A Comparative Review of Traditional and New Public Administration and Critique of New Public Management

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Abstract

The problems of collective nature have always received a good deal of attention from politicians, economists, and academicians in an attempt to seek solutions that ensure efficient utilization of resources for prosperity and progress of the present generation without compromising the future generations to meet their needs. Keeping this end in view, many approaches have been advocated at different times ranging from market economy to welfare state to the most recent focus on public-private partnership. Each approach offers some benefits as well as costs. This study is an attempt to look deeply into both traditional approach to public administration and New Public Management (NPM) with special focus on their similarities and differences in addition to critically examining some assertions associated with NPM. The aim is to build on the strengths of both approaches and overcome their weaknesses for serving the rising expectations of citizens properly.

Introduction

Public administration has been in practice since the dawn of human civilization but it is nascent as an academic field. It constitutes the government machinery and is supposed to implement policies formulated in response to public aspirations and needs. The success of governments, therefore, depends to a greater extent on how public administration effectively and efficiently meets the changing demands of the society.

The emergence of public administration as a field of scientific inquiry began with the seminal article of Woodrow Wilson titled, "the study of administration".[1] He argued that it is difficult to run modern complex governments without thorough

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knowledge and strongly advocated politics-administration dichotomy. Wilson was followed by scholars such as F.W. Taylor, Max Weber, Luther Gulick, Herbert Simon, Buchanan, Williamson, and others who shed light on different aspects of public administration.

The entire spectrum of ideas pertaining to public administration could be placed on a continuum. On one extreme are the theories, epitomized by bureaucracy, that advocate hierarchical structure and centralization, strict conformity to policies and procedures, standardization, and paternalism. On the other extreme are the proponents of fluid structure and decentralization, result-based controls, and customization. New Public Management represents this school of thought. Moreover, many countries have started revisiting the roles and responsibilities of government institutions with many of them having been subjected to privatization as panacea for bureau-pathologies.

The present study attempts to dig out the historical roots of traditional public administration and New Public Management (NPM) and collate them for the purpose of finding the areas of convergence and divergence. Based on critical analysis of relevant literature, the study concludes that effective management of modern organizations requires integration of concepts and techniques of both traditional public administration and new public management into a meaningful whole.

Traditional Public Administration

The traditional approach looks at public administration from three different perspectives including managerial approach, political approach, and legal approach; each arising in a particular political context and emphasizing different values.

The managerial approach to Public Administration looks upon the business of government as that of a big corporation[2]. It tends to minimize the distinctions between public and private administration. This view is especially popular among the elected political leaders who tend to resent the role of political influence exercised by civil servants. During election campaign the candidate's 'managerial abilities' are frequently emphasized.

Historically this approach was established as a remedy to the political patronage appointments of the civil servants.[3] The major complaint of that time was that political appointments result in inefficiency and leads to corruption. In reformers' view, "What civil service reform demanded, was that the business part of the government shall be carried on in a sound business-like manner".[4]

Many reformers thought that civil servants should not take active part in politics. The tenure of the public administrators in the office should be based on 'efficiency' and 'performance'. A vast majority of reformers insisted that most of the public administrators have no legitimate policy making functions. In the words of Woodrow Wilson, 'administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions.[5] Just like any other approach, managerial approach to public administration has some unique values. According to Wilson,

> *"It is the object of administrative study to discover: (a) what government can properly and successfully do, and (b) how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency, and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy."*[6]

Hence, efficiency, effectiveness and economy were recognized as the most desirable outcomes of the public administration. Managers, not politicians, are in the driving seat, and 'efficiency' is considered as the 'ultimate good'.

Bureaucracy is considered the most desirable structure of the organization under managerial approach.[7] Bureaucratic principles are intended to maximize efficiency. Division of labor, specialization, hierarchy, and written down rules all fit into a rationalized approach of doing work. All selection is to be made on the ability to perform. Political affiliation, race, sex should not be considered at all. According to Harold Seidman,[8] orthodox theory is preoccupied with the anatomy of government organization and is concerned primarily with arrangements to assure that (1) each function is assigned to its appropriate niche within the government structure, (2) component parts of the executive branch are properly related and articulated and (3) authorities and responsibilities are clearly assigned.

