

IMPLEMENTING NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN ZIMBABWE: CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

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Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study of the new public management (NPM)'s implementation in Zimbabwe. The data presented is a review of the government's policy initiatives and research publications. Findings suggest fragmented implementation of NPM reforms without requisite administrative skills, lack of resources, ill timing, and political inertia. This research's underlying significance is that it provides insights to improve NPM and future public sector reforms. It contributes to relevant literature by filling gaps in the research on NPM in Zimbabwe. The paper provides policy recommendations necessary for addressing public sector reforms in developing economies particularly in African countries that have a history of political instability.**

Keywords: New Public Management, Public Sector Reform, Developing Countries, Structural Adjustment Programme

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1. Introduction

Towards the end of the twentieth century there was a shift from the traditional public administration perspectives to a new public management (NPM) paradigm in Southern Africa and many other countries in the world. The departure from the traditional public administration of politics-administration dichotomy, scientific management and Weber's bureaucracy was a move perceived to drift away from the inherent weaknesses. New public management (NPM) appeared to be the best alternative providing diverse service as opposed to government monopolistic service provision. In the 1980s new public management became an international trend with its market-oriented approach to management. Zimbabwe began to implement administrative reforms based on the new public management in the mid-1990s in the public sector. There was need for change from colonial administrative structures to post-colonial structures.

This paper investigates the implementation mechanism of NPM in Zimbabwe. An overview of the Zimbabwe administrative and political structures is presented followed by conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The paper reviews literature on NPM in Southern Africa, strategies of implementation of the reforms in Zimbabwe's public sector and the main factors that have militated against implementation are identified. Policy recommendations are given for

improving Zimbabwe's public sector and for other developing economies.

2. Aim, Importance and Methodology of the Study

The study represents an assessment of the Zimbabwean experience with the new public management in view of administrative reforms in the public sector. It highlights what has been done, the major challenges, threats and opportunities realised. The significance of this study provides a basis to improve practices and designs of NPM implementation in the public sector in Zimbabwe and other developing countries. While the thrust is not to question the political administrative practices on public management reforms in Zimbabwe, the paper highlights the role played by politics in the implementation of NPM. Further, this research develops literature for developing countries while generating policy recommendations needed to respond to calls for administrative reforms from supranational bodies like the Southern African Development Community (SADC); the African Union (AU); International Monetary Fund (IMF); World Bank, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU).

The paper analyses the conceptual framework of the NPM model that inspired Zimbabwe's administrative reform strategy and the constraints to

the implementation. A qualitative approach is employed by examining secondary data obtained through extensive review of documents that relate to new public management in Zimbabwe. These documents include government policy initiatives, reports from non-governmental organisations and research papers from academics.

3. Context of Zimbabwe's Administrative Structure

After 1980's political independence government inherited an administrative bureaucracy which (in size, composition, operation and orientation) was heavily inclined towards colonial masters. This structure was not commensurate with socio-economic-political imperatives of nation building, reconciliation and transformation of the economy along equity lines (Agere, 1998). Zhou (2012) notes that, there was lack of compatibility between the inherited systems and the new socio-economic dispensation. The inherited public bureaucracy had to go through an extensive reconfiguration. The administrative machinery derived its legal existence from the Lancaster House Constitution of 1979.

This provided a governance structure with an executive Prime Minister, a ceremonial President, a bi-cameral legislature, a Public Service Commission, the Judiciary, Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Attorney General among others. The constitution provided checks and balances through separation of power in which the legislative arm enacted laws which were enforced by the executive arm while the judiciary reviewed the legality of legislative and executive actions and decisions. Presidential executive powers were exercised on the basis of consultation with relevant professional bodies such as the Cabinet, Parliament, Public Service Commission, and the Judiciary Service Commission. Amendment number 7 of 1987 provided for a shift from an Executive Prime Minister to an Executive Presidency and abolished the question time in parliament. The question time was a key mechanism for executive accountability to the legislature. The Lancaster House Constitution was amended nineteen times since 1980 until February 2013 when a Constitutional referendum ushered in a new law of the land.

Public administration in Zimbabwe is guided by the interplay between the legislature, judiciary and executive arms of government. The legislature provides law-making and policy approval roles, the judiciary reviews the legality of all government activities while the executive provides decision and policy implementing roles. The legislature's activities have a direct bearing on national public administration. Legislative approval and authorization is needed before any government policy is implemented. Legislative approval is also needed before government funds can be expended. Through

these gate-keeping functions, the legislative arm ensures national administrative structures operate within the limits set by parliament. The legislative arm exercises its oversight functions through committees such as Public Accounts Committee and portfolio committee structures, among others (Zhou, 2012). Government ministries are grouped in clusters that are superintended by a portfolio parliamentary committee. Portfolio committees are empowered to invite everyone within their powers to appear before them and give oral evidence on oath. They are also empowered to conduct fact-finding missions.

