

Post-NPM and changing public governance

Tom Christensen

Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway

Abstract

This article focuses essentially on four issues. First, it examines the typical features of the post-New Public Management reform wave, as experienced in some of the former trail-blazing countries for NPM. Second, the manuscript asks the basic reason behind the rise of the post-NPM reforms. In this connection, the paper points to a combination of external pressure, cultural factors and actions from the political leadership to be one of the major forces which have helped emerge the new reform efforts. Third, the treatise addresses to the question of: to what extent the post-NPM reform movement has moved beyond or replaced NPM, or whether it has merely supplemented them. Fourth, the paper highlights characteristics of some of new complex and hybrid organization forms arising in the recent years. The paper contends that the organizational forms of public administration have increasingly become complex and multifunctional. It delineates the post-NPM reforms to have been rebalancing existing administrative systems in several countries. Some aspects of the old public administration have been combined with NPM and post-NPM features to create new hybrid and compound organizational forms in which governance elements coexist with other reform features. The paper finally concludes by arguing that the post-NPM reforms imply the focus of government to have increasingly shifted to horizontal coordination, in addition to enhancing political control.

Introduction

Two public reform waves have been important in recent decades - New Public Management and post-New Public Management (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a, 2007b). NPM has had a focus on improving efficiency, horizontally specializing in the public apparatuses, contractualization, marketization, a private-sector management style, explicit performance standards and output/outcome control. Under NPM politicians has had a strategic, goal-setting role, and civil servants are supposed to be autonomous managers held to account through performance arrangements and incentives (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Like NPM, post-NPM offer a kind of 'shopping basket' of different elements, but there are basically clear differences between the two reform waves (Klijn 2011, Pollitt 1995). Post-NPM reforms are mainly inter-organizationally oriented. They seek to improve the horizontal coordination of governmental organizations and also to enhance coordination between the government and other actors. In contrast, post-NPM implies a mixed pattern of in-house, marketized services and delivery networks, a

client-based, holistic management style, boundary spanning skills, joined-up targets, a procedural focus, impartiality and ethical norms and stronger centralized control (Lodge and Gill 2011). Under post-NPM politicians are guarantors of compromise deals between multiple stakeholders, while civil servants are network managers and partnership leaders. Post-NPM is also preoccupied with strengthening the capacity of the center, both politically and administratively, but also structurally reintegrate or control more agencies and state-owned enterprises (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a).

The concept of working across jurisdictions has become increasingly important in public administration and management theory and practice, reflecting the increased complexity and fragmentation that New Public Management (NPM) reforms brought (Christensen and Læg Reid 2010, Halligan 2010). The need for more coordination has become a focal issue. A commonly held notion is that working across organizational, jurisdictional and political/administrative boundaries will enable more efficient and/or effective policy development and implementation and service delivery.

In post-NPM reform, efforts have focused particularly on the problems that arose as a result of greater vertical and horizontal specialization in NPM (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a). On the vertical dimension, using more central resources to coordinate subordinate institutions and levels and using stronger instruments of central control have enabled political executives to regain a degree of political control and pursue consistent policies across levels. On the horizontal dimension, cross-sectoral bodies, programs or projects are increasingly being used to modify the 'pillarization' or "silozation" of the central public administration brought about by the strong specialization by sector (Pollitt 2003a).

We will argue that reform involves processes of layering or sedimentation (Streeck and Thelen 2005) in the sense that reforms do not normally replace each other, but instead, new reforms are often added to old ones producing hybrid administrative systems. Our view is that when existing political-administrative systems are confronted with new reforms they become partly deinstitutionalized. However, they also retain some traditional elements that continue to coexist with reform elements, producing an ever-more complex and layered system as these new elements in turn are adapted and institutionalized. If this view is a valid one, public organizations will consist of elements from different eras and reform waves that become balanced and rebalanced over time.

