The Theory and Practice of Public Sector Innovation: From Performance Management to Performance Leadership

Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Government Performance Management and Leadership

PREFACE

After nearly two years of effort, the proceedings of the 1st international conference on government performance management and leadership are finally going to be published. This will not only allow conference participants to review the results of the conference held on September 15th, 2009, but also enable more scholars, government officials and the public who are interested in government performance improvement and leadership development to share the outcome of the conference. This will further promote the research and practice in this area.

The conference was another grand academic event after the founding conference of China Government Performance Management Research Association and government performance management and administrative system reform symposium held in Lanzhou University on September 23rd, 2006. And the topics of this conference were broadened from government performance management to performance leadership.

In June of 2007, Prof. Tammen, the director of Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University and Prof. Morgan from the Executive Leadership Institute of the Hatfield School visited school of management, Lanzhou University and we successfully held an international symposium on government innovation. During the symposium, a consensus developed that two schools should hold a regular international conference and form a fixed mechanism in the future so as to provide a platform of communication and participation for public administration academia and practitioners of the United States and China. After several consultations, we both agreed that government performance management was the right theme of the conference, not only because government performance management is a long-lasting topic all around the world and it is a focused problem that China government, academia and general public pay attention on, but also because the two schools have accumulated resources and conducted research in this area. After Dr. Tammen returned to the United States, he recommended Public Service Research Institute of Okuma School of Public Management in Waseda University as another cosponsor and we have three cosponsors of the international conference at this time.

The concept of “Public Leadership” was proposed in July, 2008 when Dr. Wensheng He and I visited Portland State University and discussed with Prof.
Tammen, Prof. Morgan and Dr. Minzi Su, and we reached a consensus to title the conference as “International Conference on Government Performance Management and Leadership”. After that, I widely asked for opinions with Xiaoping Gao, Jing Bao, Zhiren Zhou, Yue Zhuo, Jiannan Wu, and Dingan Zhang who are the committee leaders of China Government Performance Management Research Association and they all fully agreed with this idea and topic. It was the innovative idea and consensus which greatly expanded the depth and scope of government performance management research we have been exploring. Just as Dr. Tammen addressed in the opening ceremony of the conference, “This theme not only interests scholars, but also helps citizens” and “The ideas produced in the conference may inform governments how to improve their performance, and assist government leaders to become more successful by improving government efficiency and effectiveness”.

Government performance evaluation and management was regarded as a tool and measuring instrument by government officials and scholars before 2009. But now, more and more people realize that government performance evaluation and management is not only a tool but also an important content and constituent part in government institutional innovation. The update of government performance ideas and the development of tools and measuring instruments not only make governments more efficient and society more harmonious, but it also enables us to understand public governance in greater depth. By the means of government performance management science, we can break through many obstacles of ideologies and thoughts, and gather together scholars from around the world. Government performance management is a topic which serves all societies, and it adds value to those societies.

As a product of new public management, government performance management gained public recognition when trying to help the government get rid of financial crisis, management crisis, and trust crisis since 1970s and helped governments achieve the goals of decreasing financial expenditure, enhancing administrative efficiency and improving management ability. The achievements of government performance evaluation and management practice have attracted the attention of politicians and societies from around the world. Scholars focus on this cutting edge concept by exploring the value of its theory and its application in practice. That is why the term “government performance management” is frequently used by scholars and practitioners.

Although it was the late 1980s and early 1990s when China began to use the new concept and introduced western theories and results to explore and study government performance management in China, the work of government performance evaluation and management had never stopped since 1949. Government performance evaluation and management in China is a product of the reforms flowing from the deepening of
Chinese market economic system plus China’s access to WTO, and the emergence of the scientific concept of development and the promulgation and implementation of the “Administrative Permission Law of the People’s Republic of China”. During this period, government performance evaluation boomed in China and many new practices such as “The Development and Supervision of Performance”, “Social Service Commitment System”, “Appraising Government by Citizens”, “The Third-Party Evaluation” emerged, and four representative modes of government performance evaluation, named “Gansu mode”, “Qingdao mode”, “Siming mode”, and “Zhuhai mode”, were created. In recent years, both the central and local governments regarded government performance evaluation and management as an important impetus of functional transformation and institutional reform in government. As a result, the understanding of government performance management deepened and significant progresses has been made in practice.

China’s central government has selected eight provinces, cities, autonomous regions and sub-provincial cities and six central ministries and committees as experimental units of government performance management. Several legal documents of government performance evaluation and management in different levels have been promulgated and implemented. This fully demonstrates that government performance evaluation and management as a science has found its home in China, and the research and practice in China definitely will further enrich its contents and systems. The reform and development in China is certain to bring a golden opportunity for the rebirth of government performance management.

