

## The Changing Nature of Public Administration: From Easy Answers to Hard Questions

B. Guy Peters

*Department of Political Science  
University of Pittsburgh  
4L01 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA*

*The changes in public administration over the past several decades have been expressed primarily in terms of a contrast between New Public Management and traditional administration. This paper points to a third strand of development, usually referred to as "governance". The changes imposed by New Public Management and by governance are to some extent occurring simultaneously, but have very different implications for the public sector.*

Raktažodžiai: *viešoji vadyba, reforma, valdymas.*

Keywords: *public management, reform, governance.*

### Introduction

Had I been asked to undertake the task of discussing the "state of the art" in public administration two decades ago, or even fifteen years ago, the task would have been considerably easier. At one point in the history of our discipline there was some (relatively) clear agreement on the fundamental nature of public administration. That agreement may not have achieved the status of a paradigm as described in the philosophy of science but it did have some of those characteristics (for both good and ill). The set of ideas was relatively robust, and guided both practitioners and academics, the former about the appropriate performance of their tasks and the latter about what were the interesting intellectual puzzles. The agreement upon the nature of public administration reflected an equally strong level of agreement about the nature of the State and the appropriate forms of organization in the public sector.

There were, of course, differences in the way in which administration was practiced across countries, as well as some debates within countries on the interpretation of the prevailing paradigm. When viewed from a sufficient distance, however, there was substantial agreement on what administration in the public sector entailed, and the manner in which it should be practiced. The paradigm also had a normative status and could be used to deflect criticism, as well as to

constrain the behavior, of members of the profession. The blending of the practical and the scientific is a distinctive feature of public administration, and its dual role was yet another source of tension, but that tension was played out within a narrow set of boundaries and over a limited set of issues.

The comfortable world of the then conventional public administration has been altered dramatically during the past several decades. This transformation in public administration has come about in part through practice itself, with political leaders, their loyal advisors, and their sometimes less loyal civil servants, developing new mechanisms for achieving public sector goals. Most of these mechanisms for enhanced performance have been founded on the basic premise that public and private administration are fundamentally the same – the notion of generic management.<sup>1</sup> One might have expected these ideas to be the stock in trade of the political right (Savoie, 1994), but in many instances generic management and adoption of private sector managerial practices have been advocated as fiercely and effectively by leaders from the political left, perhaps most notably in New Zealand.

In many ways the adoption of the ideas of generic management in government was done unthinkingly. The intellectual and theoretical justifications for this shift in paradigms – called collectively the New Public Management, as we will discuss below – followed practice rather than leading it (but see Murray, 1996).

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*B. Guy Peters* – Pittsburgo universiteto (JAV) profesorius.

El. paštas: [bgpeters@pitt.edu](mailto:bgpeters@pitt.edu)

Straipsnis įteiktas redakcijai 2003 m. balandžio mėn.; recenzuotas; parengtas spaudai 2003 m. gegužės mėn.

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<sup>1</sup>One is, of course, reminded of Graham Allison's justly famous essay on this premise.

There has been a great deal of diffusion of ideas within the public management community, carried on by international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank, by consulting firms (Saint-Martin, 2000), and by individual advocates within the early adopting governments such as New Zealand (Horn, 1995). In many ways, however, the diffusion was of practices rather than of ideas, and the information that was being spread tended to say more about what could (and should) be done rather than why it should be done. Although we will later tease out ideas that reside at the heart of some of the changes in governing (see Peters, 2000), much of the change has been practical and political.

I should also point out here that although much of the change in public administration can be characterized as the New Public Management (NPM), some changes also have arisen from a rather different set of practices and ideas. At the same time that some practitioners were moving public sector management in the direction of that found in the private sector, with an implicit business model of administration in mind, other practitioners were moving toward a very different conception of relationships with the private sector. This relationship between the public and private sectors has come to be known as "governance" (see Pierre and Peters, 2000). Although governance has been assigned a number of different meanings (see Rhodes, 1996) in the academic literature, the most fundamental notion of governance for our purposes is that government no longer is the autonomous and authoritative actor that it might have been at one time. Rather, the public sector is now conceptualized as depending upon the private sector in a number of different ways, and much of public policy is developed and implemented through the interaction of public and private actors.<sup>2</sup> As with the NPM mentioned above, practice has often outstripped theory, and scholars have experienced difficulty in capturing and conceptualizing the variety of relationships that have emerged.

In the remainder of this paper I will develop first a notion of what the conventional public sector had been, prior to the impacts of the dual paths of change mentioned above. That traditional model now may appear rather quaint, but yet in some ways it remains a viable representation of a system of *public* administration (See Wright, 2000; Haque, 2001). Indeed, in many political systems, that traditional model may be a goal toward which the system should be striving, rather than an anachronism from which all are

fleeing. In contrast to that traditional, and again distinctly public, conception of public administration I will examine the two alternative strands of change individually, and then also look at the ways in which the two versions of change may interact. Perhaps most importantly, these two sources of change interact and reinforce each other in assuming that a depoliticized (whether entrepreneurial or networked) government is possible and desirable. Finally, I will examine the rather confused state of our understanding of administration at present, and ask questions concerning the possibilities of imposing some sort of intellectual order, or at least some understanding of the sources of difference, on the status quo in public administration.

### **The Old Time Religion of Public Administration**

The conventional models of public administration that had grown up over decades in the industrialized democracies tended to provide relatively easy answers to the difficult questions of how to administer public policies. That capacity to provide answers was certainly true of Weberian/Wilsonian hierarchical systems, and the "classical model" of public administration that grew out of them (see Gawthrop, 1969). These versions of administration focused on the career, neutrally competent civil servant working within a structure of hierarchical authority as the best means, in both normative and empirical terms, of translating policies into action (Derlien, 1999). Although certainly challenged by developments such as human relations management, systems theory, organizational development, and other less viable fads and fashions, and although the answers provided to the difficult questions were at times excessively facile, these notions remained the bedrock of public administration.

