



Governing the purple zone: How politicians influence public managers



Benedetta Bellò *, Alessandro Spano

Department of Economic and Business Sciences, University of Cagliari, via Sant'Ignazio, 84, Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 September 2014

Accepted 26 April 2015

Available online 16 May 2015

Keywords:

New political governance
Politics-administration dichotomy
Political influence
Managerial autonomy
Managerial power
Managerial responsibility

ABSTRACT

One of the issues raised by the New Political Governance (NPG) is the independence of senior management from politicians in public sector organizations. This article investigates how politicians influence managerial activities by providing empirical evidence for the existence of a deep form of politicization and a partisan management of public service in Italy. This relationship is also called the “purple” zone, where the “blue” of political strategy and the “red” of public administration merge in “strategic conversation”.

Based on the results obtained from a questionnaire that was completed by 568 public managers, results show that they perceive a political influence on the decision-making process, the setting of action plans, and the existing rewards/promotions policies. Managers also believe that politicians influence what objectives must be given priority, thus undermining considerations of the outputs of the decision-making process (i.e., the planned objectives). In addition, managers believe that the equity of the evaluation system is not guaranteed due to the influence of politicians. The article also proposes a categorization of public managers based on two dimensions related to the influence of politicians on the activities of public managers: (1) managerial responsibility and (2) managerial autonomy/power to act on this responsibility.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The conflicting role of politicians and administrative staff has been debated extensively by public administrations and by public management scholars. The politics-administration dichotomy remains a formally accepted and frequently used model in many advanced countries, where the public sector is supposed to be based on a sharp distinction between politicians and administrative staff functions. Administrative staff are in charge of devising the best means to achieve the goals set by politicians, and public administration should work in the same way in any kind of regime, provided that the ends are clear. “Tell me what you wish to achieve”, the public administration scientist might say, “and I will tell you what administrative means are best designed for your purposes” (Dahl, 1947, p. 3).

However, over the years, this model has proven incapable of

capturing the reality of the public sector, where the distinction between political and administrative staff is more theoretical than real.

Two key elements of New Public Management (NPM) are the primacy of political representatives over public servants and the implementation of managerial principles in public sector organizations (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991). Aucoin (1990) stated that the idea of the struggle between elected politicians and public servants has been very appealing, particularly among politicians, and has resulted in the need to reassert the primacy of politicians over bureaucrats. With respect to the implementation of managerial principles, which is related to managerialism, this element is based on the assumption that private sector management is superior to public sector management. NPM reforms attempted to empower public managers on the one hand and to assert stronger political control over public managers on the other hand, leading to a paradox (Aucoin, 2012). However, the tendency to reinforce political control over management acquired a different meaning and was transformed into a form of politicization that infringed on the traditional values of impartiality and non-partisan management in the public sector, giving rise to what Aucoin named *New Political*

* Corresponding author. Department of Economic and Business Sciences, University of Cagliari, Viale S. Ignazio 84, 09123 Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy. Tel.: +39 0706753403; fax: +39 070 6753321.

E-mail address: benedetta.bello@gmail.com (B. Bellò).

Governance (NPG) (Aucoin, 2012). Politicization concerns “the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards, and disciplining of members of the public service” (Peters & Pierre, 2004, p. 2), even if some level of political involvement in personnel matters is considered appropriate, as suggested by Peters and Pierre (2004). However, the more recent concern about politicization implies a sense that those bounds of acceptability have been breached. Thus, politicization is associated with the “use of public service for political purposes” and the “partisan appointment of senior public servants” (Mulgan, 1998, p. 3; Weller, 1989, p. 371; Williams, 1985, p. 48). Those senior public servants, who are perhaps vulnerable to concerns about employment insecurity, are suspected of being too intimidated to tender independent and fearless advice. As a result, these public servants are labeled victims of the “yes minister” syndrome (Amosa, 2008).

The issue of the independence of public managers from elected politicians has attracted increased interest from scholars and citizens and remains relevant in the current debate over the public sector. However, limited empirical evidence is available concerning how politicization and the influence of politicians over managers actually occur. Moreover, most studies on NPG focus on Anglo-Saxon countries, neglecting countries like Italy, where studies on this topic are essentially absent (Ongaro, 2008).

The research questions have consequently been formulated as follows:

- (1) How do politicians influence managerial activity in Italian Regions?
- (2) What is the impact of this political influence on the level of responsibility and autonomy of managers?

This article reports the results of a study that aimed to investigate the influence of politicians on managerial activities; this article provides empirical evidence based on a questionnaire that was administered to public managers in Italian Regions. It is organized into six sections: (1) Theoretical Background, in which the main features of the politics-administration dichotomy, the NPG and the issue of autonomy and responsibility, are addressed; (2) Italian context; (3) Methods; (4) Results, in which empirical evidence concerning the manner in which politicians are perceived to influence managerial activity is provided; (5) Discussion, in which a categorization of public managers based on two dimensions (i.e., autonomy and responsibility) is proposed; and (6) Conclusions and future perspectives.

2. Theoretical background

The origin of the politics-administration dichotomy dates back to the 1880s, but interest in this issue reached its height in the decade between 1927 and 1936 (Roberts, 1994).

In the literature, the prevailing view holds that the dichotomy model is obsolete, although a small number of scholars believe that this model remains useful and valid. For example, Montjoy and Watson (1995) argue that the model is intended to be a conceptual distinction that underlies the theory of democratic accountability rather than a guide to behavior and hold that the model should not be abandoned too hastily. Those scholars also state that a *conceptual* form of this dichotomy exists, which is “used to justify legislative supremacy” and an “institutional form of dichotomy which arises when politics is considered synonymous with patronage and particularistic influence” (Montjoy & Watson, 1995, p. 237). Long (1949, p. 257) considers the dichotomy model the “plague of politics,” and for Hughes (2012), the model is not supported by NPG studies and is more a myth than a reality. Svara

(1998) argues that the politics-administration dichotomy is often considered to be the standard relationship between elected officials and administrators. In addition, an improved way of interacting could lead to a complementary model rather than a dichotomic model. However, both Montjoy and Watson and Svara consider the relationship between politics and administration to be a continuum rather than a sharp separation; it is feasible to imagine that managers play an active role in the policy process and are able to maintain a certain degree of separation (Montjoy & Watson, 1995). In fact, a purple domain of “strategic conversation” between the political prerogatives of elected parliamentarians (in the blue corner) and the responsibilities of career public servants (in the red corner) was suggested by Matheson (1998, p. 9). In this zone where the contractual relationships between politicians and managers have been addressed as the heart of public policy, the separation of roles and responsibilities is not so clear and political will and administrative energy come together. However, some countries are experiencing increased influence from politicians and their political staff on managers. Some of these countries have attempted to limit this problem by increasing the level of managerial autonomy (Peters, 2013) in order to “let the managers manage” (Norman, 2001, 65). Metcalfe and Richards (1987) state that “to manage” means taking responsibility for the performance of a system and argues that autonomy is a precondition for effective management. In fact, according to Behn (1997), public managers face different types of responsibilities: (1) achieving public purposes, (2) setting a clear definition of success, (3) designing an overall strategy for achieving their purposes, (4) being analytical about everything, (5) paying attention to the details of implementation, (6) influencing people and creating a favorable climate of public opinion, (7) choosing between exploiting their luck or staying focused on their public purposes and (8) improving the organization. However, according to Mussari (2005), it is not possible to hold someone responsible for the results of an organization, function or service without making him/her autonomous.

In the purple zone, policy and administration intersect, creating tension. Public managers are often required to take personal responsibility for the achievement of results (Hughes, 2012). At the same time, it is necessary to grant public managers enough autonomy to choose how to organize inputs to deliver results (Norman, 2001). This requirement was suggested by the NPM, which coupled accountability (and the responsibility to be accountable) with autonomy, emphasizing that public managers must be autonomous and accountable to both political executives and the public (Feldman & Khademian, 2001).

