
1 Introduction

Shaun F. Goldfinch

Reform and change are never inevitable. Guy Peters (1996: vii) claims ‘change in the public sector is the rule rather than the exception’, but it is not smooth, continuous and incremental. It is disjointed, varies in intensity, and sharp episodes of reform are often followed by periods of relative tranquillity. Change might proceed through a series of ‘punctuated equilibriums’ where long eras of stability alternate with short-lived periods of uncertainty and conflict (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Indeed, a wealth of studies suggest a considerable degree of stability of policies, public organizations and governance structures. There are numerous terms that describe the durability of institutions arrangements: inheritance, lock-in, stickiness, deadlock, path-dependency, reform impasse and reform paradox (cf. Peters et al. 1999). Policies and structures are often protected by dominant coalitions, embedded in laws and constitutions, and sustained by habit and inertia. Reforms may be ‘smuggled in’ through a series of cumulative and incremental adjustments, but this can be a time-consuming, reversible and possibly drifting process.

Yet, reforms and significant changes do occur. Within the literature on public sector management, there are often seen to be two major periods of reform. The first is a revolution in public administration – sometimes referred to as ‘progressive-era’ public administration (PPA) (Hood 1994) or the Weberian, bureaucratic or traditional model. Originating in Great Britain and particularly associated with the Northcote and Trevelyan Report of 1854 – but with precursors from Prussia and the Indian Civil Service – it spread in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to other industrialized and colonized nations to become the orthodoxy across the world; or at least that is what is often portrayed. The second major reform trend is generally termed ‘new public management’ (NPM), a term, although it is not without faults, often used in the chapters in this book. In some accounts, albeit contested ones, NPM arose in the 1980s and 1990s in the face of the failure of the previous model. It is to NPM that we now turn.

New public management

Drawing to some extent on theoretical economics, market models and (sometimes putative) lessons from the private sector, NPM claimed to correct the inefficiencies and stultifying effects of the traditional model. It claimed to emancipate public sector managers from rigid adherence to civil service rules by giving them ‘freedom to manage’ to better utilize their skills and innovative flair in the face of a changing environment. It also attempted to change the focus of the civil service away from its supposed emphasis on procedural rectitude, towards the achievement of outcomes, outputs or ‘getting results’. And it has been repeatedly portrayed as the new orthodoxy, influencing public sector reform across the world.

Views on what constitutes NPM differ, and there is difficulty in finding common patterns across what has been shown to be sometimes divergent patterns of reform. Dunleavy et al. (2006: 470) see NPM as having ‘three chief integrating themes’ focused on:

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- Disaggregation – splitting up large public sector hierarchies . . . achieving wider, flatter hierarchies internally; and respecifying information and managerial systems to facilitate this different pattern of control. In the public sector this theme implied a strong flexibilization of previous government-wide practices in personnel, information technology (IT), procurement, and other functions, plus the construction of management information systems needed to sustain different practices.
- Competition – introducing purchaser/provider separation into public structures so as to allow multiple different forms of provision to be developed and to create (more) competition among potential providers. Increasing internal use was made of competition processes to allocate resources (in place of hierarchical decision making). The ‘core’ areas of state administration and public provision were shrunk, and suppliers were diversified.
- Incentivization – shifting away from involving managers and staffs and rewarding performance in terms of a diffuse public service or professional ethos, and moving instead towards a greater emphasis on pecuniary-based, specific performance incentives. Its impact has been particularly marked for professional groups.

Others have noted the importance of ‘managerialism’ – ‘let managers manage’ being a catchphrase – where top management is given greater autonomy and where management is seen as a generic, ‘rational’ and ‘scientific’ discipline with similar demands and practices across both the public and private sectors (Boston et al. 1996; Hood 1994). The New Zealand version of NPM also focused on the widespread use of contracts – particularly written ones – for transactions between state agencies, between state agencies and private sector providers, within agencies themselves, and in employment of state servants. Privatization and contracting-out of government services to private providers also became a core component.

For Pollitt (2002) reformed public organizations possessed common characteristics across national borders, including a customer focus, and a focus on performance and quality improvement. They adopted commercial-type accounting systems, and internal market or quasi-market mechanisms to imitate market competition. Decentralized structures with putatively flexible and innovative staff replaced highly centralized bureaucracies. Politicians took a back seat to the day-to-day operations, preferring to set the broad parameters of policy or ‘strategy’ and leave the messy day-to-day business to professional managers – to ‘steer’ not ‘row’ – in a later twentieth-century revival of the ‘policy-administration’ split (Boston et al. 1996; Hood 1994; Kettl 2000). Pollitt (2002: 26) argues that ‘everyone is doing more or less the same thing, because they have little choice’ since ‘powerful forces in the environment are obliging governments to change’. If all the world’s public administration systems are or have converged around a set of NPM prescriptions as often claimed (and which we doubt), what was the so-called traditional model that NPM putatively replaced?

The traditional model

Accounts differ as to what the ‘traditional’ model actually was; whether the model was anything beyond an ideal type; if one can distinguish between a ‘traditional model’ and a ‘bureaucratic paradigm’; or indeed if one can even talk of a coherent paradigm. We can start with the so-called ‘bureaucratic model’. For the great sociologist Max Weber and

his followers, a trend in modern society was towards ‘rationalization,’ measurement and control (Gerth and Mills 1974). And bureaucracy was seen as an efficient organization for the rational pursuit of goals.

