RETHINKING SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS BY TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Public organizations should contribute to value creation moving towards sustainability as a vision for change, strategy and action by developing the potential of information technology in order to redesign trust-based relationships sustaining governance networks within ecosystems, promoting co-production of public services, strengthening the agile working as a means to empower the employees and develop smart and digital platforms within ecosystems. As organizations seeking sustainability, public organizations should evolve as communities that develop technological sources to facilitate value creation within society. Public organizations should achieve sustainability and develop the community adopting a logic service view using technology in order to drive the transition from using technology in government to develop digital, smart, lean and open platforms that enable value creation, innovation and networking as source that help drive public organizations to design a sustainable pathway for future and wealth of communities.

Keywords: sustainability, technology, public organizations.

1 Introduction

Today, public organizations should rethink how to approach the sustainability as a long-term goal, a vision for change and key source that facilitates public trust and enables to create value within democratic life of communities (Fiorino, 2010; Goodsell, 2006; Dumay, Guthrie and Farneti, 2010; Moore, 1995; Borgonovi, 2001). With regards to public sector, research is still in infancy in identifying a pathway for sustainability as a source that helps both the development and effectiveness of public service organizations (Fiorino, 2010; Goodsell, 2006). Public organizations are seeking a sustainable business model in order to serve the public interest searching for a dialogue with citizens by strengthening cooperation and collaboration as a source for legitimacy and better outcome (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Osborne, Radnor, Vidal and Kinder, 2006), following a public value management perspective (Stoker, 2006; Flynn, 2007) in order to construct networked governance and shared partnerships (Hartley, 2005) and multilateral cooperation to cope with changing contexts and achieving policy objectives within a community (Bourgon, 2007). Rediscovering human and technological factors helps support sustainability within organizations as a source that enables value-oriented processes (Pfeffer, 2010; Larsson and Grönlund, 2014; Osborne, Radnor, Vidal and Kinder, 2006).

Value creation relies on public organizations sustaining multiple relationships promoting co-construction and co-innovation where the locus of co-production is the service system (Osborne, 2006; Osborne, Radnor and Strokosch, 2016). Public organizations should consider the public service delivery as a relational and process-based phenomenon supported by digital technologies that help public organizations to ensure services efficiency, quality and sustainability adopting an end user-driven (Osborne, Radnor, Kinder and Vidal, 2015).

The aim of this study is to elucidate how technology helps public organizations to identify a pathway for sustainability by employing and developing the potential of human resources and technological capabilities.

Public organizations should adopt a service logic view enabling the service users to actively contribute to sustaining processes oriented to value creation (Osborne, 2018). Public organizations should contribute to facilitating social and public value creation. Technologies enable the citizen to collaborate with government agencies and co-produce services, facilitate agile working and drive the employees to better respond to changes and citizens' demands, and open up to the ways to drive digital and smart public organizations.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) help public organizations to engage citizens in co-producing services, to better enable the employees to engage in agile working, contribute to developing networks that involve private and public actors, developing knowledge and capabilities in the pursuit of public goals (Janowski and Pardo, 2012). ICTs help strengthen collaboration and support the exchange between governments and civil society for service innovation, governance and administration effectiveness (Lips, 2012). ICTs are driving public organizations as digital and smart communities (Larsson and Grönlund, 2014; Granier and Kudo, 2016), enabling agile working as a means that facilitates trust-based relationships and innovation, empowering the employees that exercise autonomy and independence in responding to changes and customer's demands (Tims, 2010; Gilles, 2011).

The paper is structured in six sections. Following the introduction and methodological section, in the third paragraph, the theoretical background relies on rediscovering sustainability within public organizations as a source for strategy and action, as a vision for change and innovation within public administration. Public organizations as communities should follow a logic service view as a service strategy oriented to sustainability within ecosystems. In the fourth paragraph, it is explained how public organizations can evolve as sustainable organizations within ecosystems managing strategic, managerial and technologic capabilities. In particular, public organizations are moving from being organizations to becoming communities adopting a service logic view to value co-creation processes, and developing technologies for strengthening the role of co-production of services and sustaining the agile working

as sources that drive change within public services systems by promoting digital and smart platforms and open ecosystems. In the fifth paragraph, the discussion is presented. Finally, conclusions are set out.

