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Insights into public management from policing:
Introduction to the special issue of *Public Management Review*

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Abstract

This introduction to the special issue aims to bridge the gap between two fields –policing on the one hand and public management on the other – which have seen only sporadic cross-fertilization so far. We begin by outlining the benefits of engaging with policing as a distinctive subject of public management study but one with generalizable and challenging insights for public management. We then provide a brief overview of the papers in the special issue and draw out key themes, which hopefully will inspire academics to engage with policing research as a contribution to public management.

KEYWORDS: Policing, public management theory development, institutional analysis, public value, social equity

Introduction

The way public management is theorised and researched is highly dependent on the nature of the public services involved and the eco-system in which the services operate. This special issue, "Insights for Public Management from Policing," offers opportunities for the development of key concepts and theories in public management drawn from studying policing and its distinctive eco-systems. The focus in this special issue is on policing rather than solely the police (as a government service, profession, and set of organizations). Policing by state organizations is a public service which has coercive as well as welfare elements, and which operates from local to international levels. It is thus at the heart of relationships between citizens and the state (Hartley et al., 2023), providing powerful insights for public management. However, we also take a broader view of policing because keeping people safe and preventing and tackling crime is undertaken by a range of actors, including citizens, not-for-profit, and for-profit providers as well as those who are employed by the state to fulfil those purposes.

While policing has informed the development of several key concepts in public management in the past, this cross-fertilization has only been sporadic, suggesting the added value of more systematic inclusion of policing as a public service in public management. We argue that this neglect is detrimental to both the advancement of public management theory and the

improvement of policing theory and practice. However, policing as a topic is rapidly gaining attention in both political and academic discourses. To some extent, this is due to rising political concerns with security (personal, national, and international), which often results in couching a wide expanse of policy problems – aspects of migration, climate change and environmental concerns, poverty and inequality, and international trade relations – in terms of "security issues". This trend also reflects increasing societal stresses that have called for police to become involved in a wider array of safety concerns (e.g., mental health crises, addiction-related behaviours, protecting vulnerable people, or poverty-driven crimes). The emergence of the international Black Lives Matter movement as well as policing scandals in relation to misogyny and homophobia in several jurisdictions have spurred public and internal questioning about whether policing activities exceed – systemically or exceptionally – the boundaries of societal expectations of government action, service, and justice.

On top of that there appears to be a growing realization among policymakers of the potential benefits from public management studies for policing given that police leaders increasingly feel the fallout from fiscal austerity, demographic change, and value shifts in society and in their organizations. This new attention level is mirrored, very opportunely in our view, by a revived academic interest, particularly within the public management community, in policing as a core public service. We observe a pleasing increase in conference papers on this topic at venues such as conferences of the International Research Society for Public Management, the Public Management Research Association, the European Group for Public Administration, and the Consortium on Race, Gender, and Equity Studies. Indeed, in response to the call for papers for this special issue, we received 70 proposals from around the world for an international paper workshop we held online May 11-13, 2022, to present and discuss papers in preparation for submission to this special issue. This level of interest is an important signal of the relevance of this topic across a wide array of countries and jurisdictions. Some papers were accepted for this special issue while certain others needed more work than was possible in the special issue timeframe. Therefore there are promising potential future publications in progress.

Policing as a public service offers several characteristics that may provide rich insights from a public management perspective. Policing elicits an impressive range of very significant questions: What is policing a "case of" for public management theory development (George and Bennett, 2005)? Is policing a public service, like other features of government activity in which we may consider the views and desires of citizens as customers or consumers, or should different criteria apply to assess policing? If, as is often the case in policing, many of the targets or recipients do not desire the interaction or activity, how does this stimulate rethinking the nature of government services – or of public oversight of private security activities – and the government-public relationship? Is policing unique in its use of force, or are its activities – and the controversies surrounding them – revelatory about other aspects of government in which coercive power is salient, but perhaps less immediately visible? For example, how closely related is policing with the monitoring and disciplinary power of some welfare services for the poor (Soss, Fording, and Schram, 2011); the sectioning of patients in healthcare (Barber, Brown, & Martin, 2009); the taking by public authorities of property in land use and urban planning situations (Somin, 2019); mandated measures to protect the environment (Chertow and Esty,

1997); or public health restrictions (Buchanan, 2008)? In other words, the question arises whether policing is a uniquely "extreme context" (Hällgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2017) because it involves insecurity, emergent risks, and a need to constantly adapt to disruptions, or is it rather just one example of government addressing wicked policy problems, struggling for political power, and exerting state authority? We suspect the latter is the case, and see the related need for better public policy and management theorising (Dunlop et al., 2020). It follows from this that policing, while retaining its distinctive features, is a public service from which much can be learnt for a range of other public services, and therefore for theorising about public management more broadly.