The NPM shifted the focus to performance, which became the main element in holding public managers accountable (Aucoin, 2012). In fact, the challenge is to enhance and safeguard impartiality and management performance in the context of forces that increase politicization and increase the risk of political corruption (Aucoin, 2012), which affect political management by increasing transactional costs and creating barriers to political change (DiRienzo, 2010).

NPG is the new paradigm that brought attention to the independence of top management from politicians in public sector organizations; in fact it, has a direct bearing on the tension between the need of controlling over bureaucracy, while also allowing public managers sufficient flexibility and autonomy to exercise discretion, judgment, and professional expertise in their job.

According to Aucoin (2012), NPG constitutes a corrupt form of politicization insofar as governments seek to use and misuse, and even abuse, the public service in the administration of public resources and the conduct of public business to better secure a partisan advantage over their competitors (Campbell, 2007). “NPG is characterized by four main features: the integration of executive

governance and the continuous campaign, partisan-political staff as a third force in governance and public administration, a personal politicization of appointments to the senior public service, and an assumption that public service loyalty to, and support for, the government means being promiscuously partisan for the government of the day" (Aucoin, 2012, p. 179).

Among the published studies on political influence and bureaucratic autonomy (Hart & Wille, 2006; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004), a body of American literature analyzed the relationships between political control and bureaucratic autonomy. Most studies focused on institutional forms of influence (i.e., the influence exercised by institutions, such as the US Congress or the president) (Furlong, 1998). Furlong (1998) found a clear distinction between the influence of Congress and the president on the one hand, and the courts, interest groups and the general public on the other hand. He found that Congress and president, which are the two core political principals, exert the highest influence on public organizations. Waterman, Rouse, and Wright (1998) support these findings. The presence of two political masters (i.e., Congress and the President) is a peculiar aspect of the politicization of the civil service in the US, which is different from most western democratic states (Peters, 2004). For example, with respect to the US Congress, the influence and control of Congress over the bureaucracy occurs *ex post* and *ex ante*; the former occurs through the appropriation process, legislation and legislative changes, and oversight hearings (Aberbach, 1990; Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991; Scholz & Wei, 1986; Weingast & Moran, 1983), and the latter occurs through agency design, administrative procedures, audits and compulsory reporting (McCubbins, 1985; McCubbins, Noll, & Weingast, 1987).

In the US, the idea that incumbent politicians are allowed to select their own appointees and place them in top positions in the federal government is more openly accepted than in most European countries, where politicians are required to use more subtle techniques to justify their influence on senior civil service appointments (Peters, 2004). In the US, nearly all top positions in the government are held by political appointees. Thus, the merit pay system that was created after the introduction of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 raised the fear that performance evaluation could be used as a political tool to influence senior executives and make them more responsive than responsible (Peters, 2004).

In the European context, Yesilkagit and van Thiel (2008) examined the influence of political actors on 219 public sector organizations in The Netherlands and found that when policy autonomy is considered, organizations with less autonomy report higher levels of political influence. This result corroborates the previous findings of Furlong (1998) and Waterman et al. (1998). Denmark has experienced increased politicization since the 1970s, even though there is a prevalence of 'functional' (i.e., professional civil servants provide full political service to the incumbent political executive after a political change) rather than 'partisan' (i.e., political appointment) politicization (Christensen, Klemmensen, & Opstrup, 2014).

The influence of politicians on managers may take several forms, such as political appointments, through which elected politicians may attempt to facilitate the implementation of their political decisions by placing people loyal to the party in leading administrative positions (Lewis, 2008; Peters & Pierre, 2004); recruiting policies (Dahlström & Niklasson, 2013); discretion (e.g., the creative interpretation of rules) (Flinders & Buller, 2006); direct pressure on individuals; direct influence on the choice of operating objectives; or even influence on the operating activities, where politicians or members of their staff interfere with managers or even take their places in the decision-making process and resource allocation (Aucoin, 1990).

Institutional changes can reduce the negative effects of NPG; for instance, institutional changes may make the senior executive more independent, starting with independent staffing (Aucoin, 2012). In addition, the capacities of complex modern organizations to realize their objectives can be enhanced by management structures and practices that de-bureaucratize organizational systems (Aucoin, 1990).

However, the issues of managerial independence vs. dependence on politicians' influence and managerial responsibility vs. autonomy remain understudied. This study aims to investigate how politicians influence managerial activities and how this influence occurs in a sample of Italian regional public managers. In addition, this study reveals how this political influence impacts the level of managerial responsibility and autonomy.

3. The Italian context

Any study of the relationship between politicians and managers must clarify the institutional features of the specific context in which the analysis is performed. From an administrative point of view, Italy has a central government and is divided into twenty Regions. The next administrative layers are the Provinces (over 110) and the Municipalities (over 8000).

The Regions have gained more and more autonomy over time, although a strong financial dependency on the central government remains. In the Italian Regions, the executive power is exercised by a cabinet that is appointed by the Regional Prime Minister (called a "Governor"), while the legislative power is in the hands of a Regional Council (i.e., the equivalent of a regional parliament). Both of these bodies are elected by citizens for a five-year term.

When discussing politicians, it should be made clear whether one is referring to cabinet members or to councilors. This study refers to the former, as cabinet members hold the executive power and are the principal players in the planning process and the performance evaluation process of the managers.

The Italian Public Administration is characterized by a strong influence of administrative law, with a hegemonic administrative paradigm (Capano, 2003). This influence is not only an Italian peculiarity but also occurs in other European countries (Kickert, 2011). However, in Italy, the dominance of the law has been so high that there has been a sort of institutionalization of administrative law that has played a central role in all major public sector reforms that occurred in this country. From 1997 to the end of 2000, there were 70 legislative decrees, approximately 200 secondary regulations (i.e., decrees issued by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister or other ministers) and hundreds of other documents, such as circulars, that provided interpretations of the decrees (Capano, 2003; Kickert, 2011). In addition, compared to other "Napoleonic countries" (Peters, 2008), Italy appears to have imported the French model, which is a model of the public sector that was developed by Napoleon I in France, in its entirety, while other countries imported only individual portions of this model (Ongaro, 2008).

Therefore, politicization is far deeper in Italy and other Southern European countries than in Northern Europe. This politicization is characterized primarily by political control of administration, relations between politicians and bureaucrats, political nominations of officials and party patronage and clientelism (Kickert, 2011).

The reforms that occurred in Italy in the late 1990s and early 2000s introduced two important changes concerning the top positions in public organizations. On the one hand, the reforms made it possible to have externally appointed public managers. In some cases, these managers have a temporary contract that is later changed to a permanent position, thus bypassing the formal official route of access to the public administration (i.e., via formal and

competitive examination) (Cassese, 1993). On the other hand, the reforms increased the spoils system, with a requirement that career public managers must be confirmed in their offices by the newly elected government (Ongaro, 2011). As a consequence, managers can obtain tenure or have a renewable or short-term contract that may or may not be extended, depending on performance. Italy has recently experienced an increase in the number of managers hired from outside the Regional Governments (i.e., externally appointed), increasing the dependence of managers on their political masters (Verbaro, 2007), who can determine the duration of their contracts. The main reason for enacting these reforms was the desire of political parties for more influence, jobs and power. One of the main consequences of the reforms was that top officials became highly dependent on and fully loyal to political masters; in addition, managers carry the full responsibility and politicians make the decisions (Cassese, 2002). Individuals who were not confirmed in a managerial position and were instead replaced by loyal followers did not lose their jobs but were instead sent on study leave (Cassese, 2002). Another important side effect of these reforms was the creation of political staff comprised of politically appointed individuals who are loyal to the governing party or coalition; this effect is in line with the French model and differs from the British model, as it implies the presence of some “faceless figures” who are supposed to be serving the government of the day (Cassese, 2002).