If we move beyond these largely structural perspectives on public administration, we can find a set of propositions that help to define what governing and administering was in that conception of the public sector. Walsh and Stewart (1992), for example, argued that there were five fundamental assumptions that defined how public administration functioned in the traditional model. These five assumptions were:

- 1) *An Assumption of Self-Sufficiency*: This characteristic of the traditional system assumed that if government is to do anything it will organize and equip itself in order to make and implement the program; stated differently, government is a self-sufficient actor that can act autonomously the economy and society.
- 2) *An Assumption of Direct Control*: As well as being self-sufficient in relation to society,

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<sup>2</sup>As we will point out in greater detail below these interactions are hardly novel but the difference is in the explicit recognition of these relationships and the shift in the definition of the role of the private sector.

government is also internally structured by authority and hierarchy, so that the individuals at the top of organizational pyramids were assumed capable of exercising control within their own organizations.

- 3) *An Assumption of Accountability Upward.* In this conception of government accountability was to flow upward, with career officials answering to their political "masters" and those ministers answering to legislatures. This mode of accountability was to be the principal form of connection of administration with the political system, and with the surrounding social system.
- 4) *An Assumption of Uniformity:* Government was supposed to treat all citizens equally and to provide the same benefits and deprivations to all similarly situated people. This was seen as a fundamental conception of fairness, but by producing formal equality the doctrine may have produced inequities.
- 5) *An Assumption of a Civil Service System.* Walsh and Stewart describe this principle of the traditional system as "standardized establishment procedures", a charming British phrase meaning that personnel in the public sector were to be governed through a formalized civil service for recruitment, pay, grading, and other aspects of internal management.

The above five points are a worthy collection of ideas describing how governments performed their tasks in the pre-reform public sector. This list emphasizes that in the conventional conception of public administration public sector organizations are autonomous from society and, to the extent that they are linked to society, that linkage is conceived as coming through the political system, rather than through their own ties to socio-political networks or through joint action with organizations in the private sector. Further, in this conception of governing the internal management of public organizations was to be carried out through rule-based rather than market-based criteria, and there was to be a great deal of internal consistency in the recruitment and reward of public employees.

The above list of attributes of the public sector is especially good at describing the internal management of government organizations, but several other points should be added to the list coming from Walsh and Stewart. Those additional points emphasize the role of public administration operating within a political system. It is important to note the extent to which much of the traditional literature on public administration tended to ignore the political aspects of administration, or to condemn it through the

emphasis on traditional commitments to political neutrality. While politicization is a crucial problem in contemporary public administration (see Peters and Pierre, forthcoming), it is also somewhat naive to ignore the role that bureaucracy plays in politics and governing, and also the role that politics plays in the management and control of public bureaucracy.

*Legal and Procedural Performance.* An important additional characteristic of "traditional" public administration is that the performance of public organizations was to be judged primarily on legal and accounting grounds, rather than on the basis of the actual performance of tasks and the outcomes for citizens. That may appear to be a bit of an overstatement, given the existence of a significant evaluation industry (public and private) in most industrialized countries, including evaluators within government itself (Rist et al, 1990). Still, we could argue that evaluation was to a great extent an addition to the fundamental assessment process that was more legal and mechanistic, and which tended to give easier yes or no answers to questions about the appropriate behavior of public organizations.<sup>3</sup>

This formalistic conception of performance is important for ensuring the Weberian standard of treating the public *sine irae ac studio*, but it provided little benefit for the public beyond that legal standard. This shortcoming of the formal model of performance is especially evident when this concept is married with that of the uniformity of public services. We will point out below that the concept of democratic government inherent in the traditional view of governing is "top down", and that the concept of interacting with the public appears similar. In this view the public are largely to be treated as the loyal subjects of government, rather than as active clients, consumers, or even citizens of the State.<sup>4</sup>

*Constrained Democracy.* In addition to the performance criterion, the dominant view of governing reflected in the Walsh and Stewart formulation, and the prevailing wisdom of much of the period before significant reform of the public sector, was that democracy and politics were most appropriately representative democracy, and it occurred in the hallowed halls of legislatures and political executives such as presidents and prime ministers. In the context

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<sup>3</sup>It might also be argued that the evaluation industry was more tied to policy than to administration. It is, of course, difficult to separate totally these two aspects of governing, but there are marked differences in the focus of various institutions and procedures.

<sup>4</sup>I tend to object to the notion of the public being "customers" of government, given that this places them in an economic rather than political relationship with their government. That having been said, however, the customer is still in a more active role than is the subject orientation implied in the more traditional conception of the place of the public.

of parliamentary and presidential democracies attempts at more direct involvement of the public with decisions were not considered necessary or appropriate. Associated with that conception of democracy was a general top-down conception of governing, with the public being relevant for the process only at the time of elections.<sup>5</sup>

The possibility of interest group democracy was also somewhat constrained in this traditional view of public administration, meaning that the prevailing practice was to involve a limited number of social actors in the policy process – at both the formulation and the implementation stages. This selectivity of access for social actors is to some extent a reflection of the top-down conception of governing mentioned above, and the associated assumption that government was capable of making its own decisions about policy and administration.<sup>6</sup> Social actors may have been partners in government, but they were almost inevitably junior partners and partners whose participation could be curtailed rather easily.