At the very heart of managerial approach to public administration is the impersonal view of individual. This is true for employees, clients and victims alike. As such employee are deduced to cogs and clients to cases.[9] Critics argue that this reliance on impersonality tends to be counterproductive because it results in "bureau pathologies".[10] Rooted in the traditions of rationality, managerial approach tends to emphasize the scientific bases for the accumulation of knowledge. Woodrow Wilson[11], Leonard White[12] and Luther Gulick & L. Urwick[13] all argued in favor of the 'science of administration'. All these efforts promoted the idea to develop generalizations about administrative behavior which was later on severely criticized by Herbert Simon.[14]

The political approach, according to Wallace Sayre[15], treats public administration as a problem of political theory--the fundamental problem in a democracy is responsibility to popular control, the responsibility and responsiveness of the administrative agencies and the bureaucracies to the elected officials (the chief executives, the legislators) is of central importance is a government based increasingly on the exercise of discretionary power by the agencies of administration.

This approach flows out of the work of Paul Appleby[16] who noticed that public administration during the New Deal and World War II was anything but devoid of politics. Administration was considered political processes. Unlike managerial approach which is prescriptive in nature, political approach is descriptive of the reality. Under this approach, 'efficiency' becomes highly suspect because it has to do little with the larger questions of government.[17] According to Louis Brandeis (Judge of the US Supreme Court),

> *"The doctoring of the separation of powers, as adopted by the Convention in 1787, was not to promote efficiency but to preclude the exercise of arbitrary power. The purpose was not to avoid friction but to save the people from autocracy by means of distribution of government power."*[18]

To maintain the constitutional democracy the political approach to public administration emphasizes the values of representativeness, political responsiveness, and accountability through elected officials to the citizenry.[19] It is important to note that values sought in political approach are often at tension with those stressed in managerial approach. Political pluralism replaces the clear lines of authority, hierarchy, and non-political inductions.[20] Thus it is argued that executive branch structure is in fact a microcosm of our society. Inevitably it reflects the values, conflicts, and competing forces to be found in a pluralistic society. The ideal of neatly symmetrical, frictionless organization structure is a dangerous illusion.

The basic philosophy of political pluralism is that since the administrative branch is a policy-making centre of government, it must be truly representative of the different segments of the society. Individuals, under this approach, are aggregated into broad social, economic, or political group. It does not dehumanize the individuals to the extent of managerial approach, but rather deals with them as member of specific groups, interest and problems of whom are collective.[21] Theodore Lowi argues that a central tenet of

the contemporary American 'Public Philosophy' is that,

> *"Organized interests are homogeneous and easy to define, sometimes monolithic. Any 'duly elected' spokesman for any interest is taken as speaking in close approximation for each and every member."* [22]

Thus, individual personality exists but it is addressed in collective terms.

The legal approach views public administration as infused with legal and adjudicatory concerns. It roots in three interrelated sources: (1) Administrative Law, (2) Judicialization Movement (3) Constitutional Law.

Rooted in the work of Frank Goodnow, administrative law emphasizes law as source of organizing and running public agencies. In the words of Goodnow, administrative law is,

> *"that part of the law which fixes the organization and determines the competence of the authorities which execute the law, and indicates to the individual remedies for the violation of his rights."* [23]

Judicialization, on the other hand, is the tendency for administrative processes to resemble courtroom procedures.[24] It calls for establishment of procedures to protect individual rights. The constitutional law is the third source of the legal approach to public administration. Under this approach, rights of individuals are safeguarded in two ways; firstly, the immunity of public servants from civil suits for damages is reduced to qualified immunity and secondly, courts frequently decree ongoing relief requiring institutional reforms that place the judges in the role of 'partner' with public administration.[25]

Three values are central to the legal approach to public administration: (1) Procedural due process, which stands for the value of fundamental fairness and require procedures to protect individuals from unconstitutional deprivation of their rights, (2) Individual substantive rights and equal protection of the laws, and (3) Equity, denoting fairness in the result of conflicts between private parties and the government.[26] Legal approach to public administration views each individual as a unique person having his/her own set of circumstances, values and so on. The adversary procedure is designed such that an individual is able to explain his/her unique thinking, motivation, circumstances etc. A decision is made to protect the individual's rights.

New Public Management

A new paradigm for public management, called 'New Public Management' (NPM) has emerged since 1980s. The term NPM came into use at the beginning of the 1990s to describe public sector reforms in the UK and New Zealand, as a conceptual device invented for the purposes of structuring discussion of changes in the organization and management of government.[27] The principles of NPM are in general characterized by an emphasis on output controls, the desegregation of traditional bureaucratic organizations and the decentralization of management authority, the introduction of market and quasi-market mechanisms, and customer-oriented services.[28]

In the UK, for example, increased pressures forced the government to cope with economic problems, including high rates of unemployment and inflation, and with long-standing criticism of the quality and efficiency of public services.[29] The NPM was adopted by the Clinton Administration in the United States, which, despite the buoyant state of its economy, had experienced problems in the civil service similar to those seen in the UK. Under the slogan of 'reinventing government',[30] the adoption of NPM took shape in Vice President Al Gore's 1993 'National Performance Review'. The OECD, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been keen advocates of NPM reforms around the world, and NPM has been expanding to more countries.