Moreover, according to the NPM framework (Barzelay, 2001; Hood, 1991), in many countries (i.e., Anglo-Saxon countries, Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal and many OECD countries), public services have come under increased pressure to improve their efficiency and effectiveness and to reduce demand on taxpayers while maintaining the volume and quality of services supplied to the public. To achieve these objectives, public service organizations have been subjected to the introduction of various “private sector” management techniques. Although Italy was a latecomer and proved to be less effective than its Anglo-Saxon counterparts (i.e., Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008; Ongaro, 2011; Ongaro & Valotti, 2008) in the introduction of NPM reforms and did not emphasize performance management as strongly as other countries (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008), several public service reforms have aimed to introduce NPM principles. One of the latest such reforms (i.e., legislative decree n. 150/2009) required public administrations to introduce principles that include: a new management approach, a new system of evaluation, and incentives and rewards (i.e., monetary and non-monetary) based on performance and merit. Public administrations are also required to set up an Independent Evaluation Unit to evaluate top managers, ensure the adoption of an appropriate evaluation system, and certify performance reports. Moreover, legislative decree n. 150/2009 introduced parameters for public management responsibilities and attempted to foster social advancement by ensuring a higher level of state accountability toward citizens (in both its political and administrative functions) and by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations by improving the quality of public services and increasing both labor and total productivity. The decree was able to attain these objectives through a new management approach that was oriented toward continuous performance improvement, adopting standards and benchmarking, and evaluating customer satisfaction. However, in an NPM framework, the effects of NPM-related reforms on political control can point in different directions. Political leaders can pragmatically use some parts of externally generated reforms or attempt to redefine ambiguous reform elements in a national context in order to reach instrumental goals; on the other hand, political leaders might consciously manipulate the reforms and attempt to further their legitimacy through double-talk or separating talk or through decisions and actions (Brunsson, 1989). In

fact, in this framework, politicians should be given the role of setting political priorities and broad objectives and managers should be free to set more operative objectives, goals and activities to achieve their political priorities and objectives (DiRienzo, 2010). However, sometimes managerial activities in the Italian public sector appear to be influenced by political decisions at the operational level. “The trends we are witnessing show us a public management attentive now only to the *sentiment* of politics, rather than to the principles of impartiality, effectiveness, economy and efficiency, fragile and sometimes isolated due to the strong power of trade unions in the public sector” (Verbaro, 2007, p. 5). Interestingly, in 2007, the Italian Constitutional Court stated that “managers’ functional dependence cannot become political dependence. The manager is subject to political directives and political judgment, and as a result they may be removed. But they cannot be put in precarious conditions and removed without the guarantees of fair procedure” (Sentence 104/2007). This statement indicates that an ‘external’ intervention (i.e., the judicial system) is needed to limit the invasion of politics into managerial activities.

Another important issue is related to managerial responsibility and managerial accountability. In the Italian context, the former concept is a more sensitive issue than the latter concept and the relationship between the two can be analyzed in the context of the principal–agent relationships between elected and non-elected officials, where both dimensions aim to achieve responsiveness (Dunn & Legge, 2000). While accountability can be defined as the obligation of public officials to the public, which requires public officials to explain and justify their use of public office and the delegated powers (Banfield, 1975; Uhr, 1992), responsibility “refers to the charter of delegated powers entrusted to the government, to the grants of power conditionally made available by principals to public officials agents to do the things that they have the capacity to take charge of, act on, or provide” (Dunn, 1999, p. 299). Moreover, accountability “defines the boundaries within which official responsibilities are acted out” (Uhr, 1993, p. 4). This difference is more linked to the formal respect for the law than to the achievement of specific performance goals. In fact, the Italian public sector remains reluctant to hold public managers accountable based on performance (Mussari, 2005) and is so dominated by law and bureaucracy that public managers are more worried about their individual responsibility, particularly legal responsibility, than their accountability toward internal and external stakeholders. More specifically, Italian public managers face primarily two kinds of responsibilities: managerial responsibility and disciplinary responsibility. The first type concerns the achievement of objectives and requires a performance evaluation system to determine whether or not managers have achieved the expected results. The second type refers to the fulfillment of legal and contractual obligations related to the managerial position per se (Papa, 2011). There are also other minor forms of responsibility, such as administrative, civil, and fiscal (Timellini, 2011) responsibility, for which public managers could be reprimanded and punished. On the other hand, very rarely do Italian public managers suffer the consequences of a lack of accountability.

In this context, public managers play a central role in human resource management, defining what tasks are to be completed and what targets are to be reached. Such a role requires greater autonomy than was possible before legislative decree n. 150/2009; however, the reform appears to have ignored the political influence on managerial working behavior. For example, this influence was highlighted by a recent qualitative study (Bellò, 2011) that reported that performance evaluation systems in Italian Regional Governments face many problems caused by strong political influence. Managers appear to fear having their work controlled by politicians, while politicians want to limit managerial power and

functions by threatening to confine managers to positions that do not have a deep impact on the implementation of political priorities or positions that have a limited budget. Political groups would like an administrative class that can be controlled and shaped as they see fit, without anticipating possible negative effects. This situation stands in direct contrast to the existing legislation, which aims to provide managers with more power and autonomy, as well as more responsibilities.

Spano, Marnelli, and Buccellato (2010) reported an international comparison based on previous research (Kelly, Mulgan, & Muers, 2002; O'Flynn, 2007; Ongaro, 2008, 2011; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000) that demonstrated that in Italy, as in other countries, new legislation (from the 1990s) has stimulated the development of the NPM principles. Since this period, management evaluation systems have been introduced and implemented, the culture of evaluation has been stimulated (Sanderson, 2001), managers have started to show what is needed to acquire/develop competencies in the field of evaluation and the literature has provided more concrete ways (e.g., the model of Webb & Blandin, 2006) of combining performance evaluation and organizational effectiveness. However, Italy remains a latecomer and is less effective than other countries in the introduction of NPM reform; many changes must be implemented in order to reach the level of development of the most advanced countries (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008; Ongaro, 2011; Ongaro & Valotti, 2008).

4. Methods, sample and measures

4.1. Procedure

A questionnaire was administered to the census of public sector managers of all Italian Regions (approximately 3400 individuals) through an online system that was built *ad hoc* for the online survey. The Italian legislation on transparency requires all public organizations to publicize managers' details (i.e., name, e-mail address, phone number, and salary) on the organization's website. We sent the questionnaire to all of the published managers' e-mail addresses that we found on the regional websites.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS software.

4.2. Measures

The questionnaire (see Appendix A for details) contained the following sections:

- (1) Personal data: gender, age, education, role, and organizational tenure;
- (2) Six multiple choices questions about planning and evaluation systems: what are the characteristics of the objectives assigned to managers, who sets these objectives (i.e., higher ranking managers or politicians), who evaluates managers (i.e., higher ranking managers or politicians), when and how often are managers evaluated, and what tools are used for the evaluation;
- (3) Ten items that focus on political influence on (a) managerial activities, (b) the evaluation system and (c) the activities of the Independent Evaluation Unit after legislative decree n. 150/2009 that were designed *ad hoc* (see the appendix for details) based on the results presented in a previous paper (Bellò, 2011).
- (4) Three items focused on the consequences of the changes introduced by legislative decree n. 150/2009 that were built *ad hoc* based on the results presented in a previous paper (Bellò, 2011).

- (5) Three items from the third factor of the POPS scale (Pay and Promotion Policies; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) that are focused on the influence of politicians on the reward and promotion system.

For all of the items included in the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their perception on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree with the listed statements.

