

The Emergence of and the Process of Change in Responsive Public Administration

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Introduction

This study looks at ongoing process of change that aims at creating public administration, which is more responsive towards citizens and their needs. In the first part of the study, the paper contrasts the 'old' public administration with its 'newer' version and explains the fundamental principles that guide the work of responsive public administration. In the second part, the analysis concentrates on understanding and conceptualizing process of change that constitutes an indispensable feature of a responsive public administration.

Features of Old Public Administration

'Old' public administration was functioning more as a military and less as a private business. It had an organizational division with units, departments, ministries, which was established on the basis of common purposes and functions, the scope of responsibilities was attached to the level of authority, limits were set on the number of subordinates that reported to a single chief, activities were grouped in single units hence, the issue of compartmentalization, there was a recourse to the policy of management by exception where only the exceptional cases were brought to the attention of the top official, a top-down chain of command and bottom-up level of responsibilities prevailed, a clear division between operational and supportive functions were introduced and unity of command dominated where only one chief was assigned for a particular group of employees.

Old public administration was centralized, hierarchical based on pyramidal relations with clear lines of responsibilities and task-divisions, standardized and rule-driven. Accountability in the public administration was restricted to a legality of actions taken by public administrators and a violation of the established rules and procedures implied proper penalties. Avoiding mistakes resulting from breaching procedures and getting things right, according to a set of regulations and lawful orders of superiors were the main priorities of public administrators in conducting their daily activities. Traditional public administration was impersonal and remote from the public. It was a meritocracy where people were selected to the administrative posts based on merit through a competitive examination.

Emergence of a New Public Administration

Today, a military-like public administration is increasingly reshaped into an organization with more flexible and autonomous administrative units and with flat instead of hierarchical command, control and communication systems. Public administrations become decentralized and deconcentrated. There is an increasing diffusion of central responsibilities to lower regional and local levels (decentralization) and, at the same time, a "transfer of responsibility from the central ministries to large offices or more autonomous agencies (that are) closer to citizens while remaining part of central government"¹ (deconcentration). Additionally, in the contemporary public administration, there is a growing emphasis, next to intellectual merit, on personality, teamwork and

¹ "Managing across levels of government", Executive summary, OECD/PUMA, 1997

interpersonal communication skills of future civil servants. Intuitive judgments, innovations, quick responses to the outside changes, risk tolerant and risk taking behavior, they all gain in prominence in contrast to the ‘old-fashioned’ rule-based approach and habitual acting according to the established routines. The new public administration culture is less inward and more outward-oriented where risk aversion is gradually substituted by risk proneness. This transformation process is associated with the idea that “making the right decision (MB: in accordance with procedures) is less important than making an appropriate decision (MB: for a particular situation), given the elements of risk and uncertainty involved”².

Societal Underpinnings of New Public Administration

Today, public administration is surrounded by a society who has become more mobile, more integrated with globalized world of information, ideas and knowledge, more organized in various interest groups and outspoken in voicing their interests, concerns, demands and expectations vis-à-vis their government. Greater civic participation and citizenry awareness place an increasing pressure on public administration to reduce ‘red-tape’: simplified procedures, cut paper work, downsize administrative personnel. The pressure also raises for public administrators to be more answerable for what they do, to move closer to citizens, to be more friendly, open-minded and flexible in dealing with their requests and problems. At the same time, public administration needs to perform its activities with greater economy (input) efficiency (output), effectiveness (outcome), transparency and accountability (process). As a result of a neoclassical pursuit of a greater value for money public administration became less involved in direct provision of goods and services and began relying more on the contractual arrangements with either private or non-profit organizations and agencies that could deliver previously stated-own services on a more competitive basis. The focus is thus, directed at **what** and **how** services are provided by public administration.

- The what-issue is about quantity and quality of goods provided by public administration. Based on the logic that the state should not carry out activities in the fields where it does not have a *comparative advantage* over other possible providers, public administration is expected to shrink, contract out or privatize its functions and responsibilities.
- The how-issue is about appropriate processes that are used to produce and deliver services by public administration. Appropriateness of a process focuses on the issue of transparency, accountability, and equity—the notions that are explained below.