The NPM approach to public management was in general founded on a critique of bureaucracy as the organizing principle within public administration.[31] Bureaucracy, it was claimed, is plagued by progressive inflexibility based on complex hierarchical rule-based systems and top-down decision-making processes, which causes it to become increasingly distant from citizens' expectations.[32]

The focus of the NPM movement was to mirror what were seen as critical aspects of private sector modes of organizing and managing,[33] assuming the superiority of the private sector and private sector management techniques to those of the public sector and public administration.[34]

Government is urged to adopt both the 'techniques' of business administration and business 'values', which include the values of competition, a preference for market mechanisms as a means of social choice, and respect for the entrepreneurial spirit.[35] Since the 1990s, public sector reforms have therefore

had to go beyond simply acknowledging that there are fundamental differences between the public and private sectors; instead, as far as possible, the public sector has had to follow the 'best practice' model of private sector management.[36]

NPM is an umbrella term[37] which encompasses a wide range of meanings, including organization and management design, the application of new institutional economics to public management, and a pattern of policy choices.[38] There has been debate over the precise nature of NPM,[39] but the guiding principles of NPM have basically been agreed among scholars. According to Hood,[40] they can be summarized in the following seven doctrines:

- Emphasis on hands-on professional management skills for active, visible, discretionary control of organizations (freedom to manage);
- Explicit standards and measures of performance through clarification of goals, targets, and indicators of success;
- Shift from the use of input controls and bureaucratic procedures to rules relying on output controls measured by quantitative performance indicators;
- Shift from unified management systems to desegregation or decentralization of units in the public sector;
- Introduction of greater competition in the public sector so as to lower costs and achievement of higher standards through term contracts, etc.;
- Stress on private-sector-style management practices, such as the use of short-term labor contracts, the development of corporate plans, performance agreements, and mission statements;
- Stress on cost-cutting, efficiency, *parsimony* in resource use, and 'doing more with less'.

Hood describes NPM as originating from "a marriage of two different streams of ideas".[41] One partner is the "new institutional economics"[42], built on public choice theory,[43] principal-agent theory,[44] and transaction-cost theory,[45] which views politics as a market phenomenon.[46] The other partner in the 'marriage' is 'managerialism', whose ideas concerning public sector reforms emanate from private sector or business administration.[47]

In short, NPM is the fusion of contractual elements in the field of new institutional economics - such as the principles of measuring performance and introducing competition[48] and of management by objective in the field of business administration - such as discretion for organizational management. The former is described as 'making managers manage' and the latter as 'letting managers manage'.[49] Thus, NPM unites the new institutional economics and managerialism from business management thought; the strategy of NPM should thus be one of a balanced effort involving both the use of contractual arrangements as a tool of output controls, and managerial freedom.

Traditional Public Administration versus NPM at A Glance

Focus areas	Traditional Approach	NPM
Delivery system	Program/Agency	Contingent tools
Organizational structure	Hierarchical	Network
Normative order	Command and control	Negotiation and persuasion
Values	Efficiency	Efficiency and effectiveness
Role of government	Paternalistic	Empowering
Measurement criterion	Conformity to procedures	Producing results
View of citizens	Citizens	Customers
View of the state	Rowing	Steering

A range of critiques of NPM have been made. NPM is criticized for ignoring the fact that public management differs from private management in its essential nature. Schick[50] argues that NPM would narrow the responsibilities of the public sector and weaken collective values and interests, even though the responsibilities of government organizations are considered to be broad because of their strong influence on society.

On the other hand, Metcalfe insists that public management is rarely the task of a single organization, but one that involves inter-organizational cooperation and coordination among different levels of government or among networks including businesses, independent consulting organizations, voluntary associations, lobbying organizations, and other not-

for-profit organizations.[51] In business management on the other hand, it is competition (between organizations) that is regarded as the key to success. Borins suggests that a prominent feature of government is organizational diversity; agencies come in various shapes and sizes, and have multifarious functions, so that general statements about performance need to be qualified with reference to organizational differences.[52]

In relation to the difference in essence between public and private management, NPM has been criticized as eroding the traditionally respected values and ethics of civil servants, such as fairness, equality, probity, and impartiality, on which public administration has been based.[53] Schick[54] underscores the problem of scant loyalty to the broader values of public service. This problem has arisen because NPM is based on output controls and discretionary management in imitation of private sector management-rather than on rule-based systems or on any requirement for open procedures and processes. Under NPM, individuals' ethical standards are the only safeguard.

