

EGPA

After public policy and management frameworks. What's the next step?

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Virtual Organization Delivering Public Services

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Abstract

In the last decades of twentieth century, the subject of the administrative reform started to be in the agenda of great part of the governments of the industrialized countries. It is in a change context and of new challenges of the Administration that the New Public Management appears as a model of the Administrative Reformation. Thus, the introduction of market mechanisms and the adoption of tools of private administration are presented as a model on the basis to solve the problems of efficiency of the public administration.

The New Public Management appears as a microeconomic perspective of privatization and puts stress on private management style in Public Administration. It argues an alteration on the organisational structures and relations, the introduction of management processes and tools, and the delimitation of performance indicators. The main objectives are the specialization, the decentralization, the fragmentations and autonomy of public structures and the increase of the efficiency.

Thus, the followed way is the differentiation, which is a natural trend of the different areas of Public Administration to seek a higher identification of values and procedures within working environment. If this identification is a way for the efficiency, according to Lawrence and Lorsh (1967), it has to be complemented with an inverse movement of integration. Then, after a first phase of specialization, the creation of new economic agents, imposes a phase of higher need of coordination to really achieve sustained efficiency (Rhodes, 1996). In this line of reasoning, the agenda to public administration reforms has a new issue, the management by networks. This means that, in a macroeconomic perspective, the delivery of public services is made through partnerships between multiple agents (private, public and non-profit) - The Virtual Organizations -.

The solution to the production and coordination mechanisms of any services had been, during much time, underlying in the Hierarchic Market dichotomy (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1996). The enterprise strategies were centered in the horizontal integration, the market competition and the knowledge specialization. Nowadays, hybrid solutions are preferred, where the strategy is the creation of partnerships and sharing information. The knowledge and the information are dispersed through the market and each agent uses them in their most profitable way. Thus to get higher levels of efficiency and satisfaction of the customer, the competition must give place to complementary structures between organizations. That is, the performance and the levels of innovation of each one of these organizations are dependent of its capacity of cooperation and share of information, what for itself leads to the creation of a virtual organization.

Since Government is under a great pressure to accomplish higher levels of efficiency in Public Administration, it is its tasks and responsibility to encourage the creation of Virtual Organizations, that can be defined as an association of some specialized agents in a way to produce a final output that maximizes the utility of the citizen. It matters therefore to analyze this new model of public management.

Our work is to understand the valences and the feasibility of the creation and implementation of the Virtual Organizations as well as its impact in the installment of

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the Public Service. It is our intention to consider it a new conceptual model of public administration and to clarify some inherent dimensions, such as the factors that are in the basis of its origin and creation; the role played for the State and public agents; the financial mechanisms; the evaluation and control methods; the analysis of the inter-organizational relations; the role of the citizen in these new forms of organization.

1 – UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The last decades of twentieth century, represented an enormous challenge to the public sector management in the most developed countries. The administrative changes and reformations appeared in different contexts to solve similar problems, with complementary strategies.

From all these changes the concept of New Public Management arises, identifying an emergent paradigm in public administration. The New Public Management (NPM) as a management model is difficult to be correctly defined. Even the academic community is divided when considering or not the NPM as a true management theory of public administration (McLaughlin, 2002:409). This denomination, although, allow us to identify all efforts made over the last few decades of Twentieth century to modernize and to reform Public Management Model. To Hood (1991: 4) and Lane (2000: 3), it's an international movement based on the reaction to the dissatisfaction adopted by the Welfare State Management model and in the increasing tax burdens over the citizens. The objective is to improve efficiency in public administration and to adjusted hit reality to the information era, in other words, to move on the bureaucratic paradigm (Gray and Jankins, 1995:76). New Public Management is based on the introduction of market type mechanisms and the adoption of private management tools to solve the problems of public administration. It promotes the competition between suppliers of public goods and services in the expectation of an improvement of the service delivery for the citizen (at quality level) and, at the same time, a reduction of production costs (Hartley, Butler and Benington, 2002:388). In Denhardt and Denhardt's perspective(2000:550), the New Public Management intends to infuse the notion that the relation between the citizen and the public service is similar to the one that occurs in the market, with the need to be handled in a similar way.