It must be emphasized that although the traditional conception of administration relied on a limited and representative conception of democracy, it did have a clear sense of the political in public administration. The career personnel system was meant to be depoliticized and neutrally competent, but there was the strong sense that all administration activity was animated by political actors and by political values. In this conception of governing there was a clear sense that government was to be driven by politics and by the need to develop make policies that reflected the political composition of government. Thus, the traditional system of government was to some extent a paradoxical mixture of political dominance and depoliticization. Further, in this version of governing the depoliticized public service often could be very powerful politicians, not in a partisan sense but more in the sense of defending and promoting the interests of the organizations for which they worked.

*Limited Policy Role of Administration.* Following from the above, the top-down conception of governing in the traditional approach was perhaps most pronounced in the role of administrative organizations in making policy. Whether verbalized directly or not, the traditional conception of governing had embedded within it the all too familiar Wilsonian dichotomy between politics and administration.<sup>7</sup> That

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<sup>5</sup>A bit of an overstatement of that traditional position, but not by much.

<sup>6</sup>The selectivity was especially pronounced for the Anglo-American democracies, while the Scandinavian and to some extent Germanic administrative systems tended to be substantially more inclusive.

<sup>7</sup>This notion is especially important for the Anglo-American democracies, and even more particularly the United States. That

is, there was a sense in this model of governing that bureaucrats were to be ciphers when public policy was concerned, leaving that task to politicians. In this view the bureaucrats and their organizations were at most to be the source of objective advice and information for the "real" policy makers in government. This was perhaps good democratic theory, stressing the role of elections in the selection of policy (see Rose, 1974), but there was also some degree of unreality, given the control of information by bureaucracies and the role of senior officials in giving policy advice (Plowden, 1982; Ethredge, 1985).

The limited policy role for the bureaucracy, and the associated insulation from direct public accountability for policy choices, was a "bargain" that had been struck implicitly or explicitly between the civil service and politicians over the role of the bureaucracy (Shaffer, 1973; Hood, 2001). That bargain provided some benefits for both sides involved, with the politicians receiving honest advice and loyalty from their civil servants while the civil servants received protection from public exposure for their involvement in policy. Further, this bargain enabled the participants to cooperate in order to govern, and thus reinforced the essentially top down version of democracy inherent in the traditional approach. Again, however, the formal statements of the primacy of politics often disguised a substantial capacity for administrators to promote particular policies as they advised ministers and dealt with client organizations.

## From Clear Answers to Difficult Questions

The various principles of public administration discussed above defined a stable and comfortable way of governing for much of the "modern" public sector. That system of governing was far from exciting but it did provide for an honest, politically neutral and generally effective public service. It also exhibited a number of important political values, such as the equal treatment of all citizens. Those virtues were not enough, however, to satisfy many critics of the bureaucracy in and out of government. The numerous critiques of government administration that have been advanced want a more humane and especially a more efficient government. The problem is that the critiques that have been advanced are far from homogenous and to some extent are contradictory.

I will now detail the conflicting views labeled New Public Management and governance, as well as looking at the choices that these two views of public administration provide to political and administrative

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having been said, there are traces of the same logic in other administrative systems that emphasize the role of the bureaucrat as the independent, professional implementing agent of political actors.

leaders in the public sector. In discussing these alternatives I will address the same set of questions about administration that were used to characterize the traditional model of public administration. The alternative presented by the NPM has been discussed extensively in any number of places (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2002; Hood, 1991) so I will give rather less attention to it than to the option presented by governance, but it is important to note both the similarities and differences that exist between these views on administration.

## The New Public Management

The principal impetus for reform in the public sector has come from the ideas, and especially the practices of New Public Management. Like many changes in the political and social life it is difficult to assign an exact date to this change – there was no storming of the administrative Bastille. Rather, there was the growing sense during the 1970's and into the 1980's that something was wrong with the way in which government worked and there needed to be change. As already noted this unease with the then status quo was evident for the political left as well as for the political right, although the ideas of New Public Management might appear on their face to be more compatible with the political right. One might date the beginning of this tide in public administration with the election of politicians such as Reagan, Thatcher and Mulroney (Savoie, 1994), or with the Labor government in New Zealand in the late 1980's, but either would imply too sharp a break from the past.

The fundamental logic of NPM is that management in the public sector is not in any meaningful way different from management in the private sector. Further, the public sector has not paid sufficient attention to management and to the role of the manager, having placed excessive emphasis on the role of political leaders at the head of public organizations. If managers and their organizations can be released from the control of those political leaders, and the constraints that politics places on management and operations then the system will perform better. By performing tasks better, this approach means performing them more efficiently in an economic meaning of that term.<sup>8</sup>

*Organizational Autonomy and Self-Sufficiency.* The New Public Management has a somewhat ambiguous conception of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of public sector organizations. On the one hand,

the admonition to "steer, not row" can be taken as a rejection of a major role for government organizations *per se* in the actual provision of public services, in favor of a more indirect, enabling role (see Osborne and Gaebler, 1991). In that view government should become a contractor for, or perhaps sponsor of, organizations that actually provide services, rather than the direct provider of those services (Fortin and Van Hassel, 2000; Cooper, 2002), and hence the public sector should become more closely allied with the private sector. In the New Public Management the two sectors become mutually dependent, given that the private contractors may depend upon government for their existence, and the public sector is dependent upon the private for the capacity to perform its essential tasks.

On the other hand, advocates of the New Public Management argue that public sector organizations that remain as direct service providers should be highly autonomous from their political sponsors, and should be expected to act more like entrepreneurial firms than conventional public sector organizations. These organizations – often referred to now as "agencies" – stand in a variety of formal relationships with ministries and their ministers (Bouckaert and Peters, 2001). Some versions of devolving authority, such as the Next Steps agencies created in the United Kingdom, are more tied to the minister and the ministry than might be expected in a model premised on organizational autonomy (Talbot, 1996). That is, however, perhaps the most minimalist version of devolving authority, and most reforms of this nature have been granting their agencies a good deal of latitude in making implementation, personnel and even policy decisions (Bouckaert, Peters, Verhoerst and Verschuere, 2002).