4.3. Sample

More than 1000 managers filled out the questionnaire (approximately 33%, which is consistent with the 34.6% average response rate for electronic surveys that was reported by Cook, Heath, & Thomson, 2000), but only 568 questionnaires were fully completed and usable for the analysis.

As this study employs a self-selected sample, we considered auxiliary variables to reduce representativeness problems. The auxiliary variables that are typically used are gender, age, marital status and region of the country (Bethlehem, 2009). In our case, the most relevant auxiliary variable is the regional distribution because according to the literature, significant differences exist among Italian Regions (Di Liberto & Sideri, 2015; Putnam, 1993). We found that the respondents' distribution is representative of the census, as it has almost the same percentage distribution among the Italian Regions (see Table 1). This finding was also supported by a χ^2 analysis; based on the overall response rate, we computed the expected response rate for each region and compared that rate with the effective regional response rate. Based on this analysis, the two distributions are similar, with a probability of error lower than 5%.

The sample was composed as follows:

- 66% of respondents were men;
- 39% of respondents were more than 55 years old, 31% were between 51 and 55 years old, 16% were between 46 and 50 years old, and the remaining 14% were under 46 years old;
- 68% of respondents were graduates and 27% also had a post-graduate specialization (i.e., master, Ph.D., etc.);
- 54% of respondents had worked for the same organization for more than 20 years, 24% had worked for the same organization for a period between 11 and 20 years, 11% had worked for the same organization for a period between five and ten years and the remaining 11% had worked for the same organization for less than five years;
- 34% of respondents had been managers for less than five years, 25% were managers for a period between five and ten years, 25% were managers for a period between 11 and 20 years, and the remaining 16% were managers for more than 20 years.

5. Results

In order to give a general picture of how the evaluation systems have been structured and how they are characterized, we provide some descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies, means and standard deviations) that revealed that 88% of managers who completed the questionnaire are assigned objectives by their hierarchic superiors, who typically evaluate them only once a year. The remaining managers are assigned objectives by politicians or other superiors. Managers are typically evaluated based on objectives achieved, organizational behaviors, and managerial and professional competencies, but they are not evaluated based on their growth potential.

With respect to how objectives are defined, managers state that they comply with the requirements enacted by the legislation;

Table 1
Respondents' distribution.

Regions	Questionnaires sent (%)	Questionnaires received (%)	Regions	Questionnaires sent (%)	Questionnaires received (%)
Abruzzo	2%	2%	Lombardy	6%	7%
Aosta Valley	4%	4%	Marche	2%	2%
Apulia	5%	4%	Molise	2%	3%
Basilicata	2%	1%	Piedmont	4%	6%
Campania	4%	4%	Sardinia	4%	6%
Calabria	7%	5%	Sicily	27%	27%
Emilia	4%	5%	Tuscany	4%	4%
Friuli	4%	4%	Trentino	1%	0%
Lazio	6%	5%	Umbria	2%	2%
Liguria	3%	3%	Veneto	6%	5%

thus, the objectives appear to them to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Oriented, Flamholtz, 1996). According to our findings, the systems seem to formally comply with the main features of the new legislation and, in general, to the management control systems (Flamholtz, 1996). Politicians seem not to be involved in the planning system or in the evaluation process.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations we provide in order to address our research questions and explain: (1) how politicians are influencing managerial activity according to the managers' perception, and (2) under what conditions managers perceive themselves to be more responsible for the achievement of their objectives acting autonomously according to their responsibility. In particular, referring to the second issue we found that, especially after the changes introduced by legislative decree n. 150/2009, managers perceived themselves to have greater responsibility ($M = 3.70$; $SD = 1.04$) but not enough autonomy and power ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 0.98$) to act on this responsibility; in general, the managers appeared to be unsatisfied with the performance evaluation systems used in their Regions ($M = 2.25$; $SD = 0.94$).

More specifically, with respect to the two dimensions of responsibility and autonomy, a cross-tab analysis revealed that managers appear to be divided into four types (Fig. 1). No managers stated that they have high autonomy and low responsibility, 69 managers stated that they have high responsibility and high autonomy, and 61 managers stated they have low responsibility and low autonomy; the majority of managers (438 individuals) believe that they have high responsibility and low autonomy. This shows that the vast majority of managers seem to face a paradox: on the one hand, they are not just held accountable but even responsible for what they do, but on the other hand the 'let the managers manage' motto does not apply to them.

With respect to political influence (RQ1), even if managers perceive that the political-administrative separation of competencies is well defined ($M = 2.65$; $SD = 1.15$), they also perceive that politicians have influence on the decision-making process ($M = 2.84$; $SD = 1.20$) and on the setting of action plans ($M = 2.81$; $SD = 1.19$). In addition, managers believe that even if the evaluation unit is formally independent from political influence ($M = 2.87$; $SD = 1.29$), the equity of the evaluation system cannot be guaranteed ($M = 2.39$; $SD = 1.00$); thus, the evaluation system is perceived as unable to promote and foster merit ($M = 2.23$; $SD = 1.03$). Moreover, managers perceive that politicians are not objective in evaluations ($M = 2.78$; $SD = 1.18$) and that they influence which objectives must be given priority ($M = 2.91$; $SD = 1.04$), thus undermining the importance of the outputs of the decision-making process (i.e., the planned objectives). Managers also believe that the reward and promotion system is influenced by politicians ($M = 2.58$; $SD = 1.10$). The mean values of managers from different regions do not differ significantly. These data demonstrate that managers perceive a pervasive political influence, in several forms, even in those activities that should be immune from political interference and for this reason even more deceitful. In particular, political intervention undermines the fairness of the evaluation system.

A correlation analysis, performed in order to understand under what conditions the level of autonomy and responsibilities perceived by managers changes (RQ2), revealed that managers perceive themselves to have greater responsibility, especially when the political-administrative separation of competencies is well defined ($r = .125^{**}$), when the evaluation unit is independent from political influence ($r = .133^{**}$) and is able to guarantee the equity of the evaluation system ($r = .122^{**}$), and when the evaluation system is perceived as able to promote and foster merit ($r = .151^{**}$).

Table 2
Means, standard deviations and correlations.

V	M	SD	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
A	2.65	1.15	-												
B	2.87	1.29	.326**	-											
C	2.39	1.00	.329**	.489**	-										
D	2.23	1.03	.367**	.364**	.429**	-									
E	2.78	1.18	-.294**	-.174**	-.211**	-.218**	-								
F	2.84	1.20	-.147**	-.157**	-.136**	-.150**	.196**	-							
G	2.81	1.19	-.386**	-.267**	-.126**	-.249**	.322**	.564**	-						
H	2.46	1.20	-.353**	-.226**	-.206**	-.223**	.475**	.179**	.290**	-					
I	2.42	1.17	-.328**	-.343**	-.171**	-.221**	.351**	.428**	.501**	.336**	-				
J	2.91	1.04	-.016	-.107*	-.054	-.068	.156**	.216**	.170**	.098*	.253**	-			
K	3.70	1.04	.125**	.133**	.122**	.151**	.031	.036	.057	.098*	.011	.015	-		
L	3.68	0.98	-.375**	-.327**	-.353**	-.558**	.104*	.142**	.244**	.148**	.246**	.059	-.293**	-	
M	2.25	0.94	.352**	.329**	.503**	.515**	-.330**	-.137**	-.185**	-.290**	-.261**	-.029	.118**	-.299**	-
POPS	2.57	1.10	.379**	.257**	.192**	.299**	-.339**	-.198**	-.255**	-.374**	-.319**	-.160**	.036	-.228**	.294**

* Indicates a significant effect on the $p < .05$ level.