New Public Administration Means Responsive Public Administration

The “what” and “how” aspects of the work of new public administration basically encompass the notion of better services produced and delivered in better ways to the satisfaction of citizens. The concept of ‘betterness’ is based not only on a purely rational concept of efficiency but also on more normative notions of transparency and visibility that is believed to increase public administration sensitivity towards the needs of the societies. Therefore, today’s overarching vision of a contemporary public administration is *responsiveness* to the demands of open and globalized societies. *Responsive public administration* is about ‘putting people first’. As a result, societal members perform interrelated roles of a ‘legitimizing’ (political function) and that of a customer (economic function) of the public administration activities. Responsive public administration is about an increase of trust among the public towards a government. Trust often is not

² D. Farnham, S. Horton, *Managing the New Public Service*, Second edition, Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1996, p. 37

related to performance. Even if public administration becomes more effective (material factor) and more transparent (normative factor), public trust may not necessary increase. Therefore, a responsive public administration is the one that is able to see not only what are currently the needs but also what will be the future needs of the societal groups it serves. This means that a responsive public administration should be capable of not only embarking on *reactive approach* (acting after a problem emerged) but also applying *proactive approach* (acting before a problem emerges).

New/Old Principles of Public Administration

I. Material elements

- a) economy (old)
- b) efficiency (new)
- c) effectiveness (new)

II. Normative elements

- a) transparency (new)
- b) accountability (old/new)
- c) equity (new)

This is more an analytical distinction used for practical purposes and does not purport to reflect a complex reality, where each of the notions distinguished above is usually neither purely normative nor purely material. Nevertheless, some elements are more tangible and quantifiable and some elements are more ideational and intangible. This, in turn, allowed us to group the elements in two broad categories (material/normative).

I.

- a) Economy:** whether resources are being acquired at the least cost (input)
- b) Efficiency:** whether resources are being utilized in the most appropriate combinations (output)
- c) Effectiveness:** whether a set of organization's key objectives has been achieved (outcome)

In the literature on public administration, there is also talk about: **efficacy**, **excellence**, **enterprise**. Regardless of their exact meaning, all the "es" aim at establishing and consolidating entrepreneurial culture in the civil service work

II.

a) Transparency is about openness and visibility of the structures and processes of policy and decision-making within public administration. Transparency requires establishment of certain venues for citizens to voice their opinions, concerns and demands such as complains books, on-line complains services or social forums where public administrators meet societal groups, representatives of various professions or consumers groups to hear their grievances and suggestions for improvements.

b) Accountability means answerability for an ability to act. Thus, accountability of civil servants is about their answerability for the responsibilities specified in the constitution, legislative acts, executive orders, judicial rulings and administrative functions. Being accountable implies that the civil servants are obliged 'to report, to explain, to give reasons, to respond'.

Types of accountability in public administration:

- *Political accountability*: the notion that a civil service should maintain its loyalty to a government of the day and implement dutifully political agendas of that government
- *Legal accountability*: the notion that a legality of actions carried out by civil service is subject to a judiciary review
- *Administrative accountability*: the notion that the work of civil service is set on clearly defined administrative responsibilities that separate supervisors and subordinates
- *Managerial accountability*: the notion that the work of civil service should be gauged by a combined measurement of input (economy), output (efficiency) and outcome (effectiveness)
- *Ethical accountability*: the notion according to which the work of a civil service should be driven by the “adherence to moral standards and avoidance even of the appearance of unethical actions”³.

Political, legal and administrative accountabilities are a product of a strong desire to place limits on bureaucratic discretion. These accountabilities were characteristic for the ‘old’ public administration set up on a compliance-based system with numerous checks and controls and threats of punishment for misconduct, where performance of civil servants was “measured by how well (they) conformed to the rules”⁴. In today’s public administration accountability goes beyond political, legal or administrative answerability. Paul Light considers accountability to include next to “legal obedience” also “ethical restraint”⁵.

Managerial and ethical accountabilities are characteristic for the ‘new’ public administration. *Managerial accountability* is about performance-based system introduced by the New Public Management initiative, which moved away from inputs (how much money is spend) towards outputs (whether the money is spent in the most appropriate way) and outcomes (whether the money spent brings about desirable results). This was driven by the ideas of “public management (that turns) into business management”⁶ and public administration that does more with less or that ‘works better and costs less’. *Ethical accountability* promotes integrity-based system, where administrative system relies on aspirational and motivational incentives, encouragements and rewards for good acts of behavior and not threats of punishment or procedural inducements.

c) Equity includes elements such as *justice* and *fairness* and advocates a need to find a proper social equilibrium and non-discriminatory approach in responding to various groups and different and often conflicting interests and needs. Equity is driven by the civil service values such as integrity, selflessness⁷ and objectivity.