There were basic features in an ideal-type bureaucracy seen as common to large organizations in the modern ‘legal/rational’ era – that is, one characterized by the rule of law. These included defined hierarchies within organizations and between officials within bureaus, and between bureaus, with clearly delimited areas of jurisdiction, command and responsibility for both the bureau and for officials within bureaus. These jurisdictions were often codified in law. Administration was often based on written documents, with precedents and developing rules to refer to in decision-making. Knowledge of these rules represents a technical language which officials possessed (Gerth and Mills 1974). Further, the existence of a (learnable) body of rules allows the office to continue apart from the person, with new appointments easily slotting into the machine and acquiring these rules. These factors gave bureaucratic structures a degree of permanence and stability. The client or citizen was to be treated as equal under the law, and reference to rules and precedent was argued to decrease the likelihood of arbitrary and unjust decisions by officials, and increased the transparency, stability and predictability of decision-making itself.

Officials were specialized and recruitment (not election) was on technical ability and expertise, often by written examination. This was in direct contrast to previous bureaucracies where recruitment was often based on patronage and/or nepotism and where merit and/or competency for the job at hand was sometimes a secondary concern, or not a concern at all. In return for faithful service, the officer faced a long-term ‘career’ employment, with security of tenure, and advancement based on seniority and merit, a fixed salary, a pension and a considerable degree of status. Private and official income and property were separated; again in contrast to other models where the personal income of the monarch or the official may have been drawn from and dependent on official income, and as such open to manipulation and corruption. In addition, security of tenure and the removal of the fear of arbitrary dismissals, secure pay and pensions, allowed officers to carry out their roles without fear or favour it was claimed, and relatively free from undue pressure. The office existed as a form of vocation, with a distinctive ethos and status, and strong notions of duty. Officials were a high-status group, somewhat apart, and with strong value systems and *esprit de corps*.

Impersonal relationships existed between members or organizations and clients/citizens. Officials were to submit ego and personal interests to rules and goals of the organization. Service and loyalty were not to a person, but to an abstract idea or organization, and office itself was a creation of rules and laws with authority existing in the office, not the person. This gave some degree of independence to officials, as their role did not depend on personal loyalties. Impersonal relationships with citizens, it was argued, and treatment of them as equal under the law, also reduced the influence of personality, race, religion, tribe and so on in decision-making (cf. Du Gay 2000; Gerth and Mills 1974; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

The traditional model was also seen to be founded on the notion of an ‘apolitical’ public service characterized by a dichotomy between policy on one hand (which was the concern of elected politicians) and administration on the other (a technical task left to the professional official, which put the policy into operation). This is commonly known

as the policy–administration split. Former US President Woodrow Wilson was often cited as the originator of this concept. ‘Neutral competence’ on the part of public officials was expected – that is, they would put their expertise to serve whatever political masters were in control.

In sum, arguments for bureaucracy often represented it as the best form of organization in providing consistency, continuity, predictability, stability, efficacious and easily replicable performance of repetitive activities, equity and professionalism (Shafritz and Ott 1996). Bureaucracy was seen to minimize the potential influence of politics and personality on organizational decisions, particularly the case of political patronage in appointment and treatment of citizens. It is seen to foster accountability to higher authorities through a clear chain of command to public representatives elected by citizens. Clear responsibilities and rules, long-term and secure employments and pensions, clearly established remuneration, the vocational values and ethos, and the elite status given to officials and degree of independence from societal and internal pressure, were seen to be significant checks on corruption and other forms of undue influence. Efficiency was not simply seen in technical efficiency terms, but also included precision, stability, reliability, predictability and quality of performance – and it was often contrasted with the patronage and corruption-ridden state agencies of before, against which it seemed a vast improvement.

Bureaucracy is still with us of course and remains a widely used method of organization in some Fordist manufacturing and many aspects of the state – particularly in police and military services, but also in much of the day-to-day business of government. Indeed, much of the working life of public officials remains steadfastly bureaucratic (Parker and Bradley 2004). E-government initiatives sometime exhibit rather Weberian traits, for good or ill (see Gauld chapter in this volume). The de-bureaucratization of the state sector putatively seen under NPM might be an attractive mirage, with a move away from input and process controls to a ‘new red tape’ of accountability mechanisms, performance measures, invasive monitoring of personal behaviour, output and outcome measures and controls, and so on. That NPM was focused on the de-bureaucratization of government at all is disputed by Gregory (2007: 6) who claims

It can be better understood not so much as an attempt to abolish the bureaucratic form of governmental organization so much as a means of refining it, of enhancing the precision of its processes and the calculability of its results. And it has stressed operational, managerial, rather than democratic improvements.

Of course, Weberian bureaucracy’s virtues are often most apparent when much of its now largely taken for granted legal/rational derived assumptions are violated – such things as equality under the law, roles and responsibility clearly established, merit-based appointment and the reduction of patronage, separation of public and private income, and controls on corruption (cf. Du Gay 2000; Olsen 2006). Unfortunately this still describes much of the world.

Critiques of the bureaucratic model and the NPM challenge

Despite its seeming success through much of the late nineteenth century and twentieth century, there is a vast literature on the failings of ‘bureaucratic’ model. In their influential NPM tract, *Reinventing Government*, Osborne and Gaebler (1992: 11–12) portray bureaucracy as a failed model:

The kind of governments that developed during the industrial era, with their sluggish centralized bureaucracies, their preoccupation with rules and regulations, and their hierarchical structures, no longer work well . . . They became bloated, wasteful, and ineffective. And when the world began to change, they failed to change with it. Hierarchical, centralized bureaucracies designed in the 1930s or 1940s simply do not function well in the rapidly changing, information-rich, knowledge-intensive society and economy of the 1990s.

