

ARE YOU BEING SERVED? THE RESPONSIVENESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TO CITIZENS' DEMANDS: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION IN ISRAEL

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Research in public administration (PA) is preoccupied with questions of efficiency and effectiveness which are aimed at improving public sector performance. According to the new public management approach, addressing this prominent challenge must rely upon a comprehensive understanding of citizens'/clients' perceptions of public sector operation and the extent to which public organizations are aware of public needs. This paper suggests a theoretical grounding and empirical examination of the relationship between citizens' demands and PA's responsiveness. Participants in the study were 281 residents of a large Israeli city who reported their feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of local government activities in a variety of fields. Results indicate that perceptions of PA's responsiveness are affected by both policy and cultural factors (for example business or social orientation of the public authority, entrepreneurship and initiation of changes, ethics, organizational politics) and by the quality of the human resource system and of public servants (for example quality of leadership and management, quality of employees, general stress when contacting public officials). Implications of the study are discussed in light of the ongoing debate regarding the need for a more responsive and efficient new public management and the difficulties it faces in western societies.

INTRODUCTION

Citizens' control over the operation of public agencies is a core necessity in every democracy. It cannot be attained when there is insufficient knowledge on the fit between what citizens desire and what governments offer. The idea that citizens and rulers have a hidden agreement or 'social contract' was advanced in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By electing a government, people lend, alienate, or give up their power to political rulers on condition that it be used to satisfy certain of their most important needs (Hampton 1986, p. 256). Under such an arrangement, these needs, such as personal security, social order, welfare and prosperity must be delivered by governmental authorities and by the public administration (PA). Governments are elected to serve the people and may not be re-elected if they fail to accomplish minimum requirements. Thus, theoretically, nothing should be more important, either for citizens, poli-

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ticians, or public servants, than to work faithfully and diligently for the sake of society and its members. Otherwise, the social contract becomes useless since some basic domains of democratic regimes no longer exist.

Considering the fact that today, citizens of stable democracies are still committed to this ancient contract, the question of how governments fulfil *their* part of the deal and how sensitive they are to citizens' needs remains unclear. Do governments and public officials really work hard for the public money delivered to them continuously and in increasing amounts? Alternatively, do public officials misuse these resources? What do citizens/clients think of the quality and quantity of the services they receive? Do they really believe that they are being served properly? Answers to these descriptive questions may provide meaningful explanations of how citizens evaluate the responsiveness of PA. More importantly, they may illuminate the main causes leading to changes in such evaluations.

The present study seeks to address these questions and to propose an empirical examination of the public administration-citizens' contract. For that purpose, some plausible explanations for change in PA's responsiveness and in citizens' satisfaction are suggested. The first explanation is based on policy and cultural factors. The second emphasizes human resource considerations and the quality of public servants. Moreover, an attempt is made to estimate the relative contribution of both groups of factors, policy and culture and human resources, to understand PA's responsiveness. This will provide some insights into the question of what is important for citizens when contacting public agencies. Is it policy and cultural motives or alternatively the quality of public servants and the human system which back up this policy?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Responsiveness to citizens' demands

Approaches to the understanding of PA's responsiveness are controversial. Some studies describe responsiveness as, at best, a necessary evil that appears to compromise professional effectiveness and, at worst, an indication of political expediency if not outright corruption (Rourke 1992). According to this line of research, responsiveness damages professionalism since it forces public servants to satisfy citizens even when such actions contradict the collective public interest. To satisfy the public will, short-term considerations and popular decisions are overemphasized, while other long-term issues receive little or no attention at all. However, other studies suggest that democracy would seem to require administrators who are responsive to the popular will, at least through legislatures and politicians if not directly to the people (Stivers 1994; Stewart and Ranson 1994). While responsiveness is frequently considered a problematic concept in PA literature it is undoubtedly critical to politicians, bureaucrats and citizens alike. A responsive politician or bureaucrat must be reactive, sympathetic,

sensitive, and capable of feeling the public's needs and opinions. Since the needs and demands of a heterogeneous society are dynamic, it is vital to develop systematic approaches for its understanding. In many ways this is the key for securing a fair social contract between citizens and rulers.

A clear consensus exists among many scholars and practitioners that the opinions of service receivers need to be taken seriously by policy makers (Palfrey *et al.* 1992; Winkler 1987; National Consumer Council 1986; DHSS 1979). This information can help to: (1) understand and establish public needs; (2) develop, communicate and distribute public services and; (3) assess the degree of satisfaction with services (Palfrey *et al.* 1992, p. 128). Thomas and Palfrey (1996) argue that citizens are the clients and main beneficiaries of public sector operation and thereby should be involved in every process of performance evaluation. In their study, responsiveness of the public sector to citizens' demands is mentioned as an important part of performance *control* since it refers to the speed and accuracy with which a service provider replies to a request for action or for information. According to this definition, speed can refer to the waiting time between citizens' requests for action and the reply of the public agency. Accuracy means the extent to which the provider's response is appropriate to the needs or wishes of the service user. Nonetheless, while speed is a relatively simple factor to measure, accuracy is a more complicated one.

Contrary to the private sector, public service accuracy must take into consideration social welfare, equity, equal opportunities, and fair distribution of 'public goods' to all citizens. Rhodes (1987) and Palfrey *et al.* (1992) suggested these criteria among the values which are additional to efficiency, effectiveness, and service that characterize market-driven processes. To test for accuracy of governmental endeavours one must examine how citizens feel when consuming public services. A well-accepted method is to use satisfaction measures indicating the outcomes of certain activities and the acceptance of public administration actions as fruitful, contributive, equally shared among a vast population, and responding well to public needs.

Responsiveness, accountability, and performance in the public sector

While it is not obvious that the accumulated wisdom of the private sector is transferable to the public sector (Pollitt 1988; Smith 1993), still inevitable interactions between the two spheres are productive for both. However, this study is more interested in how the public sector could benefit from the experience of private organizations in managing large bureaucracies. This question has received much attention in the new public management literature which has been rapidly developed in western societies since the 1980s (Stewart and Ranson 1994). A considerable effort was dedicated to recognizing and defining new criteria that may help in determining the extent to which public agencies succeed in responding to the growing needs of the public. As a result, new public management trends have increased

the interest in specific Performance Indicators (PIs) used in private organizations. It has recommended that they be applied in the public sector (for example Smith 1993; Carter 1989). It was also argued that these indicators could function as milestones on the way to better efficiency and effectiveness of PA.