However, as a worldwide “difficult problem” and a “puzzle” of public management, government performance evaluation and management has perplexed everyone who wanted to view it as a “Weapon” or “Career” since its birth. But why is it difficult and what is the puzzle? As supported by fact and law, I discovered from the research of Chinese county government performance, as outlined in my keynote speech at the conference, that government performance cannot be measured a hundred percent accurately. Consequently, we proposed the concept of “performance loss” which means the gaming behaviors, the limitation of measuring tools and instruments and the information uncertainty and asymmetry because the government is a “black box”. This is the source of performance loss. Knowing that government performance cannot be measured a hundred percent accurately and performance loss exists objectively, however, why do we still persevere to measure it? The answer is trying to decrease performance loss as much as possible. It is this locus of thought we are following which deepens our research gradually and it is this “puzzle” we are confronting. This is our intellectual challenge which we willingly undertake.

The following question is what we should do to solve this practical problem. First of all, we should improve the relationship between government and the public.
“Service Orientation” and “Setting the Public as the Basis” are not only the requirements of citizens, but also should be the responsibility of government. We are delighted to see the profound change from the world political and administrative system reform tide, and the reform practice of China also shows a bright prospect. The public still traditionally views the government as fierce tigers and lions which should be locked in the cage. Otherwise, the situation as the Chinese idiom saying that “no one dares to touch the buttocks of a tiger” would happen. What’s more, as Prof. Morgan stated at the conference, distrust between scholars and politicians should be eliminated. In the past, politicians have suspected the research of scholars, while scholars have suspected politician’s shortsighted and instrumental political motivations. But now a new institutional approach has formed, and in such a context, scholars and political leaders can treat each other openly, exchanging different ideas, so as to form an interdependent and cooperative relationship. In this case, evaluating government performance is not the case that “no one dares to touch the buttocks of a tiger” any more, but there is a new model.

Observing from the institutional security system of improving the relationship between government and citizens and the fact of performance loss, I propose that government performance evaluation is a model as “blind men feel an elephant”. The elephant is completely different from the lion and tiger because it can be touched. There are two paths to implement the model, the first path is that one single person feels every part of the elephant from the front to the back and then synthesize, and the second path is that many people feel the different parts of the elephant together at the same time and then synthesize. Obviously, the first path has two fatal faults, one is that the time cost is huge and another one is that a single person often lacks of specialized knowledge and skills when feeling different parts of the elephant, while the second path can overcome the fatal flaws above. However, this generates another problem that only by different kinds of experts using different professional tools to feel the elephant can the performance loss to be minimized, so as to achieve the goal of government evaluation and management. For that reason, we developed six basic models of performance evaluation and management: named polls model of evaluation, governance model of evaluation, examining model of evaluation, participating model of evaluation, decision-making model of evaluation, and supervision model of evaluation.

As a tool of government performance evaluation and management, every basic model has its core function, and this analytical thought helps us find the right key to decrease the performance loss of the government. The integration of these basic models is needed in government performance evaluation and management practice according to specific situations. We synergize analytically academic method with comprehensive evaluation practice to make it a research paradigm of government
performance management discipline, and it has solved practical problems one after another. The “blind men feel an elephant” model of government performance evaluation actually combines professional knowledge with tools and integrates public orientation and citizen participation together, and tries to completely reflect the compatibility between internal evaluation and external evaluation, outcome evaluation and process evaluation, policy evaluation and supervision evaluation , so as to realize the organic unification of value rationality and instrumental rationality of government performance evaluation and management.

Nearly 100 scholars, government officials and social organization leaders from the mainland of China, Hong Kong, the United States, Japan and Germany participated in the conference, and 47 conference papers were received. Our discussion centered on the extensive topics of government performance management, performance leadership and public governance. The conference was fruitful and it indicated that a worldwide academic community of government performance was forming. We selected 15 English papers from all of the conference papers to publish so as to develop extensive international academic communications. Considering the fact that many Chinese scholars did not submit English papers and it is necessary to introduce their academic thoughts and research to international colleagues and the society, we compiled a review of the conference papers to the proceedings. When the proceedings is going to be published, I would like to address my special gratitude to Prof. Ronald Tammen, director of Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University and Prof. Mari Yanagi Kobayashi, director of Public Service Research Institute of Okuma School of Public Management in Waseda University. At the same time, I would like to appreciate Prof. Douglas Morgan from Portland State University and Dr. Wensheng He from Lanzhou University in China who contribute their effort to the successful conference and Jingsu Wang, the editor of China Science Press, for his help in publishing.

Finally, I would like to say that it is difficult for me to review the meaning of the conference and various academic thoughts of all participants of the conference because of the limitation of my vision and knowledge. For that reason, I have introduced some background about the conference and some thoughts and ideas of government performance evaluation and management inspired by my colleagues, hoping to share them with more scholars and practitioners.

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