Indeed the bureaucratic model saw sustained attack throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The crisis language used to usher in the era of economic liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s was also used to justify the creation of lean, mean bureaucracies along NPM grounds (cf. Butcher 2003: 2). Structural explanations for economic and other policy change have limited explanatory power as noted elsewhere (Goldfinch 2000; Goldfinch and 't Hart 2003). However, the explicit link between NPM and broader economic reform gave the reform movement a considerable rhetorical advantage, even if, as Peters (1996: 13) notes, the 'economic explanation for the advance of governmental and administrative reforms is . . . facile [as] in the recent past such problems might have been addressed by expanding the role of the public sector rather than reducing it.'

Of course, there was more traction to NPM debates than claims that changes to the world economy have forced governments to adopt market-like models. Weberian bureaucracy had, it was argued, sought to foster predictability, probity and universality. But the virtues of permanence and stability traditionally imputed to public organizations were questioned in a period of rapid economic, social and technological change (Beetham 1996). Indeed, permanence and stability might have as corollaries resistance to change and lack of innovation and, it was claimed, 'permanence and stability tend to ossify policy lines and to make the coordination of policies more difficult' to the detriment of organizational outcomes (Peters 1996, 9). Rules can become fossilized and sanctified, taking on lives of their own and clogging up the wheels of government – in contrast to market mechanisms that seemed to promise greater flexibility and responsiveness. Rules added to constrain the failing of other rules just added further layers of ossification. Indeed, the pressures of responding to changing circumstances, according to some, saw the formation of alternative, frequently temporary, organizational arrangements, including task forces, interdepartmental and intergovernmental committees, public–private partnerships and 'virtual organizations', and the like. This called into question the centrality of permanent bureaucracies to government operations, and, it was argued, pushed governments to embrace decentralization and agencification. These more flexible and more tightly focused agencies, it was argued, were better able to respond to societal demands. Of course, the experience since the 1990s where disaggregation, decentralization and the lack of permanent employment contributed to difficulties in policy co-ordination and maintaining state capacity, and possibly lapses in ethical probity and professional expertise, suggest the dangers of permanence along these lines may have been overstated, while the dangers of decentralization and informal organization may well have been underplayed (Goldfinch, Chapter 7 in this volume; Gregory 2007).

Permanent and merit-based appointment and a professional civil service may reduce the problems of personal patronage and nepotistic appointments of the past. Permanence of employment can provide a shield against undue influence over public servants. A lifetime of service within an organization or public service can develop important experience

and a professional commitment to the service. Advancement through grades, and payment on such, can build transparency and a perception of equity.

On the other hand, the desire for more 'activist', 'entrepreneurial' and 'committed' public services can be thwarted, it was argued, and the capacity of public organizations to employ specialized skills reduced, if uniform personnel policies, pay scales and 'life-time' tenure remain central to public employment despite differences in performance, and if the capacity to recruit outside the organization, particularly from the private sector, is reduced. Advancement based on seniority can simply reward time-servers rather than excellence and performance, while protection of tenure to shield from arbitrary influence can also mean protection from disciplinary and other action for lack of performance, and lack of responsiveness to political and/or social demands.

Seniority, of course, is not the same as merit and it is possible some bureaucratic models have confused the two – being old does not necessarily make you good and experience might just mean making the same mistakes for longer – as many a younger official on the make has probably noted. Similarly, the concept of merit itself as defined by passing an entry examination, or even examinations to pass through grades, or doing well in particular universities and/or tests at entry level into a position, is a highly problematic one. It should not necessarily be confused with performance, and there is a considerable body of research that suggests the two may not be closely linked (see Waxin chapter in this volume).

Similarly, ossifying one's future life chances by an examination taken early in life, or basing career prospects on the appropriate university or polytechnic attended, seems to discount the possibility that one might get better with age, and that one might grow out of, or learn from, youthful failure at examinations or university. Those entering the top universities and doing well in examinations are likely to have already had a fortunate start in life, and their achievement in examinations may just further cement this. And examinations and tests are only as good as those designing and marking them, of course. Keynes's much quoted quip that his poor performance in the Civil Service Examination in Economics was because 'I evidently knew more about Economics than my examiners', is a case in point.

In any event, the claims of merit-based appointment or advancement could act to mystify the influence of politics and personality in these processes, which still persisted despite the best efforts of technocratically inclined reformers. On the other hand, the recruitment outside the public service, and the focus on more risk-taking, 'entrepreneurial' and 'business-like' public servants, can have downsides of its own. Some of the 'activist', risk-taking and entrepreneurial activity – even cost-cutting and attempts at improving technical efficiency – of public servants have contributed to some decisions of questionable wisdom, serious policy failures, behaviour seen as inappropriate to a public service and some ethical lapses (Dunleavy et al. 2006; Gauld and Goldfinch 2006).