For example, Smith (1993) mentions two different indicators for measuring public sector performance: internal and external to the organization. Measures of internal performance, such as managerial processes, routines and formal procedures, are of limited interest to ordinary citizens yet are also those which attract more attention in management literature. Their main objective is to enable the central government to secure closer control of devolved management teams (Carter 1989). However, Smith argues that these studies are less concerned with external indicators (outcome-related) which are intended to enhance the *accountability* of public organizations to external interested parties (for example service users, the electorate, taxpayers, central government). The role of such outcome indicators is to furnish external users with information about the consequences of public sector activity so that citizens can make better judgements about the organization's performance.

Following this, Anthony and Young (1984, p. 649) claimed that more active interest in the effective and efficient functioning of public organizations by its governing boards is essential for the improvement of management in non-profit organizations. Citizens' awareness will increase the political pressure placed on elected and appointed representatives on governing boards, thereby enhancing both managerial and allocative efficiency in the public sector. Smith (1993) compares this process of public accountability to stakeholders/citizens, with the role adopted by financial reporting in the private/corporate sector. As in the private sector, increasing external-related outcomes, such as the responsiveness of public authorities to citizens' demands, will have a profound impact on internal control mechanisms, as managers and public servants become more sensitive to their duties and highly committed to serve the people.

Management theory, as well as political science theory, defines this process of 'controlling' or 'monitoring' as the collection and analysis of relevant data about organizations' achievements and the implementation of actions to improve future performance (Thomas and Palfrey 1996). Control and monitoring is frequently identical with accountability when public needs and interests are involved. As was argued by Stewart and Ranson (1994), organizations in the public domain exercise substantial power for which they are accountable. Public accountability must involve a political process which responds to the many voices of citizens/clients. A response or *voice* is defined by Hirschman (1980) as a pure political action compared with an *exit* which represents more of an economical action. Since citizens generally don't have the alternative of exit in a public market, the option of voice becomes more relevant and imminent. Moreover, It seems that western

democracies are facing pressures for greater rather than less accountability on behalf of their citizens. Traditionally, large public bureaucracies use a variety of formal control systems (for example general and internal auditing, accounting, and special departments which deal with citizens' requests and complaints) that are aimed at providing the organization with better information on which to base internal performance indicators. However, hardly any effort has been made to actively obtain external performance indicators such as citizens' opinion of actual public operation and services. Moreover, even when such steps are taken, the main motive is political rather than professional or administrative.

Politics and performance in PA

The political environment of public organizations restricts its professional flexibility and capability to appropriately responding to citizens' demands. As was noted by Palfrey *et al.* (1992, p. 133), 'enhanced awareness of consumers' views offers elected members the opportunity to increase their chances of re-election and prospective members of being elected'. It seems that the political sphere is responsible for the somewhat negative image of responsiveness in the eyes of many administrators and scholars. Since the strongest motive of politicians in every democracy is to be (re)elected, outcomes of public activity are normally examined for citizens' criticism only prior to elections. It is only when elections become imminent that citizens' satisfaction tends to be important for politicians and worthy of evaluation. Frequently, these assessments do not rely on objective or scientific data bases and serve only the politicians' narrow interests. Moreover, Winkler (1987) has criticized the superficiality of current consumerism in the public sector for being just a little more than a public relations exercise. These public relations largely involve politics and politicians who find consumerism to be a good vote recruiter. When consumerism and consumers become a tool in the political game, the reliability of public surveys made for political purposes is damaged and their implications should be treated with considerable suspicion.

In view of the above it is unsurprising to find that evaluating responsiveness in public agencies is a complex task. While private organizations must always be aware of clients' satisfaction in order to adjust for better self-responsiveness, public organizations are less concerned with citizens' demands since usually the latter do not have a real 'exit' alternative for getting the necessary services such as security, transportation, ecology, health, education, etc. Even when such alternatives exist they are usually partial, limited in quantity, relatively more expensive and beyond the affordability of ordinary citizens.

Nevertheless, as new public management evolves, PA is urged to become more active and initiative taking in measuring self-performance. For example, Pollitt (1990) suggested a taxonomy for measuring performance in the public sector: (a) measuring performance as an activity aimed at

renewing or reinforcing political and public legitimacy, and (consequently) as attracting political allocations of resources; (b) measuring performance as a decision aid to management in adjusting organizational structure and processes, and internal resource allocation to support these and; (c) measuring performance in order to provide customers and clients with information on the quality, effectiveness, accessibility or efficiency of the services being provided. It is argued that while the two first types of performance measurements remain the dominant concern of the literature, the third is a long way back. New public management argues that citizens/consumers represent a new actor – and a most important one – in the performance evaluation ‘game’.

Public management and responsiveness

The new public management perspective towards PA’s responsiveness may be understood in different ways. For example, Gunn (1984) mentions four major aspects of public management: (1) public management as public administration, (2) public management as business management, (3) public management as public policy, (4) public management as managing people. Parsons (1995, p. 554) suggests that contemporary literature in public policy ‘is for the most part concerned with the evaluation of programmes and policies. However, in a managerial framework it also encompasses the evaluation of people *qua* Human Resources’. Thus, the knowledge gained through the understanding of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Organizational Development (OD) is most important and emphasizes *the evaluation of people* as opposed to programmes and policy. Using these techniques, people are changed so as to become more committed, competent, cost-effective, and in sympathy with the aims of the organization which is to bring better services to the citizens (Thompson 1990, p. 307).

These aspects of new public management represent a holistic approach towards the goals of public services in modern democracies. Such an approach can be defined as *an integration of ideas from different disciplines on the operation of large bureaucracies which function under political pressures, using general management wisdom and business considerations to implement innovatory policies and ideologies for the public interest*. Building on the above, responsiveness in public organizations is a synthesis of business considerations, public policy, and human determinants which better describe the complex environment of PA. Thus, two main groups of antecedents which may affect responsiveness to the public needs are proposed: (1) public policy and cultural aspects and, (2) human resource determinants and in particular quality of public servants. While the conceptualization of the second group is relatively easy and relies on vast HRM literature, one may question the integration of public policy and cultural factors into one group. Indeed, policy and culture are often discussed separately in organizational theory. It is also likely that these constructs are inter-correlated and have some effect on HRM factors. However, this study analysed policy and culture as

one group (with different internal components) mainly to distinguish them from more micro-oriented variables of HRM. The usefulness of such a strategy will be demonstrated further on in the paper. Hence, the plausible relationship between all these constructs is described in figure 1.