We will focus on four issues in this paper. First, we will examine the typical features of the post-NPM reform wave, especially as they relate to governance. Second, we will ask why post-NPM reform measures emerged. Third, we will discuss to what extent this latest reform movement has replaced previous reforms or whether it has merely supplemented them – is post-NPM moving beyond NPM? Fourth, we will discuss emerging new complex and hybrid organizational forms and their eventual effects. Finally, we will draw some conclusions and look at some implications.

Our major argument is that administrative reforms represent a mixed order (Olsen 2010). The old public administration exemplified by hierarchy and Weberian forms of bureaucracy was supplemented during the NPM reform movement by disaggregation, autonomization, agencification and marketization. This was followed by post-NPM, which entailed patching up the administrative bodies of the state, bringing about stronger integration between the state and the private sector and civil society and increasing central government capacity. Thus what we have seen is not pendulum swings from government to governance and slightly back again, but rather one reform supplementing another in a complementary process whereby the trade-off between different administrative modes has changed, resulting in increased complexity and hybrid organizational forms.

The article will first outline some of the main features of post-NPM, followed by a discussion of why post-NPM became popular as a modifying and supplementing reform wave to NPM. Third, we will discuss what is happening when reform waves are combined in complex and hybrid ways of organizing public administrations.

Main features of post-NPM reforms

The main goal of post-NPM reforms has been to gradually counteract the disintegration or fragmentation brought about under NPM and to restore public-sector organizations to a situation of greater integration and coordination (Christensen and Lægveid 2007b). This is closely related to the development of governance measures in a modern political-administrative system. First, fragmentation under NPM increased pressure for more horizontal integration and coordination. Second, political executives were reluctant to accept the undermining of political control that resulted from NPM. This has resulted in efforts to strengthen central capacity and control, particularly in sectors seen as politically salient (Gregory 2003, Halligan 2006). There is an increasing striving for coordination and coherence in public policy, and one answer seems to be a return to the center. While the latter trend is more about restoring the hierarchy, the former is more about governance in the sense of networks and partnerships. Thus we will focus mainly on these horizontal elements of the post-NPM movement.

The post-NPM generation of reforms advocates a more holistic strategy (Bogdanor 2005). The slogans “joined-up-government” and “whole-of-government” provided new labels for the old doctrine of coordination in the study of public administration (Hood 2005). In addition to the issue of coordination, the problem of integration was a main concern behind these reform initiatives (Mulgan 2005). The purpose has been to work across portfolio boundaries and administrative levels to achieve shared goals and an integrated government response to particularly complex and ‘wicked’ issues. Attempts to coordinate government policy-making and service delivery across organizational boundaries are, however, not a new phenomenon (Kavanagh and Richards 2001).

The concept of working across boundaries gained popularity in public administration and in management theory and practice from the late 1990s (Gregory 2003). The new mantra was an increased focus on the notion of stronger coordination, integration and connecting the dots. The notion that working across organizational boundaries will enable more efficient and/or effective policy development and implementation and service delivery runs counter to the NPM claim that greater efficiency can be achieved via more fragmented arrangements and more unambiguous roles and functions for administrative units.

The horizontal dimension of post-NPM is regarded as even more important than the vertical one. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, new organizational units, such as new cabinet committees, inter-ministerial or inter-agency collaborative units, inter-governmental councils, the lead agency approach, circuit-breaker teams, super networks, task forces, cross-sectoral programs or projects, tsars, etc. have been established with the main purpose of getting government units to work better together (Gregory 2006, Halligan and Adams 2004). In 2003, a new Cabinet Implementation Unit was established in Australia to support whole-of-government activities. Creating coordinative structures inside existing central structures, increasing the strategic leadership role of the Cabinet, and focusing more on following up central decisions are typical hierarchical efforts in Australia. Their aim is to put pressure on the sectoral authorities to collaborate and coordinate better (Halligan 2006). In Norway a new minister of coordination was established in the Prime Minister’s Office in 2009. Other examples are merging agencies to form larger bodies, such as the Department of Homeland Security in the USA, the Ministry of Social Development in New Zealand the new welfare administration in Norway, or Centrelink in Australia being integrated into Department of Human Services (Aucoin and Bakvis 2008, Christensen and Lægveid 2007a, Kettl 2004).

