

Introduction to the Symposium Issue: Public Sector Innovation and Public Ethics

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Soon after embarking on the present symposium, we became painfully aware of the difficulties attendant to defining a topic around public ethics and innovation. Drafts, redrafts, releases, and rereleases of calls for papers made the challenge clear: Not defining the topic too narrowly or academically or technically, nor defining it too broadly, since in either case potential contributors would be left wondering if they could produce a manuscript that fit the stated criteria. For a long while there was little response, but with time the issue began to come together with what we found to be a surprising array of very high quality studies bearing on the subject from unexpected perspectives.

In the end, we had few papers that even touched on philosophical or theoretical strains of public ethics. Rather, what we had was a range of rigorous studies with interesting linkages. The issue features, for instance, a superb treatment of scaled-up, disruptive, transformative social change (Frances Westley and Nino Antadze); a consideration of the incentive structures for drugs to treat neglected diseases, defined as public goods (by Shishir K. Jha, Mukundan R. and Karuna Jain); and an incisive study of non-proprietary agricultural and rural development in partnerships, also cast as public goods for poor countries (Laxmi Prasad Pant and Helen Hambly-Odame). Miklós Antal provides a kindred study of applications for official support as an effective means to promote grassroots initiatives.

Manfred Meine and Thomas Dunn sidestepped the typically narrowly-focused approach to ethics codes in the academic and professional literature, by proposing collaboration among public administration professional associations around their codes of ethics. The authors' creative proposal would provide these organizations with some leverage for enforcement, while also allowing them to bring greater attention to professional ethics in the public service.

While working on the symposium, we joined our colleague from the University of Vermont, Richard Gregory Johnson III, in addressing the ethical implications of prevailing approaches to diversity and cultural competency education. We make the case for what some call an "insurgent" approach to the topic. Like Meine and Dunn, we would lend strength and substance to institutional commitments to diversity and equity. While the topics are quite different, there is a point of contact between the two articles. Both take on institutional commitments to social equity—a dry subject on most days—and demand that public sector organizations in particular live up to their professed values.

In a comprehensive presentation of an ambitious undertaking in public ethics, Dr. Ellen Fox and contributing authors profile IntegratedEthics, an unusual—and unusually sophisticated—effort toward the ethical provision of healthcare. Developed by the National Center for Ethics in Health Care in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, it is in the process of deployment in more than 1,500 sites of care. This instructive article suggests that ethical innovation is not beyond the capacity of major government organizations. Rather, the value stances peculiar to the public sector may in fact make such innovation possible, particularly in the human services.

Finally, five of the issue’s book reviews touch on public ethics, through prisms of corporate social responsibility, the “cultural politics of human rights,” cultural discourse and community in Canada, “Whole of Government” national security reform, and the “political economy of bigotry”—a book and review that resonate with our own article. What links these texts is the unstinting realism of their treatments of prejudice, social equity, and related subjects. The reviewers are no less unsparing in their assessments of these important books.

Inevitably, once we had a full array of extraordinarily high-quality manuscripts and decided to close the issue (after a hiatus without submissions), several manuscripts and manuscript proposals came in. Some of these have begun the process of peer review and/or revision. They will likely grace upcoming issues of this journal. One article we particularly look forward to receiving is a second installment of the Fox study, focused on the implementation of IntegratedEthics.

Our thanks go to all contributors, since they have made a substantial symposium of our once ill-defined idea. We thank our later contributors as well, as we continue to review manuscripts. We hope, therefore, that the symposium will be but the beginning of a probing conversation on the ethics of innovation in the public sector.

Our thanks go as well to Eleanor Glor, whose exceptional leadership as Editor-in-Chief of *The Innovation Journal* has seldom been as evident as with this symposium. In bringing key papers to it, and in many ways helping us work through construction of the symposium, she is the third, if unheralded, symposium issue editor.