Public policy and culture

Welfare state ideology, which flourished in Europe after the Second World War, was mainly a result of post-war solidarity and common faith in the growing power of democracy (Gladstone 1995) but at the same time reflected an attempt to respond to citizens' increasing demands for better services and an improved quality of life. The greatest challenge to PA during the late 1940s and until the 1960s was to provide more services to the people and to re-build a new European society. However, no welfare state could ignore economical and business considerations which heavily determine its efficiency and stability. Thus, since the late 1960s and early 1970s, PA has been urged to become more effective, efficient and business oriented. To achieve these goals scholars suggested ideas of better flexibility, entrepreneurship, and willingness to adopt creative new ideas. The concepts of Management by Objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (TQM), and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have become more applicable in public agencies. A philosophy of privatization was implemented under the Thatcher administration in Britain. Innovative ideas of rebuilding public sector budgets (for example Zero-Based Budgeting), reinventing government, outsourcing, and re-engineering of PA were suggested in America. These ideas have tried to respond to the growing strain between democracy and market forces. The environment of PA had started to change and called for establishing new standards of operation in the public services of western societies (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Bozeman 1993; Farnham and Horton 1993). It was agreed that a responsive, effective and efficient public policy must adopt a balanced strategy which

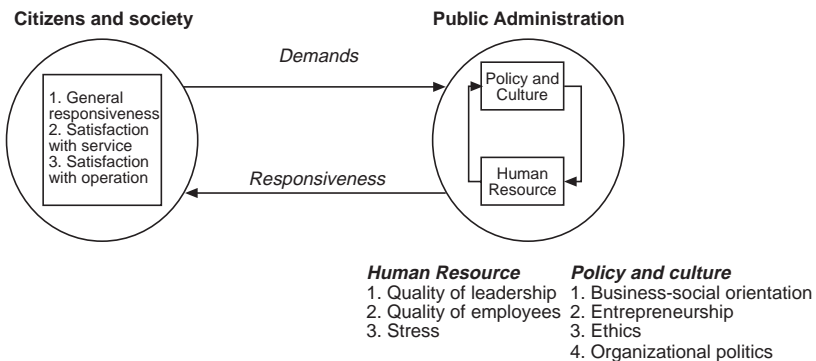


FIGURE 1 A model of PA's responsiveness to citizens' demands

synthesized economical and budgetary factors with social and human care considerations.

While today the debate continues in every modern society as to how to successfully balance these two factors, almost no one disputes the fact that citizens as clients have much to say about public policy. Since governmental policy directly affects the society, the public has the right to democratically influence public policy. Hence, policy is assumed to have an impact on citizens' perceptions of responsiveness. When policy agrees with public demands, citizens are more willing to accept administrative actions as responding to their needs and to show more support in the entire democratic process. Public policy considerations and operation affect citizens' day-to-day life. They can thus be hypothesized to affect public perceptions of the responsiveness of public authorities. It is worth noting that generating public policy that works, and at the same time obtaining citizens' support, is a complex, some say almost impossible mission. However, citizens' support of or opposition to governments' policy must be reflected through a continuous measure of attitudes towards PA and by satisfaction indicators in a variety of fields. Unfortunately, until now only few initiatives have been suggested to respond to this challenge.

Beyond the limits of policy determination and implementation, the relationship of policy with other organizational factors should also be considered. Public policy is mutually related to administrative culture, ethics, norms and behaviours of public servants. For example, hand-in-hand with governmental operation, questions of ethical standards, integrity, fair and equal treatment to clients, or appropriate criteria for rewards to public servants become more relevant. Today, public services in Europe are wider than ever before (Gladstone 1995). As a result, public servants are taking care of growing budgets. They control the transference of more capital to and from the state treasury. This exposes many of them to ethical dilemmas as to how to properly manage, distribute and redistribute economic wealth. Other ethical difficulties arise as a result of the instability between business and social requirements in the public environment. For example, when the cost of certain medicine is too high for citizens to purchase, should the state take responsibility and help them? When state prisons are full of convicted prisoners, should the state release some of them to create more places for others? Responding to such moral issues is difficult. However, public policy which neglects considerations of ethics, equal treatment of the public, or basic justice and fairness among its members is initiating a self-destructive process which may damage its functioning in the long run (Wilenski 1980).

The last two decades have witnessed a growing interest in issues of administrative ethics and fairness (Gawthrop 1976; Wilenski 1980; Richardson and Nigro 1991; Suzuki 1995; DeLeon 1996; Lui and Cooper 1997). Generally, citizens are sensitive to and aware of such unhealthy processes although having almost no opportunity to use their collective opinion in order to influence decision makers. While the media, the auditing system,

the state comptroller, and even the legal authorities in western societies are those which should play an important part in criticizing public policy and administrative culture, citizens themselves are rarely questioned about their feelings and attitudes on such topics. Do they feel that PA operates effectively and ethically? Are they being treated fairly by public servants? Nonetheless, the absence of a direct and sound public voice does not imply that citizens give up their potential power. Citizens seem to have their personal attitudes and impressions of internal processes in public agencies (for example do they work to high standards of morality and ethics? Do they fairly treat all citizens?). Citizens as clients increasingly develop independent perspectives towards issues such as what kind of culture PA encourages and how this culture corresponds with general morality in PA. It is argued in this study that the policy and culture of PA affect citizens' feelings and beliefs regarding the responsiveness of public agencies.

Consequently, it was decided to focus on four factors which represent public policy and cultural characteristics: business or social orientation of the public authority, entrepreneurship and initiation of changes, internal ethics, and organizational politics among civil servants. All these factors refer to policy perceptions, orientations, and the administrative culture of public organizations. They consist of declared objectives and actions that public authorities choose to take, stand for, or alternatively withhold. No personal affiliation is relevant here and the public system as one integrative whole is under evaluation.

Human resource and the quality of public servants

A second group of variables which is hypothesized to affect citizens' satisfaction and perceptions toward the responsiveness of public agencies is more related to the human side of organizations. Compared with the policy and cultural elements which reflect more macro-level constructs, the behaviours of public servants are nested in the micro-level of organizations and in HRM theory and practice. One goal of this study is to distinguish between macro-level and micro-level constructs that may affect citizens' perceptions of PA's responsiveness. While this classification is not ideal because of mutual macro-micro relationships, it can significantly contribute to a better understanding of what *people* do in comparison with what *policy and cultures* do in regard to PA's responsiveness.

Many studies have elaborated on the importance of creating an efficient, skilful, professional, and committed public service to assist the government in its functioning (for example Staats 1988; Hart and Grant 1989; Holzer 1989; Holzer and Rabin 1987). However, the quality of public servants is frequently criticized by scholars and practitioners. For example, Holzer and Rabin (1987) claimed that sustained attacks on the public service encourage many top students to pursue careers in the private sector, lower the morale and increase attrition of public servants. As a result, elected officials try to

minimize pay rises for career officials and thereby discourage recruitment and retention of the most able public servants.

