

# New Public Management: A Critical Review of New Public Management and Its Drivers

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## Abstract:

The current paper presents some aspects and criticisms from the theoretical literature concerning the New Public Management (NPM). The article also critically examines whether the NPM model is appropriate and the drivers that affected its efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. The article concluded that the process of managerial reform and the specific criteria in order to evaluate NPM's effectiveness are not completed yet and that there are some key factors such as the statist perception of citizens and politicians, the corruption of public, the fragmented organizational structures, the resistance to change that hinder the success of change and of NPM's effective implementation.

*Keywords* —new public management, management reforms, government reforms

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Denhardt&Denhardt (2000) refer to the term of New Public Management as “a revolution” rather than radical changes in bureaucracy and services and define it as “a cluster of ideas and practices (including reinvention and neomanagerialism) that seek, at their core, to use private sector and business approaches in the public sector». According to Indahsari&Raharja (2020) New Public Management (NPM) is considered as “an approach in public administration that applies knowledge and experience gained in the world of management and other disciplines to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service performance in modern bureaucracies”. A first element that arises from these definitions is that new public management focuses on public sector management methods and techniques which are mainly performance-oriented and not policy-oriented. So, NPM includes techniques and practices which have their roots to the private sector, and they are increasingly seen as a global phenomenon of reforms with emphasis from traditional public administration to public management.

Public sector reform has been a common experience around the world despite its various forms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Usually as scholars and professionals we refer to the reforms of the last decades as "new public management" (NPM), which, for Hood (1991), was an exemplary shift from the traditional model of public administration. During this time several countries became role models for the NPM, notably New Zealand and Australia, which underwent significant public sector change to escape the bureaucratic example of public administration. More recently, however, “cracks” have emerged and the search for a new way of thinking and applying the practice of public administration has begun, in part to address NPM's alleged weaknesses. In the late 20th century, a multi-system public administration model was consistently integrated into many countries, reflecting the outcome of a series of reforms aimed at cutting off the traditional model of public administration supported by the Weber bureaucracy (1946), Wilson's (1887) and a scientific management model of Taylor's work organization (1911). At least in part, the NPM was a reaction to the perceived weaknesses of the traditional

bureaucratic example of public administration (O'Flynn, 2005; Stoker, 2006) and included a critique of monopolistic forms of service and an argument for a wider range of service providers and a more market-oriented management approach (Stoker, 2006). The values of the new public administration soon expanded, as it became clear that a successful reform would have to include more economic parameters. The term "governance" is used to indicate the complexity of reform processes and to emphasize the role of the people. The two main values they pointed out are "legality" and "accountability". In addition, emphasis was placed on the competence to make rational decisions and their proper implementation, as well as on "respect for the law and human rights". The liberal values of the new public administration can be summarized as follows:

- Legitimacy: which refers to the democratic process and the right of the people to agree or disagree with the actions of the public state. Emphasis is placed on the existence of mechanisms that allow the government to be challenged
- Accountability: directly related to legality. It refers to the responsibility of politicians and civil servants for their actions and the use of public resources. It is a symbol of "good governance" and is a vital condition for ensuring transparency.

These reforms are characterized by various kinds of decentralization of management within public organizations, including the creation of autonomous bodies and decentralization of budgets and financial control. There is also an increasing market involvement and competition in the provision of public services (e.g. mechanisms), as so as an emphasis in performance, outputs and customer orientation. So, we can see that NPM reforms combine economic, social, political and technological factors. A common feature of the countries that adopted the NPM is the previous experience of economic and fiscal crises, which brought the need for efficiency and for finding ways to reduce the cost of providing public services. New Public Management (NPM) reforms according to Atreya and Armstrong (2002) are being implemented both in developed and developing

countries as a response to economic pressures and the changing demands of societies (Atreya& Armstrong, 2002). The research findings of Sriram, Misomnai, Metasuttirat&Rajphaetyakhom (2019) showed that New Public Management's philosophy and foundation focuses on empirical and logical positivist. Furthermore, the elements of NPM included a catalytic, community-owned, competitive, mission-driven, result-oriented, customer-driven, privatized, anticipatory, decentralized, and market-oriented government. Most scholars conclude in a common definition of NPM which is the "attempt to implement management ideas from business and private sector into the public services" (Haynes, 2003; Pollitt, 1993). Consequently, NPM has a series of recognizable core characteristics, or themes (Lodge & Gill, 2011).