The lack of permanent employment and a focus on short-term contracts may have contributed to a lack of capacity and expertise in public services. Recruitment outside the public service for some senior executive roles may have led to the appointment of some not entirely suited to the public service and its culture. And, somewhat ironically, the benefits of stability and permanence in the face of rapid change should not be overlooked. Rapid technological change can be associated with an assumption that new is

always better and that change is something to be embraced almost for its own sake – seen somewhat in the ‘idolization’ of information technology and the adoption of managerial fads in the public sector. Some old-fashioned suspicion of change and focus on precedent may indeed provide an antidote to such ‘dangerous enthusiasms’ and their often highly questionable empirical basis, and, particularly in the case of information and communications technology (ICT), their propensity to fail (Goldfinch 2007).

The traditional model of public administration was often seen to place great emphasis on securing horizontal and vertical *equality* of outcomes in the sense that people with the same attributes should be treated equally, and those with different attributes treated differently. This, it was argued, had a downside, and negated the possibility of discretion on the part of public officials that could enhance operating efficiency, save scarce resources, and tailor the services of government to the diverse needs of clients. Of course, discretion creates problems of its own and in many countries is simply patronage, influence-peddling, nepotism and corruption. Like much of the NPM agenda, attention to and support for greater discretion for public officials has waxed and waned. Support for discretion can be replaced for greater bureaucratization in the face of policy failure – and vice versa. As Brodtkin (2006: 12) noted in her study of US social policy:

Bureaucratic discretion is both the hallmark and the horror of social welfare provision. It is necessary in providing social policies that require responsiveness to complex, individual circumstances and considered judgments. But discretion also can horrify because it concedes control to street-level agents whose variations in practice can do more harm than good . . . the contradiction between promise and practice has produced episodes of management reform, propelled by swings in political sentiment.

The seemingly greater choice through market transactions provided a useful counter-example to rule-based bureaucracies, and a means to move towards a more customer-focused and responsive public sector. The vision of a dynamic ‘post-Fordist’ market economy providing customized products to a diverse group of clients, seemed rather more compelling than grey, inflexible Orwellian bureaucracies supposedly providing the same standardized product or service to all. Market-driven outcomes provided an apparently different measure or benchmark of achievement than following a standardized set of rules – with customer preferences clearly established by market exchange, and agency performance by the meeting of the ‘bottom line’. Markets and private firms too seemed less rule and process bound, exhibiting greater degrees of technical efficiency and flexibility – and critics looked to private sector firms as models for management practice, and for its focus on responding and the fulfilling the desires of customers and clients (Butcher 2003). Of course, once adopted, this client focus has in turn been criticized for reducing the interactions between state and citizen to increasingly one of a purchasing arrangement, in turn curtailing the role of democracy and the role of citizen vis-à-vis customer.

A further attack on the bureaucratic model was seen in a desire to improve political control of central government bureaucracies since ‘in a number of western liberal democratic countries, the higher civil service has been seen as an obstacle to change by elected politicians’ (Butcher 2003: 4). Especially in Anglo-American countries, commentators dwelt on the purported inability of senior civil servants to offer unbiased policy advice. It was perceived by some that the public service was insulated from the broader society

and the demands of democracy, and become a 'law unto itself' serving to thwart reformist initiatives by duly elected politicians. Accordingly, a need was seen to restore political control to the bureaucratic apparatus. However, that some reforms were driven by groups within the public services itself – such as New Zealand – suggests that such claims can be overstated. Public servants and the policy communities of which they are a part – which may or may not include politicians – can seize on such rhetoric to advance their reform aims against other parts of the public sector bureaucracy, and possibly against other segments of the government.

Butcher (2003: 3) has observed another force for reform was 'growing awareness of the potential of information technology (IT) in helping to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service operations'. Hood (1991) designated IT as one of four 'mega-trends' in public management through the computerization of government departments, synthesizing with other factors including the 'reinvention of government' under the Clinton administration in the USA, and 'joined up' government in the UK. As chapters 6 and 7 in this collection stress however, the enthusiasm with which governments have adopted information and communications technology has not always led to the hoped-for benefits nor the promised transformations (Gauld and Goldfinch 2006; Goldfinch 2007). Nor is the link between NPM and ICT always that apparent, with some e-government initiatives possibly an attempt to mitigate some of the negative effects of NPM reforms – such as the focus on 'joined-up' government. Indeed, Dunleavy et al. (2006) claim that a new digital governance has effectively killed NPM. Other e-government initiatives might actually be a return to more standardized, bureaucratic forms.

Underpinning reform efforts and the attack on the traditional model was a strong ideational component, particularly in the Anglo-American democracies, which to some extent reflected broader shifts in the economics profession. The revitalization of neoclassical economics, and related schools of public choice and new institutional economics, from the late 1960s on, and its spread to public bureaucracies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has been documented elsewhere (cf. Boston et al. 1996; Goldfinch 2000; Goldfinch and Roper 1993; Wallis and Dollery 1999). The rapidly growing economics literature on 'government failure' became increasingly influential – a theme developed in more detail in Chapter 2. Public choice theorists questioned whether public officials were in fact motivated purely by considerations of the public interest or duty and replaced this assumption with alternative behavioural objectives, such as 'budget maximization', 'slack maximization' and 'risk avoidance' (Mueller 2003). Similarly, a literature in public economics sought to measure the performance of public agencies and private for-profit organizations right across the spectrum of economic activity and saw private firms as being superior in terms of technical efficiency and minimizing costs; although much of the empirical foundations of the literature were certainly open to challenge. Moreover, a literature on the growth of government, often involving vivid images of a 'Leviathan' government gorging itself on national income, struck an ideological chord in some policy communities. As such, the NPM reform agenda was somewhat cobbled together from various strands of a supporting structure of neoclassical economics, approaches from new institutional economics, and public choice, as well as drawing on putative private sector models. One can be faced, of course, with a somewhat ironic situation of public officials strongly advocating approaches that characterized public officials as opportunistic optimizers.