The quality of leadership and management significantly influence the success or failure of every organization. Lane (1987) argues that leadership in the public sector has become more important especially since the 1980s. Its growing importance is related to the fiscal crisis of the state that has emerged since about 1975, as well as to the attempt to insert more private sector principles into the public sector. Modern organizations put a great deal of effort into improving managers' skills and developing business as well as human vocations among the internal leadership. Since this layer of employees is responsible for the continuous long-range operation and healthy functioning of the organization, it is of major value to test its image in the eyes of citizens. Despite the fact that citizens do not always have sufficient knowledge about the abilities and professionalism of public managers, they still operate as objective and 'honest' evaluators of services they are entitled to receive. In many cases, citizens' criticism is not directed towards the immediate service provider but toward the public system and its leaders as a whole. The democratic process in general, and particularly the free media, help to create better accountability and awareness of citizens. This mainly pertains to the local government level where the operation of public agencies is more relevant to citizens' day-to-day life. Hence, some questions should be addressed. Do citizens trust public servants and have faith in their leadership? Do they believe in their professionalism and capability to implement public policy as required? The assessment of employees as qualified and effective in fulfilling their duties is another aspect of human resource quality. While managers have a most influential effect on the operation of PA, street-level employees are generally those who directly confront the public and need to provide immediate answers to their requests. Being in the 'front lines', employees must demonstrate service-orientation, professionalism, knowledge, patience and understanding of the citizens' changing needs. In contrast to the assessment of managers' operation this research asserts that the public is highly capable of evaluating the functioning of employees.

Moreover, one must also be aware of another point of view: what are the citizens' reactions when contacting PA's agencies? Do they feel burdened and stressed or alternatively relieved and untroubled? While the last decades have witnessed a growing interest in the issues of stress and strain of public employees in the fields of education, health care and welfare (for example Crank 1991; Friesen and Sarros 1989; Israel *et al.* 1989) almost no attention has been given to citizens'/clients' stress in their relationship with public institutions. When public servants are skilled and professional, citizens are expected to feel more comfortable and to have less stress and strain caused by confrontation with public officials. Conversely, a non-qualified, passionless, or apathetic public servant may treat citizens insensitively and thus encourage reactions of dissatisfaction, helplessness or even anger

towards the public system as a whole. One should note that this is much in line with contemporary psychological theory. Studies have long argued and empirically validated a negative relationship between a supportive environment and reduced levels of stress and strain in organizations (for example Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Punch and Tuetteman 1996; El-Bassel, Guterman, Bargal and Su-Kuo 1998). When the individual is surrounded with an emphatic and supporting environment, levels of stress, strain and anxiety dramatically decrease. Therefore, citizens' stress when contacting public agencies is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the human side of PA. Hence, this research focuses on three aspects of public servants and their characteristics in public organizations: quality of leadership and management as perceived by clients/citizens, quality of employees who directly address public needs and, citizens' reported stress when contacting PA and public officials. The human factor is examined in this study together with policy and cultural variables and is expected to have significant effect on attitudes towards the responsiveness of PA.

METHOD

Sample and procedures

The study was based on a survey of 330 residents from a large Israeli city with a population of approximately 280,000. A total of 281 usable questionnaires (return rate of 85.2 per cent) were used in the final analysis. The city is located in northern Israel and has six main neighbourhoods from which the respondents were randomly chosen. Data collection was conducted between April and May 1998. Participants were asked to provide information concerning their attitudes towards public policy and culture, public servants in different city departments, as well as the responsiveness of public agencies and their satisfaction with the services provided by the local municipality. Participation in the research was voluntary and citizens were assured of full confidentiality through the entire process. A breakdown by neighbourhood showed that 27.0 per cent lived in low class neighbourhoods, 32.0 per cent lived in average class neighbourhoods, and 41.0 per cent lived in high class areas; 57.3 per cent of the sample were female, 55.6 per cent married, and 65.7 per cent had an income which was equal to or less than the average salary in Israel. Average age was 35.6 years (s.d. = 14.0); average tenure in the city was 24.1 years (s.d. = 15.8). A university or college degree was held by 57.7 per cent of the respondents with an additional 8.8 per cent who had partly academic or higher education studies. The demographic characteristics of the sample were quite similar to those of the total population in the city as reported by the city's research and statistics department: average age 35.6; 52 per cent female; 46 per cent married; 63.1 per cent with 13+ school years or any academic degree.

MEASURES

Dependent variables: perceptions of PA's responsiveness

Citizens' attitudes towards the responsiveness of public administration were examined by three variables. The first, general responsiveness, refers directly to the accuracy and speed of public sector reaction to citizens' demands (Thomas and Palfrey 1996). The other two variables represent satisfaction with services which are provided by public officials and satisfaction with PA's operation in a variety of fields (education, culture, transportation, welfare, decoration, etc.)

General responsiveness

Relying on the theoretical conception of Thomas and Palfrey (1996), this variable was measured by three items aimed at evaluating the speed and accuracy of public services provided to the residents by the city authorities. The items were: (1) 'this municipality seriously responds to public criticism and suggestions for improvement'; (2) 'this municipality responds to public requests quickly and efficiently', and (3) 'this municipality is making a sincere effort to support those residents who need help'. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items. The response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of the scale was .70.

Satisfaction with service

This variable assembled detailed information regarding citizens' satisfaction with services in the city offices. It refers to public servants' behaviour, ways of handling citizens' requests, and physical conditions in the city halls. Residents were asked to report how satisfied they were with the treatment they received either when they personally arrived at the city departments or contacted them by phone. A six-item scale was used as follows: (1) 'how satisfied are you with employees' courtesy and kindness?'; (2) 'how satisfied are you about the time required to handle your request?'; (3) 'how satisfied are you with the efficiency of public servants?'; (4) 'how satisfied are you with the physical conditions in the reception hall?'; (5) 'how satisfied are you with the willingness to help you over and above formal requirements?', and (6) 'all in all, how satisfied are you with the services you receive?'. The response scale ranged from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Internal reliability of the scale was .86.

Satisfaction with operation

This variable referred to a variety of duties for which the city authorities are responsible and also to the ways of determining and implementing policy. Participants were asked to report on a ten-item scale how satisfied they were with the following operational fields of the city authorities: (1) roads and infrastructures, (2) cultural and educational services, (3) city decoration and preservation, (4) cleanliness, (5) urban-construction planning, (6) ecology and air pollution, (7) initiation of employment programmes, (8) parking

and traffic arrangements, (9) development of sea coast, and (10) initiation of outstanding and unique programmes. Reports on satisfaction from operations in these fields were measured on a 5 point scale ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Internal reliability of this scale was .80.