In brief, the study of policing may provide important insights for advancing public management theories relating to, among other topics: the balancing of societal and individual values and sometimes conflicting interests in government activities; the influences of broader societal and political environments on policy implementation and public management discretion; governance structures, cultures, and processes as illuminated by the distinctiveness and genericness of policing as a government activity; and the implications of policing across borders, scales, and mixed networks of public and private actors for other aspects of cross-jurisdictional public management and cross-sectoral relationships.

Papers in this special issue

The papers published in this special issue investigate different aspects of policing which provide pertinent insights into public management. Across the four papers, there is a wide range of research topics: the institutional logics of community policing; ethics and values in post-policing employment; the new and emerging role and identity of data professionals; and a set of dialectical conversations between policing and public management to generate theoretical insights.

Daniela Sorrentino, Pasquale Ruggiero, and Riccardo Mussari (2023), in "Agents and logics in community policing: the designing of performance measures," note that community policing is a proactive approach to policing that relies on the involvement of community members. Their paper addresses managerial issues pertaining to community policing by resorting to the performance measurement construct. They explore institutional logics at play in community policing and how they affect the design of performance measures through a longitudinal case study of a local police department in Italy. Findings reveal three logics, the co-existence of which creates a unification and temporal stratification of community policing performance measures, thereby delivering theoretical and practical contributions to the research area of institutional logics as well as performance management in public management.

Isabelle Fest, Mirko Schäfer, José van Dijck, and Albert Meijer (2023) focus on the discretionary power of a particular and relatively new type of system-level bureaucrat – data professionals – which they do in the setting of the Netherlands Police. In their paper, "Understanding data professionals in the police: a qualitative study of system-level bureaucrats," they find that data professionals exert discretion and are aware of public values yet use a variety of arguments to

dissociate themselves from or downplay their responsibilities. This paper also highlights how key public management issues about public values, and ethics and dilemmas of public officials, may be insightfully tackled by exploring cases in the field of policing.

Kim Loyens, Rick Borst, and Leonie Heres (2023) consider the ethical dilemmas at the juncture of law enforcement professionals transitioning out of their police organization into other jobs, in the private, public or third sectors. Through an analysis of post-employment conflicts of interest among former Dutch military and national police, in the paper "Understanding the moral myopia and ambiguity of post-employment conflicts of interest: comparing police to other public and private organizations," they identity five possible manifestations of post-employment conflicts – such as the (mis)use of classified information for commercial purposes and of relations with former colleagues – as a foundation for a broader discussion of "moral myopia" and ambiguity in the public management of ethics.

The last paper in this special issue is written by us (Jean Hartley, Edoardo Ongaro, Kathy Quick and Eckhard Schröter, 2023), "Public management and policing: a dialectical inquiry," publishing decisions regarding which the Editor-in-Chief handled without our involvement to avoid conflicts of interest. It is a theoretical paper identifying how the study of policing is helpful for testing and refining the boundaries of several key concepts and theories of public management. We identify certain (but by no means all) areas with special potential for cross-fertilization: the potential to further theorise different rationales used in public management (e.g., hierarchist/etatist bureaucratic, individualist/market-driven, and egalitarian/community-oriented rationales) via the examination of their applicability to policing; the lessons that can be learnt from policing for further theorising about issues of state authority and legitimacy of governmental action in public management; key questions of public value creation (or destruction) raised by policing; and policing as a lens on dilemmas of pursuing equity through public management.

The papers are varied in focus – from street-level policing work in collaboration with residents (Sorrentino et al.), to those working in back-office work supporting front-line officers, undertaking crime detection and organizing intelligence data (Fest et al.), to thinking about aspects of corporate and institutional systems (Loyens et al., Fest et al., Sorrentino et al., Hartley et al.). They illustrate the wide range of functions and activities which fall under policing and mark out some valuable areas for further research. They cover a wide range of methodologies, several being multi-method (Loyens et al., Sorrentino et al., Fest et al.) and include interviews and document analysis (Loyens et al; Sorrentino et al; Fest et al) as well as a vignette-based survey (Loyens et al.) and an overview of key literature (Hartley et al.). Only one paper is comparative, between police and other services and sectors including the private sector (Loyens et al.).