Although seemingly contradictory, these answers from the New Public Management to the question of organizational autonomy do have one fundamental premise in common. That premise is that the previous approach to organizing the public sector, in which the principal building block was the ministerial department exercising substantial control over policy and administration, is not the best way of approaching the issue. The question then becomes under what conditions and to what degree the service provision of government should be devolved, and if they are devolved what are the most efficient means of doing so while maintaining some degree of public sector involvement with, if not actual control over, the service.

*Controlling Public Employees.* The notion of control over employees contained in the New Public Management is not all that different from that contained in the traditional form of public administration. In both approaches there is a sense that managers and higher level officials should exercise control over

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<sup>8</sup>The National Performance Review (Gore Commission) said that its task was to make "government work better and cost less". The definition of "working better" used by that reform process was, however, broader and came close to the governance concept discussed below.

public employees within their organizations. The difference between the two approaches to public administration is the source of the control. In the traditional model the control is based in law and rules, while in the New Public Management the control is largely through financial incentives and building organizational cultures, and is generally less concerned with legal principles than with performing certain tasks efficiently and effectively.

If anything, managers in the New Public Management have taken for themselves greater control over rank and file employees in government than is present in traditional public administration. Civil service systems provide for some control over the behavior of employees but they also provide substantial protection for employees, especially employees who may have disagreements with the political persuasion of the government of the day. By eliminating those protections personnel policies in New Public Management provide managers with much greater latitude for firing and firing, and therefore also greater possibilities for politicization, or at least personalization, of the public sector work force (see Peters and Pierre, forthcoming). That is, if managers are appointed from outside on performance contracts they will want to ensure that things in the organization are done their way, even if there is no particular partisan bias in the selection of personnel or programs.

*Accountability of Public Organizations.* The accountability model inherent in New Public Management is substantially less political than that of the traditional public administration model for government (Barberis, 1998). Although NPM does emphasize in theory the need for clear political direction of policy, the exaltation of managers as the central figures in this model makes accountability more internalized and professional, rather than the product of political controls exerted from external institutions.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the instruments associated with NPM, e.g. performance contracting, can be utilized to provide somewhat formalized standards that the managers must meet as a mechanism for accountability. To the extent that there are hierarchical controls over managers involved in NPM those controls operate between ministers and their executives, with the legislature often being kept at some distance from any significant management issues.

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<sup>9</sup>The reliance on internalized controls for accountability is made especially problematic by the elimination, or at least de-emphasizing, of the career civil service. If managers are as likely as not to come from outside government then those managers are less likely to have the public-regarding values that would be appropriate for the more autonomous role that they have been assigned in NPM.

As the New Public Management has developed during the past several decades accountability has become increasingly focused on performance and quantifiable indicators of the outputs of government. This shifts the focus of accountability from political institutions to more managerialist mechanisms. In many ways this form of accountability constitutes an improvement over the conventional mechanisms that focus on exceptions and on obvious mistakes that can embarrass a government. The emphasis on performance by governments emphasizes more the average level of performance by the organizations and what is actually being produced for the public. This performance approach to accountability, however, still requires some political mechanism for enforcement.

The logic of using performance measurement as the instrument for accountability is more that of the private sector – a bottom line of sorts – rather than that of the public sector. This bottom line can be both subjective – the views of the customers of the programs – and more objective indicators of success. The perspective, in turn, may substitute relatively technical judgments of managers and central assessors of organizations for the political judgment that has resided at the center of public sector decision-making. Empirically the standards of judgment may be clearer, but critics can raise normative concerns about making what is fundamentally political choice into an essentially technical exercise.

*Uniformity of Public Services.* The New Public Management has a much less clearly developed concern about uniformity than did the traditional model of managing within government. Indeed, to the extent that NPM involves an ethos of "serving the customer", it also involves an ethos of differentiation rather than universalism in the relationships with the public. Public sector customers are assumed to desire different products in education, health and many other sectors of public services, and it is argued that they should be given the opportunity to choose among those products, if that can be arranged within the bounds of public law. This shift in assumptions about good public administration has obvious implications for policy, with the adoption of instruments such as vouchers (Steuerle, 2000) as a means of permitting greater consumer choice of services.

As noted above, one of the most obvious changes in public management associated with the New Public Management is the elimination of standardization and uniformity within the public sector itself, in perhaps an even more extreme way than has been true for the services provided to the public. The logic for producing change within the public sector is that the conventional civil service systems, through their standards of equal treatment and reward, did not adequately motivate public employees, if indeed they

did not actually demotivate those employees. The assumption of the advocates of NPM is that standardized treatment of civil servants means that high performers would be rewarded in the same way as would poor performers, so there was no reason for anyone in government to work hard. If, on the other hand, individuals in the public sector were evaluated and rewarded differentially they could be expected to perform at the top of their abilities.<sup>10</sup> Inside and outside government, the drive from NPM is toward differentiation and difference, rather than uniformity.

*Policy and Administration.* The New Public Management also has implications, if somewhat ambiguous ones, for the policy role of public administrators. On the one hand the NPM emphasizes the old chestnut of the dichotomy between policy and administration that has been deeply embedded in public administration, at least in the United States and to some extent in the other Anglo-American countries (Halligan, 2002). Agencies and other autonomous organizations as the common structural changes in the public sector associated with the NPM have tended to institutionalize the dichotomy between policy and administration (Smith, 1999). The autonomous organizations are designed to be instruments for implementation and to follow the directions of their political masters.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the importance of the mantra of "let the managers manage" within this school of thought has emphasized the professional autonomy of these actors at the apex of organizations, and implies a substantial policy as well as administrative role for managers. This central role for managers is to some extent being constrained as the newer forms of accountability that focus on targets and strategic planning come into play. Even with that, however, the selection of the mechanisms for reaching the targets of public programs may have policy and political implications, just as would the initial selection of the goals of the programs. Policy instruments are not politically neutral (Peters, 2001), and the selection of one "tool" over another will affect the acceptability of the programs, the range of political forces that will affect the program, as well as

the distributional consequences of the program in addition to the mere efficiency of administration.