The horizontal dimension typically concerns policy areas that cut across traditional boundaries, so-called “wicked issues”. How this dimension is handled ranges from mergers to softer collaborative measures. The Canadian government launched what were labeled horizontal management initiatives

from the mid-1990s to tackle policy issues such as innovation, poverty, and climate change (Bakvis and Juillet 2004). Other examples of these were seen in Australia in 2002, where attempts were made to bring more coordination to such areas as national security, demographics, science, education, environmental sustainability, energy, rural and regional development, transportation, and work and family life (Halligan and Adams 2004).

Procedural efforts have also been made to enhance post-NPM initiatives. In New Zealand there is a stronger emphasis on effectiveness, broader long-term “ownership” interests and outcomes in contrast to the shorter-term and narrower “purchaser” efficiency and output focus that characterized the NPM reforms (Boston and Eichbaum 2005).

Post-NPM seems generally to be more about working together in a pragmatic and intelligent way than about formalized collaboration, like alluded to in the term ‘smart practice’, as coined by Bardach (1998). This is especially true in Canada where working horizontally has been an issue of ongoing importance since the mid-1990s (Bakvis and Juliett 2004). The approach to major stake-holders in the environment, including private actors, is more heterogeneous and involves joined-up governance efforts and the use of networks and partnerships.

Collaborative efforts aimed at delivering a seamless service, like Australia’s one-stop shops, can be seen as control from above to secure coordinated and efficient service delivery, but also as a real local collaborative effort requiring autonomy from central control (Halligan 2006). A comparative study of service delivery organizations in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and the Netherlands concludes that procedural bureaucratic models are being superseded by network governance (Considine and Lewis 2003).

The post-NPM reforms are also culturally oriented governance efforts. They focus on cultivating a strong and unified sense of values, cultural integration, teambuilding, the involvement of participating organizations, trust, value-based management, collaboration and improving the training and self-development of public servants (Ling 2002). The argument is that there is a need to re-establish a “common ethic” and a “cohesive culture” in the public sector because of the reported corrosion of loyalty and increasing mistrust brought about by NPM, which was rooted in diverse economic theories (Norman 1995). All agencies should be bound together by a single, distinctive public service ethos, as emphasized in Australia (Shergold 2004). Under the slogan “working together”, the Australian government emphasized the need to build a supportive public-sector culture that encourages whole-of-government solutions by formulating value guidelines and codes of conduct.

NPM is also related to governance efforts. Directly influencing public services is the “real thing”. In a democracy it is up to citizens to choose which institutional arrangements they prefer, and if they are dissatisfied with the existing system it is their privilege to try other arrangements. But we can also take a more sceptical view of the democratic value of people’s status as customers (Fountain 2001). A managerial concept of democracy might weaken civic responsibility, engagement and political equality and enhance the role of administrators and managers (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). It is a paradox that while one goal of NPM is to open public administration to the public, it may ultimately reduce the level of democratic accountability and lead to erosion of the “publicness” of public service, a development that post-NPM has tried to counteract (Haque 2001, Peters 1999).

Why the emergence of post-NPM?

There are many reasons for the emergence of post-NPM reform measures in the late 1990s in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and UK, as trail-blazers. First, structural devolution, which included transferring authority from the central political-administrative level to regulatory agencies, service-

producing agencies, or state-owned companies, was controversial and have produced disadvantages (Christensen and Lægreid 2001). The effect has deprived the political and administrative leadership of levers of control and of influence and information, raising questions of accountability and capacity. Post-NPM measures, particularly those involving a reassertion of the center, reflect the fact that political executives are more frequently being blamed when things go wrong, even though they actually sought to avoid blame through devolution under NPM (Hood 2002, Hood and Lodge 2006). So taking back some power seems natural through post-NPM.

