



Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration

The reference for understanding government action

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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New Public Management is a model of public administration that has developed in opposition to the bureaucratic model. As has been emphasized by Gow and Dufour (2000), in cases where New Public Management has not induced public administrations to shed their service delivery operations – through contracting-out, public-private partnerships and privatization – it has prompted political authorities to leverage the professionalization of public service managers for the purpose of reforming bureaucracy and to grant them greater leeway in exchange for assuming greater accountability with respect to administrative performance. Accordingly, public service managers are expected to mobilize private sector management principles and tools in order to achieve targeted outcomes. Founded on results-based management, competition between administrative units and individual performance incentives, New Public Management emphasizes efficiency, cost control, quality of services delivered to clients and organizational flexibility. New Public Management is thus constructed against such principles of bureaucracy as centralization, the politics-administration continuum, prudence and process accountability (Charih and Rouillard, 1997).

Christopher Hood was, in an article he published in 1991, the original proponent of the New Public Management appellation. Through this term he sought to describe trends that he and others had seen occurring in recent administrative reforms initiated across many OECD countries. For several authors, the event consecrating the emergence of New Public Management was the reform of Britain's administration, launched in the wake of nascent neo-liberalism and coinciding with the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. In the years that followed, several countries, English-speaking for the most part, followed in Great Britain's footsteps. On the basis of the British experience, Hood (1991) described New Public Management in terms of a quest for frugality. Another decisive publication in the construction of the concept of New Public Management was the book by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992), who prescribed, as a remedy to bureaucracy, developing the entrepreneurial spirit of American public managers and bringing administrations closer to consumer-customers. In the 1990s, the principles of New Public Management were implemented on a broader scale in OECD countries. As was noted by Hood (1991), the principles animating the promoters of New Public Management originated in two, occasionally conflicting sources; the first was microeconomics, and particularly the propositions advocated by the adherents of public choice; the second was the discipline management, as exemplified by the work of Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman bearing on the culture of excellence. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) also drew on the writings of Peter Drucker on the subject of entrepreneurship.

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It is important to distinguish New Public Management from New Public Administration, which developed in the United States beginning in the late 1960s and which lasted a little over a decade. As has been noted by Frederickson (1971), one of the main authors to conceptualize its foundations, New Public Administration sought to strengthen social equity by encouraging public servants to exercise their freedom of action whenever they were witness to social injustice; according to this view, close contact with citizens gave public servants a unique vantage point with which to devise strategies for eliminating various forms of discrimination. For the proponents of New Public Administration, there was a need to devolve powers to public servants owing to the inability of traditional administrative processes to eliminate discrimination against society's most disadvantaged members. In contrast with New Public Management's hallmark of individualism, New Public Administration stood for values that Frederickson (1996) in a later article characterized as humanistic and democratic.

New Public Management has served as an umbrella term for a variety of approaches going under different names. In particular, it has close ties with the management model characterizing the so-called post-bureaucratic age. Actually, the range of labels points to a very large array of practices that bridge differences between the British and American approaches to New Public Management. A once pioneering yet ever relevant typology is that of Ferlie et al. (1996). According to these authors, the first New Public Management model is characterized by an "efficiency drive" in public administration, wherein improvements are sought particularly through tight hierarchical control of work processes. The second model seeks to introduce flexibility into organizational structures, in particular through downsizing and decentralization in exchange for control via contracts. The third model, with its emphasis on innovation, seeks to develop a culture of excellence within public administration. The fourth model, which asserts the distinct public service mission, highlights the values specific to public administration while also according users a greater role in decision making.

Implementation of New Public Management has encountered numerous setbacks along the way, due in part to the unforeseen negative impacts of results-based management. According to Emery and Giauque (2005), the overabundance of tools and data generated by performance measurement systems has hampered the sound management of public administration, creating too great a focus on details and opening the way to political interference. In their view, measurement systems end up obscuring the objective for which they were designed. However, the most fundamental criticism lies in the recognition, by some observers, of the "non-neutrality" of New Public Management (Dwivedi and Gow, 1999), that is to say to its ideological dimension which emphasizes its neo-liberal origins. Critics of the foundations of New Public Management are particularly caustic concerning how the figure of the citizen has been supplanted by the figure of the client. For Emery and Giauque (2005), the clash between the market-based logic and the civic logic that underpins these criticisms also accounts for the difficulties that New Public Management has encountered in achieving legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and public administrators alike. Some authors, including Dwivedi and Gow (1999) have, as a result, called for debate over the values propounded by this model of management.

Further pursuing these criticisms, several authors, including Gualmini (2008), recognize the hybrid character of the management models current in public administration, linking precepts of bureaucracy to those of New Public Management. Some authors stress the need to maintain the principles of bureaucratic management in order to ensure the smooth running of public administration (Aucoin, 1997) and argue for "rediscovering bureaucracy" (Olsen, 2005). It is this perspective that informs understanding of the model of the neo-Weberian State that has developed

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primarily in Europe in the 2000s. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), this model marks a return to a conception that posits a central role for the State, representative democracy and administrative law in social regulation and that also accords priority to the professionalization of employees with the objective of bringing public administrations closer to citizens and improving performance. Other authors view the establishment of network governance as a factor throwing New Public Management open to challenge (Klijn, 2005). However, many observers point out that this model of management is still very much with us at the present time (Aucoin, 2008; Gualmini, 2008). In point of fact, NPM principles and instruments have gradually become entrenched in laws whose purpose has often been to modernize public administration, such that for several years now, it seems that we have witnessed both the institutionalization and superseding of New Public Management.

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