## **II. THE IMPACT OF STATE CRISIS**

The crisis of the welfare state has raised questions about the role and success of the state. In most developing countries, public administration reforms were mainly the result of external pressures and were carried out as part of structural adjustment programs. The rise of neoliberal ideas since the late 1970s, the development of information technology and the collaboration with international management consultants, were among other important factors in the adoption and implementation of the NPM. Other factors observed in the case of developing countries include loan terms and the growing emphasis on good governance. The vast and growing literature on public sector governance reforms in Western countries (eg Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) has shown that changes in the economic, social, political, technological and administrative environment combine to promote lead to radical changes in public administration and management systems (Zifcak, 1994; Mascarenhas, 1993; Lane, 1997; Kettl, 1997). The central goal of these changes was to improve government and service management, with an emphasis on efficiency, economy, and efficiency (Metcalf & Richards, 1990). In other words, changes aimed at remodeling the role of the State (Christensen

&Læg Reid, 2007; Ferlie, 2017; Ferlie&McGivern, 2014; Hood & Dixon, 2015). In addition, a study of Cavalcante (2019) showed that the countries that adopt NPM principles have a common feature in their concern about the fact that indicators of economic weakness have become more important and the fiscal crisis of governments has deepened, while the active role of the state in managing the economy and providing immediate services were severely challenged in most Western countries (Boudiguel&Rouban, 1988; Dunsire& Hood, 1989; Zifcak, 1994). The Keynesian model is confused with stagnant inflation and this has led to the predominance of the monetarist alternative. This reversal showed that the market economy needed to be better shaped without active state intervention. Faced with the financial crisis and in the midst of a "counter-revolution in economic thinking", most Western governments have taken steps to reduce but mainly control public spending. As seen in the UK cases (Dunsire& Hood, 1989; Marsh & Rhodes, 1992; Greer, 1994; Stewart & Walsh, 1992; Clark & Newman, 1997), in Australia and New Zealand (Mascarenhas 1993; Zifcak, 1994) Halligan, 1997), the fiscal crisis and the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness have put public sector governance reforms at the top of the political agenda.

### **III.THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERAL IDEAS**

Neoliberal ideas also had an obvious effect as they criticized the old public administration. The late 1970s saw strong criticism from new / neoliberals for the size, cost, and role of government, and doubts about the ability of governments to face the economic problems. The Keynesian welfare state was seen as a monopoly service provider and effectively ineffective. Also, customer attention and results were low (Bereton, 1994). The neoliberal view holds that only competition in the market can achieve economic efficiency and the public is offered a free choice of market (Bereton, 1994). Appreciating the virtues of the market, Lindblom (1977), for example, argues that the market is an effective resource allocator, an effective coordination mechanism, a rational decision-making process, and, in addition, encourages ingenuity and entrepreneurship. There

is some agreement among the authors on public sector management reforms (e.g., Flynn, 1993; Ferlie et al., 1996; Walsh, 1995; Pollitt, 1993) that the New Right's critique of the welfare state and public administration is based on it. Buchanan (1975) and Mueller (1979) were strongly influenced by the ideas of economic liberals such as Hayek (1973) and public choice theorists such as Niskanen (1971), Buchanan (1975) and Mueller (2003). For Jordan (1995), the theory of public choice is one of the most effective weapons of the New Right. The main criticism of public choice is that the public sector reward system does not promote effective performance and that politicians and bureaucrats have no incentive to control management costs (Chapman, 1978), resulting in increasing resource waste and inherent tendency. to increase costs and prioritize delivery over productivity. In the absence of any mechanism of automatic discipline (ie market forces), government agencies oversupply collective goods due to budget-maximizing behavior (Niskanen, 1971; Downs, 1967).

