



Experiments in Public Management Research

Interest in experimental research in public management is on the rise, yet the field still lacks a broad understanding of its role in producing substantive findings and theoretical advances. Written by a team of leading international researchers, this book sets out the advantages of experiments in public management and showcases their rapidly developing contribution to research and practice. This book offers a comprehensive overview of the relationship between experiments and public management theory and the benefits for examining causal effects. It will appeal to researchers and graduate-level students in public administration, public management, government, politics, and politics studies.

The key topics addressed are: the distinct logic of experimental methods in the laboratory, in the field, and in survey experiments; how leading researchers are using different kinds of experiments to build knowledge about theory and practice across many areas of public management; and the research agendas for experimental work in public management.

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Experiments in Public Management Research

Challenges and Contributions

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The genesis of this project is in the editors' shared interest in experiments and their collaborative research on substantive topics in public management using these methods. In the course of these activities we came to appreciate the benefits of a book to help set out the role of experimental public management in producing substantive empirical findings, advancing knowledge about theories, and informing policy and practice. This book examines the distinct logic of experimental research, especially for estimating causal effects, and shows how leading researchers are using different kinds of experiment to build knowledge about theory and practice across many areas of public management. A goal of this book is to help develop an agenda for experimental work that recognises both the strengths and limitations of the method for research on public management. This content is intended to be of interest both to those using experiments and to the broader community in public management interested in the contribution of experiments and how they relate to other, more established methods.

We identified a group of researchers currently using experimental methods in innovative ways across a range of topic areas in public management and were delighted when all those approached agreed to be involved. We thank them very much for participating and helping to make this project a reality. The use of the method is expanding rapidly, and we have not sought to include all experimental work but instead hope to show the breadth of the contribution. We are particularly pleased to draw on insights from the disciplines of psychology, political science, and economics and to discuss several different types of experimental method, notably laboratory experiments, survey experiments, and field experiments. However, this book is not only about the considerable opportunities for more use of experiments; it also actively engages with critiques of their use. In this way, it considers both their strengths and limitations and the implications of these characteristics for designing and deploying experiments appropriately.

The overall framework of this book and specific chapters were developed through a two-year process, including presenting ideas and draft chapters at international conferences and workshops. Many people provided valuable comments in this process. We are especially grateful to the Public Management Research Association for permission to run workshops at its 2015 (Minnesota) and 2016 (Aarhus) Public Management Research Conferences. In addition, the ideas were discussed at panels we ran in recent International Research Society for Public Management conferences (2015 in Birmingham, UK, and 2016 in Hong Kong). We are also grateful for the support of our universities, including the Center for Experimental and Behavioral Public Administration at Rutgers University, and grateful to the UK Economic and Social Research Council for supporting public management research using experiments at the University of Exeter. The European Union also funded some of the editors' collaborative research on which this book draws, including as part of the project Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future (COCOPS) funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme.