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**THE WAY AHEAD FOR NEW
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the public sectors of a number of countries have experienced what has been called 'new public management' (Hood, 1991; Hughes, 1998). This movement has resulted in, within some jurisdictions, a transformation of the management of the public sector: as traditional public administration has been replaced; as former public enterprises have been privatised; as the terms and conditions for employing public servants have become more like those of the private sector and as the contracting out of services has proceeded apace.

The changes induced by the new public management have continued for a number of years now. In many respects the reforms have been successful, in others they have not. Some countries have proceeded further than others; Australia and Malaysia are two of the countries which have adopted much of the model. The next thing to look at, however, is what comes next, that is what are the lessons from those aspects which have or have not worked well and those which have worked badly. As with any reform movement there are critics: such criticism is at its strongest over the application of new public management to developing countries.

There are some lessons which point to a way ahead for managerial reform. Of course, some would favour abandoning the reform movement altogether and returning to the certainties of the traditional model of public administration. Such a move would be a mistake and is unlikely to occur. What is needed instead is an appreciation of where the new public management reforms have succeeded and failed and where they are likely to proceed. A particular focus in what follows concerns developing countries. Instead of arguing, as some do, that new public management should not be applied to developing countries, it is more useful to set out the preconditions in order for these reforms to work in any country regardless of its state of development. From this a research agenda can be devised.

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AS A WORLD-WIDE PHENOMENON

A key feature of the managerial reform agenda is its similarity across nations and the seeming total agreement on the *direction* of reform. The more visible aspects would be the general cuts to spending, and privatisation of government enterprises. There are other similarities, even in, say, the detail of budgeting systems, or the kinds of regulations to promote competition, or changes to personnel systems.

The features of what is involved in new public management are set out by Hood as comprising seven main points (1991, pp 4-5):

- *Hands-on professional management* in the public sector. This means letting the managers manage, or as Hood puts it 'active, visible, discretionary control of organisations from named persons at the top'. The typical justification for this is that 'accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility for action'.
- *Explicit standards and measures of performance*. This requires goals to be defined and performance targets to be set, and is justified by proponents on the grounds that 'accountability requires [a] clear statement of goals; efficiency requires a "hard look" at objectives'.
- Greater emphasis on *output controls*. Resources are directed to areas according to measured performance, because of the 'need to stress *results* rather than *procedures*'.
- A shift to *disaggregation* of units in the public sector. This involves the breaking up of large entities into 'corporatised units around products,' funded separately and 'dealing with one another on an "arm's-length" basis.' This is justified by the need to create manageable units and 'to gain the efficiency advantages of franchise arrangements *inside* as well as outside the public sector'.

- A shift to greater *competition* in [the] public sector. This involves 'the move to term contracts and public tendering procedures' and is justified as using 'rivalry as the key to lower costs and better standards'.
- *A stress on private sector styles of management practice*. This involves a 'move away from military-style "public service ethic"' and flexibility in hiring and rewards, and is justified by 'need to use "proven" private sector management tools in the public sector'.
- A stress on greater *discipline* and *parsimony* in resource use. Hood sees this as 'cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, resisting union demands, limiting "compliance costs" to business' and is typically justified by the 'need to check resource demands of public sector and "do more with less"'.

Boston *et al* also point to a general phenomenon and set out what is involved in new public management in a slightly different way:

Although the rhetoric might have varied around the world, most of the recent efforts at governmental reinvention, restructuring, and renewal have shared similar goals - to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector, enhance the responsiveness of public agencies to their clients and customers, reduce public expenditure, and improve managerial accountability. The choice of policy instruments has also been remarkably similar: commercialisation, corporatisation, and privatisation; the devolution of management responsibilities; a shift from input controls to output and outcome measures; tighter performance specification; and more extensive contracting out (Boston *et al*, 1996, p. 2).

There is a lot in common between these formulations, even though whether or not there is a world-wide phenomenon has been a matter of some controversy. Hood (1995) would later argue that there was not and in this was joined by Lynn (1996, 1998). It has been argued, for instance, that different countries have implemented different changes at different times or for different reasons.

However, the timetable need not be the same, the point is that the underlying principles and theories are the same. Some other points - reduction in public service conditions of service, program budgeting, accrual accounting and many others - were similar if not identical. These detailed items have been applied to a number of countries but at differing times and at differing rates of change. But the key point is that the theoretical changes - management rather than administration, a basis in economic theory, cuts in government function and privatisation, widespread use of contracts - have indeed spread worldwide, even if the detailed reforms have varied.

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

There is some argument about the use of new public management in developing countries. In recent years, many developing countries have adopted principles of market liberalisation, including cutting the public sector and restructuring to follow the principles of new public management. However, whether managerial principles will work as well as they have in the West is far from clear. In the changes, markets are to replace bureaucracy as far as possible, but the obvious problem is that markets require other preconditions in order to work.

There may be some danger in adopting new managerialist approaches, on the other hand, the traditional bureaucratic model cannot be regarded as having been a success in developing countries. The traditional model did not serve developing countries particularly well. Features which worked in the West, notably political neutrality and incorruptibility, were not followed in the Third World and the bureaucracy, while maintaining the appearance and institutions of traditional bureaucracy, served particular elite or ethnic or religious interests. It could be argued that what was happening was not the problem of the model, but was due to its precepts not being followed, as exemplified by the problem of corruption. While this is possible, it is more the case that the flaws in the model were exacerbated in developing countries. It was always a flaw to think that bureaucrats would be impersonal, neutral arbiters and not involved in either politics or looking after themselves.

Compounding these problems was the fact that developing countries failed to thrive under the traditional model of administration and the failures were more often than not failures of governance. In part due to the apparent failures of the traditional model of administration developing countries began to experiment with other forms. If the key characteristic of the traditional model is bureaucracy and the key characteristic of new public management is the use of markets, it was clear that developing countries began to ditch the traditional model at the same time as they began to adopt market approaches more generally.

Without establishing the appropriate preconditions, the World Bank argues that the new public management 'must be introduced cautiously' (1997, p. 97):

If informal norms have long deviated significantly from formal ones (with regard to personnel practices, for example), simply introducing new formal rules will not change much. Where countries have been unable to establish credible controls over inputs, giving managers greater flexibility will only encourage arbitrary actions and corruption. And where specialised skills are in short supply, performance contracts and other output-based contracts for complex services may absorb a large share of scarce bureaucratic capacity to specify and enforce them. Nevertheless, countries can begin by providing greater clarity of purpose and task and by introducing performance measurement on a selective, sequential basis. When output measurement is strengthened and credible controls over inputs are instituted, managers can be granted more operational flexibility in exchange for greater accountability for results.

Despite such warnings, variants of new public management have been introduced. Privatisation is commonplace, contracting of even such sensitive services as barrier control is often contracted out and personnel reforms have been introduced, with Malaysia, for example, having a service-wide performance bonus scheme

Any kind of blanket ban against the use of new public management in developing countries has two main problems. First, it is patronising in that developing countries are presumed to not be 'advanced' enough to be able to handle these reforms. Secondly, it saddles developing countries with the traditional bureaucratic model of public administration which manifestly failed in that setting. What needs to be done instead is to compare the positive and negative features of traditional bureaucracy with new public management. Even if new public management might not work as well as in developed countries, it still might be better than the traditional model of public administration.

A more productive approach is that, instead of ruling out new public management in developing countries, rather various factors can be identified for new public management reforms to work in any country, developed or developing.

1. A Suitable Role for Government

There needs to be increased attention paid to what governments do. In its *World Development Report* in 1997 the World Bank argued:

An effective state is vital for the provision of the goods and services - and the rules and institutions - that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives. Without it, sustainable development, both economic and social, is impossible. Many said much the same thing fifty years ago, but then they tended to mean that development had to be state-provided. The message of experience since then is rather different: that the state is central to economic and social development, not as a direct provider of growth but as a partner, catalyst, and facilitator (World Bank, 1997).

Markets were to be encouraged, not discouraged and the role of government was as a facilitator in economic development rather than a competitor. The role of government was seen by the World Bank as: (i) establishing a foundation of law; (ii) maintaining a non-distortionary policy environment, including

macroeconomic stability; (iii) investing in basic social services and infrastructure; (iv) protecting the vulnerable and (v) protecting the environment.

This list from this institution shows that substantial rethinking had taken place as to the positive role for government when compared to earlier years when the automatic response for any country was to simply reduce government by any means. A foundation of law is required for markets to work at all. This includes establishment of property rights, protection of property rights from criminals and a fair and reasonable judiciary. Markets can only work if there is enforcement of contracts through the legal system. Some certainty is needed in economic policy to encourage investment, the absence of which makes it hard for any country to engage in growth. Infrastructure is needed as well and may have to be government provided.

The role of government was to change from that of the post-independence period in the developing world, but was also quite different from the small government approach that was supposed to be tried in the 1970s and 1980s. One thing that the managerial reforms showed was that governments are good at doing some things - such as the provision of a safety net - and not so good at running businesses.

2. Facilitative Institutions

It is difficult to make a strict separation between government and institutions given that most institutions are provided by government. However, even if institutions are created by governments in the main, in order to work over a long period of time they need to have a life and a standing of their own. If the courts are merely an arm of the executive government and without any independence, the impartial arbiter may not exist. This will mean, over time, that the market-facilitating role of courts - the enforcement of contracts - may be lost and the market itself not thrive to the fullest extent. Aggregate economic outcomes will then not be achieved.

New public management is based on applying market principles to public policy and management. It is also associated with reducing government and developing markets instead. However, it is one thing to adopt a market and managerial approach, but yet another to have markets work. Developing countries often have little experience in the operation of markets and there is a range of factors that are required before markets are effective. Markets are ineffective without the rule of law to, for example, ensure compliance with contracts. On the other hand it could be argued that many people in the developing world are natural traders with a history of commerce lasting for many centuries and that these instincts were stifled during the period of command economies. But, until capital markets develop or domestic entrepreneurs arise, a market economy may mean greater domination by foreigners and foreign corporations.

There are obvious problems in moving to contractual arrangements for the delivery of services if the rule of law and the enforcement of contracts are not well established. Contracting works best where its outcomes are easy to specify; where goals are vague and not able to be clearly set down in writing, or where corruption is endemic, using contracts is not likely to be successful. Contracting has major problems in the West, so without these other changes it would seem difficult for developing countries to move away from formal bureaucracies. A phased approach would seem likely to be more successful than to assume that sudden shifts can be made.

3. Competent Management

Not only do institutional settings need to be in place, managers need to be competent. In the earlier structural adjustment period in developing countries, there was a real problem of administrative competence in implementing international assistance programs and this inadequacy by itself was a reason for the failure of many of them. There were some signs that the international institutions recognised the problem and this led them to put forward programs of improving governmental performance, with the World Bank, the United Nations and the OECD offering various programs aimed at improving the

management of the public sector as part of their attempts to foster economic development. How the institutions of government were organised and, importantly, how the managerial competence of public managers should be developed were to be looked at instead of the usual programs of privatisation and cutting spending by themselves. No longer, it seemed, was government merely to be minimised as part of a program of structural adjustment; it was to be improved as well. The theoretical framework used is largely that of new public management.

In its 1997 development report the World Bank argued (1997, pp. 79-80):

Many lower income countries have been unable to provide even the most rudimentary underpinnings of a rule-based civil service. Their formal systems often resemble those of industrial countries on paper. But in practice informality remains the norm. Merit-based personnel rules are circumvented, and staff are recruited or promoted on the basis of patronage and clientelism; budgets are unrealistic and often set aside in any case by ad hoc decisions during implementation. At bottom, all these problems can be traced back to weaknesses in the underlying institutions; poor enforceability of the rule of law both within and beyond the public sector; a lack of built-in mechanisms for listening to, and forming partnerships with, firms and civil society; and a complete absence of competitive pressure in policymaking, the delivery of services and personnel practices.

The World Bank report called for three essential building blocks. First, 'strong central capacity for formulating and coordinating policy', including visions goals and strategic priorities on the place of politicians and the public service alike; secondly, 'efficient and effective delivery system', setting the balance between flexibility and accountability, including contracts for contestable services, better performance and client feedback; and thirdly, 'motivated and capable staff', with incentive structures to motivate them to perform well, including 'merit-based recruitment and promotion, adequate pay, and a strong esprit de corps' (1997, p. 81). All these elements are to be found in the new public management model compared to that of the traditional model of administration.

