

Recent Trends in Public Management

ABSTRACT: Citizens around the world are awakened as never before to their right to an effective government, to a government that can perform honestly and efficiently. This awakening is the greatest source of pressure for better public policies, administrative reform, and a "New Public Management." Administrative reform is now an unquestioned priority of the international community, of OECD, of the World Bank, of the European Union, and of many regional bodies. This paper first describes key ideas of New Public Management movement and evaluates the results and experience accumulated over the past 15 years. It offers the analysis of the points of global convergence in the administrative reform around the world and suggests caution with respect to one-size-fits-all solutions. The second part of the paper is dedicated to the presentation and analysis of the US experience with administrative reforms of Clinton and Bush administration.

KEYWORDS: New Public Management, public administration - administrative reform

In the field of public administration, the talk throughout the world is of change, of the transformation of governments: new forms of governance, new relationships between citizens and their governments and between the public, private, and nongovernmental sectors, new processes of policy making. In recent years, administrative change has become so pervasive as to constitute what many believe is a world-wide movement. Citizens around the world are awakened as never before to their right to an effective government, to a government that can perform honestly and efficiently. This awakening is the greatest source of pressure for better public policies, administrative reform, and a "New Public Management." In addition to revenue generation, infrastructure, and public services, governments must respond to the consequences of an aging population, to the mounting pressures to provide health care and social security, and to care for their neediest and least capable citizens, who are often becoming more visible and whose rights are increasingly being advocated by nongovernmental organizations and interest groups.

Beginning in the 1980s, administrative states of every type were widely perceived to be insufficiently responsive to global changes in markets, fiscal capacity, technology, politics, and public attitudes. According to Gerald Caiden, "... inherited administrative systems were proving to be sluggish, inflexible and insensitive to changing human needs and novel circumstances" (1991: 1). Over time, he said,

vested interests in the *status quo* and state performers had become adept at protecting their turf. Most had lost sight of any possible alternative arrangements and could not

conceive of anything different being done. Complacency had set in, until a rude shock—a sudden emergency, a new invention, a serious accident, failure under growing pressure—set people thinking that something had to be done: something radical, not incremental, some reinventing, not just some piecemeal reform.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia and the emergence of the European Union spawned a number of important “transitional states” seeking to adapt to regional global economic and political change.

Administrative reform is now an unquestioned priority of the international community, of OECD, of the World Bank, of the European Union, and of many regional bodies, as well as of bilateral aid donors, trade partners, and allies. EU requirements have been a major influence over countries in Eastern Europe who aspire to membership. Where will and can these developments lead? What are the implications for countries such as Slovenia?

Although at times it appears as if technical efficiency and budget savings are the overriding goal of administrative reform, this is much too narrow a view, as Slovenian experience can attest. Yes, governments must demonstrate that they can be efficient. But administrative reform is a means to accomplish the goals of the people and of those whom they elect to represent them. Under pressure from their own people, governments everywhere are engaged in self-conscious projects of administrative and managerial improvement. In a relatively short period, governments have come under great pressure to face the most fundamental question of public administration: how shall governance be organized and carried out so as to meets the needs and aspirations of its people?

1. New Public Management

A striking aspect of the worldwide administrative reforms of the last 15 years or so is that the various national and subnational projects of various governments appear to have some common political motivations and to resemble each other in more than superficial ways. The most popular and most reductionist interpretation of these developments declares the emergence of a “new paradigm” of governance and public management, a paradigm that has become known as a New Public Management. Governments are, according to this story, increasingly adopting as a goal the replacement of “administrative, hierarchical, and professional cultures” by a “private, commercial, market culture” (Dunsire 1995; cf. Hood 1995, 96). In the American Don Kettl’s characterization, “these reforms [are seeking] to replace traditional rule-based, authority-driven processes with market-based, competition-driven tactics” (Kettl 2000: 3).