Although a decline in values and ethical standards would be extremely difficult to measure and forestall, widespread public concerns over these problems can be dealt with by government intervention. DeLeon and Green[55] argue that the lessening of rules and increased flexibility will lead to administrative corruption because precise application of private sector management will not always work well in the public sector. In the public sector, external political forces influence internal systems of management; for example, performance evaluation could be beset by a series of political compromises, and likewise any sense of accountability is geared towards politics rather than management.[56] Thus, performance measurement and accountability might be much less effective as tools for output controls in the public sector.

In addition, NPM is criticized as making little commitment to democratic forms. DeLeon and deLeon[57] discuss the problem that, under the thrust of reinvention, workplace democracy in the public sector has been developed less than entrepreneurship and technocracy. In addition, many scholars suggest the problem of government's relationship with civil society. Metcalfe[58] criticizes NPM for paying little attention to the involvement of citizens, and regarding the users of public services simply as clients or customers rather than as members of democratic states. DeLeon and Denhardt[59] point out that

Osborne and Gaebler's[60] *Reinventing Government* offers little discussion of citizen participation. Denhardt and Denhardt[61] suggest figuratively that the owner of the boat (whether steered or rowed) is forgotten

Under NPM, it is intended that citizens participate in the process of evaluating public services, since the NPM principle of 'customer responsiveness'[62] requires that the degree of user satisfaction with public services be measured. If the results of user evaluation feed back to the policy-making process, it can be said that citizens have been brought into the policy-making process indirectly. However, this is a rather passive form of citizen participation. A more active form of citizen participation has been seen in the UK, where the Blair Government has placed user or citizen representatives in active decision-making roles. For example, the National Health Service (NHS) has appointed new local patient representatives to draw attention to issues such as dirty hospital wards, and there are to be patient representatives on many national decision-making bodies.[63] Denhardt and Denhardt[64] propose as an alternative what they call 'New Public Service', suggesting that the primary role of public servants is to help citizens articulate and meet their shared interest rather than to attempt to steer society. As Kettl demonstrates, the main goal of the public sector reform movement is to attempt to solve the problems inherent in government's relationship with civil society.[65]

Furthermore, NPM is criticized for focusing on managerial reforms-whose goal is the pursuit of efficiency and economy within the constraints of pre-determined policy and resources-at the expense of policy issues, and for separating managers and front-line workers from the policy process, as described in the UK White Paper *Modernizing Government*. Osborne and Gaebler insist that "those who steer the boat have far more power over its destination than those who row it",[66] but the focus of their discussion is on the issues relating to rowing (service delivery), not steering (policy decisions). To put it another way, NPM focuses on the individual achievements of managerial reforms rather than on any contribution to an overall strategic purpose.

A final major criticism is that NPM is a self-serving movement designed to promote the career interests of an elite group of bureaucrats (top managers and officials in central controlling departments/ministries, management consultancies,

and business schools) rather than those of the mass of low-level civil servants.[67] DeLeon and deLeon[68] indicate that NPM focuses on allowing more managerial discretion (in particular, over hiring, job assignments, and firing) rather than on greater autonomy for workers or on more widely shared leadership. The suggested remedies are disproportionate cutbacks on managerial staff rather than on operational staff,[69] and the promotion of workplace democracy.[70]

Conclusion

With the emergence of globalization, financial constraints, and rising social expectations, public administration has to live with many dilemmas. Modern administration has to deal with the problems of technical complexity, new technology, transitory professionals who move in and of public organizations with ease, public-private partnerships, and the meshing of powers in addition to more public demands for services. The most important of all these developments is the overlapping of powers. More specifically, the concept of separation of power has gradually eroded into a domain where the boundaries of state organs- legislature, executive, and judiciary – seem blurred. This is particularly true in the case of problems such as combating terrorism and protecting environment.[71] In order to have better understanding of public administration, there is a need for a new approach that combines the values of traditional public administration and those advocated by the New Public Management (NPM). Although the three approaches (managerial, legal, and political), which Rosenbloom[72] have integrated into one theory seem deficient in addressing modern challenges to public administration. By using Rosebloom's theory as a framework and borrowing ideas from NPM, researches in future could be focused on developing a new theory of public administration which resolves discrepancies in public policy and administration on the one hand and reconciles competing values of probity, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and innovation on the other. In other words, a synthesis of managerial, legal, and political approaches to public administration is required in addition to accommodating some of the values of New Public Management.

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