### **IV.OTHER FACTORS**

Other factors that have influenced the adoption of reforms include changes in the policy framework, the rapid development of information technology and globalization, and the emerging role of management consultants. More specifically, changes in the political and ideological context have been a major factor in reforms in some Western countries. For example, New Right's ideas found common ground in the Conservative government that came to power in the United Kingdom in 1979 and in the next three Conservative governments (Farnham & Horton, 1996). Next, the literature on public administration reform also highlights the development and availability of information technology as a means of providing the tools and structures needed to bring about effective public administration reform (Greer, 1994). For example, specialized information systems are vital to the principle of decentralizing management through the creation of executive bodies. In order to be decentralized and at the same time more responsible, it is important to have confidence in the reported performance information.

Finally, NPM reforms have also been "globalized" by change factors. These include major international management consultants, accounting firms and international financial institutions, which have contributed decisively to the growing "introduction" of new management techniques by the private sector into the public sector. They have played an important role in the packaging, sales and implementation of NPM techniques, as government agencies considering institutional change or reinforcement often hire expert advisory services to clarify available options and suggest courses of action (Greer, 1994; Bevan, 1997).

#### **V. THE CRITISISM ON NPM AND ITS OUTCOMES**

Some researchers state that democracy requires bureaucracy, the rule of law, the legally sanctioned regulation of markets, the preservation of equity, and competent bureaucracies subject to control by statute and by judicial institutions as Kalimullah, Alam&Nour, (2012) write. For instance, Weber viewed a system of bureaucratic rule in the modern state as inescapable. For more than 30 years, New Public Management has been the most popular label for public sector reform (Reiter and Klenk, 2018), however, more than 15 years, this reform has also been heavily criticized. Specifically, there is a growing trend to consider the called post-New Public Management due to the failure of NPM. These waves of criticism have common elements in many aspects and differ only in terms of their main emphasis on the assumption that NPM is obsolete (Reiter &Klenk, 2018; Çolak, 2019). Post-NPM considered as a post-NPM trend, is not the only concept that indicates the end of NPM (Reiter &Klenk, 2019), but it is closely related to other concepts, such as 'whole of-government', 'joined-up government', the 'Neo-Weberian state' or 'digital-era governance' (De Vries&Nemec, 2013; Pollitt &Bouckaert, 2011), however these trends in reforms resulted a more complex and hybrid public administration (Lægreid, 2017). Lægreid (2017) states that Post-NPM is something more than an alternative to NPM. It complements the specialization, fragmentation, and marketization characteristic of NPM reforms with more

coordination, centralization and collaborative capacity (Christensen &Lægreid, 2008).

No one can claim a monopoly on NPM ideas. Osborne and Gaebler (1995), for example, focus on public sector reform and innovation. Pollitt (2001) added market orientation and the idea of shifting value from justice and security concerns to efficiency and individualism. NPM is not a well-defined idea (Wegrich, 2009). Van Thiel et.al (2007) also recognizes that NPM is not a unified set of ideas that have yielded enjoyable tools. NPM is a hybrid as noted by Christensen &Lægreid (2002) and is a term used to describe a combination of trends. This is why different (alternative) terms are used to describe the public reforms that took place in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s (Van de Walle&Hammerschmid, 2011). The United Kingdom has made a significant contribution to the development of the concept of the new public administration (NPM) and can be described as its "birthplace" (McLaughlin & Osborne, 2005). Indeed, the semantic article that coined the term NPM was a product of the British experience (Hood, 1991). The work of Osborne &Gaebler (1995) also contributed significantly to the elaboration of the concept, which soon spread to the United Nations, Australia and New Zealand, and then to Scandinavia and mainland Europe. Financial institutions, such as the World Bank, also spread NPM principles, concluding that governance issues are vital to economic growth and investment expansion. The idea that policies that have worked in one political context can be transferred to others also seems to have been implemented here. This is known as "policy transfer" as defined by Dolowitz as "the process by which the policies and / or practices of one political system are fed and used in the policy-making space of another political system" (Dolowitz, 2003: 101). researchers have challenged the idea that NPM is a completely new practice (Hood & Jackson, 1991), others have argued that its reforms are limited to a few countries and not globally (Flynn, 2002), while others have argued that NPM does not involve substantial changes in the day-to-day operation of the public sector (Pollitt, 2000). The NPM therefore embodies a series of reforms inspired by the idea