To Pollitt (1990: 134), the performance improvement with quality standards and economy of costs seeked by the New Public Management, can be substantiated in eight elements:

- a) Reduction of costs through a bigger transparency in its production;
- b) Desegregation of the public sector and introduction of a new type of organizational relations: the contracts;
- c) Separation of responsibilities between the financial promoter and the producer of goods and services;
- d) Introduction of market mechanisms;
- e) Decentralization of the authority;
- f) Introduction of performance measures;
- g) Introduction of a new logic in the management of the human resources, with more similarities to the techniques of the private sector;

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h) Bigger emphasis in the quality of the service.

Hood (1991) presents us the different dimensions of analysis and changes that characterize the NPM and the paradigm change in public administration. A concern for the financial control is denoted through the reduction of the expenses, the professionalization and decentralization of the public administration. Moreover, it also seeks the use of new management tools (to rethink and to improve flexibility in contracting staff and the budgetary system) and to control and evaluate the management by the results and not only for the processes.

Figure 1 – The New Public Management

Doctrine	Meaning	Justification
1. Professional Management	Public Manager with freedom to act	The Responsibility needs managers perfectly identified
2. Performance Measures	Definition of performance Indicators	Responsibility and efficiency
3. Output Control	Expenses and rewards linked to performance	Focus on achievements not in process
4. Fragmentation of Public Units	Creation of more flexible and decentralized units	Use of contracts between public units and private ones
5. Competition in Public Sector	Liberalization of the use of contract mechanism	Rivality make lower cost
6. Use of Private Management Tools	Freedom to punish inefficiency and reward effectiveness	Better Management seizing market opportunities
7. Discipline in Management	Cut back in cost and raise of productivity	Need to do more with less

Font: Adapted Hood 1991

The introduction of the NPM carries out the decentralization of public units, the processes and logics of functioning reorganization, the redefinition of organizational objectives and a higher concentration on customer satisfaction (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000:550). NPM intends to transfer the power to the managers of each administrative agency and to cease the hierarchic dependence relations within other levels of Public Administration. The bureaucratic control was substituted by a new system of auditorships. The creation of new independent regulating organisms for each one of the liberalized markets is needed (Hood, James, Jones, Scott and Travers, 1998).

Making a comparison between the NPM and the bureaucracy and hierarchic control model of management, the NPM always reveals itself superior (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000:550). Figure 4 makes a comparison of the public administration models in cause.

Figure 2 - A comparison between Public Management Models

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Dimensions	Bureaucratic Model	NPM
Epistemological Foundations	Political Science	Economic Theory
Man Vision	Administrative Man	Economic Man based in personal interests
Public Interest Conception	Defined by political option and legally substantiated	Represent the aggregation of particular interests
Accountability of Public Managers	Politician and superior in the chain of command	Customers
Means to achieve Political Objectives	Producers of goods and services	Promoter of goods and services
Means to control and input responsibility	Hierarchic Control	Market Mechanisms based on contracts
Discretionary Power	Bounded to Law	Large Power of autonomous action
Organizational Structure	Top-Bottom Authority	Decentralization of power by organizational units
Public Managers Motivation	Salary and benefits from public servants	Manager and entrepreneur spirit

Font: Adapted from Denhardt e Denhardt, 2000

Despite its impact, various authors depreciate the innovating character and the own concept of New Public Management. Dunleavy *et al* (2005) even declares the death and substitution of this paradigm. Others find very hard to accept its neoliberal identity, its simplicity of solution based on private management tools and on the use of contracting-out. They also argue that NPM has an internal incoherence and does a microeconomic analysis of State Functions. (Lane, 2000).

