

## **Positive Management as a means to deal with VUCA**

### **Panel Organisers**

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#### **Presenters (\*) and c-authors**

##### **The role of job descriptions, performance management and accountability on change processes**

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##### **The role of social and supervisor support in managing the effects of workplace bullying and promoting engagement**

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##### **Leadership and organisational factors that foster resilient behaviours in workplaces**

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## **Positive Management as a means to deal with VUCA**

Public agencies often need to change, but have great difficulty doing so. This symposium explores the value of positive management, which includes positive dynamics, attributes and outcomes as a means to strengthen opportunities for change. In doing so, it seeks to help address many of the gaps in the Public Administration (PA) change management literature.

A review of 133 organizational change papers between 2000 and 2010 identified seven such gaps (Kuipers et al., 2014). These gaps were: 1) the use of different theoretical approaches (in particular integration of institutional and generic change management literature); 2) in-depth empirical research across varying contexts; 3) a stronger focus on implementation from a practitioner perspective; 4) identifying success or failure-contributing factors; 5) Leadership, and 6) interactive effects of micro- and sector-level change; and 7) comparative research such as between sectors and between national contexts (Kuipers et al., 2014).

Some progress has been made in these areas, particularly regarding interactive effects micro and sector level features. For instance, Bakker (2015) explored micro level factors such as public sector motivation and engagement, and the meso level factor of resource inadequacy. In a similar vein, Brunetto et al (2015) studied the rise of work harassment that accompanies resource inadequacy.

While studies of detrimental factors such as resource inadequacy are important, an omission in many public administration studies is the role of positive organisational features as effective levers for practitioners to enact change. In contrast, the management of change literature has identified a number of positive features such as psychological capital. This symposium addresses positive organisational change in public sector organisations, and in doing so seeks to address many of the research areas called for by Kuipers et al. (2014), such as leadership, interactions across levels, practitioner orientations, and success or failure factors. Positive organisational change theory recognises the paradox that while organisational life has both positive inclinations (such as in judgements about ourselves and the future), there is also a bias to negative, particularly threatening information (Cameron 2008). Thus this symposium also explores the role of negative events in organisational change processes.

The first paper considers the role of fundamental HR practices on organisational change processes, specifically the relationships between job descriptions, performance management and accountability. Qualitative research data is used to argue that change is more probable when the accountability lines and governance are clearer, and that one contributing factor to a less positive change process is the lack of clarity regarding people management in many job descriptions (Guidice, Mero, Matthews and Greene, 2016; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2004). Moving away from job descriptions as list of inputs and redrafting as outcomes and outputs statements is discussed as a way forward. This paper has strong practitioner implications, identifies success or failure factors, and parallels the management of change literature.

The second paper examines the consequences of negative workplace behaviour such as bullying on the work engagement of public sector employees in Vietnam. Data were collected from 207 public sector employees in Vietnam. The findings showed that social support plays

an important role in reducing workplace bullying, and that perceived organizational support is a key factor in reducing job-related stress. Both types of support are necessary in enhancing the positive work engagement of these public sector employees. These practitioner relevant findings point to different types of support as helps to organisational change, and bullying stress as likely hindrances to change. This in depth empirical research, outside of the Anglo Saxon context that dominates much PA literature, will help address bullying as a failure contributing phenomenon and leadership support as a success contributing phenomenon.

The third paper explores leadership and organisational factors that foster resilient behaviours in workplaces, an important positive behaviour to support organisational change (Kuntz, Näswall et al. 2016). This mixed methods study quantitatively explores the role of paradoxical leadership, public service motivation, and social support to enable resilient behaviours. Subsequent qualitative work identifies specific leadership competencies and behaviours, presented as paradoxes, that foster resilience. Harmful leadership behaviours are also identified. This practitioner useful paper will discuss how macro and meso level phenomenon influence micro level behaviours.

Presenters in this symposium will share their thinking on effective change management in public sectors, based on research conducted in Vietnam, Australia, and New Zealand – all with public sectors grappling with VUCA. The use of diverse methodologies will, we believe, add an added richness to this panel. This symposium will help address many gaps in current research, in particular practical implications, different contexts, and the application of ideas from the change management literature in public institutions.