevailing management model	Key aspects of the model	Behavioral approach	Authors
Performance	CPM	Network; outcomes; cross-cutting and renegotiable objectives	Improve relationships and individual behaviors	Campbell (2017); Chen et al. (2014); Ko and Hur (2014)
Accountability	NPM	To contracts; individual/manager	Improve individual accountability towards the community and all public stakeholders	Kim et al. (2015)
Community engagement	PA	Client; minimum public information and engagement; one-size fits all	Improve community engagement in the decision-making process	Agranoff and McGuire (2003); Kickert et al. (1997)
Values	PA	Public service ethics; probity; impartiality; consistency; equity; risk minimization	Improve mutuality, reciprocity, and ethics in the public interest, not only in the public service	Cabral and Lazzarini (2015); Wright (2015); Wynen and Verhoest (2015)
Leadership	CPM	Natural; facilitative; participative	Develop transformational, merit appointed, facilitative, participative, but also ethical and accountable leadership	Campbell (2017); Kolthoff (2016); Svara (2014); Vandenabeele et al. (2014)
Employment relations	PA	Personnel management; national pay rates; stable careers; role specialization; manager appraisal; staff training	Improve employees' motivation with monetary incentives, non-monetary incentives, increasing commitment and participation, reducing repetitive tasks, and increasing employees' responsibility	Chen and Hsieh (2015); Nielsen (2015); Homberg et al. (2015)
Management tasks	CPM	Network/process manager: activation; framing; mobilizing; synthesizing	Improve managers' skills in negotiation, and in ethical and cultural management	Kolthoff (2016); Svara (2014)
Decision making	CPM	Evidence based; joint stakeholders; integrated policy implementation and evaluation	Improve adaptive management	Artinger et al. (2014); Bauer et al. (2013)
Structure	CPM	Network; pluralistic; multiple agencies; inter-agency; permeable supported boundaries	Maintain hierarchy, but develop responsibility; increase flexibility	Anton et al. (2014); Campbell (2017); Tummers et al. (2015)
Processes	CPM	Covenants/compacts; commissioning; pooled budget; integrated technology	Reduce formalism; introduce management by projects to increase flexibility and individual responsibility	Kim et al. (2015)
Change	CPM	Experimental; bottom-up; continuous improvement	Both cultural and structural, but shared and oriented to improvement	Cabral and Lazzarini (2015); Wright (2015); Wynen and Verhoest (2015)

Source: own elaboration based on Geddes, 2012, p. 953.

Notes. CPM denotes collaborative public management; NPM denotes new public management; PA denotes public accountability.

Table 2 provides interesting insights into the behavioral approach that deserve in-depth discussion. Geddes (2012) asserts that in looking at *performance*, the prevailing model is collaborative public management (CPM). This model is based on considering the network as an entity to be accountable to in terms of outcomes, and based on cross-cutting and renegotiable objectives. While this might be an interesting and prominent aspect under a collaborative approach toward the improvement of external relationships, it does not focus on the aspects internal to the public administration. The reference here is to the need to improve relationships and individual

behaviors within the public administration (Campbell, 2017; Chen et al., 2014; Ko and Hur, 2014), as negative relationships and behaviors may have an impact on both the organizational climate and performance, thus negatively affecting how the administration is perceived by external (public) stakeholders.

In terms of *accountability*, Geddes (2012) categorized NPM as the prevailing model. NPM assigns individual accountability to contracts, considering public managers and employees as “contractualized” individuals who should be accountable for what is stated in their contracts. On the one hand, this should ensure that individuals accomplish their tasks according to pre-defined conditions, thus “forecasting” all possible situations that might occur. On the other hand, this might not be sufficient considering bounded rationality (Simon, 1956), which characterizes the human mind, and the theory of incomplete contracts (Grossman and Hart, 1986), according to which it is impossible to consider all the possible choices to be undertaken both by the human mind and by contracts. Thus, the behavioral approach shares the view of recognizing individual accountability, but this might be considered in relation to the community and all public stakeholders (Kim et al., 2015).