that private sector management techniques and market mechanisms increase public sector efficiency. Such NPM-type reforms include, for example, quantification, introduction of performance management systems, increase of civil servants' accountability, introduction of public sector purchasing mechanisms, introduction of quality management techniques, among others (Maesschalck, 2004). Despite the use of the NPM model in many reforms, the term still lacks conceptual clarity. It was originally a term used to describe public sector developments in New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the bureaucracy (Barzelay, 2002). The NPM has its theoretical foundations in two schools of thought, namely the theory of public choice and the role of management. The combination of the two elements has potential contradictions in public choice theorists who support market forces and accountability, as opposed to emphasizing greater autonomy for managers. A key component of the New Public Governance model is Performance Management and has become a central and critical issue for political leaders and public and private sector managers (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008; Larbi, 2006; Mupazvirih, 2003; Radin, 2006). With the support of international organizations and other advocates, until the mid-1990s, the NPM became the dominant model in public administration (Cejudo, 2008). However, its implementation in developing countries remained unpublished.

A concern in mainly developing countries was that public sector reforms could lead to unfair social consequences, a view expressed by several authors (Bale & Dale, 1998; Batley, 1999; Kiggundu, 1998; Manning, 2001). Governments have limited resources, which require reliable and accurate information to make the best use of them. Evaluation is one of the most important tools for gathering relevant information, however the purpose of evaluation varies between different countries / organizations. The important goals set by the OECD (1999) are to improve decision-making by policy makers, to allocate resources and capital more efficiently, and to strengthen public policy accountability. Evaluating the government

reform program is a complex task due to the problems associated with setting reform goals, the methodological limitations in measuring the results of the reform, and the problems associated with data collection and interpretation. The objectives of public reforms are mainly expressed in qualitative terms as opposed to private sector reforms which are mainly expressed in quantitative terms. Another problem with public reform is that we cannot create an effective cause-and-effect relationship because different variables are involved together in a reform process (Boston 2000, OECD 1999; Savoie, 2006). Other researchers argue that convergence between the private and public sectors is not a realistic scenario (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010), while others such as Hunt (2020) report that collaborating with private providers is the key to fighting pandemics, as in case of the Australian Government (Lapuent & Van de Walle, 2020). Similarly, we point out that the transformation of public infrastructure and services, for example through partnerships with the private sector (PPPs), has successfully dealt with the failures of government projects, controls, financial crisis resistance, fiscal austerity, etc. (Whiteside, 2020).

NPM is based on a concept of service, decentralization and clear assignment of roles to managers. This could lead to situations where decentralization leads to a form of concentration by public administrators. Kanfo (2020) in his article, shares an interesting view that these ideas were translated for business studies and public administration, in order to radically change both fields and "become more scientific" (Kanfo, 2020). For others (Pollitt, 1990; Armstrong, 1998; Painter, 2005; Cheung & Lee, 1995), NPM very simply describes the nature of the public sector, which is characterized by more complex objectives, levels of accountability, and a lower degree of freedom than private sector. Another critique of the use of private sector management principles and their application in the public sector is characterized by a completely different context (Minogue, 2001; Ormond & Loffler, 2006). Since its inception, the NPM has been criticized by many public administration scholars who have argued that it is not a real theory and that its theoretical foundations are inconsistent