Inspite of these arguments, we can't deny that Public Management is changing (Hughes, 2006). Every day there are challenges to the Public Administration and it has to manage them to achieve efficiency and quality. Under the denomination that we want to give, Hughes (2006) typifies 13 dimensions of change:

1. A Strategically Vision - Definition of the political priorities through an analysis of resources;
2. Management not Administration - Emphasis in the capacity and autonomy of the management;
3. Stress on the results - Control of achieved objectives when comparing with the established;
4. Improvement in the Financial Management - Reduction of costs and economic and financial viability;
5. Flexibility in the Human Resources - Bigger freedom in the management of staff;
6. Flexibility in the Organization - Freedom of adequacy of the organizational configuration that better serves the interests of the administrative reformation;
7. Bigger Competition - Liberalization of the public monopolies;
8. Bigger emphasis in Contracts: Do not to confuse with "contracting-out". The intention is to spread the use of contracts even between public agents in order to improve control and efficiency of the organizations or the departments of the organizations;

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9. Models of Private Administration - importation of management tools and adoption of a more enterprising spirit;
10. Better relation with Politicians - the public administration has a umbilical relation with the political sphere without denying the differences between these two realities it is necessary to know how to manage conflicts;
11. Better relation with the citizen – A better and greater citizenship. Transforming the citizen from a passive actor to an integrant agent of the administrative reform;
12. Separation between Producer and Financier - Separation of responsibilities and fields of specialization. On one side the one that decides to promote and to finance the production and on the other those who are in charge of producing following the rules of the first;
13. Reexamine what the government makes - To analyze and to reflect about the functions of the State and about what we expect it to do;

2 – MODELS OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew (1996: 10), using the advantage of not existing a clear definition of NPM, propose four different models (or four moments of its evolution), in a way to distinguish from the old conception of public administration.

Model 1 –Stress on Efficiency

This model assumes a negative vision on the previous model of public administration (bureaucratic model of the constructed Professional Administration during the Welfare State), considering it as a model without alternatives to motivate the workers, too much expensive and with an exaggerated level of bureaucratic procedures. The main objective is an economic and financial equilibrium of Public Administration, obtained through the introduction of private management initiatives is a way that the public sector will be more similar to the private.

This introduction of models of private management doesn't take in account the differences existing between the sectors suggested by Allison (1998). What guides administrative reform is the concept of economical efficiency. Thus, in this phase of the NPM, it is given importance to the financial control and equilibrium, to profits, to efficiency, rather to social equality. The management functions with importance and need a more professionalized and specialized management. The professionalization of the management brings more responsibility to producers of public services towards citizens. The bureaucratic mechanisms of control give space to the external auditorships procedures.

This phase of NPM sometimes reveals itself, a too economist view, proceeding to blind cut backs, stopping investment expenditures that could help economic growth and development. However, it has the virtue to control public expenses. Nevertheless, Public Administration still was too big and too slow when answering to external challenge.

Model 2 – Focus on Decentralization

There is an attempt to invert the logic followed until the decade of 70 in constructing organizations that promoted the vertical integration. NPM suggests a transformation within Public Administration towards the construction of more flexible units and orientated to specific missions. The bureaucratic organizations give place to new agencies with the capacity to adapt and to identify itself to different and more challenging environments, respecting the interests of the users whom they intend to serve.

Therefore, this model provides the appearance of organizations with lower dimension, favors the specialization in production, frees the government from the responsibility to produce public services. The fragmentation of public sector and the liberalization of its market has allowed the competitiveness of new agents, with the objective of increasing efficiency to citizens. It allowed, with the use of contracts, a greater and better control over agencies. However it was necessary, after the financial equilibrium and the use of market type mechanism under a organizational revolution, to give the next step towards quality in public management.

Model 3 – In search of Excellence

The models previously presented all make an external analysis of Public Administration. That is, they present imposed solutions to the administrative system, from politician power. It is now the time to activate internal mechanism of reform. To promote this kind of change we must understand the need to modify management process as well as ethical values and believes of public servants. Which is the same as to promote the organizational development.