Kettl summarizes this reform movement in terms of six characteristics:

- a concern for **productivity**, becoming more efficient in the use of public revenues;
- **marketization**, introducing market-like incentives into the production of public goods and services;
- **service orientation**, meaning responsiveness to citizens as service recipients;
- **decentralization**, moving responsibility to lower levels of government and to the private sector;

- **policy direction**, meaning improvement in government's capacity to make, implement, and measure the effectiveness of public policies;
- **accountability** for results, replacing top down rule-driven systems with bottom-up, results driven systems.

There is in these accounts of worldwide change a strong suggestion, if not outright assertion, of a convergence in the forms and aims of governance: national governments are gradually becoming more alike. According to American Patricia Ingraham, despite obvious differences in national experiences, "the commonalities are more important than the differences" (1996, 4). The implication is that similarity of governing relations across nations is or will be the resultant of national efforts at reform. In other words, the national sovereignty of administrative reform has been shattered by globalization in its many guises.

Not everyone sees recent changes as convergent, however. The balance to be struck between a strong market and a strong state countries is strongly affected by national circumstances. The OECD correctly observes that "there is no single model of reform, there are no off-the-shelf solutions" to the problems of the bureaucratic state (1995: 19). And although European Union countries must comply with EU policy and regulations, they may do so in their own way. Convergence may be selective or partial, affecting certain institutions more than others. Such convergence is hardly unprecedented. Ideas and the language expressing them have long crossed borders and become a *lingua franca* among actors worldwide, often motivating imitative action, or at least imitative talk.

What are the intended results of the New Public Management? These have been nicely summarized by Christopher Pollitt, as follows:

- **savings** (reduced budget appropriations);
- improved **processes** (e.g., faster, more accessible complaints procedures, quicker turn-around times for repairs or the processing of licenses; 'one-stop' service locations; and the like);
- improved **efficiency** (better input/output ratios, e.g., more students graduate per full-time equivalent number of staff; the same number of drivers' licenses are issued with 20 percent fewer staff);
- greater **effectiveness** (less crime, poverty, functional illiteracy; homelessness; drug abuse; gender or ethnic inequality; more new jobs created; more contented and trusting citizens);
- an increase in the overall **capacity/flexibility/resilience** of the administrative system as a whole (e.g., through the recruitment and training of more skilled, more committed public servants).

What results have been found? Pollitt also summarizes these.

- **Savings:** Many reforms have led to savings, or at least claims of savings. But such claims are hard to assess. A savings in one area may have been offset by increased outlays in other areas; costs may have been shifted rather than reduced. For example, U.S. federal government employment has been reduced; our federal government has been downsized. But the number of personnel dependent on government outlays

has actually increased. In general, though, competition in contracting that leads to lower costs is probably a good thing. A case for pervasive savings across a wide spectrum of countries cannot be made, however.

- **Processes:** There are some success stories. But there are likely to have been trade-offs: improved client processing at the expense of serving more difficult or needy clients. Improved processes may work better for some users than for others, and unintentional discrimination may be the result; a flagship project's successes have been obtained at the expense of other projects that lost support. Overall improvement, as with overall savings, is hard to document.
- **Efficiency:** the story, again, is trade-offs: outsourcing may reduce the costs of service, but the services themselves, and who is served, may have changed for the worse. Some of the studies that document improvements are badly flawed and their findings cannot be trusted.
- **Effectiveness:** The effort to document improved effectiveness is hampered by the difficult of measuring outcomes, even outputs, and by the difficult of controlling for other things that might be contributing to greater effectiveness other than management reforms. My own research shows how hard it is to measure effectiveness gains than can be attributed to organizational or managerial factors. Says Pollitt (2000: 194): "*cases where there is unmistakable evidence of management reform producing more effective government action are rare.*"
- **Capacity:** Elected officials often make expansive claims concerning the improvements they have brought about. The evidence is often anecdotes, good stories, "sound bites" rather than systematic, well-documented improvement. Says Pollitt (2000: 195): "*the jury is still out on 'systems transformations' and it may be out for some time.*"

The conclusion of this assessment is not wholly pessimistic. According to Professor Pollitt (2000: 195-196), "*Downsizing has been achieved in a number of countries. In many instances measured efficiency has definitely increased. The influence of published targets in prompting improvement on specific dimensions has been demonstrated time and time again. In many cases, also, specific services have certainly become more user-friendly and flexible.*" But the full cost side effects and trade-offs are far from clear. "*It is only rarely that the full balance sheet is available for scrutiny.*" In general, the New Public Management has been oversold as a single best solution to the administrative problems of the many different nations that are under pressure to improve their governments.