Independent variables

Two groups of independent variables were chosen. The first group reflects a macro-level of policy and culture in public administration. It was defined as a combination of the following factors: (1) business or social orientation of the public agency, (2) internal ethics, (3) entrepreneurial activities, (4) organizational politics. The second group of independent variables embodies a set of micro-level constructs which involves perceptions of the human resource system and quality of public servants. This group was made up of the following factors: (1) quality of leadership and management, (2) quality of employees, (3) stress when contacting PA.

Business or social orientation

This variable represents citizens' attitudes towards the priorities of urban policy. It attempts to evaluate how successful the policy is in regard to balancing financial considerations with the social duties of standard operation. The variable consisted of a four-item scale: (1) 'this municipality is more concerned about financial incomes than about helping the less able'; (2) 'for this municipality, economic efficiency is the most important goal while citizens are those who must pay the price'; (3) 'In this municipality, policy is business derived no matter what are the citizens' real social needs', and (4) 'this municipality's investment policy gives priority to weak neighbourhoods over strong ones (reversed item)'. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with these items and the scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of this variable was .70.

Ethics

This variable describes general attitudes towards the morality and fairness of civic servants. It consists of three items: (1) 'in this municipality, most civic servants are disinterested and honest'; (2) 'citizens of this city receive equal and fair treatment from the city officials', and (3) 'in this municipality, exceptions from good moral norms are rare'. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with these items. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) while higher scores represented a more positive (moral and ethical) view of the public service in the city. Internal reliability of this variable was .75.

Entrepreneurship

This variable represents the degree to which public policy in the city is flexible, taking account of initiative and willingness to adopt new ideas. It was measured by a five-item scale: (1) 'This municipality comes with prom-

ising new ideas which improve citizens' quality of life'; (2) 'compared with other cities, this city has a leading position in developing useful projects for the public'; (3) 'I find this city to be managed with much creativity'; (4) 'this municipality encourages its employees to take initiative and to suggest good ideas to improve service quality', and (5) 'advanced technology is involved in improving quality of service in this city'. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of this variable was .80.

Organizational politics

This variable was measured by items from the shorter version of perception of organizational politics scale (POPS) which was first developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and re-examined by Kacmar and Carlson (1994). The above studies, like this one, defines POPS as the degree to which the respondents view a certain work environment as political, and therefore unjust and unfair. In most of the studies which used this scale or part of it, employees were asked to report the level of internal politics in their work environment. As far as this research could find, this is the first time that any version of POPS has been used to obtain clients' /citizens' opinion on internal politics within public agencies. While the Kacmar and Ferris's original scale included 40 items, Kacmar and Carlson's study used the most parsimonious set of only 12 items from which we adopted 6. These items were modified to fit the report of an external evaluator. The items are (1) 'Favouritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead in this municipality'; (2) 'There have always been influential groups in this municipality that no one ever crosses'; (3) 'I think that employees in this municipality usually don't speak up for fear of retaliation by others'; (4) 'people in this municipality attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down'; (5) 'There are changes made in the policies of this municipality that only serve the purposes of a few individuals, not the organization or the public interest', and (6) 'Generally speaking, this municipality operates appropriately and is not affected by political pressures' (reversed item). Respondents were asked to use their best knowledge and to report how much they agreed with the items. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), so that a higher score meant higher perception of organizational politics in the municipality. Internal reliability of the scale was .77. This is quite similar to the reliability reported in other studies which used internal employees' evaluations (for example .74 in Ferris and Kacmar 1992, .76 in Parker, Dipboye and Jackson 1995).

Quality of leadership and management

This variable examined citizens' perceptions of the municipality's leading group, managers and senior bureaucrats. Three items were used to test this variable: (1) 'public leadership and senior management in this city are well qualified and with high professional standards'; (2) 'I think that this city is

managed appropriately and it is in a good order', and (3) 'the leaders of this city have a vision and long range view as to where we are going'. Respondents were asked to provide their attitudes on a 5 point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of the scale was .80.

Quality of employees

To provide supplementary information on the quality of human resources we asked the participants to report their perceptions regarding the quality of employees. This variable was measured by three items: (1) 'employees of this municipality are professionals and highly qualified'; (2) 'employees of this municipality show understanding, care, and willingness to serve the citizens', and (3) 'this municipality employs only high quality individuals'. Respondents were asked to provide their attitudes on a 5 point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal reliability of the scale was .81.

Stress when contacting PA

This variable represents the levels of citizens' consolation when they are in need of certain services or apply to a public agency or public official. Low levels of stress indicate that public servants are treating the public with sufficient patience and empathy which reduces strains. To measure this variable we used three items: (1) 'when I come to the city offices for some purpose, I feel tense and worried'; (2) 'I find that for me, contacting public agencies is an annoying task', and (3) 'when I need to talk to a city officer I generally feel bothered'. As in the above variables, respondents were asked to render their attitudes on a 5 point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability of this scale was .80.

Control variables

The control variables included two dichotomous variables, gender (0 = male; 1 = female), and neighbourhood (0 = low class; 1 = high class) as well as one ordinal variable, income per month, which was measured on a five point scale from 1 (up to NIS2000 [about \$750; very low salary]) to 5 (over NIS8000 [about \$2500]; very high salary).

Data analysis

To test the relationships between the independent variables and public responsiveness we used a multiple hierarchical regression method. Three regression models were tested to examine general responsiveness, satisfaction with service and satisfaction with operation. In each of the regression models we examined both the individual relationship of the independent variables with the dependent, and the overall contribution of a group of variables (policy and culture vs. human resources and quality of public servants) to the explanation of responsiveness and satisfaction.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities of the research variables. Reliabilities and psychometric properties of all the variables are good and show normal distribution of the research sample. The correlation matrix shows some significant relationships between general responsiveness and a series of independent variables ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$ with business orientation; $r = .50$, $p < .001$ with ethics; $r = .59$, $p < .001$ with entrepreneurship; $r = -.40$, $p < .001$ with organizational politics; $r = .65$, $p < .001$ with quality of leadership and management and; $r = .54$, $p < .001$ with quality of employees). Satisfaction with service was positively related to ethics and entrepreneurship ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), quality of leadership and management ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), and quality of employees ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). It was also negatively related to business orientation ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), organizational politics ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$), and stress when contacting PA ($r = -.25$, $p < .001$). Satisfaction with operation was positively related to ethics ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), entrepreneurship ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), quality of leadership and management ($r = .52$, $p < .001$), and quality of employees ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). In addition it was negatively related to business orientation ($r = -.29$, $p < .001$), organizational politics ($r = -.35$, $p < .001$), and stress when contacting PA ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$).