More practically, public administration needs to take a very active posture vis-à-vis the public since the attitude about justice and fairness often, if not always, depends on the

³ P.C. Light, Federal Inspectors General and the Paths to Accountability, in: *Handbook of Administrative Ethics*, edited by T.L. Cooper, Marcel Dekker, Inc., New York 1994, p.274

⁴ D.F. Kettl, P.W. Ingraham, R.P. Sanders, C. Horner, *Civil Service Reform*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC 1996, p. 92

⁵ Light P., Federal Inspectors General and the Paths to Accountability, in *Handbook of Administrative Ethics*, Cooper T.L., Marcel Dekker, Inc., New York 1994, p.274

⁶ D.J. Savoie, *Thatcher, Reagan, Mulroney*, Pittsburgh 1994.p.125

⁷ “Acting solely in terms of the public interest”, Lord Nolan, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, United Kingdom

peoples' subjective perception about the work of public administration. In this situation, better communication between public administrators and society is the essence. Public administrators need to provide the public with more comprehensive and comprehensible explanations of the administrative decisions. A rise in public confidence in what public administration does will thus, depend on how well civil servants justify and explain their way of acting every time an important decision is made,

Responsive Public Administration and Change

Responsive public administration is more often than not about change. Constant change ensures that public administration and its policies as well as its goods and services remain relevant to the needs and expectations of a larger population. Therefore, studying and understanding process of change are gaining a new significance, particularly when emphasis is placed on building responsive public administrations.

Studying Process of Change

How changes in public administration are introduced and what forms they basically take depend on the questions that are initially put forward. Therefore, it matters whether *core questions* about the mission of public administration are placed in the forefront: What is the role of public administration? What areas should or should not public administration be involved in? Or whether *technical questions* that deal with administrative processes are more emphasized: How does public administration carry out its functions? How are policies and programs designed and implemented? Focus on either the core or technical questions will determine pace and scope of changes taking place in public administration.

Types of Changes in Public Administration

Usually, the *core questions* would stipulate transformation and *technical questions* would lead to accommodation. Transformation leads to questioning basic beliefs that determine selection of ends and alters not only strategies (means) but also missions/goals of an organization. Usually, such mission-oriented change affects major parts of the organization and most if not all of its various units simultaneously. In turn, accommodation aims at improving the matching of ends and means without questioning the very concept of causation, which defines organization's task. Thus strategies, goals and missions remain the same, just the means are improved in order to implement the goals and strategies better. Usually, such process-oriented change affects only some parts of the organization and some units in different time-loops.

Changes in public administration can also differ depending on the pace with which they are introduced within the organization. Some take the form of incremental changes implemented step by step (*'mosaic theory'*). This is determined by a belief that a gradual introduction of pinpointed initiatives will be more acceptable in inertial environment and will be carried out relatively quicker than any large-scale undertakings. Changes can also take the form of rapid changes (*'boom-bang theory'*). It is assumed that reformers are usually given only a small and time-limited window of opportunity to build a momentum for change in a short period of time. In order to circumvent a possible resistance that usually grows progressively while changes are being introduced, a more holistic or comprehensive package of reforms is introduced. This kind of reform covers a wide range of issues and is introduced with a degree of swiftness and decisiveness in order to cross of the 'point of no return' to the old ways of doing things.

Usually, accommodation and incremental changes leave more autonomy and time for lower levels to influence if not to determine the process of change thus, creating a

possibility for a more '*bottom-up*' approach. In turn, a process of transformation and rapid changes requires greater centralization, leadership and supervision that comes directly from the central authorities and leaves little time and room for the participation of lower levels, thus a '*top-down*' approach prevails.