** Indicates a significant effect on the $p < .01$ level.

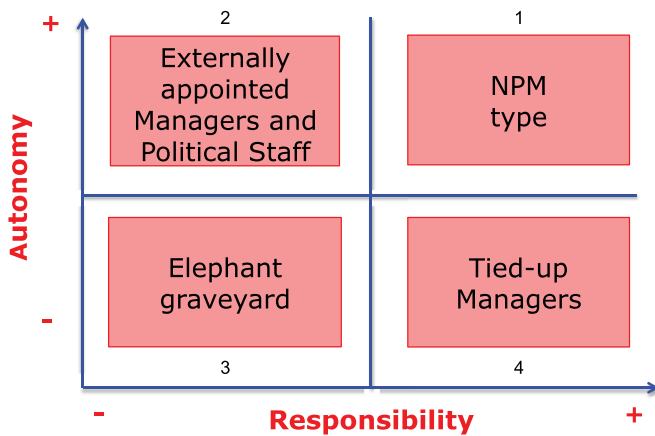


Fig. 1. Public managers' autonomy and responsibility.

Moreover, when managers perceive that politicians are not objective in evaluations ($r = .104^*$) or that politicians influence the decision-making process ($r = .142^{**}$), the setting of action plans ($r = .244^{**}$), the evaluation system (determining its inequity) ($r = .148^{**}$) and managers' evaluations ($r = .246^{**}$), they also perceive themselves as not having enough autonomy and power to act on their increased responsibility. In contrast, the perceptions among managers that the political-administrative separation of competencies is well defined ($r = -.375^{**}$), that the evaluation unit is independent from political influence ($r = -.327^{**}$), able to guarantee the equity of the evaluation system ($r = -.353^{**}$) and able to promote and foster merit ($r = -.558^{**}$), and that there is no political influence on the decision to assign rewards and promotions ($r = -.228^{**}$) are negatively correlated with the perception of not having enough autonomy and power. It is interesting to note that the clearer the managers' role is and the better the evaluation system works, the higher is the perceived responsibility; moreover, when managers perceive that there is a separation of the political and managerial spheres, they also believe to have more autonomy and power to act. On the other hand, there is a clear inverse relationship between political influence in manager's activities and their perceived autonomy. This suggests that managers perceive themselves as having limited autonomy when the political interference occurs.

Finally, managers appear to be satisfied with the performance evaluation system when the political-administrative separation of competencies is well defined ($r = .352^{**}$), when the evaluation unit is independent from political influence ($r = .329^{**}$) and is able to guarantee the equity of the evaluation system ($r = .503^{**}$), and when the evaluation system is perceived as able to promote and foster merit ($r = .515^{**}$), but managers are not satisfied with the performance evaluation system when they perceive that politicians are not objective in evaluations ($r = -.330^*$) or when they perceive that politicians influence the decision-making process ($r = -.137^{**}$), the setting of the action plan ($r = -.185^{**}$), the evaluation system (determining its inequity) ($r = -.290^{**}$) and managers' evaluations ($r = -.261^{**}$). These are consistent with the previous results, showing that managers are satisfied with the evaluation system when it is not influenced by politicians.

Although some of the Pearson correlation values are not high, they are highly significant (**). These findings support the obtained results that indicate that managers perceive that political influence occurs through different tools, such as interventions in planning and evaluation processes, particularly when the evaluation processes is not perceived to be fair and independent, as these factors have an impact on reward and promotion policies. In addition,

individuals perceive that their level of responsibility and autonomy is related to the level of political influence. Further, perceived responsibility is higher when a clear separation exists between the managers' role and the politicians' role. With respect to autonomy, the higher the political influence in the evaluation and planning processes is perceived to be, the less managers perceive themselves to be autonomous.

6. Discussion

This article provides evidence concerning how politicians influence managerial activities in Italian Regions. The results are consistent with [Auccoin's \(2012\)](#) ideas related to the relationships between politicians and managers and provide an example of how NPG is shaping the public administration in the Italian context.

This article also confirms the results of the above-mentioned qualitative study ([Bellò, 2011](#)), which reported that performance evaluation systems in Italian Regional Governments face many problems due to a strong political influence. Moreover, even if the evaluation units are intended to be independent, those units are strongly influenced by politicians. This situation does not respect the meritocratic criteria for bestowing promotions and making appropriate evaluations.

Surprisingly, we found no significant differences among the twenty Italian Regions, although Italy is characterized by profound differences among the different regions and between the northern and the southern areas of the country ([Putnam, 1993](#)). In his seminal study on the performance of Italian Regions, [Putnam \(1993\)](#) found significant differences in performance, due to a number of reasons, such as economic, social and political traditions and the regional reforms that occurred during the 1970s, which exacerbated the historical disparities between North and South Italy ([Putnam, 1993](#)). The North–South differences in economic performance indicate that the best-performing institutions are located in the northern areas and the worst-performing institutions are located in the southern areas of the country; a significant portion of this gap is due to differences in the quality of institutions and due to the role of historical institutions ([Di Liberto & Sideri, 2015](#)).

In addition to the North–South gap, differences also exist among individual regions ([Milio, 2007](#)). We expected to find a stronger political influence in southern regions due to the traditional, atavic gap between northern and southern Italy; public managers from southern regions, which are poorer and have higher unemployment rates than the northern regions of the country, are considered to be particularly sensitive to political interference in order to secure their jobs and careers ([Cassese, 2002](#)). A possible explanation for the absence of identified differences is the combined effect of a legal approach (that made performance evaluation more of a legal requirement than a useful managerial tool) and widespread, borderless politicization.

The basic feature of the politics-administration dichotomy is that politicians set the fundamental priorities and policies, and managers cascade those priorities into more specific and operational objectives. In fact, although this dichotomy is to some extent a myth ([Hughes, 2012](#)) and administrative and political matters are intertwined, a difference in the functions of these entities remains. Thus, in the same way that politicians are free to choose the priorities they believe are most important to citizens, managers should be free to decide how to proceed to achieve the required outputs and outcomes. However, this expectation is contradicted by our findings, as managers in Italian Regions reported political influence in their decision-making and operating activities, which restricts their autonomy when deciding how to fulfill their obligations, even if they appear to have full managerial responsibility.

With respect to the first research question on how the political influence on managerial activity takes place in Italian Regions, our analysis provides evidence concerning how this influence occurs. Politicians formally respect the traditional dichotomy but continue to exercise their influence or even intrude on managers' activities in order to influence managerial behavior and make managers more responsive to the political will, through the following processes:

- the goal setting process (e.g., determining what objectives must be given priority);
- the performance evaluation system (i.e., by influencing managers' evaluations).

With respect to the goal setting process, politicians apparently allow managers to decide how to cascade political priorities into more detailed objectives, but after the managers have set their annual plan, politicians ask them to revise this plan to pursue those objectives that they want to prioritize. This political interference has significant side effects, and objectives lose their systemic relationships. In fact, in the cascading process, managers make decisions by considering the links and mutual influences among objectives at different levels. For example, objective 2.1 may be in some way linked to objective 2.2 and to objective 2.3, and all of these objectives may contribute to achieving objective 2. There could also be a predefined sequence, which managers may have set according to a detailed annual plan, so that objective X should be achieved before Y. If one focuses on objective 2.3 and not on the other objectives or fails to respect the cited sequence, the systemic relationships between objectives are diminished.

One may ask why managers do not stick to official plans and act accordingly. In theory, managers should do so, given existing legislation that provides a clear separation between political and managerial functions. However, politicians have the power to make managers behave as they want. First, some managers are appointed by the Regional Cabinet on a temporary basis and can be easily removed or not confirmed in their positions. Such managers can also be moved to another position and/or another Department within the same Regional Government. These changes influence their careers, their salaries and their pensions and superannuation. Thus, managers are very careful to avoid contradicting politicians or doing something that is not consistent with the wishes of politicians. A normative change that was introduced in 2010 (Law Decree n. 78/2010) reinforced this influence. While prior to this change, managers could be removed or not confirmed in their positions only for failing to achieve their objectives or not providing a sound reason for failing to achieve their objectives, now they can be removed even if they perform well. This change surely impacts managerial motivation (Severino, 2010).

