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The “Publicness Puzzle” in Organization Theory: A Test of Alternative Explanations of Differences between Public and Private Organizations

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Abstract

“Publicness” is defined as a characteristic of an organization which reflects the extent the organization is influenced by political authority. The concept, operationalized as a series of interval measures, is placed in direct competition with the traditional core definition of publicness as ownership (i.e., formal legal status). Using a sample of research and development laboratories, the two approaches are compared in terms of their ability to explain organizational outputs and process in the context of an explanatory model. The results suggest that both approaches tap unique characteristics of publicness and contribute to a more complete understanding of the role of publicness in the study of organizations.

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