Developing countries absorbed the lessons well, indeed as well as their counterparts in the West. For example, the government of Malaysia adopted Total Quality Management (TQM), a Client's Charter and sophisticated forms of information technology. A report in 1995 would argue:

A shift must occur from the old paradigm of paying too much attention to inputs to a stronger emphasis on resource utilisation to meet organisational objectives. A results-oriented approach requires agencies to be more focussed in terms of the level of efficiency and effectiveness to be achieved by the programmes and activities implemented. Objective setting and the formulation of organisational strategies must become part of the organisational culture whereby the establishment of a performance measurement system backed by performance indicators forms and essential feature of the results-oriented approach (Malaysia, 1995, p. 15).

These comments could well come from Britain's *Next Steps* as could the claim in the Client's Charter that 'the citizen need not play the role of supplicant but is instead viewed as a client who can demand a recognised level of service' (Root, 1996, p. 161).

4. Effective Ways of Dealing with Corruption

There is a lot said about corruption especially in the developing world and to some point given the history. However, corruption is not confined to developing countries, rather its incidence anywhere depends on the structure of incentives to individuals in a system and the management systems set up to deal with it. Corruption is above all else the result of management failure; the corollary is that it can be dealt with as a management problem. Changing from bureaucracy to markets might seem to risk making corruption endemic, although it could be argued that corruption might be reduced:

A major thrust of any effective strategy to reinvigorate the public sector will be to reduce the opportunities for corruption by cutting back on discretionary authority. Policies that lower controls on foreign trade, remove entry barriers for private industry, and privatise state firms in a way that ensures competition - all of these will fight corruption. Such reforms should not be half-hearted: reforms that open opportunities for private entry into closed sectors of the economy, but leave that entry to the discretion of public officials rather than establish open and competitive processes, also create enormous scope for corruption. Formal checks and balances can also help reduce official corruption, but they are seldom enough. Reforming the civil service, restraining political patronage, and improving civil service pay have also been shown to reduce corruption by giving public officials more incentive to play by the rules (World Bank, 1997, p. 9).

There are measures of corruption used by agencies such as Transparency International; by themselves these might have some role in reducing corruption. What is more important are the underlying management systems and the methods of dealing with corruption. By some accounts Singapore has an effective anti-corruption strategy which shows that 'it is possible to minimise corruption if there is political will' (Quah, 1999, p. 492). As well as sanctions, Singapore pays very high salaries to senior administrators which reduces the incentive to be corrupt.

5. Rethinking the Link Between Politics and the Administration

In any system of government administration there is an inherent problem of organising the link between the political arm of government and the administrative arm. This problem has not been solved anywhere, however, there are obvious problems if the administration is overly politicised; there are less obvious but still real problems if administrators disregard the political nature of their work. Politicisation is probably a greater problem in developing countries than in the developed world but only in degree not in kind. There would seem to be some chances for politicisation of the public services, the awarding of contracts to cronies and the like. However, the old bureaucratic model was rife with this as well, so to expect a reduction may be asking too much. Where there might be some chance of reducing politicisation would be in the smaller scale of government and the recognition that the public service is a political instrument, so that perhaps as in the United States, that particular civil service positions could be expressly political appointments.

It is possible that, as part of the replacement of bureaucracy with markets that any economic liberalisation 'may be accompanied by very limited political liberalisation' (Smith, 1996, p. 362). On the other hand economic advancement through a market system may enhance the prospects for democratic participation. It depends on the particular society and the implementation of new public management. It will be a fine line between the advantages of new public management by replacing bureaucracy with markets while minimising the disadvantages and dislocations caused by the bureaucracy vacating parts of the societal structure.