Main Phases of a Process of Change

Regardless of the scope (transformation/accommodation) and pace (incremental/rapid) of changes taking place in public administration, one can usually distinguish two basic phases of the process of change:

- a) Conceptualization phase where strategies and directions of changes are determined
- b) Operationalization phase where changes are introduced with the application of specific means

Both phases are important and linked with each other. The conceptualization phase determines the nature (scope and pace) of reforms as well as the methods according to which the reforms are operationalized. Initiators of changes in public administration may place greater emphasis on persuasion and incentives (soft approach), on the one hand, or on command and threat of punishment (hard approach), on the other hand. Hard approach relies usually on legally binding measures that must be implemented by all ministries under the threat of penalties whereas soft approach uses more consultations, deliberations and explanations in order to encourage introduction of changes. Such approach would usually ask units or ministries that failed to implement changes to state the reasons of their specific action or non-action rather than threatened them with punishment.

Process of change in conceptualization phase includes:

- Asking right questions: “What are we getting for what we are spending?” or “How will we know if we are successful?”
- Developing a new mission statement for a public administration with a participation of all ministries that would include politically elected representatives and civil servants Transformation
- Developing new implementation processes and procedures that would stimulate departure from the old thinking about how available resources should be used (input) towards a new approach of how the available resources should be used in order to reach previously defined objectives (output). Accommodation
- Designing clear principles according to which public services should be delivered such as equality, impartiality, continuity, regularity, transparency, courtesy, helpfulness, consultation and value for money.
- Providing effective leadership that comes from senior political (usually a Prime Minister) and top civil service officials
- Establishing working groups staffed by civil servants from different ministries and academic experts to prepare a package of needed reforms

- Making a public promise by a minister with clearly stated objectives: motivational factor
- Building support among influential political, social and administrative actors
- Prioritizing change. Since oftentimes there is a need to introduce many changes the issue is often about their sequence. Usually, implementers aim at introducing those changes first that have potential to generate other important and desirable changes in public administration. In other words, prioritizing, eventually, aims at creating a ‘snowball’ effect of reforms. In practical, ‘time-frame’, erms, priorities in reforming public administration can be set according to short-term measures (within 1 year), medium-term measures (usual a constitutional government’s term in office) and long-term measures (more than one term in office)
- Conducting internal surveys to identify what services are superfluous, what programs can be carried out more efficiently by the outside actors and what programs should still be done within public administration framework
- Conducting briefing sessions for all civil servants (usually during the lunch time) by top management in order to inform ranks-and-files about the purpose, scope and details of a given reform or about its progress.

Process of change in operationalization phase includes:

- Sending a signal of firmness, commitment to and inevitability of reforms by:
 1. Appointing, on a short-term contract basis, a well known and professionally successful person from a private sector to lead transformation in public administration
 2. Giving the example that has to come from the top. An administrative unit responsible for introducing major changes in public administration should act as it wants others to act: “practice what you preach” or “walk the talk”. This is because too many good ideas about a lean government and cuts in superfluous bureaucracy met with skepticism, sarcasm and eventual rejections because staff felt that the top management did not apply them, in the first instance, towards themselves. In other words, changes leading to downsizing and streamlining start from these units that are made responsible for implementing the same reforms in all other units of public administration.
- Creating a system of awards, (i.e. a service quality award program) for the best public service projects that aim at improving customer service, saving money, inventing better methods of problem-solving, conducting more effectively a mission of a given agency, etc. A tool for the evaluation of the project can be a Business Excellence Model, which gauge results such as financial efficiency, customer satisfaction and a general impact on society against processes: human resource management, programming, budgeting, strategy.
- Introducing regular progress reports that would measure the success of changes against their objectives and timeframe