2   Methodological section

The study relies on qualitative data that relate to the analysis and review of literature in the field of public service organizations following a service logic to value creation. This study aims only to provide an interpretive framework and advance some trends in understanding the dynamics of public organizations. Even if the theme of sustainability is an emerging topic in the recent studies about public administration, the research is still in infancy. Some studies show the need to look at the sustainability as a vision for future public administration (Fiorino, 2010; Dumay, Guthrie and Farneti, 2010) and have identified the public value and governance perspectives as the context where public organizations tend to identify a sustainable pathway or model in the future (Osborne, Radnor, Vidal and Kinder, 2006). Thereby, the relationship between technology in government for sustainability is emerging in recent times without yet having defining a framework of reference (Larsson and Grönlund, 2014). The analysis on literature is no structured and systematic. The study is theoretical and exploratory and aims to propose some hypotheses and trajectories of change and evolution of public organizations walking towards sustainability. The study is the first step of research project that aims to further investigate and develop the theme of sustainability within public organizations and services system. Only a limited sample of articles is considered in order to lay down the basis for in-depth investigations on the relationship between the concept of sustainability, the adoption of technology and the role of public organizations that use technology to interact with citizens, business and other stakeholders. The research is based on archival and qualitative data considering the literature related to the role of information technology in driving public organizations to go digital in order to support services co-production, embrace agile working as way for better work, and promote smart platforms that enable public and private organizations to work together and cooperate in order for public value creation. The study is based on the results of a search performed considering referred journal articles selected from *Google Scholar* as the main web source and database. In particular, the selected contributions refer to human and technological sources and factors that help enable the sustainability of public organizations. With regards to services co-production as a way to ensure sustainability of public services system some articles referring to the technology as a support are considered. Some journal articles that refer to sustainability and digital technology in the title are also considered. With regards to agile work, the regulatory dimension is also considered in order to elucidate the framework presented in the paragraph 5. The selected contributions are summarized and interpreted in a narrative synthesis as a flexible approach that accommodates differences between the questions, research design and the context of the studies considered. It focuses on how studies address a different aspect of the same phenomenon and contribute to providing a picture of that assisting not only theory but practice in dealing. It helps provide a description of data in order to develop and present new perspectives on emerging issues and advance theoretical models (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Dixon-Woods, Agarwall, Yougn, Jones and Sutton, 2004).

3   Literature review

Even if a universally agreed definition is absent, sustainability should be considered as a focus to be developed to be understand the future evolution of public administration. Sustainability should be a principle that drives strategy and supports collective action within public administration as a community. Research is still in infancy in identifying a pathway for sustainability as a source that helps both the development and effectiveness of public service organizations. Public organizations should con-

ceive sustainability as a long-term goal and vision that supports democratic development and life of communities within society (Fiorino, 2010; Goodsell, 2006; Dumay, Guthrie and Farneti, 2010; Borgonovi, 2001). Public organizations should rethink about the way to interact with citizens, business and other stakeholders in order to facilitate a pathway for public value creation that «assumes an interactive and dynamic relationship where value is created at the nexus of interaction» (Osborne, 2018, p. 225). Public organizations are seeking a sustainable business model, serving the public interest for a dialogue with citizens by strengthening multilateral cooperation as a source for legitimacy and better outcome (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Osborne, Radnor, Vidal and Kinder, 2006), following a public value management perspective (Stoker, 2006) in order to construct a networked governance and shared partnerships to cope with changing contexts and achieving policy objectives (Hartley, 2005; Bourgon, 2007; Osborne, 2006).

Public organizations should proceed towards sustainability in order to achieve long-terms issues in order to provide benefits and contribute to value to be engendered for future generations (Fiorino, 2010) enhancing human and technological factors that enable value-oriented processes driving public organizations to emerge as platforms that facilitate exchanges and relationships within the ecosystem (Pfeffer, 2010; Larsson and Grönlund, 2014; Dumay, Guthrie and Farneti, 2010).