Second, post-NPM can be seen as a reaction to the “pillarization” or ‘silozation’ of the public sector that has been typical for the NPM reforms (Gregory 2006, Pollitt 2003a). By focusing on performance management, single-purpose-organizations and structural devolution NPM reforms tend to ignore the problems of horizontal coordination or integration (Fimreite and Lægreid 2005). Performance management is mainly focused on vertical coordination. The principle of “single-purpose organizations’ or ‘stand alone organizations’, with many specialized and non-overlapping roles and functions, seem to produce too much fragmentation, self-centered authorities, and lack of cooperation and coordination, hence hindering effectiveness, efficiency and public goal achievement (Boston and Eichbaum 2005: 21, New Zealand Government 2002).

Third, the ‘fear factor’ has been important. For a number of reasons the world is perceived as increasingly insecure and dangerous, which may be either seen as evidence-based or related to emerging symbols. The concerns raised by terrorist attacks have had important repercussions for public-sector reforms in the US, the UK, and Australia (Halligan and Adams 2004, Kettl 2003), while New Zealand is concerned about bio-security (Gregory 2006). More and more countries are worried about either international or national crises, disasters, and threats, such as natural disasters, like tsunamis, or pandemics, like mad-cow disease, SARS or bird flu. This has led to a tightening-up of government, or what some Australians refer to as a “thinking up and out” strategy, which includes typical post-NPM measures. The new threat of terrorism has underlined the importance of governments’ having compatible structures and ensuring that information is shared between agencies, as seen in considerations connected to the organization of military security and intelligence units in US (Hammond 2007).

Fourth, NPM promised quite a lot concerning many things, but has had problems of delivering on these promises. Saving money was focused, because of less bureaucracy and more efficiency, whether on a macro or micro level. On a macro level typical NPM countries don’t seem to have been doing better than countries less eager on NPM reforms (Christensen and Lægreid 2007a). On a micro level, there is a scholarly disagreement whether services have become more efficient as a result of NPM, including increased use of competitive tendering. Economists seem to have a generic argument of saving costs, in particular in ‘simple’ services, while political scientists much more is problematizing the research results and at best think they are divided (Boyne et al. 2003). Adding to the economic equation, there is the question of transaction costs related to NPM reforms, which the critics say are huge. There are also concerns with NPM whether more efficiency means less quality, or whether NPM has been creating increased social inequality (Stephens 2000).

Post-NPM as replacing or supplementing NPM?

A further central question is whether post-NPM is transcending NPM (Christensen and Lægreid 2007b). One can argue that there has been a process of substitution and pendulum swings. Just as NPM was a substitute for the “old public administration”, post-NPM is replacing NPM. This “*zeitgeist*” approach focuses on the deinstitutionalization and (re)institutionalization of reforms, rather than combinations of reforms (Røvik 2011). Another possibility is simply that political priorities have

changed and that leaders have therefore decided to remove one set of reforms and start on another reform path, or that dominant coalitions have been renegotiated and have decided to move beyond NPM. Dunleavy et al. (2006) simply claim that NPM is dead and has been replaced with Digital-Era Governance.

Another understanding is that different reform waves will be combined. In reality reform waves influence the development of public organizations and their activities in a gradual process of change. One claim is that NPM is by no means over (Pollitt 2003b), but is being supplemented by post-NPM reform initiatives. The next question is then how we may characterize this combination, i.e. what kind of dynamics and mechanisms does it involve? Some would say that NPM is the dominant reform wave and that post-NPM has simply modified certain aspects of it. Another possible version is that both reform waves are important and are used in different ways according to policy area, political saliency or just combined differently in different reforms.

Another take on how reform waves interact is inspired by a combination of structural, cultural and myth perspectives (Christensen et al. 2007), and sees the different reforms as a process of layering or sedimentation (Olsen 2009, Streeck and Thelen 2005). The historical development of public institutions shows that at certain points in time elements of their basic structures and cultures are either pushed aside or deinstitutionalized when a new reform wave comes along or else manage to remain viable and influence the further development of the organization, regardless of new reform waves. This layering of various elements from the “old public administration”, NPM and post-NPM makes public organizations increasingly complex (Christensen and Lægveid 2011).