In sum, some accounts suggest a consensus about a failed bureaucratic model. A

new reform agenda partly assembled from these critiques: a mixture of economic imperatives and desires to cut costs and reduce the state sector; inherent failures in the bureaucratic model; the unresponsiveness of the public service to political and social demands and attempts to reassert political and social control; the revitalizations of market and neoclassical economics; and the attractiveness of a flexible and dynamic private sector and its management models; seemed to become a new orthodoxy, driving reform across the world and seeing the abandonment of the traditional model and the de-bureaucratization of state sectors. New public management agendas were diffused through the world through ‘policy transfer’ and ‘policy learning’ particularly as pushed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) (cf. Goldfinch 2006).

Compelling as it is, there are a number of problems with this picture. First, many of the attacks on the bureaucratic model were not entirely new, and had been repeated through the twentieth century and before, and may well have been taken for granted. Second, the existence of a bureaucratic model, either as an orthodoxy in the minds of academics and practitioners, and as a worldwide system of public management, is questioned in some accounts. There were certainly a wide variety of public management systems in existence across the world. As such, it is possible that some critiques were of a system that did not actually exist. Third, that the world has seen a convergence around a set of NPM prescriptions is also called into question, with a resilience of existing institutions, and a diversity of public management systems across countries, including some that seem not entirely dissimilar to the putatively abandoned bureaucratic model. These issues are discussed in greater detail below.

Was there anything new about NPM and did the bureaucratic model exist?

Critiques of the bureaucratic model go back well before the 1980s and 1990s. Merton (1940) and others were writing in the mid-twentieth century and before of the failings of bureaucracy (cf. Lynn 2001). Merton (1940) noted the trained incapacity bred in public servants, where rules became an end in themselves and took on a rarefied and sanctified air; where impartiality and impersonal service became inflexibility, inhumanity and brusqueness; and where *esprit de corps* becomes arrogance and distance from a population that in the end is that which was supposed to be served. Members of bureaucratic structures can have the tendency to follow commands even if they are misguided, and responsibility and initiative can be discouraged (Merton 1957). The bureaucratic model was also criticized for, amongst other things, its focus on procedure rather than the achievement of results, the tension between bureaucratic and democratic control, while the policy administration split seen as an inherent part of the model still in introductory textbooks, was noted as something naive and unworkable (cf. Lynn 2001).

All these criticisms would be reiterated by new public management and other critics of the bureaucratic model, and indeed Hood (1994) argues that the various strands comprising the NPM-style model itself, some of which draw on these attacks, are neither new nor novel. Even the appeal for government to be more ‘business-like’ finds echoes in progressive-era reform rhetoric. Weber and the often cited originator of the policy-administration split, Woodrow Wilson, are often caricatured in any event. Weber was ambivalent about the role of bureaucracy in modern life; the threat that powerful bureaucracies could hold to democracy, individual freedom and personal autonomy; and

the stripping of individuality and the dehumanization that the 'iron cage' of increasing rationalization and control involved (Gerth and Mills 1974). He noted the importance of countervailing powers within society in constraining an overly powerful bureaucracy. Perhaps some (non-)readers of Weber confused his heuristic and abstract 'ideal type' with a normative agenda.

Going even further than pointing out the constant debate regarding the model, Lynn (2001) notes the continual questioning of the bureaucratic model throughout its life and possible abandonment by the mid-twentieth century – and indeed raises the question whether the 'bureaucratic paradigm' is something of a *post hoc* invention, and even whether it existed among academic writers. Weber, for example, one of the supposed founders of the model, was not translated into English until well into the mid-twentieth century, nor was Wilson widely read or cited until 1941.¹ Many of the criticisms made of the bureaucratic model were accepted by the public administration discipline, suggesting a distinction between a 'bureaucratic model' and a 'traditional model'. As Lynn notes:

beginning with Wilson, a professional reasoning process . . . *took for granted* (and thus did not always explicate) the interrelationships among the values of democracy, the dangers of an uncontrolled, politically corrupted, or irresponsible bureaucracy, the instruments of popular control of administration, and judicial and executive institutions that can balance capacity with control in a constitutionally appropriate manner. (Lynn 2001: 154)

As such, one can perhaps draw overly sharp distinctions between the 'old' PPA style of public administration and the 'new' NPM-type of public administration (Howlett 2002; McCourt and Minogue 2001; Peters 2000), with aspects of both shading into practice in the past and in the present. Hood (1998: 5) argues this game can be played by both sides of the debate too, with an outmoded 'traditional model' of public administration 'portrayed as fairly homogenous . . . fairly uniform . . . typically characterized as rule-bound and process-driven' replaced by a 'results-driven, managerially orientated approaches to public service provision with a particular stress on efficient least-cost provision'. Indeed, this view can be taken by 'traditionalist critics of "modern" public management ideas' and NPM advocates who both share the 'assumption of a radical break with all past ideas'. The only substantive 'difference between the traditionalists and the modernizers' might be that the 'former use rose-tinted spectacles to view the past and grey-tinted glasses to look at the present, while for the latter the lens tints are reversed'.