Considering *community engagement*, Geddes (2012) suggests public administration (PA) as the prevailing model, based on minimum public information and engagement, and on the concept of “one-size fits all.” Clearly, this model refers to the community as a passive actor, and it is much more oriented to a sort of “mass production,” according to which citizens are a unique and indistinct mass. While this concept might be shared in a “local” world, as it was in the first 50 or 60 years of the 20th century, today the globalization process also requires a structural change within public administration, including increased community engagement in the decision-making process. Thus, the behavioral approach shares the view of CPM (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Kickert et al., 1997), which considers citizens to be an active part within the public service provision process, defining choice, quality, and responsiveness related to the public service.

In terms of *values*, Geddes (2012) again identifies the PA model as prevalent. The PA model is built on values such as public service ethics, probity, impartiality, consistency, equity, and risk minimization. This because the PA model considers limiting public employees’ responsibilities only to those aspects provided by their contracts. This has engendered situations in which public employees do not take risks that are far from what is stated in their contracts, leading to phenomena such as the “displacement of goals” (Merton, 1940) and the “work to rule” (Blau, 1955). Indeed, the behavioral approach intends to promote values such as mutuality, reciprocity, and ethics, oriented not only to public service, but also to the *public interest* (Cabral and Lazzarini, 2015; Wright, 2015; Wynen and Verhoest, 2015).

The prevailing model considering *leadership*, has been set out by Geddes (2012) in the CPM, which attributes to leadership characteristics such as natural, facilitative, and participative.

Improvement in this kind of leadership should consider the fact that to be recognized by the group, a leader requires not only transformational abilities, but also competences in terms of work tasks. Thus, the goal to be attained in terms of leadership, is to develop it around characteristics, such as merit appointed, transformational, facilitative, participative, but also ethical and accountable (Campbell, 2017; Kolthoff, 2016; Svava, 2014; Vandenabeele et al., 2014).

Employment relations represents one of the most sensitive aspects within public administration. Again, Geddes (2012) delineated PA as the prevailing model, namely one that is based on high specialization, stable careers, staff training, manager appraisal, and national pay rates. This model has repeatedly been indicated as leading to alienation and turnover (Mintzberg, 1979) due to the excessive standardization related to the tasks to be carried out by public servants, thus also lowering their motivation and negatively affecting their behaviors. The solution proposed is to improve employees’ motivation, not only through monetary incentives introduced by NPM, but also by finding other non-monetary solutions, such as increasing commitment and participation, and reducing repetitive tasks (Chen and Hsieh, 2015; Homberg et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2015). This is necessary, but not sufficient if not accompanied by increased individual responsibility related to low performance or missed goals.

The prevailing model with regard to the *management task* dimension is CPM. Geddes (2012) highlights that “*Adroit managers activate and mobilize other managers to build and shape the nexus, developing capacity through searching for and assembling the right resources to enhance service delivery*” (p. 959). Thus, according to Geddes (2012), public managers’ tasks should mainly be oriented toward networking and activating partnerships, thus mobilizing resources and improving the reputation of their public administration. Here the reference appears once again to be focused greatly on the external context, leaving unresolved several issues concerning the internal context of the public administration. For instance, one prominent aspect highlighted above in Section 4 is conflict management and the problem of cohesiveness. It has been argued that a lower level of conflict and a high degree of cohesiveness within the organization may help in attaining better performances,

both in terms of quality of service and improved relationships within the PA. Thus, a critical skill to be developed, and continuously trained, is the negotiating ability of a public manager. Clearly, this should be accompanied by the ability to develop ethical and cultural management (Kolthoff, 2016; Svara, 2014).