2. Patterns of Administrative Reform

A more sensible version of recent trends in public management is that, because of the globalization that "*engulf[s] the world in virtually every dimension of life*" (Fosler 1999: 495), all governments are facing similar challenges and tasks and the same general paradigm of change, even if their responses differ.

Gerald Garvey (1995: 87) has defined the paradigmatic problem of republican administrations as follows: "*Administrative action in any political system, but especially*

in a democracy, must somehow realize two objectives simultaneously. It is necessary to construct and maintain administrative capacity, and it is equally necessary to control it in order to ensure the responsiveness of the public bureaucracy to higher authority . . .” By this logic, establishing and maintaining an appropriate balance between capacity and control becomes the central dynamic of administrative transformation in democratic republics everywhere.

In his useful little book, *The Global Public Management Revolution*, Don Kettl has identified key issues that could be said to affect all republic democracies facing the reality of administrative change:

- nontraditional service delivery, e.g., reliance on nongovernmental partners who are, in turn, dependent on governmental revenue, creating new challenges for institutional integrity and operating effectiveness for both partners.
- more decentralization to lower levels of government. For federal systems, decentralization will bring new challenges in sorting out governmental roles.
- increased burdens of service coordination, perhaps through one-stop shopping, integrated services, working across organizational boundaries.
- and for the national government: managing basic functions, redistributing income, gathering data and promoting information-based linkages, building bridges, and thinking strategically.

The general point is that, despite globalization, the cultural and political forces at work in each country are likely to have a major influence over the directions that administrative reform will take. Global capitalism requires the dismantling or substantial weakening of command and control bureaucracy and statist enterprise, of all distortions in prices and interferences in capital and labor mobility. If global capitalism is the dominant consideration, bureaucracy should dissolve into a series of successor institutions whose shape we may not yet fully grasp but which place property rights and the control of scarcity rents largely in private hands.

Nationalism and internal democracy, however, require the rule of law, legally sanctioned regulation of markets, and competent bureaucracies subject to control by legislatures and by judicial institutions that have the capacity to carry out national policies. Carl J. Friedrich argued that democracy would have no chance to survive without bureaucracy because it would not be able to carry out the programmatic promises of its elected leaders. Max Weber viewed bureaucracy as inescapable and could discover no known example of a bureaucracy being destroyed except in the course of a general cultural decline. Bureaucratic power, says B. Guy Peters (1996: 8), “*may simply be a prerequisite of effective government in contemporary society.*” Bureaucracy, in other words, is essential of a state is to be effective.

Max Weber (1947) precisely identified what the rule of law means for bureaucracy: official business is conducted on a continuous basis in accordance with stipulated rules by an administrative agency in which personnel have defined duties, authority to carry them out, strictly defined powers, and appropriate supervision. They have no property rights in the resources at their disposal or in their offices. Official business is conducted

in writing. Without these features, “*there cannot be a system of legal domination in which the exercise of authority consists in the implementation of enacted norms.*” (Bendix 1977: 424) Citizen control of government requires effective and accountable bureaucracy.

If it is the spread of democracy, and not of capitalism, that is the story of our times, then we should not expect to see bureaucracy shrivel and die so much as we should expect to see it come into its own as an indispensable adjunct to competitive nationalism and the achievement of national aspirations. Bureaucratic excesses and arbitrary exercise of power must be curbed, transparency of operations must be assured, and competence and accountability must be institutionalized and made permanent.

3. The U.S. Experience

What can be learned from recent U.S. experience with administrative reform? In some important respects, there are similarities between Slovenia and the United States. For example, Slovenia as a Constitutional Republic is implementing the principle of separation of powers between the three branches of government that restrain each other by a system of checks and balances. Slovenia is likewise contending with the challenges of creating effective working partnerships with actors from throughout civil society in order to accomplish public purposes. There are, of course, important differences. For example, the Slovenian Constitution provides entitlements to health care, social security, primary education, freedom of artistic endeavor, and the preservation of cultural and natural monuments, a far more extensive welfare state than that in the U.S.