As well as a possible lack of an entirely dominant paradigm within the public administration discipline, one should also not overstate the existence of one 'traditional' model in practice across the world. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004: 62) point out, an examination of older civil service systems in the OECD shows *no* single system actually existed. Rather, there was a complex amalgam of different administrative forms, attuned to specific historical and institutional circumstances (Howlett 2004). While some parts of a given public administrative structure might conform to a 'traditional model', substantial sections might depart from it, especially in areas dominated by highly skilled labour such as economic advisory institutions and health systems.

If the existence of a single 'traditional' or 'bureaucratic model' might be open to question, similarly the portrayal of a whole-scale and worldwide adoption of NPM practice overstates the case. Howlett (2004: 14) notes 'multiple efforts at reform in different countries, the patchy record of success and failure, and the contradictory efforts'. Rhodes

and Weller (2003: 22) argue ‘the seeming coherence of the NPM program prompted the observation that reform was global’, but ‘new public management now covers all types of reform: it excludes nothing’, with this ‘common language of management’ doing little more than obscuring deep national differences. Indeed, the apparent adoption of NPM rhetoric and other aspects of NPM practice might simply obscure political and other battles over reform, with questionable substantive change (Goldfinch 2006). Similarly, while some like Shields and Evans (1998) tend to attribute all reforms in public administration to the conceptual framework of NPM, the role of ideas in administrative reform is one of only several contributing factors (Aucoin 1990; Christensen and Lægreid 2001; Goldfinch 2006). The intellectual coherence of the NPM policy paradigm and its capacity to ‘drive’ reform is open to question in any event (cf. Boston et al. 1996; Dunleavy and Hood 1994; Hood 1991). Finally, as the chapters in this collection show, there is a great diversity of public administration systems in existence, different time-lines and trajectories of reform, and considerable resilience of existing institutions. This is supported by numerous studies: cf. Savoie (1994), Campbell and Wilson (1995), Naschold (1995), Peters and Savoie (1998) and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004). For example, Naschold (1995: 11) compared administrative developments in 11 western democracies and argues ‘contrary to the official view taken by the OECD as an organization, there is no evidence of a linear homogenous trend in public sector development [and] convergence seems less likely than centrifugal trends within regulatory models’. Even between the UK, New Zealand and Australia – often seen as the exemplars of NPM reform – there are significant differences, as well as similarities. The US adoption of NPM ideas imported from the UK and New Zealand has been patchy at best (Moynihan 2006). This, we argue, puts to rest the idea of a worldwide convergence around a simple set of NPM prescriptions. It is to the rest of this collection that we now turn.

Public sector reform

Dollery begins this collection in the first of the ‘theme’ chapters by outlining the theoretical basis of the NPM agenda. Particularly in its New Zealand form, new public management drew heavily on a ‘generic managerialism’ and an economics derived ‘government failure’ paradigm. The latter drew on heavily on ‘public choice’ and ‘new institutional economics’, with NPM reforms relying on economic theory generally to a ‘unique extent in the history of modern public administration’. None of these approaches are beyond challenge, as Dollery shows, and debate continues to their utility.

Waxin and Bateman show the strong diversity of human resource practices across the world. In their comprehensive coverage, they distinguish broadly ‘career-based’ systems where candidates are hired at the beginning of their career and proceed through grades and ranks within their working life within a public service – very much along the lines of the ‘traditional model’. Position-based systems focus on selecting the ‘best’ person for the job, with great access to the system from outside and with lateral entry. Departmental-based systems exist where civil servants develop a career within a single line department. The authors chart continuing developments in recruitment and selection practices across the world, and note, while it is easy to overstate the case, there is evidence of the movement of human resources management practice from the private to the public sector. They caution against an unreflective adoption of private sector approaches, however.

In his comprehensive survey, Gregory examines the complex morass that is

accountability. It remains a core characteristic of liberal political systems, where the people own the government and expect it to work in their interests. However, the competing demands and procedural requirements to ensure accountability can have as their downside stultifying red tape, where to do things the right way becomes more important than doing things right. Indeed, an increasing preoccupation with accountability has accentuated a 'gotcha' mentality where retrospective sanctioning has become the focus. Nor is it clear that the introduction of NPM with its principal–agency relationships supposedly clarified, necessarily resulted in clearer accountability relationships. The authors focus on story-telling as an aspect of accountability – in an environment where truth is contested and actions and responsibilities are difficult to unravel – giving account through public debate, the tos and fros of politics, explaining and arguing may be the best some can hope for.

Wallis and McLoughlin in their study of leadership examine 'public value-seeking leadership', which seeks to find ways of adding to public value beyond the cost-cutting and outputs focus of NPM and the 'safe pair of hands' of the traditional model. While noting it would be an overstatement to see this as a new paradigm, the authors advocate a leadership that mobilizes networks to create public value. Such leadership could be encouraged, they argue, through a leadership development policy they outline, plus the appropriate incentives.