One reason for layering processes may be the simple instrumental fact that executive leaders decide to keep reform elements they support or like when introducing new reforms. Another reason may be that a diversity of reform elements from different waves makes it easier to make flexible political compromises, decrease conflicts and increase legitimacy. A third and more culturally oriented reason could be that path-dependent mechanisms and cultural resistance make it difficult to remove all elements from an old reform when a new one emerges. It is never easy to start from scratch, and continuity in norms and values helps a public organization to cope with periods of transition. A fourth and more symbolically oriented reason is related to the labeling of reforms (Meyer 1979). Often reforms are sold as new, modern and efficient, whereas in actual fact there is far more continuity than reform entrepreneurs would have us believe.

Summing up, the view furthered here is that reform movements are characterized by combination, complexity, layering and hybridization, rather than by dominance, substitution and pendulum swings (Christensen et al. 2007). Administrative reforms in the public sector can be understood as compound reforms that combine different organizational principles based on multiple factors working together in a complex mix (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). Compound administrative reforms are multi-dimensional and represent “mixed” orders and combinations of competing, inconsistent and contradictory organizational principles and structures that co-exist and balance interests and values (Olsen 2007).

Multi-dimensional orders are considered to be more resilient to external shocks and therefore preferable to uni-dimensional orders, but may also create conflicts and ambiguity (March and Olsen 1989). Executive governance rests on the mobilization of multiple and complementary sets of institutions, actors, interests, decision-making arenas, values, norms, and cleavages, reflected in what we call a transformative approach to reforms (Christensen and Lægveid 2001). In a pluralistic society, where there are many criteria for success and different causal understandings, we have to go beyond the idea of a single organizational principle to understand how public organizations work and are reformed and look at them as composite organizations (Olsen 2007).

Our argument is that we face a dialectical development in which the old public administration has

been combined with NPM and post-NPM features to create new hybrid organizational forms. The central component in the old Weberian bureaucratic model is sustainable and robust, but in the strong modern state it has been supplemented with neo-Weberian components such as performance management and user participation, responsiveness and professional management (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) and also with new public governance initiatives (Osborne 2010).

Emerging complex and hybrid forms of governance

The last questions to be raised is what characterize some of the new or supplementing organizational forms being used in a layered governmental system and what are their effects. In the post-NPM reforms governance elements and networks are supplementing hierarchy and market as coordination mechanisms. Organizational forms such as partnerships and collegial bodies spanning organizational boundaries are being used more intensively. Networks have been introduced in most Western democracies as a way to increase the capacity of the public sector to deliver services (Klijn and Skelcher 2007). Instrumental accounts of networks argue that the central government is a powerful actor that creates networks in order to realize its projects and be a delivery arm for a national policy initiative that requires inter-organizational cooperation at the local level (Skelcher et al. 2005).

For complex, unstructured and rapidly changing problems a network approach may be suitable (Kettl 2003). This approach understands coordination as the interaction of interdependent actors from different traditional hierarchical structures and from outside such structures. Such actors pay less heed to formal top-down authority and rely more on negotiations and mutual adjustments and on bringing together organizations to pool resources and knowledge. This network model scores high on adaptability and flexibility, but accountability may be reduced and ambiguous, and steering may be more difficult.

There is a state-centric approach to governance in which public-public networks are a main component (Peters and Pierre 2003). Here civil servants have networking and boundary-spanning competences allowing them to act as go-betweens and brokers across organizational boundaries both vertically and horizontally. Public-public networks bring civil servants from different policy areas together to trump hierarchy (Hood and Lodge 2006), i.e. they are facilitators, negotiators and diplomats rather than exercising only hierarchical authority, which may be especially important in tackling 'wicked issues' that transcend traditional sectors and policy areas. The ability to further cooperation is also valued.