One may notice that some of these correlations are relatively high. However, only one (general responsiveness, and quality of leadership and management) exceeds the level of .60. Therefore, the possibility of multicollinearity or 'concept redundancy', as mentioned by Cohen and Cohen (1983), is significantly low. These findings provide some indication for a relatively strong and meaningful relationship between the independent variables and the three types of responsiveness examined in the study. The correlations thus suggest some support for the research model.

Table 2 describes the findings of three multiple hierarchical regressions. In each of the regressions the dependant variable was regressed on the independent variables using a three step method. Every step added one group of variables into the equation. In the first step, only variables of the first group (policy and culture) were entered into the equation. This was followed by entering the second group of variables (human resource and quality of public servants). In the third and final step we added the control variables which created the final regression model.

The first regression examined changes in the general responsiveness of PA as perceived by the public. After step 1, all four variables of the policy and culture group were significantly related to general responsiveness. As expected, general responsiveness was positively related to ethics and entrepreneurship ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$ respectively) and negatively related to business orientations and organizational politics ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$ respectively). Step 2 and 3 caused some decrease in these values. However, only organizational politics

TABLE 1 *Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and intercorrelations among research variables (reliabilities in parentheses)*

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Policy and culture</i>														
1 Business or social orientation (business)	3.44	.78	(.70)											
2 Ethics	2.79	.77	-.23***	(.75)										
3 Entrepreneurship	2.71	.71	-.24***	.47***	(.80)									
4 Organizational politics	3.46	.67	.31***	-.38***	-.35***	(.77)								
<i>Human resources and quality of public servants</i>														
5 Quality of leadership and managers	2.58	.84	-.32**	.51***	.60***	-.44***	(.80)							
6 Quality of employees	2.64	.77	-.23***	.52***	.49***	-.44***	.63***	(.81)						
7 Stress when contacting PA	2.96	.97	.15*	-.17**	-.09	.19***	-.11	-.20***	(.80)					
<i>Perceptions of PA's responsiveness</i>														
8 General responsiveness	2.58	.79	-.36***	.50***	.59***	-.40***	.65***	.54***	-.08	(.70)				
9 Satisfaction with service	2.77	.74	-.17**	.40***	.40***	-.31***	.46***	.58***	-.25***	.43***	(.86)			
10 Satisfaction with operation	2.69	.64	-.29***	.29***	.58***	-.35***	.52***	.36***	-.14*	.51***	.39***	(.80)		
<i>Control variables</i>														
11 Gender (female)	.57	.50	-.02	-.04	.01	-.04	.04	-.03	.02	-.03	-.05	-.06	(-)	
12 Income	2.90	1.59	.10	-.03	-.18**	.09	-.15*	-.03	-.04	-.19**	0.00	-.21***	-.30***	(-)
13 Neighbourhood (high class)	.61	.49	-.09	.01	-.08	-.09	.01	-.02	0.00	.06	-.10	-.05	-.01	.02

N = 248–281 due to missing values

* p ≤ .05

** p ≤ .01

*** p ≤ .001

TABLE 2 Findings of multiple hierarchical regression analysis (standardized coefficients) for the effect of independent variables on PA's responsiveness (t test in parentheses)

Variable	General responsiveness			Satisfaction with service			Satisfaction with operation		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Policy and culture</i>									
1 Business or social orientation (business)	-.18(-3.53***)	-.14(-3.03**)	-.13(-2.80**)	-.02(-.31)	.01(.23)	.00(.06)	-.13(-2.49*)	-.10(-1.89)	.10(1.84)
2 Ethics	.23(4.12***)	.13(2.45*)	.14(2.50*)	.24(3.56***)	.08(1.24)	.08(1.20)	-.03(-.55)	-.08(-1.23)	-.07(-1.21)
3 Entrepreneurship	.39(7.26***)	.24(4.13***)	.23(3.98***)	.24(3.68***)	.10(1.51)	.09(1.40)	.52(8.82***)	.43(6.70***)	.41(6.27***)
4 Organizational politics	-.13(-2.34*)	-.05(-.97)	-.04(-.80)	-.13(-2.05*)	-.01(-.05)	-.02(-.26)	-.14(-2.42*)	-.10(-1.68)	-.10(-1.78)
<i>Human resource and quality of public servants</i>									
5 Quality of leadership and managers		.31(4.67***)	.30(4.57***)		.07(.96)	.08(1.09)		.25(3.32**)	.25(3.33***)
6 Quality of employees		.11(1.86)	.12(2.03*)		.42(5.95***)	.41(5.77***)		-.06(-.84)	-.06(-.82)
7 Stress when contacting PA		.06(1.25)	.05(1.15)		-.13(-2.50*)	-.13(-2.44*)		-.06(-1.26)	-.07(-1.34)
<i>Control variables</i>									
8 Gender (female)			-.06(-1.39)			-.02(-.42)			-.12(-2.31*)
9 Income			-.10(-2.11*)			.03(.63)			-.12(-2.26*)
10 Neighbourhood (high class)			.07(1.59)			-.09(-1.65)			-.04(-.76)
R ²	.46	.54	.56	.24	.39	.39	.38	.41	.44
Adjusted R ²	.45	.53	.54	.22	.37	.37	.37	.40	.41
F	52.48***)	40.02***)	29.31***)	18.59***)	21.28***)	15.26***)	37.37***)	23.98***)	18.07***)
ΔR ²	–	.08	.02	–	.15	.00	–	.03	.03
F for ΔR ²	–	16.63***)	4.13**	–	22.73***)	.00	–	4.63**	4.83**

N = 248–281 due to missing values

* p ≤ .05

** p ≤ .01

*** p ≤ .001

became insignificant in the final model. Step 2 showed a positive relationship between quality of leadership and management, and responsiveness ($\beta = .31, p < .001$) and step 3 induced a positive relationship between quality of employees and responsiveness ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). In addition, those with high income perceived PA as less responsive compared to those with low income. These findings support the relationship between the above variables and general responsiveness. Explained variance after step 1 was 46 per cent. Step 2 contributed 8 per cent to this value and an additional 2 per cent of step 3 brought the total explained variance of the entire regression model to 56 per cent. This value is high and implies that the prediction of general responsiveness by the suggested set of independent variables is good and meaningful. Moreover, variables from the first group (policy and culture) were dominant and contributed a higher proportion of variance compared with the other variables. This finding emphasizes the importance of policy and culture variables in explaining general responsiveness.