Gauld's chapter asks whether 'e-government' is simply the next big trend in public management. Noting that the term can be vague and used in multiple ways, he notes three key uses: managerial; government co-ordination and transformation; and participation. The first sees e-government contributing to increasing technical efficiency and information flows, and in some cases, focuses on cost-cutting. The second is to some extent an attempt to reconnect a government fragmented by NPM reforms where agencies are reconnected through new information and communications technology, although some transformational rhetoric sees fundamental changes to work practices. Participation in policy and politics generally is seen to be facilitated by new information technology, even to the extent of an increasing 'e-democracy' and electronic forms of voting. After examining e-government initiatives in a number of countries, Gauld cautions against accepting some of the overblown rhetoric. Few initiatives have yet to deliver on their promised benefits, and the success and use of some systems remains well below projections.

Goldfinch looks further at ICT developments in the public sector and notes the alarming degree of project failure, with some studies finding by far the majority of projects are unsuccessful. Hundreds of billions of dollars a year are spent on systems that do not work at all, or do not work as promised. Despite decades of development there are still no reliable methods of controlling projects and guaranteeing success. The author argues that many of the problems with ICT stem from the overblown expectations regarding technology. These he terms 'dangerous enthusiasms', each linked to a particular group within ICT developments. Combined with the difficulties of control, these problems of enthusiasm mean the likelihood of failure of large ICT projects remains. Goldfinch suggests a pessimism when it comes to adopting ICT in the public sector, and suggests ways of operationalizing this pessimism when making ICT decisions.

From the theme chapters, we move to examining a number of reform processes in particular countries. In the first of our four Anglo-American chapters, Wegrich's examines the UK – often seen as an NPM exemplar – and challenges some orthodox accounts of

reform. He questions the standard accounts of a coherent NPM programme laid out by the Thatcher government, noting instead that spending actually increased in the early years of the regime; that modifications of the reforms changed the original content of the reform process and reforms often evolved in response to events; and there was always a lack of coherence in the original reforms with a vacillation between the competing demands of markets and top-down management control. And continuous change is often seen, with British public management 'regarded as an experiment in hyper-innovation relying on an ever changing pattern of managerial ideas and central control'.

The New Zealand reforms of the 1980s and 1990s and their subsequent modification after 1999 are examined by Goldfinch. In a period of reform remarkable for its speed, coherency, comprehensiveness and derivation from theoretical ideas, New Zealand adopted what is probably the purest NPM model, encapsulated in two not entirely reconcilable trends – 'managerialism' and 'contractualism'. New Zealand possibly differed from other reform programmes, with its focus on written contracts and largely quantitative 'output' measures of performance – although perhaps the difference was one of degree, not of kind. Critiques of the reforms were quick to eventuate, and the Labour government elected in 1999 sought to reintegrate a highly decentralized government and strengthen central control of government agencies, reintroduce a focus on public sector values and ethics, renationalize some assets, and move from short-term reporting of outputs to also look at 'outcomes' – the 'results' of government actions. Such changes have led to questions whether there is a 'new' New Zealand model and an abandonment of NPM.

Simm's examination of that other apparent NPM exemplar – Australia – discusses the long debate in Australia regarding public sector reform. Within Australia's federal system there was ample scope for policy learning, but reform accelerated after the election of the Labour government in 1983. Soon the buzzwords of NPM became part of the Australian landscape, and like New Zealand, there was an abandonment of permanent heads, the use of contracting out and privatization, programme budgeting and performance indicators, and so on – but there were Australian differences with the creation of mega-departments during the Hawke government, and the creation of a senior executive service. More recent reforms have seen an attempt to reconnect and 'join-up' government. In Canada, as Tomblin documents, the provinces were also important in modifying and sometimes resisting NPM-type reforms, and Canadian traditions and collectivist notions channelled NPM-type reforms in certain directions. Indeed, reform was largely incremental, varied from province to province, and existing institutions showed considerable resilience.

If Australia and Canada's federal systems complicate matters of reform, these pale into comparison with the USA, which, above all, is distinguished by its complexity. The USA has also differed from other Anglo-American nations by the degree of politicization of its public service, with ongoing attempts by various presidencies to exert control. Rockman and Thiam outline in detail the reform proposal of various regimes, the creation of a senior executive service under Carter; attempts to politicize the public service under Reagan; the reinventing government rhetoric of Clinton, and contracting and privatization of recent times. As the authors conclude, two powerful ideologies have intermingled in the American public sector – a business model emphasizing the government ought to be run like a business, and the politicization of the public service, drawing on the long

history of the spoils system and fought over from various parts of the US polity. Indeed, Rockman and Thiam suggests a little less politicization and a degree more independent professional public service would lead to a better run government – but acknowledge the small probability of this happening.

Jones and Cole's chapter outlines in detail the structure of the French state and the public service. Their chapter is particularly important to this collection as it shows the considerable resilience of institutions in the face of pressure and rhetoric for reform. The authors outline a series of administrative reforms including the Quality Agenda of the Chirac government which introduced, among other things, performance targets; the mid-1990s reforms that delegated greater autonomy to field services through a contractual regime; and budgetary reforms, pension reforms and other reforms into the 2000s. As they conclude, however, resistance from the unions and tensions between the centre and field services saw minimal impact of reform attempts, particularly pertaining to the NPM agenda. As such, perhaps, the French state sector remains 'unreformed'.

Belgium, too, exhibits a large degree of stability of existing institutions, with a classic Weberian bureaucracy existing until 1993 when decentralization of the Belgian state and fiscal pressure caused the new federal system to look towards NPM models, including performance contracts and employing 'contractuals' (persons employed on limited term contracts and without the same protection as core public servants). However, as Dierickx notes, reform has been piecemeal and some reform initiatives have slowed and/or halted since the 1990s.

