

# From Old Public Administration to the New Public Service Implications for Public Sector Reform in Developing Countries

## Introduction

Public administration in the 21st century is undergoing dramatic change. Globalization and the pluralization of service provision are the driving forces behind these changes and policy problems faced are often complex, wicked and global rather than simple, linear, and national. Yet the prevailing paradigms through which public sector reforms are designed and implemented are relatively static and do not fully encompass the significance of these wider changes. While public sector reforms in the developing world are influenced by policy experiments and organizational practices originating in OECD countries they tend to operate within traditional public administration paradigms. Consequently, discrepancies remain between the thrust of public sector reform efforts in the developing world and changes in the nature of governance and contemporary approaches to public management in OECD countries.

## Models of public administration and approaches to public sector reform

There are three models: Public Administration (PA-statist and bureaucratic), New Public Management (NPM-competitive and minimalist) and New Public Governance (NPG-plural and pluralist). McCourt (2013) summarizes these as follows:

### The “Old” public administration

The prevailing approach to public administration drew on a model of bureaucracy based on hierarchy and meritocracy. McCourt (2013) lists the principal features of this model:



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- ▶ A separation between politics and elected politicians and the administration, with appointed administrators
- ▶ Administration is continuous, predictable and rule-governed
- ▶ Administrators are trained professionals who are appointed on qualifications
- ▶ There is a functional division of labour, and a hierarchy of tasks and people
- ▶ Resources belong to the organization, not to the individuals who work in it
- ▶ Public servants serve public rather than private interest.

This “command and control” approach was introduced in most Commonwealth countries, including in Singapore where the post-independence political leadership built a high quality and efficient civil service (see Box, overleaf).

**Table 1. Public service reform problems and approaches**

	Problem	Approach	Main action period
1.	How can we put government on an orderly efficient footing?	“Weberian” public administration and capacity-building	Post-independence
2.	How can we get government closer to the grassroots?	Decentralization	1970s to present
3.	How can we make government more affordable?	Pay and employment reform	1980s and 1990s
4.	How can we make government perform better and deliver on our key objectives?	New Public Management	1990s to present
5.	How can we make government more honest?	Integrity and anti-corruption reforms	1990s to present
6.	How can we make government more responsive to citizens?	“Bottom-up” reforms	Late 1990s to present

## Singapore's model of public management

### Reforms and achievements

The Singapore model of public management is premised on meritocratic principles. Success derives from four policies: comprehensive reform of the Singapore Civil Service; strong and enforceable anti-corruption measures; decentralisation of the Public Service Commission; and payment of competitive salaries to attract and retain the best candidates (Quah, 2013).

Singapore selectively introduced NPM reforms by adopting market-based principles in creating arms-length public corporations, and adopting new management models and e-government techniques (Lee and Haque, 2006). The government established "Public Service for the 21st Century" to nurture public service excellence and promoted "whole-of-government" thinking on key strategic challenges (Ho, 2012).

### Challenges and limitations

The model is not without its challenges: retention of public service leaders with the right skills and attitudes; meeting the changing needs and rising aspirations of the population; public concerns about meritocracy, accountability and high salaries in the senior civil service; shortcomings in transparency and responsiveness; and dealing with uncertainty and complexity in cross-cutting policy issues (Saxena, 2011).

Singapore's success in public management has limited potential for replicability, as such sustained political will on the part of the government is rare elsewhere. Singapore is also a small city-state with a relatively homogenous Chinese majority population (Quah, 2013).

### Lessons learnt

The importance of integrity and strong anti-corruption measures; meritocracy expressed through recruitment of the best talent; results-orientation in which pay and promotion reflect individual performance and contribution to innovative outcomes; and competitive salaries for the public service to mitigate the risk of corruption; operational autonomy for public sector corporations; rewarding performance through incentives and recognition; a practice of continuous innovation; and leadership by example (Saxena, 2011).

## The new public management (NPM)

The key elements of NPM can be summarised as follows (Osborne, 2006):

- ▶ Incorporates lessons from private-sector management;
- ▶ Growth of hands-on "management" and of "arm's-length" organizations where policy implementation is organizationally distanced from the policy makers;
- ▶ Focus is on entrepreneurial leadership;
- ▶ Emphasis on input/output control, evaluation,

performance management and audit;

- ▶ Disaggregation of public services into basic units and a focus on savings;
- ▶ Increased use of market principles for resource allocation and service delivery.

Some aspects of NPM reforms have been criticized: the idea that its success is dependent on buy-in from top officials and central departments; its singular emphasis on private sector principles; the weakening of democratic accountability with the creation of executive agencies; and failure to foreground the needs of citizens as the primary focus for public sector reforms (Peters and Savoie, 1998). NPM is said to have diminished coherence across government owing to fragmentation between policy and delivery (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000), and it has also been described as a cluster of different approaches (Osborne, 2006).