We should note also that there are other forces at work – intellectual as well as political – to expand the policy role of public bureaucracy. One of the most important of these, at least in the American context, has been the notion of a "civic republican" state in which the traditional political branches of government become primarily instruments of accountability and the formulators of very broad policy, while administrative agencies are the principal source of policy and discretion in the political system (Sunstein, 1987; 1990; Seidenfeld, 1992). In some ways that is a restatement of the principle of parliamentary government that the role of the legislature is to criticize, while the executive's role is to act (see Savoie, forthcoming). The difference is that in this version the executive in question is the professional, career public bureaucracy rather than the political executive.

*Summary.* The New Public Management, and the private sector model that resides at the heart of its reforms, have become central to change in the public sector. Although it has a rather clear set of ideas at its core, the prescriptions that come from NPM are often rather ambiguous. Many of these ambiguities and paradoxes (Hesse, Hood and Peters, 2002) that result from change have to do with the special nature of the public sector, and the multiple values and issues that are invoked at any time there are attempts to reform the public sector. So, when there are attempts to make managers in government more independent, the net result may be less autonomy as political leaders find new ways to exercise control over the bureaucracy, control they believe is justifiable in democratic theory.

The New Public Management is especially problematic when viewed from the perspective of democratic values in administration. On the one hand there is a strong emphasis on responsiveness to the "customer" or the "consumers" of public programs, and indeed greater concern with service provision *per se* than is evident in the more conventional approach to managing. On the other hand, however, the mechanisms through which the citizens can

## Governance and Public Administration

In addition to the shift toward using the ideas of the New Public Management, a crucial shift in thinking about the role of public administration in government has been moving away from a concentration on government *per se* and toward more concern with governance. Governance has appeared in the literature with a number of meanings, but the basic thrust of the argument is that governing is fundamentally about steering the economy and society, and analysts

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<sup>10</sup>This also assumes that financial reward, or financial insecurity, were the best way to motivate people, something that has been central to private sector management but antithetical to conventional ideas about the commitment of public employees to public service.

<sup>11</sup>This is to some extent a mis-reading of the Scandinavian tradition in which the agencies had substantial freedom to make policy decisions as well as merely to implement (Premfors, 1991). The notion of having a board governing the activities of the agency implied that there was policy as well as implementing capacity. Further, there was a clear accountability mechanism present in the board that may be lacking in some of the attempted copies of this arrangement.

(as well as practitioners) should consider the range of possibilities for providing that steering. Too often this argument has been taken to the extreme and displacing government with a range of other actors. I am arguing for retaining governance as the central instrument for goal-setting and for accountability, but much of the discussion of governance has focused on the role of non-governmental actors in producing public policies. This shift in emphasis has occurred both in the real world of government and in the academic literature concerning the collective management of societies. It has been easy to over-emphasize this transformation in the style of achieving collective goals within contemporary political systems, and to assume that "governance without government" is a real possibility (see Rhodes, 1997). Despite the importance of networks and connections of government organizations with organizations in the civil society (see O'Toole, 2000; Kickert, Klijn and Koopjans, 1999), a central role for government remains in establishing goals for society and in monitoring the implementation of programs.

The shift toward the governance conception for collective goal-setting has a number of implications for the role of administration. In descriptive terms the shift toward governance means that government has become more of an Enabling State than it is a hierarchical, commanding State governing through its own authority (Hall, 2002). Over the past several decades a number of cooperative instruments for delivering public programs have become standard components in the repertoire of government action when confronting policy problems, especially in social, health and urban policy (Salamon, 2002; Webb, 2002). Governments now use contracts, partnerships, co-production and co-finance, and other more creative arrangements to find the means of delivering policies.

### **Self-Sufficiency**

Public administration in the governance model is anything but autonomous from society. One of the defining features of the governance approach is that government utilizes organizations in the private sector as part of the service-delivery strategy for public programs. In a range of policy areas, but perhaps particularly in social services, public programs are delivered by private organizations or through some form of partnership or collaboration with networks of non-governmental actors. Instead of relying on the autonomous capacity of government itself, governance approaches to the tasks of the public sector assume that programs can be delivered better by linkages with the private sector. For example, social services may be delivered better if the clients have some involvement in the shaping of the programs, as well

as even greater involvement in the delivery of the programs.

In this case "better" has both empirical and normative dimensions. Empirically the assumption in governance is that governments can deliver services more efficiently and effectively if the structure of delivery involves private sector actors. At a minimum this may mean that the public sector is able to leverage private sector actors that use volunteers and other lower cost service delivery personnel. Normatively, the private sector organizations that may be involved in delivering services have a great deal of legitimacy with the recipients of the services and they may be closely linked with those clients. While that linkage may present problems of accountability it may also provide greater legitimacy for the "public" actions, especially in services to disadvantaged segments of the population who have rather problematic experiences with government and may find less bureaucratized means of delivery more acceptable.