- Launching wide and regular evaluation programs carried out by internal groups (administrative officials) or external ‘teams’ (a parliamentary group, university researchers, etc), which assess the impact of implemented reforms, suggest changes and improvements
- Establishing an oversight *administrative committee* inside the public administration, which provides a constant and ‘in real time’ follow-up on the reforms. This should encourage building consensus among ministers and sharing information about a progress of changes
- Establishing an ad-hoc special *parliamentary committee* for the administrative reforms
- Establishing a special *social committee or council* under a direct leadership of prime minister composed of people from central and local political authorities, from academia, industry, trade union, various societal groups that would prepare and supervise specific administrative reforms
- Broadening public access to government information by introducing parliamentary act backed up by appropriate administrative rules, which would allow citizens to access administrative records regardless if they have or do not have a connection with the issue or interest in the matter. Thus, public access to the information should be defined as broadly as possible and only limited in exceptional circumstances when the law states that explicitly.
- Establishing proper mechanisms for dealing with citizens’ requests that would aim at identifying official in charge, providing for consultations with citizens and setting specific deadlines for handling and ending a case (“sunset” clauses), which will be combined with the citizens’ right for compensations if deadlines are not met
- Setting up an impact assessment scheme for new administrative procedures and other legal rules that would require administrators to include a systematic and comparable-across-the-board cost-benefit analysis of possible consequences of an administrative act for budget expenditures and earnings (budget assessment) as well as costs for individuals, groups, private and public enterprises (public assessment). Administrative regulations and legislative proposals are thus, evaluated based on the criteria of necessity, efficiency and effectiveness as well as a “net impact” on the welfare of individuals and community.
- Introducing a comprehensive administrative guideline (or handbook) on how legislation should be drafted and which criteria needs to be considered before legislation or any administrative procedures are considered for adoption
- Setting up a special agency whose work aims at reducing a burden of paperwork on the public. This special agency considers every requests coming from ministries, which ask the public to supply additional information, in terms of their practical utility measured against the benefits for an administrative organ and its work, on the one hand, and the costs that the request impose on the public, on the other hand. Such an evaluation forces public administration to demonstrate convincingly that its proposal constitutes the most efficient way of obtaining

necessary information, that other agencies do not already possess this information or are in the course of acquiring it, that collected information is processed and used for the benefits of the public and the administration and that it does not create too much burden for the citizens.

- Introducing advertising campaign in mass media: “We can’t make it nicer for you, but we do make it easier.” (an example of a commercial slogan of a Tax Department)
- Setting up real or virtual multi-purpose ‘one-stop shops’ for service delivery that have easy access for disabled, private interview rooms and are located at sites that are convenient for local residents. The basic idea behind ‘one-stop shops’ is that a customer will be served only at one place, by one civil servant and his request will be dealt with and finalized already during the first meeting.
- Setting up a ‘single window’ based on self-serve kiosks or internet with the objectives similar to the ones standing behind the introduction of ‘one-stop shops’: serve the customers more efficiently in order to increase their satisfaction.
- Introducing ‘smart-cards’, for example, a single toll road smart card to collect tolls on all major roads in a country (rather than a separate card for each of the roads), or an electronic identification cards that facilitate a review of applications in the areas of social insurance, employment, education or enhance control functions, (encryption, payment, electronic signatures).
- Using internal and external benchmarking in assessing performance of different units in public administration. Benchmarking is based on systemic comparison of performance and sharing of experience between various units within public sector or between public and private sectors on national and international levels. Benchmarking that can involve both, processes and results, aims at learning best practices in a specific field, in which a given organization specializes.
- Establishing an information highway, which enables each unit within public administration to make a comparison between the work effectiveness and service delivery mechanisms across the whole spectrum of departments and to determine where exactly its activities fit a larger mission of the public administration, which it is part of.
- Conducting customer satisfaction surveys (externally oriented surveys)
- Conducting civil service satisfaction surveys (internally oriented surveys)
- Changing a contractual environment in which civil servants work by making a requirement that top and middle ranking civil servants are appointed on a five-year fixed term contracts thus, terminating life tenures. Criteria for a renewal of a contract should be based on a general and comparable performance of civil servants measured by an independent committee.
- Encouraging efforts to simplify bureaucracy. Ministries can be asked to submit to the center that is responsible for a public administration reform or to the Cabinet of Ministers up to ten proposals or measures for simplification of the public

administration work and of its dealings with the public. The implementation of a simplification program should be regularly evaluated based on written reports prepared by a relevant ministry every three or six months. The reports coming from various ministries are then compiled by a center responsible for public administration reforms and made available to the public.

- Introducing greater decentralization and deconcentration of government activities
- Proceeding with greater delegation of powers to the line managers in the public administration in the area of human resource planning, programming and budgeting.
- Continuing privatization and contracting out of public administration functions
- Introducing budgeting by objectives

Conclusion

Depending on the pace and the extent to which practical steps described under the conceptualization and operationalization phases are implemented successfully within a given administration it is possible to talk about accommodation or transformation, on the one hand, and incremental or rapid changes, on the other hand. Additionally, the elements of the process of change, which are enumerated above, are viewed as practical steps necessary for bringing public administration closer to citizens so as to make it more responsive to the society's needs. In other words, the conceptualization and operational phases with their specific normative and procedural contents constitute a practical toolkit that is used for building a responsive public administration.