Considering *decision-making*, the prevailing model set out by Geddes (2012) is CPM. Within this model, the author asserts that “*Decision-making is incremental, proceeded by adjustment, convergence and closure, characterized by successive marginal adjustments due to the inability to accurately predict service user behaviour despite a range of structured assessment tools designed for that purpose*” (p. 960).

While it is interesting that decision-making should be incremental and proceed by adjustments, and although it is argued that it is impossible to predict service user behavior, there is no reference to the fact that managers should reason concerning the possible outcomes that may derive from a certain action taken, especially considering that they are taking decisions in the public interest. Thus, here the possible solution is to adopt adaptive management (Artinger et al., 2014; Bauer et al., 2013), varying the managerial style relative to the understanding of the specific situation.

Geddes (2012) argues for CPM as the prevailing model considering *structure*. CPM considers as its main structure the network, based on multiple actors, agencies, and inter-relations. The boundaries of the organization are permeable and vary in consideration of the external actors included—or not—in different situations. While this represents an improved step towards openness to the external context with respect to the bureaucratic model, the literature has also argued that as post-bureaucratic models are much more flexible and open, with fewer rules, there is the risk of losing control over activities and engendering opportunistic behaviors (e.g., Maravelias, 2009). Thus, here the possible solution might be to consider maintaining hierarchy and rules, but at the same time increasing responsibility and flexibility (Anton et al., 2014; Campbell, 2017; Tummers et al., 2015).

Linked strongly to the structural aspect, there is the dimension related to *processes*. Even in this case, the prevailing model is CPM, which as it considers the network as a structure also views processes as the result of covenants and commissioning, with a pooled budget and integrated technology. Here, despite the interesting openness to partnerships and shared processes, the focus is again outside the public administration. Before finding solutions outside, it is important to imagine how to solve internal issues to avoid low quality in public service and low organizational performance. A solution that might present a move toward this aim could be to reduce formalism and introduce management by projects. This would increase flexibility and individual responsibility (Kim et al., 2015), thus also affecting positively other management dimensions, such as employee relations, structure, performance, values, and accountability.

Finally, considering *change*, the prevalent model is CPM. CPM sees change as an experimental and bottom-up process, based on continuous improvement. While the behavioral approach shares the need to improve continuously, here it is argued that change must be a shared process, neither necessarily top-down nor bottom-up, which might be of interest in terms of both cultural and structural aspects (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015; Wright, 2015; Wynen & Verhoest, 2015), thus having a wider impact on the organization.

6. Conclusions

This paper has discussed the main features of the behavioral approach, starting from the premise that public sector has too often shown inefficiencies under manifold aspects, despite the evolution of different approaches over time. This has been undertaken by first assessing the literature in the for-profit sector, also drawing upon the framework provided by Huse (2007), which has prompted several studies on the behavioral approach.

It has been argued that research in the for-profit sector has devoted great attention to the behavioral approach, even if the accent has mainly been put on the board of directors. In this regard, the framework provided by Huse (2007) analyzed behaviors within the board of directors through four main dimensions: “*board members*,” “*interactions*,” “*structures and leadership*,” and “*decision making culture*.”

These dimensions enable the understanding of how board composition, interactions among the board members, the characteristics of the organizational structure, the features of leadership, and the organizational climate (in terms of cohesiveness or degree of conflict) influence board performance and the quality of the board decision-making process.

Despite the reference to the for-profit sector and to the board of directors, the framework provided by Huse (2007) shows great potential for the general understanding of human behaviors within organizations. Thus, a tentative approach in adapting Huse’s framework to the public sector has been undertaken by first assessing specific literature on the behavioral approach in the public domain. This has been implemented by employing research in the ISI Web of Knowledge research engine. Then, building on the results of this review, the framework proposed

by Huse (2007) has been adapted by introducing four dimensions to analyze behaviors within public administrations: “*human resource management*”, “*culture, leadership, and structure*”, “*interactions*”, and “*organizational climate*.”