The administrative modernization is seen as a process that cannot be performed top-bottom, but it need to be a desired process by all the elements of the organization. The changes have to be presented and accepted by all employees in order for them to understand its need and importance. The organizational culture is considered to be stronger than any hierarchic control.

It is in this process of change that NPM proposes the Total Quality Management and the search of Excellence as a management philosophy. The total quality management intends to be a global philosophy that all the elements of the organization do in an effort for the satisfaction of the customer. The age of mass production was already exceeded, we are in the age of “post-fordism” as a mechanism of capital accumulation. The consumer preferences change every day and that leads to market segmentation. The efficiency of the organizations is obtained whenever the organization achieved integration in each branch of market that it intends to reach.

As a consequence of the previous models it's a priority that public agencies, with bigger autonomy and acting within market pressures, assume product differentiation and quality as a main target. We also seek a better identification with citizens' needs and better customer services. (Barzelay, 2001; Gains, 1999).

Despite all the developed efforts of Public Administration continues too much closed down in its own world. It would be necessary to invite the citizen to be an active part of

management and decision taking. In some situations the economic priority gives place to the questions of social equity.

Model 4 – Toward a Better Citizenship

The use of market mechanisms is accepted but we need to adapt it to the very meaning of public services. Some tools and some practices of private management are accepted but it is necessary to keep the central idea that the Public Administration is not a company, although it can be managed as one (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew, 1996:57; Van Gramberg and Teicher, 2000:488). The main paradigms of this model are:

- a) The promotion of the quality in the public sector;
- b) The construction of a new concept of citizenship;
- c) To give more power to the elected elements;
- d) Some skepticism before the offered valences by the market solutions.

These models can be understood as an evolution process. The starting point is a producer State with the responsibility to deliver public services. Feeling the necessity to control the increase of its expenses, the State appeals to cut backs and to the introduction of internal control systems. Wanting to improve the management capacity and the levels of efficiency, NPM introduced public-private partnerships. Bit by bit the big State has been transformed into a regulator one. The question of the quality is assumed as a necessary issue to control its loss. Finally, the citizen ends to play a central role in public management, acts as a judge towards public agencies.

2 – THE FIFTH MODEL – THE VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS

Summing up the logic of the NPM model, we shouldn't decentralize and break up the old public administration organizations until a financial reform. Without the appropriate financial equilibrium, the decentralization process could become chaotic. Trusting the own agencies to reduce their own budget, we would be perhaps part of a counter-productive process. Hardly an organization assumes its excess of financing and considers the reduction of the same. Thus, by being a hard and quarrelsome process, it should be handled by central government. With its improved viability, the following phase is to give more autonomy and freedom to management also in favor of the specialization. With more power and necessity to fulfill its organizational objectives, the concern for the citizens' satisfaction appears as an inevitability, at the same time that the citizen is integrated in the utility concept.

The globalization, the competitiveness of economic agents and the new age of the information society forces the appearance of immediate and flexible solutions for the satisfaction of the citizens' necessities, at the same time that it cares more and more about quality and lower cost of production (Brutsch, 1998). The fragmentation and competitively earlier introduced compels the public sector to establish relations with external agents, in order to give more attention to citizens and their expectations. The new economic era, based on information and communication technologies, modifies the perspective of the problems, as well as their solution (Bovaird and Loffer, 2001; Jagers, Jansen and Steebackers, 2000). Currently, the Public Administration has a new identity, which is not constituted by elements under the political leadership, but it is constituted

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by a set of specialized units around its organizational objectives. To deliver services to citizens, in an efficient way, it's required to link complementary abilities of different units. This new situation raises coordination problems. To reach the main objective of administrative reform (the increase of efficiency of the public sector), it's necessary a perfect coordination of the different public and private actors, so that each organizational unit, opportunely and in its measure, contributes to give ultimately the best services to the citizens. Although each organization keeps its individuality, acting in coordination, the organization end acting as just a single one.