What may be as important as changes in the actual structure of the delivery of public services may be in any one case is that the system of governance is bargained and contestable. Traditional styles of administration, and to some extent the New Public Management, have pre-determined action ensemble for reaching public goals. In an era of governance each decision must to some degree be discussed and negotiated. While this may appear open and democratic there is the potential for a "Faustian bargain" in which the seeming openness actually represents co-optation, the continued dominance of the public sector institutions, and some loss of autonomy for the private sector organizations.<sup>12</sup>

### **Control of Government Employees**

Both the traditional approach to public administration and the New Public Management contain rather negative preconceptions about public employees, except perhaps those at the upper echelons of organizations. In the traditional model there was a perceived need to use authority to control the autonomy and discretion of employees. In the New Public Management managers are empowered but this is perhaps at the expense of other public employees. Further, the use of the various means of control over behavior contained within NPM tend to deny autonomy for lower echelon employees. At the

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<sup>12</sup>In the United States, for example, President George W. Bush's initiative to involve "faith-based" organizations in government was resisted by these organizations almost as intensively as it was by civil libertarians concerned about the separation of church and state. The private-sector organizations were concerned that they would lose their autonomy, and their standing with their clients if they were to become more closely involved with the federal government.



core of both of these notions about governing was a fundamental distrust of public sector employees.

The governance approach to the public sector, on the other hand, tends to contain more positive, trusting assumptions about the public sector employees. In the governance perspective, in addition to the emphasis on the involvement of private sector actors and the relationships necessary to deliver services, there is an assumption that the lower echelons of the public sector should be empowered to make more of their own decisions, as should the clients of the organizations. I should say that here there is no strong theoretical linkage (and not much of a weak one either) between the ideas of using civil society organizations to assist in the governing process and this more benign conception of public employees. The views have, however, covaried empirically. In some ways, these two views are actually antithetical, given that they imply that both the civil servants charged with managing programs and the recipients of those programs should be empowered simultaneously (Peters and Pierre, 1999).

To the extent that there is a connection between these strands within the governance approach it is the weakening of the dichotomy between state and society that is inherent in the traditional approach. If the State is to some extent sharing its sovereignty with non-state actors and using their employees to implement programs, then it makes less apparent sense to invest heavily in control over State employees. Both of these changes in the administrative system imply a softening of the boundaries among organizations and careers and some general acceptance of weakened controls within the system. As we will point out in some detail below, that in turn involves some change in ideas of accountability.

### **Accountability Regimes**

As noted above, accountability is transformed when there is a shift toward a governance approach to the public sector. The greater use of the private sector as the mechanism for delivering public programs at once weakens and broadens the imposition of accountability for those programs. The most noticeable consequence of adopting the governance perspective is that the linkage between state organizations and the actions performed in their name is weakened, and there are fewer levers available to political leaders to exercise the control that is assumed in democratic theory. Contracts may be capable of specifying some of the conditions necessary for the non-governmental actors to meet in order to conform to the demands of legislation and other standards, but

contracts tend to be relatively blunt instruments for accountability (Peters, 2001; Greve, 2002).<sup>13</sup>

At the same time that the conventional mechanisms of accountability have been weakened they also have been broadened to include means such as the contracting mentioned above. The accountability regimen also involves the same organizations and clients in the private sector that are responsible for delivering the services. Thus, the greater openness to the society makes accountability less of an internal governmental operation and more of a collaboration between the various set of actors. As noted, contracts, partnership agreements and the like are a part of this arrangement, but some of it also must be based on mutual trust and respect. Further, there may be a greater need for the involvement of the courts in ensuring that standards of fairness are maintained in the implementation of programs.

To some extent the governance approach is compatible with the elaboration of public management that have been designed to increase, or at least alter, accountability. As previously noted, the most important of these changes has been the implementation of performance management. The fundamental nature of accountability then shifts from an emphasis on process and political control to one of performance and demonstrable actions. This shift in the nature of accountability means, in turn, that there are clearer standards by which to judge the outcomes of governance arrangements, and to terminate or modify them as needed. In the governance context, the availability of performance management as the mechanism for enhancing accountability assumes that the interactions between state and society can be placed into this. Further, accountability tends to become defined more in terms of the average performance of an organization rather than in terms of potentially isolated and exceptional

The accountability system under governance also is increasingly being supplemented by attempts to politicize the public service, and the interactions with society. With both governance and the New Public Management the political components of government – ministers – and the central bureaucracy lose some or most of the instruments of hierarchical control. These instruments were important for their capacity to control the implementation of policy, but are equally important for creating a chain linking accountability.

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<sup>13</sup>Paradoxically, while the governance approach may be thought to create greater capacity to provide services, the opposite may be the result. Contracts specify minimum levels of performance and those may become the maximum levels of performance. Public sector organizations, by virtue of their more general commitment to service, may be less constrained in how they deliver the services.

## Uniformity of Public Services

The New Public Management moved the public sector away from an assumption of uniformity in public services. The NPM approach to greater diversity in services is based on the market and the assumption that "consumers" or "customers" of public services should be able to make more of their own decisions about the services they want to consume.

The changes in politics and government since that time, however, have made these ideas about change all the more germane. In the first place, the reforms in public administration associated with New Public Management have tended to devalue, or more commonly to ignore, the constitutional position and legal position of the civil service system. The career civil service has been denigrated in favour of a model of generic management, a view within which civil servants are not partners in the management of the State but rather are impediments to the efficient management of the public sector (Hood, 1990; 2001).

Contemporary political events also have produced a disjuncture between the reality of administration and conventional formal statements about the role of the civil service in many countries. In particular, the termination of the socialist systems in the Central and East European countries resulted in a clear distinction between the inherited system of administration and the assumed role for administration in democratic political systems (see Coombes and Verheijen, 1998). This disjuncture has become all the more apparent as the majority of these countries have applied for membership in the European Union and their ability to administer the *acquis* in an effective and responsible manner becomes an issue in the accession debates. Democratic transformations in Asia and Latin America have produced other marked disparities between the reality and the stated principles of administration (see Burns and Bowornwathana, 2001).