It has been argued that the way in which human resources are managed, in terms of selection, evaluation assessment, motivation, and incentives, has a great impact on employees’ behaviors, not only in the private sector, but also (*especially?*) in the public sector, in which the peculiar characteristics of the tasks to be carried out may engender alienation and turnover.

In the same way, the values and the culture promoted within the organization, and the leadership style adopted may affect positively or negatively employees’ behaviors. Here the reference might also be made to managers/superiors adopting behaviors to serve as an example for employees: if a manager does not behave properly, or he/she adopts unethical behavior, it could be a negative example to his/her employees, thus engendering negative imitative behaviors.

Interactions are also important in explaining employees’ behaviors. Studies on individual behaviors argue that interactional difficulties often affect individual work performance, and threaten the achievement of full potential in the task to be performed. Employees’ interactions are greatly affected by workplace trust: if people trust each other, the willing to work and interact with others will increase. Also power and influence may affect individual behaviors. On the one hand, the possibility of exerting power and influence on other people represents a motivating factor; on the other hand, they could undermine and negatively affect the behaviors of people who have undergone their effects.

The organizational climate represents another key factor determining employees’ behaviors. It has been argued that within the organization a high level of cohesiveness, as well as commitment, enables and increases the willingness to work with others, while in contrast a high degree of conflict might engender negative behaviors, or people leaving the organization.

The last section of this paper has summarized the key features of the behavioral approach, with the aim of explaining how to locate it within the studies on the public sector. With this aim in mind, the study of Geddes (2012) has been taken as a starting point due to the interesting review of previous models provided by the author. Geddes (2012) analyzed the different models of public administration (PA, NPM, CPM) through 11 management dimensions: performance, accountability, community engagement, values, leadership, employment relations, management tasks, decision-making, structure, processes, and change. Then, the author set out the prevailing model for each management dimension, coming to the conclusion shown in the first three columns of Table 2.

In light of the discussion provided in this study on the behavioral approach, in Table 2 two more columns have been added to highlight what might be the contribution of the behavioral approach to improving on previous models concerning public administration. On this basis, it has been argued that the behavioral approach considers as its main concerns the individual and his/her behaviors as these represent the basis of the organizational analysis. Thus, to solve the problems occurring in organizations—both private and public—an in-depth understanding of the factors driving human behaviors is needed.

In reasoning concerning the 11 management dimensions, the reactions and the possible behaviors that might be adopted by employees should always be considered. In this regard, incentives—both monetary and non-monetary—might help in aligning individual behaviors with the public administration targets, but this also needs an increased individual accountability related to low performance or to missed goals.

The main suggestions to be derived from the behavioral approach are that the hierarchy characterizing the bureaucratic approach should be maintained, thus guaranteeing no loss of control over activities, but at the same time increased flexibility should be considered, thus avoiding repetitive tasks and related issues. This may only occur if human resource management, culture, and structures are oriented toward this aim. For instance, a possible solution might emerge by adopting the management by projects: this could simultaneously increase employees’ motivation and accountability, and the degree of organizational flexibility.

This work offers manifold practice and policy implications. First, it contributes to the literature on public management by providing an advancement in the discussion on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic models. Second, this paper introduces a newer practical and theoretical framework to the analysis and interpretation of the issues mentioned above, addressing the inefficiencies and weaknesses related to the classic models of public administration (bureaucracy, New Public Management, and New Public Governance). Third, it suggests that there is a need to pay much more attention to the individual and behavioral analysis, both in studying and in managing public administrations. It builds a discussion on issues that may support the development of solutions to improve

operational management and perform a better change management in the public sector: if the awareness about the above-mentioned dimensions is also raised in the public sector domain, it will be possible to develop better organizational models that balance the satisfaction of public stakeholders and the respect of the principles of performance and efficiency.

Future research on public management should increase the consideration of behavioral dimensions as key analysis in addressing an improvement of the public sector in the public interest, not in that of managers and politicians.

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