I thought it might be useful to give you an overview of the U.S. experience with administrative reform. Slovenian Public Administrative Reform Strategy, dating from 1997, is quite young, whereas we make almost continuous efforts to improve our public administration. Perhaps our experiences will provide some useful lessons concerning the difficult, time-consuming challenges of administrative reform.

In recent decades, administrative reform in the United States has become something of a political obsession, pushed by liberal and conservative politicians who want to make bureaucracy less bureaucratic, government less expensive, and public programs more responsive to their stakeholders. In recent years, there have been three significant developments: the enactment by the U.S. Congress of the Government Performance and Results Act, the sustained effort by the administration of President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore to “reinvent government,” and, most recently, President George Bush’s initiative to promote performance management in all national agencies. These initiatives represent three different ways of attempting to focus public budgeting and management on achieving measurable results that are cost-effective. The results of these efforts have not been impressive.

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), initiated by the U.S. Congress, was signed into law by the President of the United States in August 1993. Its purpose, according to the Act’s preamble, is to provide for the establishment of strategic planning and performance measurement in the U.S. Federal Government. More

specifically, the goal of the Results Act is to reduce political preoccupation with inputs to the collective production of goods and services and instead focus budget planning on the results achieved by governmental activity.

Specifically, GPRA requires the following of the Executive Branch:

- Each federal agency is to have to both the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Congress “a strategic plan” for not less than a five-year period.
- The Director of OMB is to require each agency to submit an annual performance plan covering program activities in the agency’s proposed budget.
- The head of each agency is to submit to the President and Congress a report on program performance for the previous fiscal year.

In addition to these provisions, agencies are allowed to propose waivers of “administrative procedural requirements and controls, including specification of personnel staffing levels, limitations on compensation or remuneration, and prohibitions or restrictions on funding transfers . . . in return for specific individual or organizational accountability to achieve a performance goal.” This *quid pro quo* is a clear break with past reform practice and reflects an effort to trade performance accountability for rule-based compliance accountability.

According to Don Kettl, who has closely followed the progress of recent American reforms: the GPRA effort “ranks as the world’s most ambitious.” The fact is, however, that a great many, and probably most, U.S. agencies do not have the capacity to do what the Act requires. For example, success of the Act requires stronger financial management and accounting than is the case now. Moreover, many U.S. federal government agencies, especially in social policy, operate through networks of organizations at federal, state, and local levels of government, including the NGO and for-profit sectors. Thus federal agencies may have little or only indirect leverage or control over their network partners, over what goes on in the field. They do not control their own performance.

The effects of the United States Congress’s decision to enact and implement GPRA has resulted mainly in the proliferation of products on paper: the output of a seemingly far-reaching technocratic effort, with copious documentation, to create plans, performance standards and targets, the measures by which to assess their attainment, and their links to the budget (USOMB 1998). These paper products are generated in response to the process requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act. Much of the evaluation of the reforms focuses on the technical adequacy of these paper products and of the processes underlying them.

Periodic reviews of actual strategic plans by the US GAO focus almost entirely on textual criticism. There are virtually no reported efforts to determine if the plans have affected thinking or decision making or if new insights into program administration, achieving efficiency, or the adequacy of priorities have occurred as a result of the planning effort. Little interest has been shown in the changes in priorities or operations brought about by the Act.

A second recent American initiative was the National Performance Review (NPR) initiated by President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. Beginning in 1993, Vice

President Al Gore led an 8-year effort, popularly called Reinventing Government, to create a government that was smaller, cheaper, and more effective. There were four themes, summarized by Paul Light as follows:

- **“cutting red tape,”** including streamlining the budget process, decentralizing personnel policy, reorienting the inspectors general, and empowering state and local governments.
- **“putting customers first,”** including demanding that service organizations compete and using market mechanisms to solve problems;
- **“empowering employees to get results,”** including decentralizing decision-making power, forming a labor-management partnership, and exerting leadership; and
- **“cutting back to basics,”** including eliminating programs, investing in greater productivity, and re-engineering programs to cut costs.