Public organizations seeking sustainability should pay attention to human factor (Pfeffer, 2010), strengthening the people that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of public organizations in serving the public interest and rediscovering the human factor and side as a source for sustainability enabling the employee to better perform their tasks (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Pfeffer, 20120). Public organizations should design a work environment in which employees feel that they can contribute both to the public goal and to an organization performing valuable services (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007) by enabling the agile working that is claimed to bring 'people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task' (The Agile Organisation, 2010).

After the promises of New public management about efficiency and effectiveness, public organizations are following a public value management view (Stoker, 2006) by embracing ICTs in order to achieve sustainability as a vision for managing *res publica* within digital and smart communities (Granier and Kudo, 2016) and strengthening the role of civil society and governance networks moving towards a community perspective for engendering value creation within society (Hartley, 2005; Osborne, 2006).

Public organizations should identify a pathway for sustainability following a service logics view to public value creation and looking at an ecosystem perspective promoting co-construction and co-innovation where the locus of co-production is the service system (Osborne, 2006; Osborne, Radnor and Strokosch, 2016; Osborne, 2018; Dumay, Guthrie and Farneti, 2010).

Technology helps users and community to contribute to support services co-production «where all the parties make substantial resource contributions» (Bovaird, 2007, p. 847). The advent of interactive and digital technology helps public organizations to develop a community/citizen and smart approach in order to support public-private partnerships and involve citizens in policy-making for sustaining public values, equity and development (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow and Tinkler, 2005).

4   Driving public organizations towards sustainability

Public organizations should contribute to achieving sustainability as a source for strategy, action and change (Fiorino, 2010), promoting dialogue, cooperation and social exchange and building interorganizational relationships (Osborne, 2006). Public organizations should facilitate value co-creation by encouraging the service users in co-producing services, developing the potential of advanced information technology to support services co-production, enable and facilitate agile working, and to drive public organizations as digital platforms.

4.1   Sustaining the co-production of services

Public organizations should facilitate value creation processes, enabling the service users to contribute to production, design, innovation and value of public services (Osborne, 2018). The advent of technology helps citizens and public organizations to interact and behave as active co-producers of public value to exert an active role developing collaboration and social exchange (Alford, 2002). Public services are complex service systems employing human, organizational and technical elements and processes. Co-production requires the co-producers. Bovaird (2007, p. 23) defined the co-production with regards to the role of the user and community in service co-production: «User and community coproduction as the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community where all the parties make substantial resource contributions». Users and community coproduction emerges as an integrating mechanism bringing together a variety of stakeholders and effective means of public policy where all the actors have significant influence on outcomes and contribute to interdependence of decision-making. Co-production helps both social inclusion and citizen engagement as source of effective performance and innovation in public services (Osborne, Radnor, Vidal and Kinder, 2014). Co-production relies on building partnership and collaboration leading to construct trust identification-based in government over time (Fledderus, Brandsen and Honingh, 2014). Public value is enjoyed by citizenry even more if citizens are called and want to co-produce. In the public sector, the primary concern in dealing with service-users is to encourage 'willingness to co-produce', that is to provide time and effort to participating in production of public services (Alford, 2016). The Internet and global communication network contribute to enhancing the role and capabilities of citizens opening up new channels for collaboration. New technologies are empowering the citizen as responsible partner in public services delivery and in the work of government (Linders, 2012). Sustaining networked coproduction of public services by virtual communities helps support a community approach to public service support. Information technology helps to rediscover a community/citizen centered approach that enables citizens to interact with government agencies and contribute to co-production (Meijer, 2011; Bovaird, 2007).

4.2   Sustaining the agile working

World, economics and production are going across a phase of transformation characterized by a technological revolution that influences and changes the way to work and supports interaction among physical, biological and digital spheres (Scjwab, 2016). In particular, the almost endless possibilities of computer connection enable the chances of working remotely, making the employee more agile in working within or far from a certain workplace and paying more attention to the results of work performances than the ways to execute the performance. Experimenting smart working as the way for performance characterized by a certain spatial flexibility helps redesign job organization and support a better work-life balance bringing together both technological and organizational infrastructures helps modify how people interact and perform their task at work (Ichino, 2017).

