

CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The knowledge society imposes growing demands on nations, organizations and the people. In fact, the intellectual training needed to perform with social efficacy in a digital society with networks that interact in a systematic and uninterrupted manner is constantly increasing. Peter Drucker predicted, at the beginning of the 90's, that in this 21st century the doctoral level would be equivalent to what middle school education was in the 20th century. The truth is that the prediction is still ambitious; however, each passing day its fulfillment seems to become closer.

Indeed, training of advanced human capital represents an unavoidable challenge for society and all spheres of human endeavor, both in the social and the economic aspects. But the demands emerging from the knowledge society are also inherent to public institutions. The latter are not simply nonprofit entities but are, rather, institutions with public purposes, that is, pertaining to the generation of public goods.

Many of these organizations do not count on a full fiscal funding and must resort to the generation of their own resources for its functioning and growth. It is common that public institutions must equilibrate multiple interests in play, both external and internal, responding also to requirements of higher transparency and an efficient use of public resources, in a framework in which there usually exist significant legal restrictions for acting within the market logic.

Under such perspective, among the most relevant challenges for the management of public organizations in the knowledge society are:

Defining clear and simple objectives that allow making it known to every member of the organization what is being attempted to achieve; which is the strategic focal point. That is to say, where are the institutional efforts aimed at. Also, the objectives must be transparent and fully known by society, so that the basic activity of the institution is accounted for and an adequate social image of what it truly is and is able to do can be put together.

Knowledge management for decision making, given that under circumstances in which a profound knowledge of the environment is required and since the changes take place at great speed, a static intelligence function is not enough,

but a knowledge management that allows to explore external and internal information sources, generating the capacities to transform such information into knowledge that can be shared and applied to adopt the strategic decisions as well as the tactical ones. Without the capacity to create, share and apply knowledge, the adopted decisions will be deficient and probably inconsistent or not in line with the changing requirements of the environment.

Focalization on the assessment and deployment of institutional resources and capacities, referred to the fundamental obligation to know the quality, depth and breath of the institutional resources and capacities. To this end, it is required to evaluate each available resource and capacity in an objective manner and from the viewpoint of discovering its reach and impact on value creation within the institution and from it towards society. Correctly assessed, both resources as well as capacities shall be deployed to allow an effective implementation of institutional tasks in pursuit of the foreseen goals.

Self-regulation capability, which means that the public institutions should have the abilities that allow them to achieve, in a permanent fashion, internal equilibrium, as well as with the environment. To this end, the knowledge management and organizational intelligence systems must permit a monitoring and control that makes possible the required adjustments in a setting of continuous improvement.

No doubt, this synthesis of challenges is not exhaustive, but it makes reference to aspects that are so central that if not considered it just implies to cast aside essential elements that explain the efficiency of public organizations in the knowledge society. In turn, it would be important to emphasize that the training of public directorial staff, the management styles, the congruence of values and the diversity in directive personnel are determinant elements of the mode in which each of this challenges can be developed.

The knowledge society leads to deep changes in the way to conduct public organizations, inducing larger and growing responsibilities in matters of transparency and accountability, in an environment where people or final users of public goods are every day more demanding.

LILIANA PEDRAJA-REJAS
Universidad de Tarapacá