Thus, the fifth phase is one of creation of virtual organizations that represent the possibility of an organization to gain advantages of market through a better coordination of its organizational structure that is based on a network, involving a series of efficient agents (Siber, Swagerman, 2001). Other complementary definitions of Virtual Organizations can still be presented. Fuehrer and Votalk (in Brutsch, 1998) identify it as temporary partnerships between organizations to obtain and offer better services to the customers and to guarantee greater market share. Travica (in Brutsch, 1998) defines them as temporary organizations which integrate independent and spread agent who can be substituted whenever they become unefficient. Davidow and Malone (1992) define the virtual organizations as temporary bridges between the entities that allow, through information systems, a share of costs and accesses to the market. Mc Hugh and Wheeler (1995) show them as a dynamic system that allows to combine and improve their the agent's abilities in the market.

In short, the virtual organizations can be synthesized in five points:

1. Temporary - they always exist, until the facts that had given origin to it are satisfied;
2. Independent agents - the organizations are said virtual for being the association of autonomous agents, or part of them;
3. Share of Information - Normally the links and Inter-organizational agreements present a difficulty known as transaction costs. Sharing information, the trust and the interdependence can consist on a way to minimize transaction costs;
4. Each one acts in his own interest and in the interest of the remaining elements - an interest balanced between all actors' guarantees the cohesion of the group and as the information is shared, the probability of opportunist behaviors is minimum;
5. Necessity of a Network Broker - an agent who is capable to co-ordinate the network and that replaces inefficient agents.

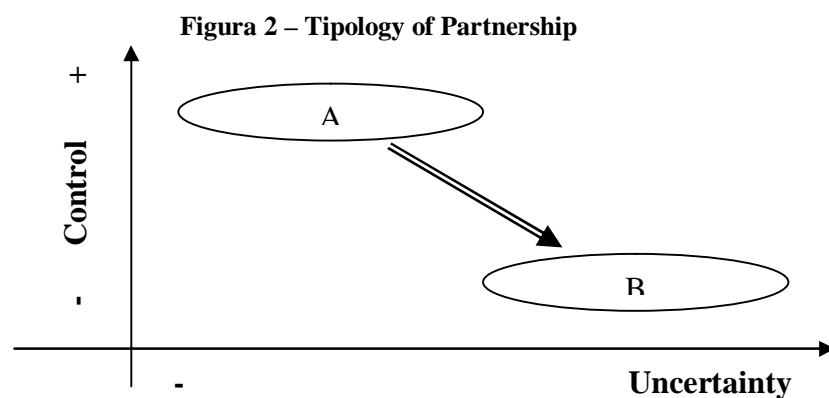
According to Brutsch (1998:146) virtual organizations are based over all on two movements: one internal to the organizations and another external, that maximize the efficiency of the solutions presented to the populations:

1. The specialization of each organizational unit in the nuclear activity. That is, the concentration of efforts in the chain of value of the organization, separating the main activities from the secondary ones. The virtual organization look forward to follow a strategy of excellence and effectiveness in the activities that represent more-value for the customer and provide, to the organization, quota of market;
2. High capacity to cooperate. In the pursuing of the previous point, the organizations, after the specialization process, need a process of successive combination of abilities truly creating a new entity.

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Whereas the conventional organizations are social entities try look to reach an objective at long/medium stated period, based on a formal structure to assist these activities, the virtual organizations are more flexible and dynamic. They are the junction of autonomous specialists who interact until the objective is reached. Whereas the conventional organizations believe in the valences which a formal structure can bring, the virtual organizations don't. They use to advantage the high level of decentralization of the market and gain efficiency, through specialization of the knowledge and the capacity of each one to adjust better to the external environment (Erben and Gersten, 2000).