Agile working is claimed to bring 'people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task' (The Agile Organisation, 2010). Agile working implies working differently through trust-based relationships and innovation rather than hierarchies and bureaucracy (Tims, 2010), requires decentralization and flexibility in terms of the ability of employees to be autonomous and independent workers in responding to changing demands of services (Gillies, 2011).

Technology helps people to better work independently of the physical workplace meeting customer needs, reducing costs, increasing productivity and improving sustainability. Information and communications technologies drive the organizations to develop agile working by ensuring maximum flexibility and minimum constraints empowering the employees to work where, when and how they choose

to perform the task without the traditional limitations in order to optimize their performance and deliver best value and customer service. Agile work is defined as a way of carrying out subordinate work without restrictions of place and time, partly inside and partly outside the company plant with possible use of technological tools. Agile work or smart work refers to a set of practices that enable a better workforce organization, combining flexibility, autonomy and collaboration by empowering the employees to achieve results measured through performance indicators. Agile working helps create a more responsive, efficient and effective organization which is able to improve performance and increase customer satisfaction. Agile working relies on the complete flexibility of work to drive long-term organizational success. Agile work needs of a written agreement between the worker and the employer, in which the methods of performance are defined. The performance modalities of the work are defined agile in relation to the employer's exercise of directive power and the use of any tools necessary to ensure the service.

4.3 Developing technology-enabled and digital public organizations

Public organizations should develop the potential of technology in order to advance digital, smart and open communities as spaces and platforms that help encourage partnerships and collaboration among private and public actors within ecosystems. Public organizations should drive digital evolution that helps redefine relationships with government stakeholders building communities within society. ICTs help support the building of networks and enhance the relationships between public organizations and civil society facilitating knowledge sharing, social exchange and partnerships to achieve public value issues, (Janowski, Pardo and Davies, 2012; Lips, 2012). Public organizations are embracing ICTs to connect with networks, to drive change in democratic processes, and to create new governance structures that enable change, enhance government effectiveness, support public sector reform, and strengthen citizen engagement and relationships between civil society and government agencies (Bannister and Connolly, 2012). Digital government relies on creating a digital ecosystem for public value creation by strengthening cooperation, ensuring openness, inclusiveness, engagement and participation in policy-making and service design, opening to a data-driven culture and strategy in order to better serve citizens and business that access to social and informative exchange (Oecd, 2014). Technology enables the relationships between citizens and public organizations towards a community/citizen centered approach as oriented to a public service design (Meijer, 2011). The future of public services delivery and design relies on building digital platforms and spaces that contribute to services co-production and value co-creation (Fishenden and Thampson, 2013)] leading to open, public and networked ecosystems that help promote innovation and transparency, support citizen engagement, knowledge and information sharing (Harrison, Pardo and Cook, 2012). ICTs enable public organizations to proceed towards sustainability moving from transformation to contextualisation by promoting policy driven e-governance platforms (Janowski, 2015). ICTs contribute to enhancing social and knowledge-based interaction between public and private sphere as a source for value creation and services co-production. Digital technologies are leading sustainable public organizations to encourage private-public collaborations, to evolve as smart communities that rely on proactive citizen participation, and help drive smart culture in government, empowering citizens as co-designers and co-producers of public services and leading to innovation and knowledge development (Gil-Garcia, Zhang and Puron-Cid, 2016). Governments should use technology to design digital platforms to enable people to do most of the work create future public services delivery and production (O'Reilly, 2010). Building public digital and open ecosystems relies on designing a network by combining expertise and emerging resources in the market and civil society (Tapscott, Williams and Herman, 2008) sustaining participation and collaboration driving the evolution of technology, organizations and institutions (Luna-Reyes and Gil-Garcia, 2014). Public organizations should strengthen Web 2.0 technologies in order to enable citizen to collectively create public information, provide services and support citizen-sourcing as a new mode of government operations as a means to develop collective intelligence (Nam, 2012).

5 Discussion

Public organizations identify the sustainability as a vision for action and change in order to contribute to driving the wealth of communities and advancing the progress of society. As sustainability-oriented institutions, public organizations tend to integrate strategic, human and technological capabilities promoting collaboration and encouraging inter-organizational and long-terms relationships, where multiple inter-dependent actors and processes contribute to public services delivery and help policy making.