The papers in this special issue are all from one region (Europe) and share many commonalities in their political-institutional contexts (liberal democracies). This is the effect of the cumulative impact of the outcomes of double-blind peer review of individual papers, not a deliberate strategy. As the field advances, it is highly desirable to construct a more geographically and politically comprehensive picture. The interpretation of policing and implications for public

management are heavily dependent on context, a lesson that we have taken to heart from co-editing this special issue and facilitating numerous conference panels on the same topic. Not only is there a lack of data about policing that can be meaningfully applied across political and/or cultural systems, but there may even be a lack of words and key concepts that capture equally the essence of policing in, say, democratic and authoritarian systems. We are hopeful: the interest elicited by this special issue may be an encouraging indication that highly interesting papers from a wide range of contexts are likely to materialise in future issues of PMR and other publications, enriching the field.

All the empirical papers in this special issue draw on the theme of institutional analysis, which sets policing squarely in the public management field by examining not just the activities of police and other stakeholders, but how the institutional arrangements of policing influence what is prioritised and deprioritised, how activities are perceived, understood, made sense of, managed, and judged. Sorrentino and colleagues' study of community policing shows that different actors have different rationales for community policing (and different ones in different contexts), which leads to particular approaches to performance measurement. Fest and colleagues' study of data professionals shows that this emerging profession (happening in policing as in other public services) shows a tendency to focus on technocratic activities and logics to the detriment of consideration of what public values are enacted through their work, and in fact their work tends, in various ways mapped out in the paper, to distance themselves from public values. This echoes the corporate context for post-employment conflicts of interest analysed by Loyens et al., where integrity officers report largely making their own decisions about the public interest. Both Fest et al. and Loyens et al. argue for stronger institutional support to both monitor but also engage this workforce (or ex-workforce) and to develop protocols, and other institutional processes including debate and discussion, in order to embed public values. As Loyens et al. note, such institutionalisation is important in the changing public sector context, with increasingly blurred boundaries, e.g., in public/private partnerships, where values may become more ambiguous. The interest in institutional processes is captured at an abstract level in Hartley et al.'s consideration of the three problematizing rationales of public management.

The papers all address, in various intriguing ways, aspects of public values and public value, showing that policing throws into relief important questions about what is achieved, and what is lost or at risk of loss for whom and for society as a whole. The Fest et al. paper is suffused with questions of technocratic vs public value outcomes. Loyens et al. discuss the public interest, and how this is ambiguously understood by both national and military police. Both note the lack of active construction of norms about public value/public interest for data professionals and for police in their post-police employment and underline the need to reinforce normative public values. Hartley and colleagues' theoretical examination discusses public value as a contested practice, with outcomes achieved through struggles and contests between different groups in society with different access to power and resources, so that policing is inevitably concerned with equity, justice, and fairness, a salience relevant to other public services. Different values underpin the institutional logics found by Sorrentino et al., with some favouring residents, some favouring the police and some the community. Public trust and legitimacy are closely tied to

public value, as noted by Loyens et al.; Sorrentino et al., and Hartley et al., with Fest et al. signalling troubles ahead for data analysis and management if this matter is not addressed.

The papers also signal that these issues raised across the articles really matter because society is changing. Policing is the canary in the mine, one of the first public services to affect and be affected by economic, social, political, technological, and environmental changes. Digitally enabled services are affecting all public organizations. Data professionals are a new occupational identity for certain public servants (an identity found across all sectors) and an institutional as well as an operational response is called for. Loyens et al. show that society is changing through the increase in public/private collaboration which can muddy the waters of ethics though also create new opportunities, and again an institutional response would be helpful in how to deal with a changing ethical and more ambiguous context. Hartley and colleagues note that rapidly emerging social movements (such as Black Lives Matter) throw up important challenges for policing about trust, legitimacy, justice, and social equity. As societies become more fragmented and polarised, and safety issues rise higher in societies' priorities due to war, climate change, the prospect of further pandemics and changing political systems, then policing increasingly provides insights about the relations between government, public services, and multiple publics. The papers collected here provide rich food for thought, encouragement to engage in further research about policing's intersection with public management, and challenges to established assumptions about the state, society, and its public institutions.

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Disclosure statement

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