(Vabø, 2009; Haque, 2007). NPM is usually characterized by its deniers as a form of managerial character and management mania. Critics have also expressed reservations about the degree of transparency that can be achieved in contracts. In addition, citizens' expectations of the government may be quite low, for example in developing countries, and citizens may have no intention of complaining about the quality of services. When a particular service is missing, how can one talk about service quality (Manning, 2001; Turner & Hulme, 1997; Hughes, 2003; Pollitt & Dan, 2011) In addition, the NPM literature deals much more with efficiency than with equality. The terms used by NPM such as customers, users, etc., instead of citizens with rights and obligations also raise doubts about its successful integration into the public sector. Also the overestimation of the role of the market as a panacea, especially in its early stages, the separation of politics from administration and management resulted in the 1990s, the New Public Administration (NPM) is now in decline. The key to NPM-type reforms was its failure to implement the announced ideas (promises) (Ferlie, Fitzgerald & Pettigrew, 1996; Maor, 1999). It was found to be desirable at a time when public services and public goods are generally provided through collaborative networks involving governmental and non-governmental actors. (Evans, 2009: 38-39). Others criticized the theoretical shallowness of the NPM to the extent that it was merely a "collection of techniques" (Common, 1998). It has even been described as an advertising campaign without much substance. NPM, in many cases, equates to "increased management" (Martin, 1983) and bureaucracy. Hood (1991: 9), noted that "Despite claims to promote the 'public good' (cheaper and better public services for all), the NPM is said to be a vehicle of particular advantage. Maor (1999) argued that politicians have lost control of policy implementation because of NPM reformers, and public choice theory has also been challenged, with Boston, et al. (1996) noting that personal interest is questionable as the a priori assumption that private sector organizations are better managed than public ones is also questionable.

Many authors (Common, 1998; Halligan, 2020; Lindquist, 1997) argued that the results of the NPM movement showed the weaknesses inherent in it. Analyzing the Australian Reform, Considine (1999) stated that the management revolution has indeed brought small achievements. The cost is high and the means used were controversial. Reform techniques were costly and indeed increased costs, and cost-saving efforts did indeed destroy service quality and innovation. The reforms focused on the short-term benefits and lost the key reforms needed. The result was "increased central control and greater homogeneity" (Considine, 1997: 109). In assessing reforms in New Zealand and Australia, Halligan (1997) refers to high social costs, high employment, economic inequality, and growing distrust of political power, among others. Halligan (1997: 43) concluded that "15 years of reform did not bring relief from change, but simply laid the groundwork for more" in Australia. Regarding reforms in the case of Canada, Lindquist (1997) argued that the impact on civil society and the quality of public speaking in governance as a result of reforms is unsatisfactory.

However, the NPM was not a complete failure. It is worth noting his desire to reduce government spending, to decentralize power over central control, to citizens' rights in bureaucratic states, and to provide opportunities for individual initiatives and experimentation. The two major evaluation reports, one of Schick's report on New Zealand reform in 1996 and the Task Force on better governance in Australia in 1992, outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the NPM reforms. The Management Improvement Working Group (1992) concluded that the direction of the reforms was right and that it had many positive results. Schick (2000) noted that we can predict that the government of the future will be organized in very different directions than it is today. The literature on the impact of reforms on OECD data is weak. Exceptions are Propper, Sutton, Whitnall & WiNPMeijer, (2010) and Kelman & Friedman, (2009) who deal with two more professional and science-based public services - healthcare and education, in countries that maintain high-performance databases, particularly from the United Kingdom and the United States. There are

several secondary studies that generally discuss the mechanisms of NPM reform, citing secondary data, but only a few have begun to collect primary data on specific effects on service users and citizens in general (Pollitt & Dan, 2011).

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

From the above review we can conclude that a combination of factors coincided to produce a seemingly irresistible push for public service management reforms in developed market economies. Changes in the political context, fueled by new ideas, and the search for efficiency and effectiveness in public services have been key drivers of change for more market-oriented policies. In order for the markets to function well, then there was a need to renew the organizational and administrative rules and to modernize the structures, so that the public administration institutions could help the economy to be competitive. This exemplary shift to Western countries since the late 1970s has surpassed crisis states in developing regions, especially in countries that have launched structural adjustment programs supported by the IMF / World Bank. This was required by the severe economic and fiscal crises in these countries and exacerbated by political and political instability.