As shown in figure 1, the main contribution of this study is to identify some pathways that enable public organizations to evolve as value creation-oriented and sustainable organizations within ecosystems.
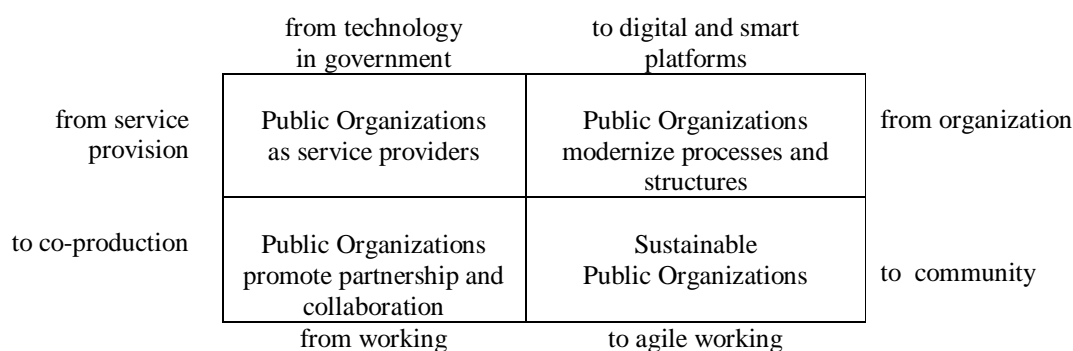
	from technology in government	to digital and smart platforms	
from service provision	Public Organizations as service providers	Public Organizations modernize processes and structures	from organization
to co-production	Public Organizations promote partnership and collaboration	Sustainable Public Organizations	to community
	from working	to agile working	

Figure 1 – Rethinking sustainable public organizations: the dimensions

As services providers, public organizations contribute to service provision following an organizational view in order to serve the public interest, driving e-government processes and strengthening traditional ways of working. As organizations embedded within social and economic ecosystems that merely contribute to service provision, public organizations should use the potential of digital and smart government and platforms in order to involve civil society within networked governance where public employees develop skills and the benefits of agile working attending to value community and interacting with citizens to build shared partnerships. As institutions oriented to public value and service logic view, public organizations become sustainable communities that contribute to public service delivery and design, strengthening the potential of technology in processes and enabling autonomy and empowerment of employees, developing smart and lean platforms and communities within ecosystems. Public organizations as communities should consider the sustainability as a source that helps value creation processes and enables the wealth of people and business ensuring social, financial, economic and democratic performances.

6 Conclusions, limitations and further research directions

In this study, there are theoretical, managerial and organizational key implications. Public organizations tend to become communities by increasing driving the technological evolution going digital and smart by promoting the dialogue and supporting cooperation among private and public actors as the result of multilateral relationships, social exchanges and shared values. Public organizations as communities tend to follow a service logic view as strategic approach for developing action within public service system, sustaining the potential of technology to drive smart, lean and open communities with-

in ecosystems, and empowering the employees meeting the needs of citizens and being responsible in front of the society.

Some propositions are proposed along the pathway that public organizations are identifying for proceeding towards sustainability: strengthening services co-production more and more involving citizens in co-design and co-production (proposition 1); promoting diffusion of agile working as a means to perform tasks and ensure efficiency/effectiveness of administrative action (proposition 2); and developing the potential of information technology in order to drive the transition from use of technology in government to drive digital, smart, lean and open ecosystems for value creation, innovation and networking (proposition 3).

In this study, there are some limitations. This study identifies some theoretical propositions and provides a framework of analysis in order to drive public organizations towards sustainability. Only a limited sample of journal articles are considered to identify some trends for understanding the future of public organizations interacting with communities and citizens. Thereby, any empirical research and case studies are provided in the analysis because public organizations are still in infancy in dealing with sustainability as a source for change and innovation in governance and services design within ecosystems.

Further research perspectives and investigations will consider how the hypothesized propositions can be applied within local autonomies and be translated in managerial and leadership programs, human resources policies and practices, technological advancements and digital platforms that contribute to enhancing the community development within public organizations that interact with civil society in order to develop knowledge sources, organizational frameworks, strategies, value-oriented processes, and shared culture within social and economic ecosystems.

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