

PEOPLEGOV NEWS

The People in Government Lab bi-monthly newsletter



WELCOME

Welcome to the PeopleGov newsletter, a bi-monthly publication with updates on our research and engagement activities. If you would like to (un)subscribe, please email peoplegovlab@bsg.ox.ac.uk.

This term we hosted the penultimate instalment of the PeopleGov Speaker Series, while also preparing for the PeopleGov Conference on 15 July.

We have published blogs on the future of work, a paper on red tape and burnout and celebrated research success for our team members, as well as progressing our core research projects.

Building bridges between governments and academia

In our seventh talk of the PeopleGov Speaker Series on 3 March 2022, Beth Blauer, Executive Director and Co-founder of the Center for Civic Impact at John Hopkins University, and Sabine Junginger, Head of the Competence Center for Design and Management at the Lucerne University, discussed how to strengthen the collaboration between governments and academia.

Four main insights were highlighted. Firstly, the need for scholars to generate data that is useful, timely, and digestible for policy makers. Secondly, the need for better incentives for governments to continue partnerships with academics and vice versa, by recognising the relevance and impact of applied research to bring science to policy making. Thirdly, speakers acknowledged the talent that it is already inside of governments, for example data analysts and data scientists, and the need to continue working with them and developing their skills. Finally, the need to collaborate with governments in the whole research process and policy cycle not just as the end of the research or at the delivery step. Projects need to belong to academics and policy makers and need to be initiated, discussed, and conceptualised together.

This talk is available to view on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/C5I6CXHyH DU>

At a crossroads: mid- to long-term challenges and opportunities in people management

In December 2021, the PeopleGov Lab hosted the first international meeting of the PeopleGov network. The meeting brought together practitioners, scholars, and experts from the public and private sector across the world to reflect on people management challenges and opportunities in the mid- to long term and evaluate key opportunities to improve public servants' motivation, effectiveness, and responsiveness.

Milton Seligman, former Minister of Justice for the Brazilian government, noted in his opening remarks that we are in a time of great transformation. There has been a profound change in the means of production, sales, and logistics of products and services and we are now entering a 'new and frightening' age in which the material, digital and biological worlds become intertwined and interdependent. New technology poses legal, regulatory, and ethical challenges for governments, while a growing power gap makes it both more difficult and more critical to design public policies for social inclusion. To develop, governments must reinvent themselves, collaborate with citizens and the private sector, and strengthen international co-operation. We are at a crossroads and our response now will influence how well we are able to withstand these changes.

To face these changes, which affect every area of life, the public service needs to be agile, adaptable, and innovative. How to build a more flexible and autonomous workforce was therefore a central point of conversation. Low Peck Kem, Chief HR Officer and Advisor of the Public Service Division of the Government of Singapore, shared how the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in less strict adherence to policy within the Singaporean public service, with an increased focus on skills over job descriptions while employees became more willing to collaborate and go beyond their official roles. To sustain this flexibility as the pandemic subsides, her advice was to hire for competencies, not experience, and to protect employees, not the job, by redesigning roles and providing the relevant training.

Ms Low particularly advocated building agility into the workforce through structured job rotation or transfer schemes. In the public service, she explained, it is very common for employees to stay in the same role for fifteen years or more, lacking the opportunity to gain new skills and experiences, whereas employees who change roles every few years both become more adaptable and accept requests for changes and flexibility in the system more easily. She also runs a talent attraction programme, in which she partners with private sector companies with desirable skill sets and sends her top talent to work there for six months, during which time their job is secured and their salary is paid by the government. The programme has had good feedback from both employees and private partners and Ms Low feels that those who have participated return not only with new skills, but also renewed motivation and a sense of gratitude to their workplace.

Dan Honig, Associate Professor of Public Policy at the University College London, explored how to move away from top-down monitoring to allow employees greater autonomy. Remote work is a difficult context for performance management, he explained, because while technology offers more opportunities for control through better monitoring and observation, such control is unlikely to be an effective solution for many people, tasks and environments. 'We will not control ourselves to success' - what, then, is the alternative? Dr Honig suggested a joined-up approach, connecting many of the current challenges in public administration: the more we build trust and communication, he said, the more we can attract and retain people who are committed and can make use of that trust, people to whom we then rightly give autonomy and flexibility, which leads to more adaptable systems. Additionally, he encouraged managers to strengthen peer accountability, especially through incorporating citizens' views of and responses to the public service.

We will continue the conversation around the agenda for people management in public organisations at the PeopleGov Conference on 15 July 2022. We will add details for this event and how to register in the next issue and on our website: <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-programmes/people-government-lab> .

Our publications

J. Fuenzalida, A. Fernández, P. González, L. Gutiérrez, 'Red tape and burnout risks of public service managers', February 2022.
<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/red-tape-and-burnout-risks-public-service-managers>

This paper examines the results of a survey experiment with 375 principals in Chile, based on the numerous requirements they regularly deliver to key educational stakeholders of the country's school system governance. The authors confirmed that red tape leads to public service managers' burnout risks and analysed the extent to which an increase and decrease in red tape impacts different dimensions of public service managers' burnout. Their findings expand the understanding of red tape implications in public service, especially in institutional settings different from those traditionally studied.

S. Leach, 'Together apart: embedding successful remote working practices in the public sector', 14 March 2022.
<https://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/together-apart-successful-remote-working-practices-in-the-public-sector/>

A blog with the Global Government Forum, reviewing our November seminar on the future of work. The article summarises research and experts' views on the future of work in public organisations, exploring employees' appetite for hybrid working post-COVID, telework best practice, and the need to rebuild social capital.

S. Leach, 'Tip of the iceberg: public sector leaders on the shift to remote work and what more is to come', 20 March 2022.
<https://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/tip-of-the-iceberg-public-sector-leaders-on-the-shift-to-remote-work-and-what-more-is-to-come/>

The second part of our seminar summary for the Global Government Forum shares public servants' perspectives on creating a hybrid working culture built on understanding staff and their needs – and one expert's thoughts on the pressures and opportunities around government contracts in this shift to a new way of work.

Keep in touch

You can find our upcoming events, recent talks, publications and research updates on our website:

<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-programmes/people-government-lab>

Email: peoplegovlab@bsg.ox.ac.uk

IMPACTING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Pedro Arcain Riccetto's research on judicial diversity was featured on the front page of Folha de São Paulo - the largest newspaper in Brazil - and in other newspapers such as Valor Econômico, Globo, Correio Braziliense, Istoé Dinheiro, GZH Política, etc., as well as on Conjur and Jota - the two largest legal newspapers in the country. Pedro also presented this research in a press conference broadcast on national TV and radio.

As a result, Brazil's Association of Federal Judges (AJUFE) has formally requested the creation of a committee to look further at the findings and present policy recommendations to improve diversity in the Brazilian Judiciary.

Congratulations Pedro!