The second regression examined predictors of citizens' satisfaction with service. Step 1 yielded three significant relationships. Satisfaction with service was positively related to ethics and entrepreneurship ($\beta = .24, p < .001$ for each of the variables) and negatively related to organizational politics ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$). Step 2 added the human resource variables into the equation. This caused the disappearance of all previous significant relationships. In addition, satisfaction with service became positively related to quality of employees ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) and negatively related to stress when contacting PA ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$). The effect of step 3 on the final model was minor. These findings partially support the relationships between satisfaction with service, ethics, entrepreneurship, and organizational politics. While these relationships were quite strong after step 1, they were also inconsistent and became insignificant in the following steps. However, the relationships between satisfaction with service, quality of employees, and stress were consistent. The explained variance after step 1 was 24 per cent and increased up to 39 per cent after steps 2 and 3. This finding shows that human resource constructs significantly contribute to the explanation of satisfaction from service in PA.

The third regression tested satisfaction with the operation of PA. After step 1, this variable was found to have a strong and positive relationship with entrepreneurship ($\beta = .52, p < .001$) and negative relationship with business orientation and organizational politics ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$ and $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ respectively). However, only the relationship between entrepreneurship and satisfaction with operation remained consistent after step 2 ($\beta = .43, p < .001$), while an additional relationship appeared between satisfaction with operation, and quality of leadership and management ($\beta = .25, p < .01$). These relationships remained stable even after step 3 in which gender and income showed a negative relationship with satisfaction with operation ($\beta = -.12, p < .05$ for each of the variables). In the third equ-

ation, step 1 contributed 38 per cent of the total explained variance while each one of step 2 and 3 contributed an additional 3 per cent. Thus, the total explained variance for the variable satisfaction with operation by all the independent variables summed at 44 per cent. These findings provide support for the relationships between citizens' satisfaction with the operation of PA, entrepreneurship, and quality of leadership and management.

The findings also show that each of the independent groups of variables significantly contributes to the understanding of PA's responsiveness. In all the three regression models described up till now, policy and cultural factors were more important than human resource and quality of public servants. However, at the same time, all of the regression models showed that the importance of policy and culture also dropped when human resource factors and quality of staff considerations were involved. The implications of all these findings will be discussed in the last section of this article.

DISCUSSION

While Perry and Kraemer (1983) see the roots of public management as contained in Woodrow Wilson's essay on *The Study of Public Administration* (1887), it was only a century later that business orientation in PA became of major interest for governments, politicians, media, and citizens. However, factors which may affect the responsiveness of PA have not been systematically analysed before. The main goal of this study was to try and narrow the gap between the normative and the positive approaches to PA, and to suggest some plausible explanations for citizens' perceptions of responsiveness in public organizations. The findings generally support a basic assertion that different variables are involved in this process. The study also implies that PA theory may benefit from the separation of these variables into at least two different groups: policy and culture, and human resources and the quality of public servants.

It is clear that on the edge of a new millennium, modern democracies cannot prosper without minimum standards of efficiency, economy and cost-benefit of internal operation in PA. However, the findings of this study show that the business orientations of a city's agency have some negative effects on perceptions of general responsiveness, and almost no effect on citizens' satisfaction with services or operation. These findings may be interpreted in two ways. First, high or sometimes excessive business orientations of PA may lead towards a decrease in responsiveness capabilities in terms of speed and accuracy. When economic considerations are dominant and dictate a rapid, business-like operation of PA, the quality and accuracy of human services may be damaged. On the other hand, taking a more realistic view, business orientations do not necessarily conflict with citizens' demands as reflected in satisfaction indicators. They may even conform to citizens' requirements for an effective and efficient PA, or careful spending

of taxpayers' money, as long as PA remains sensitive and aware of citizens' social needs.

While previous studies provided theoretical reasoning for the relationship between ethics and performance in PA (Balk 1985; Cohen and Eimicke 1995), this study is suggesting some empirical evidence in that direction. As well as business orientations, ethics in PA showed a consistently positive relationship with general responsiveness but not with the satisfaction indicators. The findings show that citizens who believe that public policy is implemented according to clear ethical standards also perceive PA as more responsive and sensitive to their demands. No support was found for a relationship between ethics and satisfaction from operation, yet, some relationship was found between ethics and satisfaction with service. Some of these relationships are also relevant for the variable of organizational politics. Citizens who believe that PA involves internal political manoeuvring which contradicts fairness and standards of equity reported lower responsiveness to PA, lower satisfaction with service and operation. The findings regarding the negative relationship between internal politics and performance are consistent with much evidence from organizational behaviour theory which found this variable to be a good predictor of negative behavioural intentions and low satisfaction levels among employees in private and public organizations (Bozeman, Perrewe, Kacmar, Hochwarter and Brymer 1996; Ferris and King 1991; Drory 1993). However, since both relationships disappeared in the second and third steps of the equation, the implication may be that they are not stable and are heavily influenced by other factors in the environment such as human resource and quality of staff. Therefore, the findings regarding these variables should be treated with caution.

The fact that entrepreneurship showed a more consistent relationship with responsiveness and satisfaction is noteworthy. This finding indicates the importance of flexibility, creativity and acceptance of change in public agencies and is much in line with recent literature on new public management which calls for the encouragement of such processes (Du-Gay 1994; DeLeon 1996; Bozeman 1993; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Farnham and Horton 1993). According to the current findings, citizens show concern with stagnation in PA. They may interpret lack of initiation or entrepreneurship as 'walking back in time' and feel that it damages PA's capability to respond to their needs.

Among the human resource factors it was found that citizens' perceptions on the quality of leadership and management were more related to general responsiveness and to satisfaction with operation while feelings of stress were more related to satisfaction with service. The relationship between quality of employees, stress, and satisfaction from service is not surprising and can be explained by the more intimate connections that employees have with the public. When services are delivered by well-qualified employees who have faith and trust in the operation of the public organization, citizens

receive a more adequate treatment which is directly reflected in satisfaction with service. These findings may also have another explanation. According to this view, citizens draw a clear line between quality of services and quality of operation in PA. It may suggest that PA can operate efficiently, effectively and respond directly to citizens' needs yet at the same time provide poor services in its offices by inadequate employees. The relationship between stress and satisfaction with service may also imply that more responsiveness and satisfaction can be obtained by narrowing the psychological gap between public institutions and individuals. While political, structural, and cultural restraints will always continue to dominate the operation of large bureaucracies they should still try and reduce formality when possible and create a more supportive environment for those citizens who need it. Stress and avoidance from contacting PA may result in lower levels of satisfaction with services and unnecessary tension which brings no benefit to the individual or to the entire public system.