Other specific initiatives of the NPR oriented to performance improvement include:

- **Benchmarking**, described as “the process of continuously comparing and measuring against other organizations anywhere in the world to gain information on philosophies, policies, practices, and measures that will help your organization improve its performance. As part of the NPR Federal Benchmarking Consortium, federal agencies are working together to benchmark against world class private companies and high_performing government agencies.
- **Reinvention Labs**, defined as innovative organizations or activities [there are 325 as of February 1998] that are established to test or prototype radical new ways of doing business, then to share their ideas, successes and lessons across government. There are no specific rewards or waivers associated with Lab status.
- **Performance Partnerships** in which Federal, state, and local governments and service providers jointly design programs and measure program performance. The putative benefits include consolidated funding streams, devolved decision-making, and reduced paperwork, with the implied reward of additional funding and other unspecified benefits financed by the increased efficiency.

In addition to these more-or-less purposeful, high profile initiatives, the NPR recognizes and endorses governmental improvements of many kinds, such as interagency partnerships; improved human resource management; reducing internal regulations; improving travel management; procurement reform; improvement in support systems; downsizing; fiscal accountability; managing for results; transforming organizational structures; and improving information technology.

James R. Thompson, a scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has attempted to summarize the accomplishments of the National Performance Review. He notes that *“NPR incorporates a diverse set of interventions directed toward the achievement of multiple objectives.”* (Thompson, 2000: 509)

First, he summarized and classified the objectives of the National Performance Review as of first, second, and third order of importance. Of first order importance were downsizing, reducing administrative costs, and reforming administrative systems. Of second order importance were decentralizing authority within agencies, empowering front-line workers,

and promoting cultural change in agencies. Of third order importance were improving the quality of public services and improving the efficiency of agency work procedures.

Then, he conducted a broad review of the results of NPR in terms of satisfying these objectives based survey research conducted by a U.S. government personnel agency. “A broad conclusion,” he says, “is that while some success has been achieved with regard to lower, first-order goals, only limited progress has been made toward critical, higher, second- and third-order reinvention objectives. Thus, downsizing and cost reduction objectives have been substantially achieved. . . . but there is no evidence of any significant, systemic improvement in quality of services or culture” (Thompson 2000, p. 510)

In many ways, these two major U.S. reform initiatives, GPRA and NPR, have the opposite implications for public administration. GPRA’s success depends upon a professionalized bureaucracy able to make detailed objectives, plans, and measurements. NPR, as an example of what American Paul Light calls “liberation management”, or “let managers manage,” tended to distrust professionalized administration and complex administrative machinery. The net result is that changes in the U.S. bureaucracy are slow and incremental. As a colleague noted, “the status quo appears to prevail” unless there is unusually strong executive leadership or the agency’s continued existence is threatened by the Congress or the administration and must change to meet the threat.

The third American reform effort in recent years has just been initiated. In presenting his new budget proposals to the Congress in January, President George Bush unveiled his “Management Agenda.” The key feature of this initiative, which has provoked much discussion, is an “Executive Branch Management Scorecard,” which ranks the 26 major departments in terms of their performance on five government-wide management initiatives:

- strategic management of human capital;
- competitive sourcing;
- improved financial performance;
- expanded electronic government; and
- budget and performance integration.

According to the initial scores—green for good, yellow for “needs improvement”, red for failed—almost all departments were failing on all five initiatives; these scores apparently reflect the judgments of budget examiners in the O.M.B. No greens and only a few yellows were awarded; the rest were red. The administration has promised to update the scores twice a year and to issue a mid-year report during the summer.

A second, more significant change introduced by the Bush administration is the reformatting of the Federal Budget. His budget is organized by agency, not by the 50-year-old budget function codes. Accountability is now centered on departments, not policy areas that cut across agencies. Further, each agency chapter highlights its key activities and includes an assessment of the agency’s performance in meeting the objectives of selected programs. A total of 126 programs were rated, and 43 programs were termed effective, 22 as moderately effective, and 41 as ineffective; in 20 cases it was impossible to tell. Budget allocations were based in part on these performance assessments.