6. Allowing Local Adaptation

New public management does offer much to developing countries, at least by comparison to the bureaucratic model which failed. However, by itself it is unlikely to be able to overcome the manifest problems of developing countries. Any kind of management can be expected to do too much and this expectation can lead to failure by itself. Certainly if developing countries are forced to adopt a single unvarying model of new public management the result is unlikely to be successful. There are problems of institutions, the rule of law, inadequate capital and retail markets, insufficient educated staff and so on. Moreover, developing countries have different histories, capabilities and are not homogeneous. New public management may offer an opportunity to develop some kind of management that suits particular societies, that may be owned by the citizens, especially if combined with greater participation in choosing governments than has been all too often the case before.

Perhaps the reforms impose yet another single model of development that all must follow. That this was a mistake in the old model of development administration is hard to deny, but it does seem that again making developing countries follow another single Western model is likely to be problematic. As Peters argues:

Some Third World regimes that have been dominated by a bureaucracy (perhaps in the pejorative sense of the word) may find the alternative models just as applicable and desirable as do the industrialised countries. One difficulty in the reform process has been that the advocates of reforms have assumed that 'one size fits all' and that any government could be improved by the institutionalisation of their preferred new pattern (Peters, 1996, pp. 17-18)

Turner and Hulme agree, arguing:

Whatever the reasons - naivety, historical and environmental blindness, or ideology - a powerful international lobby is promoting a 'one size fits all' approach to public sector reform in spite of the evidence accumulated from organisational and management theory and from empirical study that the outcomes of planned changes in organisations are conditioned by many contingent factors, especially those in the organisation's environment. In some contexts, the NPM may yield its promised benefits, but in others the possibility of it contributing to reduced performance, and even political instability must be recognised (Turner and Hulme, 1997, p. 240).

Too much can be claimed for any model. In the same way as the bureaucratic model failed in its attempts to impose a single view of modernisation on disparate developing countries the managerial model may similarly fail. There are differing perspectives and these need to be respected. However, the managerial model should allow differing approaches in a way the bureaucratic model does not. A series of rigid prescriptions is necessary in the formal model of bureaucracy; in new public management, the basic prescription is to manage for results with the precise method able to be varied.

As Polidano argues:

It is hard to arrive at a blanket conclusion either for or against the transferability of NPM [new public management] to developing countries...Localised contingency factors – ones that vary from sector to sector and situation to situation within the same country – play a predominant role in determining the outcome of individual reform initiatives. Different situations can call for radically different responses. Reformers' watchwords must be open-mindedness and eclecticism (1999, p. 4).

This is good advice. Individual countries should not be required to follow the same unvarying menu but should find their own way. More and more will follow the precepts of new public management but this will not and should not look exactly the same as in other countries.

CONCLUSION

Developing countries do seem intent on following new public management as an organising principle for their societies. This is an effort to overcome their endemic problems of development and the failure of earlier models of development economics and development administration.

If as part of the change to a market economy, institutional arrangements to enforce contracts, provide for competition and the like can be adopted prior to new kinds of public management, there is little reason to argue that the only kind of management suitable for developing countries is that of the old bureaucratic kind. It would be patronising in its own way to argue that traditional bureaucracy is the only way that developing countries are capable of managing, particularly when the administrative model failed so signally in the past.

Even if it is argued that developing countries need a stronger private sector and stronger markets these do not develop overnight and do not do so without certain fundamentals only obliquely related to the administrative system, such as adherence to the rule of law, laws to maintain competition and prevent the emergence of monopolies and competent staff. All three are frequently lacking in the developing world and to assume that simply turning activities over to the private sector will work without any other change is wishful thinking. Markets require a competent and appropriate public sector to work at all. In general, though, the traditional bureaucratic model did not serve developing countries very well and a change to managerialism accompanied by increased use of the private sector may help the transition of developing countries into more developed ones.

One positive step would be to abandon the dichotomy between 'developed' countries and 'developing' countries. It is inaccurate and deserves to be re-examined (Salleh, 1996, p. 3). This is almost certainly no longer of any real utility unless it is clear what the difference means. This then would mean that, instead of ruling out new public management for developing countries, various aspects could work depending on the institutional settings.

A second step is to set in train further basic research in the impacts of change across different countries. This would include examination of the new public management and how well it has worked, the relative success of some kinds of market-facilitating policies, such as competition policy and the institutional response to crisis.

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