There is no single accepted explanation for why the NPM was merged and why it succeeded (see Hood 1990b, Hood & Jackson 1991, Chapter 8). Many academic commentators have linked it to the political rise of the "new right." This in itself does not explain why these doctrines were in favor, nor why the NPM was so strongly adopted by the governments of the seemingly opposite in the New Right ", mainly in Australia and New Zealand. NPM implemented in its complete form in the United Kingdom (UK) between the years 1945-1979. This was a period of great emphasis on the organization of the welfare state, a period when expectations were high that the state would be able to respond effectively to the economic and social needs of its citizens. This administrative model was expected to be the tool of governance, which could ensure justice and equal treatment of citizens. Inevitably such a vision was doomed to failure, as social needs always require higher resources than

available. The welfare state in order to meet the increased needs of the citizens proceeded to establish regulations and impose high taxes. In the last days of the hegemony of NPM both the welfare state and the model itself have been heavily criticized (initially by academic scholars and finally by the political elite). Chandler (1991) argued that the NPM as a model of administration was coming to an end at a rapid pace, while Rhodes (1997) claimed that this model had become a mere spectator of what is happening in the field of public administration and politics. In fact, in the early 1980s, in the context of the growing popularity of New Right ideas, the prevailing view was that the state should intervene less in society, and large bureaucracies had to be reduced so that individuals could once again take responsibility for their own prosperity and not depend on an overprotective overblown state. These processes gradually paved the way for the rise and prevalence of the ideas of the NPM.

It is generally accepted that the process of managerial reform and the specific criteria in order to evaluate NPM's effectiveness are not completed yet. However, as more countries adopted the reforms, it was the traditional model of public administration that seemed more and more dated (Hughes, 2003). Finally, NPM reforms, understood as a style of organizing public services towards the efficiency and efficacy of outputs, have been controversial. As write, "they have been accused of importing practices and norms from the private sector that could collide with core public values, such as impartiality or equity". All in all, the failure of NPM orthodox motivational models has encouraged the adoption of new motivational schemes, known as "new public service", "new public governance", or "post-NPM", and, in particular, to what Perry and Boruvka (2020) refer to as the "Public Values Governance Model" (Lapuenta& Van de Walle, 2020). All over the world, public organizations have adopted the two central NPM goals: efficiency and effectiveness. And, no matter the extent of specific NPM reforms, performance in the public sector is nowadays universally seen as output and outcome, instead of

the previous view of performance as input and process (Andersen, Boesen, & Pedersen, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the NPM has contributed to the implementation of the objectives of the administrative reform, although the questions raised by its innovative proposals and applications are often more than the answers, but this happens every time a new approach to unresolved problems appears. Despite any scientific and methodological reservations towards the NPM, its acceptance by different political-administrative systems at the initiative of the governments indicates, among other things, its usefulness for the political system. The majority of those involved in the NPM do not accept the critical academic claims that its predominance is a confession of the weakening of the state and the imposition of the market on politics. On the contrary, it is argued that the new model of governance contributes to the revitalization and strengthening of the political system. Key factors hindering the success of the NPM are the statist perception of citizens and politicians, the corruption of public organizations and certain officials, the fragmented organizational structure with the consequent dispersion and overlapping of responsibilities and pluralism. Resistance to change has highlighted the management culture as an important parameter of the success of change, as it has been revealed that the cause of the reforms at a stalemate was, for the most part, the adoption of the bureaucratic model by the employees. Among the obstacles to NPM's progress should be mentioned, in particular, the attitude of politicians towards administrative reforms, which is often ambivalent and contradictory. In addition, pluralism, confusion of responsibilities between the various levels of government and organizational fragmentation in order to secure trade union interests have always been the main obstacles to administrative reforms and the same applies to the implementation of the NPM.

The answers regarding the usefulness of the NPM reforms differ. In the 1980s, led by the transatlantic states of the United States and Canada and Europe by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the NPM proposals were seen as a

panacea, both theoretical and, above all, administrative and political. The problems that NPM came to solve at that time were problems of rational management of resources. It is a fact that the rationalization attempted through the measures and actions of NPM, especially at the local level (municipalities, communities) has substantially improved the financial management of local authorities.

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