

Call for Abstracts – Leading Change in Public Services
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Abstract

Leading Change in Public Services Through Redesigning Public Governance Institutions: The Role of Leadership

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This case study will offer an assessment of the performance of the new model of public governance implemented in Scotland from 2007. We will present an analysis of how the political leadership and the civil service leadership changed the institutions of Scottish Government. We will also address the evidence of a learning process informing the intentions and approach to public governance redesign of the dual leadership. Finally, we will explore the possibility of evaluating the contribution of the quality of leadership to the results attributed to the Scottish Government in the period from 2007 to 2011.

In this case study we examine the redesign and creation of a new public governance framework for public services in Scotland between the years 2007 and 2011. The ideas behind the redesign of public governance came from both the political leadership and the civil service leadership (Elvidge 2011 34):

“So, in May 2007, two separate analyses of ways to define and pursue the objectives of government more effectively by changing the organisation and functioning of government – that developed by the SNP outside government and that developed by me, with my senior colleagues, within government – came into conjunction.”

The model, according to Elvidge, included the Scottish Government being strategic and would work cooperatively with others (2011 4):

“In partnership between Civil Service and political leadership, a radical Scottish model of government has developed since 2007, *building on the learning from the earlier period of devolution*. [...] It places strategic leadership and the facilitation of cooperation between organisations and sections of society at the heart of the role of central government, rather than a managerialist view of the relationship of central government to others.” (Emphasis added.)

Elvidge (2011 25) highlighted the issue of leadership styles as an influence on the success of the model, which he discussed in relation to the move to a small Cabinet:

“I do not think it is a contentious judgement to opine that Alex Salmond is a dominating political figure. [...] my leadership style is, in some key respects, very different from that of Alex Salmond, I offer the personal view that different leadership styles, provided they are effectively deployed, are not likely to make a significant difference to the degree of effectiveness of the small Cabinet model.”

This leads to three propositions. First that leaders – political and civil service – can play a key role in redesigning public governance institutions. Secondly, that learning from experience can help with redesign. And, thirdly, that leadership style matters in how well a new public governance system works.

References

Elvidge, J. (2011) Northern Exposure: Lessons from the first twelve years of devolved government in Scotland. London: Institute for Government.