There is evidence that the agencies are paying attention and making every effort to respond to the President's priorities. Most experts on public management reform, however, view the Bush initiative as a political strategy rather than as a serious effort to change the way the American government is managed or to improve allocative efficiency or performance. Just as was the case with the National Performance Review, they expect little change in agency culture or quality.

It is interesting to compare the Bush Administration's approach with the approach taken by the Government Performance Project, a foundation sponsored project located at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of citizenship and Public Affairs. Under a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the project combines the results of a broad-ranging survey of each agency with in-depth reporting to create a rich portrait of management capacity and the environment within which it is exercised. The project team then rates each agency in five areas—financial management; information technology management; human resources management; managing for results and, where appropriate, capital management. The ratings are based on 22 criteria developed and refined during the course of the project by panels of academic experts and government practitioners, as well as the project staff. Ratings in each management area are averaged to reach an overall management grade for each agency.

Project staff report that they studied agencies' responses to their survey. (Only one agency failed to complete the survey.) They pored over thousands of pages of agency documents and, in most cases, received unprecedented access to interview hundreds of agency officials, managers and employees, as well as agency clients, critics, customers and overseers. They spent hundreds of hours developing, discussing and assigning grades. In the process, they believe they learned that, while management goals and obstacles vary from agency to agency, some things hold true across government:

- Most agencies are not doing nearly as well as they could be.
- Given the relatively long history and complexity of their management challenges, most agencies are doing far better than might be expected.
- Elected officials often act in ways that make it very difficult to effectively manage agencies.

Project staff found that, in general, federal managers do a surprisingly good job of accomplishing agency missions against difficult odds. Further, they found that improving those odds is a long-term, incremental and complicated task tangled in a net of competing national and local interests; changing economic, social and demographic conditions; conflicting political priorities; and lack of national consensus on the appropriate limits of government action and accountability.

In the view of United Kingdom scholar Colin Talbot, the Bush approach, similar to the Treasury approach in the United Kingdom in setting targets for performance, appears to be in a spirit opposite to the New Public Management: that is, they are old-fashioned, top down, command-and-control systems which use performance information to obtain political leverage over departments and agencies to get them to do what the elected administration wants. In the view of Irene Rubin, an American budget scholar, grading

departments is an excuse to cut departmental budgets rather than part of an ongoing effort to improve management,

As Professor Talbot notes, the Bush initiative resembles the system of Public Service Agreements in the United Kingdom. These agreements, which cover all executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies, establish expenditure limits, performance measures, and performance targets for service providers. This complex system tended to centralize power over resource allocation and management in the Treasury and would, if implemented as designed, have meant strong strategic and rational direction. But, as Professor Talbot points out, executive politics triumphed. Parliament, for example, failed to make significant use of the wealth of performance information, target setting, and delivery agreements. The spending review process has been secretive. In both respects, the American experience has been the same as the British experience.

4. Conclusion

The emphasis on reforming government has had little political impact in the U.S.; the general public has barely been aware of it. The only result that anyone took notice of was the reduction in the federal workforce by one in seven workers, or 350,000 employees. What is popular with the media and the public is discovery of “waste-fraud-abuse”: a major scandal, corruption, gross incompetence, tax collectors who abuse citizens, the failure of a major procurement program, or administrative stupidity. But these political disasters are also political opportunities for someone: to gain attention and a sense of urgency for a reform agenda, for seeking solutions to long range problems. In general, you do not become rich and famous by creating more effective government; you must want to do it for its own sake.

Professor Talbot’s views are worth quoting again. *“Public services are extremely complex and interlocking systems [that] cannot be managed by centralized command and control type mechanisms.”* They require transparency, stakeholder involvement, scrutiny, public involvement. In other words, genuine reform in public services efficiency and performance require that the political game adapt to allow reconsideration of the proper balance between governmental capacity and popular control. Good government requires the capacity to carry out the will of the people. It also requires the means for the people to exercise proper control over what government does on their behalf. Ensuring an appropriate balance between capacity and control is the proper goal of administrative reform.

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