The Dutch state, too, has undergone considerable reform from the 1980s on – with civil service reform aimed at smaller and more efficient government and greater organizational control. In the 1990s 'service reform' focused on improved accountability and better service delivery. More recent times have seen the government direct its attention to building greater ties with civil society, 'empowering' citizens and developing organizational co-operation. Rhetoric too has evolved from 'efficiency', to 'innovation' to 'accountability' at the turn of the twenty-first century, and more recently 'joined-up' government. However, as Noordegraaf notes, even as the Netherlands adopted much of the rhetoric found in NPM, actual reform has been channelled through the institutions of the Dutch polity, which have shown considerable robustness. Indeed, in some cases the reforms have had the paradoxical effects of reinforcing aspects of the Dutch system.

Denmark's case is fascinating in that some of what was later termed the 'NPM agenda' was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. Even then, as Jørgen Christensen notes, reform has continued, with more recent moves to individual contract employment in 1990s particularly for senior executives, contracting-out (albeit relatively limited in scope) and the adoption of private sector accounting practises (including accrual accounting) in 2007. Corporatization and privatization also occurred, beginning in the 1990s, although Denmark had a smaller state sector than some of its neighbours, meaning programmes lacked the scale sometimes found elsewhere. The use of 'quasi-markets' was also introduced, particularly in the delivery of welfare services, with this trend continuing into the mid-2000s. However, the author plays down the intellectual coherence of the reforms and their derivation from overseas experience – instead seeing their development evolving through complex interactions between ideas, interests and actors.

In our second Scandinavian chapter, Tom Christensen and Per Lægveid examine the 'reluctant' NPM reformer that is Norway. The authors outline the features of the

Norwegian polity, and note how NPM rhetoric and reform programmes adopted from overseas have been channelled and reformulated through Norwegian institutions and political traditions. Reforms included granting greater flexibility and autonomy to agencies, and some privatization, particularly during the mid-2000s. In the mid-1990s a trend towards a ‘super-market’ state became apparent, including the use of market orientation and contracting out, service decelerations and ‘one-stop’ shops, among other things. University and health became more market focused, adopting a ‘money follows client’ approach, although, as the authors note, these are assembled in a particularly Norwegian way. However, the change of government and the election of a Red–Green coalition in 2005 saw an explicit post-NPM agenda of strengthening the centre and reintegrating the state, although there is considerable resilience of NPM features – more a ‘re-balancing’ than a ‘roll-back’.

We conclude this study by looking at Japan and Hong Kong (HK), our two Asian studies. Hong Kong is that unique mix of British colonial heritage and indirect Chinese rule, with the state built upon the robust institutions – including a bureaucracy – left by the retreating British. As Cheung documents, reform began in the British era when devolution, public sector reform, customer focuses and corporatization, and ‘managing for results’, among other things, were introduced. However, given the success of the HK economy, even with the change over to Chinese rule pressure for reform was not great and the power of the bureaucracy was maintained. Nor were HK reform processes simply aping NPM agendas, but drew on a long process of modernization going back to 1970s. The Asian crisis saw further reform and some degree of delegitimization of the bureaucracy, and measures focusing on productivity, some amalgamations, and some privatizations in the 2000s and mid-2000s were introduced. What was of particular importance was the rise of ministerial appointments into the senior public service after 2002. However, resistance of the bureaucracy to some austerity measures, and a change of regime in 2005, saw senior career public servants again take a central role in the state, and public sector salaries again started to rise. The HK experience shows the resilience and adaptability of strong institutions – even in the face of fundamental regime change.

Japan has often been seen as a reform laggard, with a powerful Weberian-type bureaucracy highly resistant to change. Yamamoto, however, outlines the increasing influence of NPM ideas by the 2000s, and notes that privatization has roots going back to the 1980s. New public management ideas were in currency in Japan from the early 1990s, and NPM-type reforms were being proposed by the mid-1990s. By the early 2000s, NPM techniques such as performance evaluation were introduced, while in 2006 the Kozumi regime required competitive tendering in some areas, although implementation of this initiative remains tentative. Corporate-type and accrual accounting practices were introduced in 2007. A particular aspect of Japanese reform has been agentification and decentralization, with the establishment of a large number of autonomous agencies after 2001. New public management proposals continue to hold an attraction for Japanese governments. As such, the Japanese experience is a suitable place to conclude our country studies. What was often considered a ‘hold-out’ against the NPM tide, has now seemingly adopted NPM practices. This is somewhat ironic, perhaps, if we accept that the NPM ‘early initiators’ have somewhat turned their back on NPM and entered a post-NPM phase, as some suggest. Nor should it be forgotten that there is a very Japanese take on NPM – and there is some doubt whether the adoption of NPM rhetoric

has seen a substantive change in practice in some cases (cf. Goldfinch 2006). Japan highlights that those looking for a simple transition from the ‘traditional model’ to ‘NPM’ and then to a post-NPM world, are going to find their views challenged by the messiness of the real world, where some jurisdictions have seemingly adopted NPM while others have not, and where NPM rhetoric and techniques have been filtered and heavily adapted through robust domestic institutions, while early NPM adopters have modified, reversed or even abandoned NPM techniques. Adoption of reforms have varied across countries in a temporal sense, as have techniques and rhetorics introduced. It is to these issues we return in the conclusion.

Note

1. Of course, one could describe what was happening without directly influencing events.

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