In figure 3, the initial situation (a) represents an usual process of contracting-out: the called satellite relations. The main entity uses these satellite organizations made the analysis to the chain of values of the organization, to delegate the production of a secondary activity. It can be characterized by a high level of control and low level of uncertainty, normally associate to the celebration of a contract which intends to control and punish unformed behaviors. The situation (b) identifies a virtual organization. It's characterized for the sharing of information and a raising in uncertainty due to the risks that each agent incurs when incorporating these partnerships. Since there is a bigger difficulty in clarifying the kind of services and the responsibility of each agent, the value of trust is the main glue that keeps together the established relation in the network. The control through a written contract is difficult, incomplete and raises transaction costs (Williamson and Winter, 1993).



The Virtual Organizations are characterized by acting in very specific operations with high degree of complexity. All of this because they are the sum up of different organizations that analyzed individually act efficiently and subsidiarily between itself. Virtual Organizations can be created in any different situations despite their complexity in coordination (Dembski, 2000).

The Virtual Organizations, created in such a way, can come to provide the following advantages:

- Synergies through the combination of the primary activities of the different actors;

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- Sharing of business-oriented risks and consequent reduction of production costs;
- Variability and Efficiency when allowing a perfect mobility and substitution of the elements that constitute it;
- Better attention to the necessities of the citizen;
- Reduction of the transaction costs;

3 – THE FUNCTIONING OF VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PORTUGUESE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

The most recent changes in the Portuguese health sector are situated in the reorganization of the existing structures. The options of the national health plan for 2005-06 identify, as main deficiencies of the NHS (National Health Service):

- Incorrect geographic distribution of the health services of;
- Inadequacy of the functioning schedules to the necessities of the populations;
- Inadequate staff of maximum use of technical resources;
- Use of hospital urgencies as a form to guarantee faster and generalized health care services;
- Existence of inadequate hospital structures, in such a way that functionality, conditions of work and the dimension of populations to be served don't match;
- Inefficiency in the access to the specialty services in the public system;

Thus, as a way to guarantee the increase of the qualitative health care services, to contain and to reduce the expenses and to improve the mechanisms of coordination of the available resources, the government decided to reformulate the NHS, based on Central and District Hospitals and Health Centers. The previous model defined the necessity of each one of these units to offer an efficient and vast number of services to the populations that habited in their area of intervention. Only in cases of bigger emergency, and of clear incapacity of the services, it was decided the patient transference and the share of information with another unit.

The reorganization through Hospital Centers had the objective to deliver differentiated and complementary health services with superior levels of quality and better use of the installed capacity. In such a way, it was necessary to concentrate the existing units of health (District Central Hospitals offices) to concentrate abilities, to exchange and to abdicate some specialized services on one simple basis: it doesn't fit to each disaggregated unit to deliver all health services to its resident population, but to integrate an area of vaster intervention where the specialization is made by organizations to guarantee all set of diversified health services with better use of resources.

Health Centers and particular agents are acting with Hospital Centers. The first ones function to help to solve the hospitals' overload and to guarantee generalized access to the NHS. The seconds develop its actions, integrated in the NHS, to supply search peaks and to solve the problem of the waiting lists (namely through the system of vouchers).

In such a way, the characteristics of a Virtual Organization are identified. The health services are guaranteed, regionally, for independent entities, the Hospital Centers (that it guarantee specialization and complementarily of the Hospital Units that compose it), the health centers and the private agents. The relations with the private agent, in the scope of the NHS are temporary. They work until the resolution and normalization of the

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extreme flow of search. All the involved agents share their market, the inherent risks and information to guarantee a better service.

CONCLUSION

The New Public Management appears as a microeconomic perspective of the privatization and application of private management tools to Public Administration. It expects a change in the organizational structures, management processes and the organizational objectives. Its mainframe has the specialization, the decentralization, the fragmentation, the autonomization and the increase of the efficiency. Then, after a first phase of specialization, fragmentation and creation of new economic agents, it's normal to have a need for a phase of coordination and collaboration between organization in order to foment the efficiency (Rhodes, 1996). In this line, the state reform and public administration modernization goes through a network management that in a macroeconomic perspective implies delivering services through partnerships between multiple actors (either public or private) - the Virtual Organizations -.

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