Synopsis of Research – Shlomo Mizrahi

Public Sector Performance, Citizens’ Trust in the Public Sector, and Citizens’ Participation in Decision-Making

This is an on-going research project that examines the mutual relationships among public sector performance, citizens’ trust in the public sector, citizens’ participation in decision-making and the changing relationship between bureaucracy and democracy. This project has already produced an ISF research grant, several scientific publications, a scientific book and many research and policy papers. Since the project is built on the idea of accumulating data over time, I plan to continue working on it while broadening and deepening the scientific investigation.

At the core of this project (in collaboration with Eran Vigoda-Gadot) is the idea that the public sector may improve its effectiveness and performance if it regains the public’s trust. Hence, we study the variables that influence trust in the public sector both theoretically and empirically. We examine whether citizens’ participation in decision-making, managerial quality and satisfaction are related to their trust in the public sector and show that there are complex relationships with several intervening variables such as history and political culture. We base our empirical analysis on surveys about citizens’ perceptions regarding those variables. For the last 13 years we have been conducting a yearly survey that has become one of the most authoritative sources of data about public opinion in Israel. We also conduct surveys among workers in the public sector and periodically focus on specific organizations, areas and populations. Lately, we have also added an international perspective based on surveys we conducted in the US. The scientific examination of these rich data sets has been published in top journals as well as in a book that is forthcoming from Springer. This research project has produced important insights into the study of performance management and its role in democratic societies. In the coming years, I plan to deepen and broaden both the data collection and the empirical analysis.

Workers’ Motivations, Gaming and Manipulation, and Incentive Schemes

Performance management mechanisms create internal regulations that are expected to encourage the organization’s employees to invest more effort in their work and hence improve the organization’s performance. One research project that I am conducting in this area explores the relationship between employees’ perceptions
about performance management mechanisms and perceived organizational performance. I hypothesize that they are related directly and indirectly, and test whether in the latter case behavioral-attitudinal or structural variables have a stronger mediating effect on these relationships. An empirical analysis based on data from the federal government in the US provides more support for the structural approach than for the behavioral-attitudinal approach. In that sense, performance management schemes have significant symbolic functions as they signal to employees that the management is doing something to improve performance. I plan to extend this project and compare countries and sectors.

Another research project that I am conducting in the area of workers’ motivations and incentive schemes focuses on the tradeoff between the effort invested in work and the effort invested in the manipulation of data (gaming strategies). I am trying to integrate these two types of effort through formal modeling and empirical investigation, which I expect to produce efficient managerial strategies to reduce gaming strategies among workers.

**Public Management Reforms and Institutional Design**

In recent decades, public management reforms have become a leading restructuring strategy in developed and developing countries. Reforms include regulation, corporatization, privatization, restructuring and legislation. This research project builds a theoretical framework that addresses various questions in the field by integrating the historical and rational choice new institutionalism with insights produced by the comparative literature on public sector reforms. The theoretical framework has been, and will be, applied to a wide variety of reforms in areas such as performance management and in sectors such as electricity, healthcare and education. We have investigated the capital markets, pensions, the labor market and local government, and will continue to do so. In addition, our concerns encompass issues such as transparency and open government. The complex and comparative integration carried out in this project allows us to explore inside the black boxes of decision-making processes, trace motivations and strategies, and produce interesting insights and potentially generalizations. This project has already yielded several scientific publications and doctoral dissertations (both completed and in progress).
This project focuses on the possible impact of government effectiveness on the interaction between equality and public attitudes towards redistribution. I integrate two avenues of research in the political economy literature. One approach shows that institutional quality, which may result in effective government, has a positive relationship with the equal distribution of income. The second avenue of research explores the factors that explain redistribution preferences. However, this approach often tends to neglect government effectiveness as an important variable in explaining public attitudes towards redistribution. Thus, I contribute to the literature by including this variable in my study. Furthermore, unlike many existing explanations in the field, the project explores these relationships as citizens themselves perceive them rather than through macro socio-economic indicators. This project has already produced one paper, INI research grant and a basis for a doctoral dissertation (in process).