To explain the importance of public leadership and management we referred to Lane (1987) who compared leadership in private and public organizations. Lane claims that leadership in public management is more difficult than in business and complicated in many respects. This is the result of different organizational design, structure, objectives, evaluation, openness of procedures, rules, predictability, technology, and professionalism. Leadership style in public organizations is also less innovative and based on unique motivation (Jonsson 1985). It is highly stable (Kaufman 1976), powerful (Olsen 1983), and less entrepreneurial. Even more important is the relationship between public leadership and citizens as consumers/clients. Lane's theoretical argument is that public leadership shows less sensitivity to citizens'/consumers' demands simply because the latter do not have the option of exit (Hirschman 1980). While private sector leadership is dependent on an exchange relationship with the consumer, public leadership relates to citizens on the basis of authority. That makes private managers more sensitive to short-term changes in consumers' demands while public leadership remains less responsive in the short-run.

The comparison between leadership in private and public organizations is based on sound theoretical grounding. Nonetheless, empirical evidence is scarce. The findings of this study provide some support for the notion that quality of leadership and management in public organizations is more related to citizens' satisfaction with PA's operation and to general responsiveness, than to satisfaction with service. A strong positive relationship exists between senior managers' professionalism, citizens' satisfaction with operation, and PA's responsiveness. Thus, the findings emphasize the need for better recruiting and training systems for senior administrators in the public service.

In this study, an estimate was made of the relative contribution of each one of the independent groups of variables to the explanation of PA's responsiveness. As the findings show, policy and cultural factors were more

effective in explaining responsiveness and satisfaction in comparison with human resource variables and quality of public servants. However, the human resource variables considerably and consistently raised the total explained variance in all of the dependent variables. More important is the fact that human resource variables caused a moderation in the effect of policy and culture on responsiveness and satisfaction.

These findings are much in line with contemporary HRM approaches which encourage the integration of *personnel* management into the corporate strategy of the public organization. The general HRM approach stresses that performance is related to the commitment of each employee which can be achieved through better recruiting procedures, emphasis on training at all levels, regular staff appraisal and rewarding performances (Parsons 1995, p. 555). This study argues that another important way of developing commitment among public personnel is by providing them feedback to check on their quality. A necessary source for such feedback lies in citizens' evaluation of the responsiveness of PA as an organization as well as the responsiveness of its members. The suggestion is that while policy and culture continue to play a crucial part in postulating citizens' satisfaction and perceptions of PA responsiveness, the human side of PA makes its own independent and important contribution. Therefore, PA would benefit from an integrative strategy which considers quality of policy, programmes and culture, as well as the quality of leadership and employees. Public servants' qualifications may create a helpful and kind environment that sometimes can cover for errors or problems in public policy or equivalent cultural characteristics.

An additional contribution of this research is the suggestion of some operative measures for further empirical study of PA. While an effort was made to find established scales for the measurement of the research variables, such scales were not always available in PA's literature. Thus, an attempt was made to use scales which are well grounded in theoretical definitions and similar variables from general management literature. That was the case in examining general responsiveness, satisfaction, ethics, entrepreneurship, stress, and the quality of public servants. However, the scales chosen showed good validity and reliability which imply that they can be used in further studies as well. These studies will also benefit from trying to extend the conceptual operationalization and more comprehensively allow the investigation of each variable.

As was argued by Wildavsky (1979), public organizations tend to have goals that are difficult to quantify, meaning that it is difficult to measure their outcomes. Considering this, measuring responsiveness of the public sector as perceived by its own clients/citizens is more of a necessity than just another option for measuring performances in PA. Drawing on a document from the Local Government Training Board (LGTB) in Britain, Palfrey *et al.* (1992, p. 132) suggested that responsiveness and the idea of 'getting closer to the public' must involve a profound examination of the public's

views on a range of issues. For example, it is necessary to find out the public's preferences and priorities, the kind of services they want, expect and need, their views on the quality of service and their experience as customers, the image they have of the local authority and the things they would like to be done better or differently. This information, when used appropriately, is valuable for every public agency. It can help to improve future policy and administrative actions while providing citizens with better 'value for money'. For this purpose, it is important that administrators and scholars alike will look for reasons of variation in the public will. Questions such as what affects citizens' perceptions of PA's responsiveness and how citizens' satisfaction transforms during policy determination and implementation may help in: (1) initiating a more effective and service-oriented public bureaucracy, (2) improving decision-making processes and the management styles of administrators, and (3) establishing some well-grounded criteria for better responsiveness in the public sector.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

Several limitations of this study should also be noted. First, and most importantly, the data was collected in an Israeli setting which is different from the North-American or even the European setting. Therefore, the results might have been affected by cultural and structural factors unique to Israel. For example, the Israeli public sector is markedly different from the American and European. It is more conservative and centralized, and for many years it faced problems typical of relatively new democracies. Thus, this research should be replicated in other settings before firm conclusions can be made. Second, the design of this research is based mainly on self-report data, which are subject to measurement biases such as common method error. While this approach is not infrequent in public sector analysis it has its advantages as well as weaknesses. Therefore, future research on the responsiveness of PA would benefit from more objective measures of PA's responsiveness (for example examining public spending or evaluating the way in which distribution of goods and services is made). Third, this study examined citizens' perceptions at one point in time and should be replicated to reveal trends and developments in public opinion on PA. This is recommended also for theoretical purposes as well as for the practical objectives of public administrators and policy makers alike. Fourth, the theoretical separation of our independent variables into two groups (policy and culture, and human resource) may be criticized as too vague. Some alternatives can be provided as to other classifications of determinants of responsiveness. However, we believe that our model serves the parsimoniousness criteria that is so desired in studies of this kind. We also have confidence that it may be used and developed in further studies on responsiveness to citizens' demands.

Despite its limitations, the findings of this study have demonstrated the usefulness of examining two groups of variables as antecedents of respon-

siveness in PA. Up to now, research on responsiveness has followed a normative approach. This study expanded on the advantages of using an empirical method. However, more work is needed in this area. Questions on the relative effect of policy, culture and human resource considerations (together or individually) should include more variables to better represent the contextual setting for defining the antecedents of responsiveness. In this study only seven variables were used. They may be replaced in future studies with other variables which reflect more reliable and valid measures required for understanding the causes of responsiveness. Moreover, a sample of residents in one city allows us to draw upon specific implications in a particular local government. More studies are needed to compare these findings with other public organizations. Hence, the contribution of the study lies in its pointing some new directions to better explain the responsiveness of public agencies to citizens'/consumers' demands in light of the new public management approach.

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