Partnerships have become a popular tool in the governance of welfare services (Fimreite and Læg Reid 2009). They are designed to enhance collaboration and cooperation across boundaries in public services (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). There are different kinds of partnerships, but a common feature is lack of hierarchy. Mörth and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) classify partnerships along two dimensions – degree of formality and degree of permanence. Two further dimensions are: the degree to which private actors are involved and the degree of voluntariness (Fimreite and Læg Reid 2009). Some partnerships can be very informal, time-limited, voluntary and include a strong private component. Others can be highly formalized, mandatory and permanent with a weak private component. In the welfare state administration one-stop shops have become an emerging instrument for joining up and strengthening governance relations, but there is significant diversity between countries regarding the task portfolio, participant structure, level of autonomy, proximity to citizens and instruments used in these arrangements (Askim et al. 2011).

In addition to the partnership model we also have a multi-level governance system furthered by post-NPM in which tasks are carried out at different levels of government, implying increased interdependence of public agencies operating at different territorial levels, often in a complex system of

overlapping jurisdictions (Bache and Flinders 2004). Tasks can rarely be treated independently of each other, the different levels have to collaborate, and coordination between levels is an important precondition for coordination between sectors. Multi-level governance does not necessarily imply state decline, but rather state transformation and adaptation (Pierre and Peters 2000). Networks, partnerships and multilevel governance as coordinating mechanism supplement rather than replace the traditional state hierarchy (Bouckart et al. 2010).

There is no agreement in the scholarly community about the effects of increasingly complex and hybrid structures, as a result of combining Weberian, NPM and post-NPM features (Christensen and Lægreid 2011). A optimistic view sees hybrid structures as effective in goal attainment and flexible in catering to different interests, while a more pessimistic view emphasis increasing conflicts, ambiguity and problems of achieving public goals.

Conclusion

Post-NPM initiatives in different countries vary according to the starting points and national administrative cultures. But a common characteristic is that post-NPM reforms do not represent a break with the past, nor do they fundamentally transform public administration. Rather it is a question of rebalancing existing administrative systems without changing them in any fundamental way (Gregory 2006). Countries show complex combinations of organizational autonomy on some issues, increased centralized control and network-like coordination mechanisms alongside resilient traditional hierarchical control (Bouckaert et al. 2010).

In the last decade there has been no dominant model (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). NPM has been supplemented by post-NPM, including key concepts such as coordination, centralization, governance, networks and partnerships. NPM and post-NPM overlap and are not mutually exclusive when it comes to specific reform tools. Both paradigms incorporate ideas from the other perspective, and both in practice and in the academic literature ideas from both models are combined (Klijn 2011).

Summing up, post-NPM reforms imply an increased focus on integration, horizontal coordination in line with a governance approach and enhanced political control and recentralization (Pollitt 2003b, Lægreid and Verhoest 2010). The emergence of post-NPM reforms can be understood as a combination of external pressure from the technical and institutional environments, learning from problematic elements of NPM reforms and deliberate choices by political executives, based on concerns about political control and capacity, skepticism whether NPM can deliver on their promises, the fear factor and social concerns (cf. Christensen et al. 2007). An increasing number of scholars are arguing that these post-NPM trends are a reaction to the organizational proliferation and resulting fragmentation induced by NPM doctrines (Pollitt 2003a, Boston and Eichbaum 2005, Gregory 2006, Halligan 2006, Christensen and Lægreid 2007a, Bouckaert et al. 2010, Lægreid and Verhoest 2010). This counter-reaction contains increased central control and coordination and has been observable in many countries (Bogdanor 2005, Bouckaert et al. 2010). External and internal pressure has questioned the effectiveness of a fragmented public sector. These include internationalization and Europeanization, security threats and crisis management needs as well as a call for more integrated service delivery and holistic policies, e-government and regulatory reform initiatives, and the loss of a common civil service culture.

However, it remains unclear what these coordination initiatives imply for public-sector organizations in terms of actual autonomy, control, coordination and performance. One take is that this is a new “one best way” orientation with a lot of symbolic flavor. Another is that such post-NPM initiatives have made a substantial contribution to a better organized public sector. The question is

whether post-NPM and governance efforts will continue to be a strong reform movement or whether it will gradually fade away and be supplemented by new reform initiatives.

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