Another lever held by politicians is the performance evaluation process. In fact, managers perceive that their performance evaluation is influenced by politicians, even when there is a supposedly Independent Evaluation Unit that aims to evaluate and guarantee a fair evaluation process. The managerial performance evaluation system that is used in the Italian Regions is designed such that each line manager is evaluated by his/her superior, up to the highest level (i.e., the "Director General," who is the administrative head of each regional Department, named *Assessorato*). In turn, the Director General is evaluated by his regional minister, with the cooperation of the Independent Evaluation Unit. The members of the Evaluation Unit are politically appointed, even though they are purportedly appointed for their specific competence in the field. As a consequence, managers perceive that their performance evaluation is neither fully objective nor free from political influence. Thus, managers perceive that the performance evaluation process does not aim to improve performance but to make people more

responsive to the political will. The existing planning process is consistent with this approach. Even when the performance evaluation process is formally working in the right way, it is negated by the manner in which goals are set and pursued. In fact, when planning is poor and when political influence fosters ambiguity (Hofstede, 1981), objectives tend not to be measurable; therefore, the achievement of such objectives may be difficult to evaluate. Moreover, the presence of multiple and conflicting objectives presents a problem, especially when contrasting actions, which are impossible to perform at the same time, are required to achieve such objectives (Locke, Smith, Erez, Chah, & Schaffer, 1994). For example, when politicians request that managers focus on objectives other than the planned objectives, managers are forced to give priority to such objectives, for which they may only have circumstantial responsibility.

These levers appear to be very powerful in influencing managerial behavior to please political wishes. As a consequence, it is not surprising that managers consider themselves to be the "meat in the organizational sandwich" (Hood, 2011, 22), as they must cope with two different forces: (1) political influence and (2) the risk of being given legal responsibility for their decisions. This result allowed us to answer the second research question on the impact of this political influence on the level of responsibility and autonomy of managers. Our statistical analysis demonstrates that the less independent and autonomous the evaluation is perceived to be, the less managers perceive themselves to be free to act. Broadly speaking, managers perceive themselves to have more responsibilities and less real autonomy; this perception is a consequence of political intervention coupled with the present legal framework, which holds managers not only accountable but also legally responsible for their actions. In addition, these two variables (i.e., responsibility and autonomy) have been used to categorize our group of public managers. As shown in Fig. 1, the two variables result in four different managerial types. The first type can be defined as the "NPM type of public manager," with high responsibility and high autonomy. The autonomy and responsibility of managers have both been strengthened due to the reforms that occurred in Italy and brought about what is considered to be a *privatization* of public managers' contracts. In particular, a precise sequence exists: autonomy > evaluation > reward > responsibility (Papa, 2011). The second type is composed of staff who are externally appointed through a political process. Aucoin (2012) emphasizes that the presence of political staff is one of the four main features of NPG. Due to political patronage, this type of manager enjoys more autonomy (but is entirely dependent on political masters) and less responsibility than managers of the fourth type, who have more certainty about keeping their jobs but face several forms of responsibility (Behn, 1997). In some cases, political staff can be more influential than senior public servants (Aucoin, 2012), and according to different authors, an administration run solely by party loyalists is likely to have a severe negative impact on the competence, efficiency, and legitimacy of the public administration (Lewis, 2008; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Rouban, 2005).

The third type includes managers with low responsibility and low autonomy. In some cases, politicians wish to "neutralize" an individual manager who is not willing to openly support the government of the day; thus, politicians place such managers in non-relevant positions, where they cannot obstruct the implementation of political priorities. This behavior is also consistent with NPG, according to which in some cases, "public servants are obstacles to overcome in the pursuit of effective political management" (Aucoin, 2012, 186). According to our findings, this effect can be achieved in two ways. One way is to place a manager in charge of a department or other organizational unit where decisions do not have a deep impact on the implementation of political priorities (for instance,

departments that deal with issues that are not considered important, departments that have a limited budget, or departments that deal with study and research (*Ufficio studi*) (Cassese, 2002). In the second approach, individuals are paid as managers but do not have any managerial tasks. As strange as it may seem, the Italian legislation allows for this to happen. In some cases, individuals who have been hired to be managers do not have managerial positions (Papa, 2011). In their additional comments, some respondents referred to this type of manager as the “elephant graveyard”.

The fourth type is characterized by managers with high responsibility and low autonomy; such managers perceive a strong limitation of their autonomy due to deep political interference in managerial activities, coupled with an increased responsibility (decreed by law) for decisions that are formally made by them but are externally driven. Thus, we named this type of manager “tied-up managers”. This type of manager is also consistent with NPG, and managers report that they feel a constant pressure from politicians that deeply undermines their managerial autonomy. In a way, this low autonomy is an effect of one of the contradictions of the NPM, which aimed at “empowering managers on the one hand and then asserting political control over them on the other” (Aucoin, 1990).

The results of our cross-tab analysis provide evidence for the existence of these four types of managers. We found out that 438 individuals fall into the fourth type, 69 individuals fall into the first type, 61 individuals fall into the third type and 0 individuals fall into the second type. In addition, 412 of the 438 managers of the fourth type are full-time career public managers and 22 have a temporary contract. In the first type (NPM type), 61 individuals are full-time career public managers and 8 have a temporary contract. Finally, 55 of the 61 individuals of the third type are full-time career public managers.

These data confirm Cassese’s (2002) hypothesis, which holds that in Italy, managers carry the full responsibility and politicians make the decisions; we found that 438 managers out of 568 respondents (77%) believe that they have high responsibility and low autonomy. The NPM type, which could be considered a sort of “ideal” type, only includes 12% of respondents. We also found some individuals (11%) of the third type (i.e., the elephant graveyard). We found no individuals of the second type (i.e., high autonomy and low responsibility). Because the questionnaires were administered only to individuals who were hired (with a temporary or a permanent contract) to be managers and because we did not ask externally appointed staff to fill out the questionnaire, we did not find any managers who perceived themselves to have high autonomy and low responsibility. This absence is due to the Italian legislation, according to which both managerial and disciplinary responsibility arise primarily from a contract. However, the presence of this type of “de facto” manager was reported in a previous study (Bellò, 2011) and was also confirmed by the respondents of this study in the open section of the questionnaire.

Given this general picture, the results of our research confirm and corroborate some basic assumptions of NPG and provide empirical evidence for NPG in Italy. Previous research demonstrated that politicians in Italian Regions tend to ‘mortify’ and even ‘choke’ managers with a deep interference in their activity; as a consequence, managers experience limited autonomy and feel powerless (Cerese, 1990).

7. Conclusions

Although the politics-administration dichotomy is sometimes a myth, politicians and managers do play two different roles and should perform different activities. In a Napoleonic country, such as Italy (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000), where the life of public

organizations has been significantly influenced by legislation, with a much stronger focus on the formal respect of the law rather than on the results achieved, responsibility is a more sensitive issue for managers than accountability for performance. As a consequence, managers often consider themselves to be the “meat in the sandwich” and are required to find a delicate balance between catering to political requests, performing their duties and shouldering the responsibilities, risks and legal consequences of their actions.

At the same time, politicians are sometimes worried that the strength of Italian managers is overwhelming and reduces their political freedom. In a way, as theorized by NPG, politicians believe they are the “slaves” of public managers. This sentiment is due in part to the virtual impossibility of firing public managers, who are often considered obstacles to political activity.

The NPM fostered a contradiction, as it aimed to free public managers from centralized control over the use of resources while holding them accountable for results and reaffirming political control and direction (Aucoin, 2012; Hughes, 2012). However, the result was a deep form of politicization and a partisan management of public service, which Aucoin called New Political Governance (Aucoin, 2012).