## The new public governance (NPG)

NPG places citizens and the public interest, rather than government, at the centre of its frame. NPG conceives the state as both plural and pluralist; government is no longer the sole force shaping public policy and implementation. Several strands of NPG are identified in the literature:

- ▶ **New public service (NPS)** argues that the focus of public management should be citizens, community and civil society, and the primary role of public servants is to help citizens articulate and meet shared interests (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000). Bourgon (2007, p.22) suggests that this approach has four elements:
  - Build collaborative relationships with citizens and groups;
  - Encourage shared responsibilities;
  - Disseminate information to elevate public discourse; and
  - Seek opportunities to involve citizens in government activities.
- ▶ The "**whole-of-government**" approach arose in response to a lack of coherence and coordination problems in the NPM approach. It strengthened central oversight and increased horizontal collaboration.
- ▶ The "**motivation of public officials**" approach, takes the view that changes in organizational arrangements require attention to the values and incentives that govern the behaviour and performance of public officials. A study of public officials in one state government in Brazil identified four key elements in explaining motivation and dedication (Tendler, 2007; Rao, 2013):
  - Dedication and civic duty is appreciated by communities;
  - Recognition by rewards and public information campaigns is effective;
  - Officials exhibit voluntarism and willingness to carry out a larger range of tasks;
  - Downward accountability through scrutiny of performance by local communities.

The following table summarizes the three approaches examined so far:

**Table 2. Comparing perspectives: Old public administration, new public management, and the new public service**

	<b>Old Public Administration</b>	<b>New Public Management</b>	<b>New Public Service</b>
Theoretical foundations	Political theory, naïve social science	Economic theory, positivist social science	Democratic theory
Rationality and models of human behaviour	Administrative rationality, public interest	Technical and economic rationality, self-interest	Strategic rationality, citizen interest
Conception of the public interest	Political, enshrined in law	Aggregation of individual interests	Dialogue about shared values
To whom are civil servants responsive?	Clients and constituents	Customers	Citizens
Role of government	"Rowing", implementation focused on politically defined objectives	"Steering", serving as catalyst to unleash market forces	"Serving", negotiating and brokering interests among citizens
Mechanisms for achieving policy objectives	Administering programmes through government agencies	Creating mechanisms and incentives through private and non-profit agencies	Building coalitions of public, non-profit private agencies
Approach to accountability	Hierarchical - administrators responsible to elected leaders	Market-drive-outcomes result from accumulation of self-interests	Multifaceted-public servants guided by law, values, professional norms and citizen interests
Administrative discretion	Limited discretion granted to public officials	Wide latitude to meet entrepreneurial goals	Discretion needed but constrained and accountable
Assumed organizational structure	Bureaucratic organizations with top-down authority and control of clients	Decentralized public organisations with primary control within agency	Collaborative structures with shared leadership
Assumed motivational basis of public servants	Pay and benefits, civil-service protections	Entrepreneurial spirit, desire to reduce size and functions of government	Public service, desire to contribute to society

Source: Adapted from Denhardt and Denhardt (2000, p.554)

### Globalization, complexity and wicked problems

Koppell (2010, S50-51) identifies three institutional forms and practices that transcend boundaries: (i) organizations with mixed governmental and non-governmental characteristics play a central role in the delivery of public goods and services; (ii) the regulation and allocation of scarce resources using market mechanisms is favoured in numerous policy areas; and (iii) cross-border cooperation and reliance on institutions that span nation states is a common response to transnational policy challenges.

There is growing recognition that many contemporary public policy problems are complex, relentless and contested, that is, they are "wicked problems" that cannot be addressed through single interventions by individual agencies. Collaborative networks between public managers, citizens and not-for-profit actors become critical for addressing such wicked problems (Weber and Khademan, 2008).

### Implications for public sector reform

Nunberg (1992) argued that developing countries should focus on strengthening centralized civil service management models and that public sector reforms should prioritize establishment

control and staff recruitment. In practice many countries adopt an approach that combines elements of different models of public administration. Organizational hybridity in the public sector has several distinct features, among them a mix of organizations at the interface of the public and private sector, located in the market or civil society, a mix of market and hierarchy, or a mixture of different organizational forms inside ministries that encompass specialized agencies, state enterprises and different levels of government (Christensen and Laegreid, 2011). In some African countries this has produced "governance states" where finance ministries have acquired strong internal capacity and have adopted NPM-style market reforms (Harrison, 2004). Elsewhere successive civil service reforms did not substantially improve efficiency or reduce corruption (McCourt, 2013). While the NPG and NPS approaches offer useful correctives by focusing on inter-organizational relationships and citizen engagement, they do not offer a comprehensive solution to problems of public service efficiency and effectiveness.

## Next steps?

- ▶ First, public sector reform efforts should be sensitive to context and draw on various approaches; no single model of public management offers a magic bullet solution for deep-seated problems.
- ▶ Second, only those countries that have established the basic organizational requirement of a functioning public administration will be in a position to experiment with NPM. A whole-of-government perspective can mitigate the risks of incoherence and fragmentation associated with the NPM approach and digital governance offers the potential simultaneously to increase efficiency and transparency.
- ▶ Third, and by extension, a heterodox approach that draws selectively on a range of public management traditions ("best fit") will be more appropriate for developing countries than a singular approach to reform grounded in models that have evolved in the political and economic conditions of advanced countries ("best practice").

For a more detailed coverage of Public Sector Reform please refer to the full paper and GCPSE's other publications: [www.bit.ly/GCPSE-evidence](http://www.bit.ly/GCPSE-evidence).

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