In more analytical and theoretical terms governance also implies that rather than clear and widely-accepted answers to most questions in government existing and being operational within the political system, many of the issues of structure and process are open and subject to negotiation, bargaining and creative forms of institutional design. The answers of how to approach any particular policy delivery question are no longer programmed, with the assumption that government and its civil service will deliver the service (Walsh and Stewart, 1992). As noted above the selection of instruments for achieving public purposes now extends beyond simply those involving government itself and includes a range of co-operative arrangements, and these may be selected by bargaining with the affected actors rather than by fiat within government.

Adopting the governance approach for service delivery also implies strongly that uniformity of public services is valued less than in the traditional model. Even if there is a common legal framework for policy, depending upon private sector organizations as principal elements within the delivery system will likely be associated with different versions of that policy being implemented in different setting. Further, normatively, the differences that may emerge are generally regarded positively. Variations resulting from the involvement of actors from civil society (either at the input or output stages) may be considered appropriate responses to differences in the clients to whom the service is being delivered (Sorenson, 1999).

## Governance and the Civil Service

The shift toward governance as model for public administration has several important implications for civil service systems. One implication is that the concept of a permanent, hierarchically-organized civil service is significantly less viable than in the past. Like governance itself as a concept, the personnel systems of government will require increased flexibility, and greater openness to a range of career and management arrangements, than has been true of traditional formalized personnel systems. By using contracting and allied devices to involve personnel in government that openness can be obtained, albeit again at some cost. These instruments for personnel management will, in turn, create greater equality among participants in the public sector.<sup>14</sup> Although contracting given its (at least partial) economic basis might be expected to be more compatible with New Public Management, the capacity to manage short-term and specialized relationships of individuals and government appears to make it also suitable as an instrument within the governance framework.

As with multi-level governance the openness of governance arrangements and the involvement of actors from civil society appear to be important democratic transformations of what had been perceived as rigid bureaucratic arrangements for administering public policies. The central issue in all of this shifting of roles and responsibilities, however, appears to be the capacity to retain the public nature of the public sector (Wright, 2000). For personnel management the increasing adoption of both governance and New Public Management concepts means that the civil service is valued less in the delivery of services or in the overall management of the State. Both the re-

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<sup>14</sup>Contracting implies that both sides of the agreement have independent status and rights in the bargain, in contrast to the hierarchy inherent in traditional personnel management (Peters, 2002).

cruitment of more managers from outside the career system and the use of personnel in not-for-profits, for-profits, or client organizations to implement programs means that a significant number of the people making decisions about governance will not have been socialized into the career values of the public service (Chapman, 2000).

### **An Expanded Conception of Democracy**

The governance approach to public administration has a much broader conception of democracy than does either of the other approaches to public administration. While (in most versions at least) still accepting that the State does have ultimate authority over policy because of its democratic legitimacy, the governance approach also accepts other forms and loci for public participation. As already indicated governance involves private sector organizations and actors as crucial elements of service delivery and permits the actors involved to have some say over the manner in which the services are delivered, if not necessarily in the actual content of the services to be delivered.

Governance is premised upon a concept of steering society, and that steering can be at a distance. The important normative question that follows from that premise about the substantial involvement of private sector actors in the delivery of services is how much deviation from policy norms established in legislation is acceptable, given the democratic mandate held by the formulators of the policies.<sup>15</sup> While involving private sector organizations as components of a governance strategy has the virtue of providing an alternative form of participation, there is the clear potential for modifying the legislation produced by formal institutions. There is an extensive literature on "regulatory creep" as implementing bureaucracies impose their own views on policy, and analogous deviations may be expected from involving non-governmental actors. To some degree deviations are expected, and even applauded, in this approach but we must then question the degree of variation expected and accepted.

In some ways, therefore, the managerialism of the New Public Management maintains more of the public nature of governing than does the seemingly more democratic governance perspective.

### **Limited Policy Role of Bureaucracy**

We have noted that in the traditional model of administration the public bureaucracy is assumed to have a limited role in making policy. In New Public

Management, on the other hand, the bureaucracy, and especially its senior managers, is expected to be a major player in shaping programs. The governance approach falls between those two extremes, although the tendency is to assume that it should have greater autonomy than in the traditional administrative model. The autonomy that the bureaucracy receives in the governance approach, however, is more in the way in which it manages its relationships with the civil society, so that the management of networks becomes a crucial means of shaping policy.

In the governance approach the policy role of the bureaucracy therefore is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand there are not the hymns of praise for the manager that are part of New Public Management, and the notion of steering implies a crucial role for democratic political institutions in shaping the direction of governing. On the other hand, the involvement of the civil society, and the role of bureaucracy as the principal interface between the public and private sectors, place the bureaucracy in a central position for defining the implementation of policy and therefore for defining the meaning of the programs as they are experienced by citizens. Thus, the bureaucracy is important for monitoring implementation, using tools such as the contracts and partnerships through which it is linked to the private sector as the mechanism for enforcing accountability.

Again, the governance approach which appears open and democratic may pose some important questions about the effective meaning of democracy. The involvement of groups and other actors from civil society must be managed by the bureaucracy if these interactions are to contribute to achieving public purposes, and this managerial function points to some of the problems indwelling in the more extreme versions of network theory in governance. The self-organizing capacity of networks appears overstated and there must be some means of providing direction and common purpose to these networks if effective action is to be produced. In a democratic regime the functions of goal-setting and accountability inherently fall with government and with its agents (often the public bureaucracy).

### **Emerging Questions**

The assumptions about reform of governing and the role of civil services are themselves based on a number of fundamental assumptions that determine the viability of the recommendations that may emerge from them. The most important of these assumptions is that there is already a well-established public service in place to be reformed, and that this public service is generally infused with the traditional public service values and behaviors of state administration.

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<sup>15</sup>This is, of course, analogous to the debate over top down and bottom up conceptions of implementation.