Although the NPG doctrine is attractive and appealing, limited empirical evidence is available to support this doctrine, especially in the Italian Regional setting. This article aims to reduce this gap by reporting some aspects of the managerial perception of the relationships between politicians and managers in Italian Regions. This study sheds some light on the complicated marriage between politicians and managers. Our survey results are consistent with the theories of Aucoin (2012) and with the basic features of NPG.

In the Italian context, the role of individual performance evaluation is not merely a managerial issue but is also politically and socially relevant. In fact, the immaturity of the Italian public sector with respect to evaluation issues makes it difficult to introduce an evaluation culture that is based on trust and fairness. In addition, the output of evaluations is used primarily to allow the assignment of monetary rewards, which makes public employees particularly sensitive when it comes to their individual evaluations.

Moreover, as strange as it may seem, the Italian legislation sets out the features of a “good” objective. In fact, a specific article of legislative decree n. 150/2009 lists the characteristics of objectives and goals, in essence, telling managers how to set objectives. Objectives must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-oriented. They must also be relevant and congruent with public needs, coherent with the policies and strategies of public organizations, capable of increasing the quality of services and congruent with the available resources. Strikingly, all of these aspects are defined by a piece of legislation rather than being naturally embedded in a wider planning culture, which is clearly lacking in the Italian public sector. This legislation may also be interpreted as a lack of trust between central government and public manager competencies.

The recent scandals in which politicians and public managers were involved in cases of corruption at both the national and local levels have increased the level of citizen mistrust toward politicians and public organizations. Trust is fundamental and one of the most important outcomes of performance management systems influencing the effectiveness of public organizations; it is crucial for proper service delivery (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008). Bellò (2011) has shown that a lack of trust also undermines the relationship between politicians and managers. This relationship is the subject of our ongoing research.

A limitation of this research is that our focus has only been on reporting on managerial perceptions. The voice of the politician has not been heard. As a consequence, these results must be interpreted with caution, as they are based exclusively on the

perceptions of the managers. We are also aware that the use of *ad hoc* measures and items requires a more robust validation.

However, we believe that this article contributes to the existing body of literature on NPG by providing evidence for the validity of some of the assumptions of NPG in Italian Regions with regard to the political influence on managers' activity. In particular, the fact that managers perceive political influence on their behavior and knowing their level of acceptance or resistance to new managerial evaluation systems is an important finding from this research. In addition, because respondents came from across Italy, the results can be considered to be a generalized representation of the political management relationship in regions across the nation.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Gender

1. male
2. female

Age

1. under 35
2. between 36 and 40
3. between 41 and 45
4. between 46 and 50

- 1) What are the characteristics of the objectives assigned to managers?
 1. specific
 2. measurable
 3. attainable
 4. realistic
 5. time-oriented
- 2) Who sets these objectives?
 1. hierarchic superiors
 2. other superiors
 3. politicians
- 3) Who evaluates managers?
 1. hierarchic superiors
 2. other superiors
 3. politicians
- 4) How many times per year are managers evaluated?
 1. once
 2. twice
 3. more than twice; please, specify: ...
- 5) What are the key elements of the evaluation?
 1. objectives achieved
 2. organizational behaviors
 3. managerial and professional competencies
 4. growth potential

Items

		1	2	3	4	5
A	the political-administrative separation of competencies is well defined					
B	the evaluation unit is independent from political influence					
C	the evaluation unit is able to guarantee the equity of the evaluation system					
D	the evaluation system is perceived as able to promote and foster merit					
E	politicians are not objective in evaluations					
F	politicians influence the decision-making process					
G	politicians influence the setting of action plans					
H	politicians influence the evaluation system (and determine their inequity)					
I	politicians influence the managers' evaluations					
J	politicians influence what objectives must be given priority					
K	after L.Dgs. 150/2009, managers have greater responsibility					
L	after L.Dgs. 150/2009, managers do not have enough autonomy and power to act on this responsibility					
M	after L.Dgs. 150/2009, managers are satisfied with the performance evaluation systems used in their Regions					
POPS1	I do not perceive a political influence on the decision to assign rewards and promotions					
POPS2	I have never seen the pay and promotion policies applied politically					
POPS3	When it comes to pay raises and promotion decisions, policies are irrelevant					

(1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = quite agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

5. between 51 and 55

6. over 55

Education

1. secondary school
2. three-year bachelor degree
3. five-year bachelor degree
4. post-graduate specialization (masters, PhD, etc.); please, specify: ...

Role tenure

1. less than 5 years
2. between 5 and 10 years
3. between 11 and 20 years
4. more than 20 years

Organizational tenure

1. less than 5 years
2. between 5 and 10 years
3. between 11 and 20 years
4. more than 20 years

References

- Aberbach, J. D. (1990). *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Oversight*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Amosa, D. U. (2008). The NPM agenda in small developing countries: Employment contracts and politicization in Samoa's public service. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(6), 611–622.
- Aucoin, P. (1990). Administrative reform in public management: Paradigms, principles, paradoxes and pendulums. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 3(2), 115–137.
- Aucoin, P. (2012). New political governance in Westminster systems: Impartial public administration and management performance at risk. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 25(2), 177–199.
- Banfield, E. C. (1975). Corruption as a feature of governmental organizations. *Journal of Law and Economics*, 18(3), 587–605.
- Barzelay, M. (2001). *The New Public Management: Improving Research and Policy Dialogue*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Behn, R. D. (1997). Branch Rickey as a public manager: Fulfilling the eight responsibilities of public managers. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 7(1), 1–33.
- Bellò, B. (2011). *Value creation in Italian Regions through a renewed managers' performance evaluation system*. XVI AIDEA Annual Conference, Value Creation: critical aspects and measurement.