Thus, if we want to reform we must be certain about the question of reform *from* what, as well as that of reform towards what. If the assumption about the nature of the pre-existing public sector is incorrect then the prescriptions for reform are also likely to be incorrect. If there is not such a system in place the loosening of hierarchical controls inherent in New Public Management, and the close alliances of government with private sector organizations can become a recipe for corruption and mismanagement.

Given the above, it is clear that the proposals for change inherent in both the New Public Management and in Governance are likely to be poorly suited to other than industrialized, democratic political systems with fully institutionalized civil service systems. Unfortunately, this point is rarely understood by the true believers in these reform strategies. Their advocates have assumed that these administrative arrangements are suitable across a broad range of administrative systems. This view is understandable given that civil service values and ethics and similar concepts are of little significance if the focus of working in government is to be on efficiency defined in relatively simplistic economic terms.

The viability of these alternatives to public management also may depend upon the development of civil society and the availability of reliable partners for government in the delivery of services. Obviously the governance approach depends heavily upon networks of actors who can be partners with government, and to some extent also upon active citizens who can participate as individuals. The New Public Management also may depend upon actors in the private sector, but more commonly in the for profit sector. In both cases, however, governing is a more cooperative enterprise than usually thought and the right partners have to be ready and willing to become involved.

Finally, as well as being contingent upon the degree of institutionalization of the civil service, and public administration arrangements understood more broadly, the possibilities of reforms are also contingent upon administrative traditions influencing the systems potentially involved in the changes. For example, the New Public management ideas may be appealing in some settings, but not in others in which administration is based primarily on law rather than management values (see Peters, 2000). Likewise, the capacity to implement the governance style of reforming public administration will depend very heavily upon the existence of strong organizations within civil society, as well as institutionalized norms legitimating involvement of interest groups and analogous bodies directly into policymaking.

## Putting the Two Together

These two changes in the political and administrative systems have been implemented in rather close proximity in time. Also, to some extent, they employ similar ideas about governing, but may do so for rather different reasons. The two approaches to change both assume that the traditional system for governing is not desirable. Further, both bodies of literature emphasize ideas like "Steer, don't Row", a phrase made popular by the execrable Osborne and Gaebler book (1991). In the NPM world the use of non-governmental actors is to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and limit the power of the State. In the governance approach there are some elements of efficiency but the principal justification is to involve the civil society, enhance participation, and recognize the capacity of networks in civil society to provide at least a certain degree of self-management in their policy areas.

In some ways the two approaches do fit together well, both attempting to break down the hierarchical, top-down system of governing inherited from the past. Some of the recommendations coming from the two approaches are almost exactly the same, e.g. the decentralization of government functions. Further, the two versions of change make some recommendations that are compatible, and even complementary. For example, the ideas in the New Public Management about the performance management and an emphasis on the measurement of outputs from government may facilitate the use of non-governmental actors to deliver programs.

Although some of their recommendations may be compatible there are also a number of recommendations that are incompatible, and when taken together may produce quite negative results for governing. For example, the development of autonomous and quasi-autonomous organizations for the delivery of public services may reduce the capacity of the center of government to ensure accountability. If that change in government were to be combined with elements of the governance approach that recommend reliance on actors in civil society then an extremely long chain of action, and accountability, is created that will make the tasks of control and monitoring extremely difficult. Likewise, mixing the empowerment of managers from the New Public Management with the empowering of clients and lower echelon workers in governance is a recipe of conflict (Peters and Pierre, 2000).

## Summary

Public administration has experienced a great deal of pressure for change during the past several decades. These changes have been discussed

primarily from the perspective of the New Public Management, but the concepts here described as "governance" as the mechanisms for public service delivery also have had a substantial effect on administration within the public sector. The governance paradigm (if that is not ennobling this body of literature beyond all reason) requires thinking about administrative systems from the perspective not just of managing programs and making policy choices within government itself, but also from the perspective of managing interactions with private sector actors, as well as with the clients of the programs. Rather than assuming that government is the principal actor, and that public managers are the principal actors in the delivery of services, this is a much broader perspective on the options available for delivering services.

The ideas of New Public Management and governance are sometimes conflated by observers who note the extent of change within the public sector and assume that all the reforms are part of a common dynamic of change. As I have in other places, however, I would argue that it is important to examine the differences in recommendations, and in outcomes that may arise from alternatives to traditional public administration. Assuming that change is change and that these two are in essence part and parcel of the same approach to change is likely to lead to confused advice and equally confused administration. As noted, although the changes may have some beneficial aspects they may also have some injurious aspects, and those may be exaggerated when their interactions are not understood.

Although there are a number of important challenges arising from these shifts in the mechanisms and style of delivering public services, accountability and control of discretion appear central to the changes that are being observed. Both approaches to change contain strong challenges to ministerial accountability, and at the same time they both provide alternative means of addressing that crucial value in governing. These alternative means for enforcing accountability depend less upon the top down version of governing inherent in the traditional model. The emerging means of ensuring accountability depend more on the professionalism of the personnel involved, or on the political mobilization of forces external to government, or on more mechanistic instruments.

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B. Guy Peters

### **Kintantis viešojo administravimo pobūdis: nuo lengvų atsakymų – prie sunkių klausimų**

#### Reziumė

Pastaraisiais metais vykstantys viešojo administravimo pokyčiai išryškino naujosios viešosios vadybos ir tradicinio viešojo administravimo kontrastą. Šiame straipsnyje akcentuojamas trečiasis raidos bruožas, paprastai siejamas su valdymu. Parodyta, kad valdymo ir naujosios viešosios vadybos pokyčiai tam tikra prasme vyksta kartu, tačiau jie turi ir skirtingos įtakos viešajam sektoriui.