- Bethlehem, J. (2009). *Applied Survey Methods: A Statistical Perspective*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bouckaert, G., & Halligan, J. (2008). *Managing Performance. International Comparisons*. Routledge.
- Brunsson, N. (1989). *The Organization of Hypocrisy. Talk, Decisions and Action in Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Campbell, C. (2007). Spontaneous adaptation in public management: An overview. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 20(3), 377–400.
- Capano, G. (2003). Administrative traditions and policy change: When policy paradigms matter. The case of Italian administrative reform during the 1990s. *Public Administration*, 81(4), 781–801.
- Cassese, S. (1993). Hypotheses on the Italian Administrative System. *West European Politics*, 16(3), 316–328.
- Cassese, S. (2002). Le nouveau regime de la haute fonction publique en Italie: une modification constitutionnelle. *Revue Française d'Administration Publique*, 104, 677–688.
- Cerese, F. P. (1990). *Un'amministrazione bloccata. Pubblica amministrazione e società nell'Italia di oggi*. Milan: FrancoAngeli.
- Christensen, J. G., Klemmensen, R., & Opstrup, N. (2014). Politicization and the replacement of top civil servants in Denmark. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 27(2), 215–241.
- Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thomson, R. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in Web- or Internet-based surveys. *Educational & Psychological Measurement*, 60(6), 821–826.
- Dahl, R. (1947). The science of public administration: Three problems. *Public Administration Review*, 7(1), 1–11.
- Dahlström, C., & Niklasson, B. (2013). The politics of politicization in Sweden. *Public Administration*, 91(4), 891–907.
- Di Liberto, A., & Sideri, M. (2015). *European Journal of Political Economy*, 38, 12–41.
- DiRienzo, C. E. (2010). Quality of political management and the role of corruption: A cross-country analysis. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33(14), 832–842.
- Dunn, D. D. (1999). Mixing elected and nonelected officials in democratic policy making: Fundamentals of accountability and responsibility. In A. Przeworski, S. C. Stokes, & B. Manin (Eds.), *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (pp. 297–325). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunn, D. D., & Legge, J. S., Jr. (2000). Local government managers and the complexity of responsibility and accountability in democratic governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 11(1), 73–78.
- Feldman, M. S., & Khademian, A. M. (2001). Principles for public management practice: From dichotomies to interdependence. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 14(3), 339–362.
- Flamholtz, E. (1996). Effective organizational control: A framework, applications, and implications. *European Management Journal*, 14(6), 596–611.
- Flinders, M., & Buller, J. (2006). Depoliticisation: Principles, tactics and tools. *British Politics*, 1(3), 293–318.
- Furlong, S. R. (1998). Political influence on the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy speaks. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 8(1), 39–65.
- Hart, P., & Wille, A. (2006). Ministers and top officials in the Dutch core executive: Living together, growing apart? *Public Administration*, 84(1), 121–146.
- Hofstede, G. H. (1981). Management control of public and not-for-profit activities. *Accounting, Organization and Society*, 6(3), 193–211.
- Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1), 3–19.
- Hood, C. (2011). *The Blame Game. Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hughes, O. E. (2012). *Public Management & Administration. An Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kacmar, K. M., & Carlson, D. S. (1997). Further validation of the perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS): A multiple sample investigation. *Journal of Management*, 23(5), 627–658.
- Kelly, G., Mulgan, G., & Muers, S. (2002). *Creating Public Value: An Analytical Framework for Public Service Reform*. Discussion paper prepared by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, United Kingdom.
- Kickert, W. (2011). Distinctiveness of administrative reforms in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Common characteristics of context, administrations and reforms. *Public Administration*, 89(3), 801–818.
- Kiewiet, D. R., & McCubbins, M. D. (1991). *The Logic of Delegation. Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Lewis, D. (2008). *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Locke, E., Smith, K. G., Erez, M., Chah, D., & Schaffer, A. (1994). The effects of intra-individual goal conflict on performance. *Journal of Management*, 20(1), 67–91.
- Long, N. E. (1949). Power and administration. *Public Administration Review*, 9(4), 257–264.
- Matheson, A. (1998). Governing strategically: the New Zealand experience. *Public Administration and Development*, 18(4), 349–363.
- McCubbins, M. D. (1985). The legislative design of regulatory structure. *American Journal of Political Science*, 29, 721–748.
- McCubbins, M. D., Noll, R. G., & Weingast, B. R. (1987). Administrative procedures as instruments of political control. *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization*, 3, 243–277.
- Metcalfe, L., & Richards, S. (1987). *Improving Public Management*. London: Sage.
- Milio, S. (2007). Can administrative capacity explain differences in regional performances? Evidence from structural funds implementation in Southern Italy. *Regional Studies*, 41(4), 429–442.
- Montjoy, R. S., & Watson, D. J. (1995). A case for reinterpreted dichotomy of politics and administration as a professional standard in council-manager government. *Public Administration Review*, 55(3), 231–239.
- Mulgan, R. (1998). Politicization of senior appointments in the Australian public service. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 57(3), 3–14.
- Mussari, R. (2005). Public sector financial management reform in Italy. In J. Guthrie, C. Humphrey, L. R. Jones, & O. Olson (Eds.), *International Public Financial Management Reform: Progress, Contradictions and Challenges* (pp. 139–168). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Norman, R. (2001). Letting and making managers manage: The effect of control systems on management action in New Zealand's central government. *International Public Management Journal*, 4(1), 65–89.
- O'Flynn, J. (2007). From new public management to public value: Paradigmatic change and managerial implications. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 66(3), 353–366.
- Ongaro, E. (2008). Introduction: The reform of public management in France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(2), 101–117.
- Ongaro, E. (2011). The role of politics and institutions in the Italian administrative reform trajectory. *Public Administration*, 89(3), 738–755.
- Ongaro, E., & Valotti, G. (2008). Public management reform in Italy: Explaining the implementation gap. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(2), 174–204.
- Papa, V. (2011). Dirigenze Pubbliche e Responsabilità 'Al Plurale'. Tra oscillazioni normative e giurisprudenziali. *Il Lavoro nelle Pubbliche Amministrazioni*, 24(6), 935–963.
- Peters, B. G. (2004). Politicization in the United States. Politicization of the civil service in comparative perspective: The quest for control. In B. G. Peters, & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 125–138). London: Routledge.
- Peters, B. G. (2008). The Napoleonic tradition. *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(2), 118–132.
- Peters, B. G. (2013). Politicization: What is it and why should we care? In C. Neuhold, S. Vanhoonaeker, & L. Verhey (Eds.), *Civil Servants and Politics: A Delicate Balance* (pp. 12–24). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2004). Politicization of the civil service: Concepts, causes, consequences. In B. G. Peters, & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 1–13). London: Routledge.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2000). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2004). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
- Roberts, A. (1994). Demonstrating Neutrality: The Rockefeller Philanthropies and the evolution of public administration, 1927–1936. *Public Administration Review*, 54(3), 221–228.
- Rouban, L. (2005). Politicization of the Civil Service. In B. G. Peters, & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Administration* (pp. 310–320). London: Sage.
- Sanderson, I. (2001). Performance management, evaluation, and learning in 'modern' local government. *Public Administration*, 79(2), 297–313.
- Scholz, J. T., & Wei, F. H. (1986). Regulatory enforcement in a federalist system. *American Political Science Review*, 80(4), 1247–1270.
- Severino, C. (2010). Il 'management' pubblico: nuovi poteri e responsabilità, ADAPT, Associazione per gli Studi Internazionali e Comparati sul Diritto del lavoro e sulle Relazioni industriali.
- Spano, A., Mameli, S., & Buccellato, A. (2010). *Gli strumenti manageriali per l'attuazione della riforma Brunetta, IV National Workshop Nazionale "Azienda Pubblica"*. Il sistema delle Amministrazioni Pubbliche per un modello di crescita economica sostenibile, 25–26 March 2010.
- Svara, J. H. (1998). The politics-administration dichotomy model as aberration. *Public Administration Review*, 58(1), 51–58.
- Timellini, C. (2011). Responsabilità amministrativo-contabile e danno erariale per errata ed illegittima determinazione del Fondo per la contrattazione integrativa da parte del dirigente del Comune. *Il Lavoro nelle Pubbliche Amministrazioni*, 24(3–4), 560–588.
- Uhr, J. (1992). *Public Accountabilities and Private Responsibilities: The Westminster Word at the Crossroads*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago.
- Uhr, J. (1993). Parliamentary Measure: Evaluating parliament's policy role. In I. Marsh (Ed.), *Governing in the 1990s* (pp. 346–375). Melbourne, Australia: Longman Cheshire.
- Verbaro, F. (2007). *Breve rassegna sulla Dirigenza delle Pubbliche Amministrazioni. Analisi sullo stato del management delle pp.aa. e i possibili interventi per rafforzare i poteri e le funzioni*. http://www.aransicilia.it/publicazioni/Verbaro_BreveRassegna.pdf Accessed 24.07.13.
- Waterman, R. W., Rouse, A., & Wright, R. (1998). The venues of influence: A new theory of political control of the bureaucracy. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 8(1), 13–38.
- Webb, N. J., & Blandin, J. (2006). Evaluating executive performance in the public sector. *International Public Management Review*, 7(1), 98–117.
- Weingast, B., & Moran, M. (1983). Bureaucratic discretion or congressional control?

- Regulatory policymaking in the federal trade commission. *Journal of Political Economy*, 91, 765–800.
- Weller, P. (1989). Politicisation and the Australian Public Service. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 48(4), 369–381.
- Williams, C. (1985). The concept of bureaucratic neutrality. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 44(1), 46–58.
- Yesilkagit, K., & van Thiel, S. (2008). Political Influence and bureaucratic autonomy. *Public Organization Review*, 8(2), 137–153.