4. Conceptual Framework for New Public Management

Public sector reforms have been driven by internal and external factors the world over. In developing countries the reforms have manifested in three stages. First in the mid-1980s, focusing on structural reform through IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs. Second in the mid-1990s, focusing on capacity building, improving the work environment and management systems, and third, in the new millennium, emphasizing improvement in public service delivery.

NPM has been coined by Hood and Jackson (1991, 12). It borrows most of its techniques from the private for profit sector. The concept came into ascendancy in the late 1970s and the early 1980s and took centre stage of public administration in many countries, including New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Hood 1989, 349). The Weberian bureaucracy which promoted production during the industrial revolution was abandoned. Weber's bureaucracy produced a government with distinct ethos and impersonal but slow and inefficient according to Osborne and Gaebler (1992). It had to be replaced by a market based public service management. The scientific management model based on the principles of bureaucratic hierarchy, planning, centralization, direct control and self-sufficiency, was succeeded by a market-based public service management.

In Southern Africa and other developing countries it was commonly associated with the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) which were initiated in the mid-1980s with the support of the Bretton Woods institutions. NPM is sometimes confused with the New Public Administration (NPA) movement in the United States of the late 1960s and early 1970s. New Public Administration's thrust was to bring academic public administration into line with the radical egalitarian agenda that was influenced in United States University Campuses at that time (Osborne and Gaebler; 1992). On the other hand, a decade later NPM had its thrust on managerial issues and it stressed the different techniques managers could engage to improve efficiency of public services. According to Zungura (2014), NPM and

New Public Administration (NPA) have diverging themes hence are different.

Hood developed the term NPM as a set of administrative doctrine denoting specific ideas about what should be done in administration (Hood and Jackson; 1991: 12). Despite the differing names, these various scholars essentially describe the same phenomenon (Hughes 2003). There is controversy on the meaning of the phrase but the basis of NPM is in reversing the two cardinal doctrines of the progressive public administration (Hood; 1991).

5. Theoretical Framework

Gruening (2001, 1-25) argues that, NPM has been inspired mainly by theoretical footings such as public choice theory, management theory, classical public management theory, neo-classical public administration, policy analysis, principal agent theory, property rights theory, transaction cost economics and New Public Administration (NPA). Advocates of NPM argue that the line between public and private sectors will be blurred while the same good practices of management will prevail in both sectors.

Turner and Hulme (1997:232) have observed that NPM's proponents have been successful in marketing its key features and persuading potential patients of its curative powers. These proponents have made claims backed up with empirical evidence of substantial savings in public expenditure and improved services. The NPM prescriptions have tended to be applied through powerful international donor agencies and the World Bank on developing economies. Weaknesses in public administration which gave rise to NPM were identified as; expensive, low-quality service, too far removed from citizens to be able to cater for their interests, corruption, inefficient and ineffective (wasting financial and human resources) (Teehankee, 2003).

Public choice theory has largely influenced the development and implementation of the NPM as alluded above. It developed from the study of taxation and public spending as a branch of economics. The theory hinges on the principles used by economists to analyse people's actions in the trading arena then applies them to people's collective decision making. According to the proponents of the public choice theory, although people in the marketplace have concern for others, their main motive is self-interest. In view of that, bureaucrats are motivated by self-interests not public interest. Hughes (2003:12) argues that bureaucrats maximise for themselves and not for the agency. In most cases, the agency is unable to ensure that the principal performs hence poor service delivery. This is the basis for those who argue for contracting-out. Zungura (2014) observes that, public choice theory explains the civil servant (principal)'s behaviour in Zimbabwe's public management where civil servants are on record of

rampant corruption due to the inability by the agency to pay them satisfactorily.

6. New public management in Southern Africa

Literature provides evidence that in the majority of, developing countries, economic crisis has been the driving factor to the introduction of NPM reforms in the public sector since the early 1980s (World Bank, 1997:151). Economic and fiscal crises preceded economic reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) which also prompted public sector management reforms. Some developing economies in Southern Africa experienced unsustainable external and domestic debts, decreasing real terms of trade, increasing real interest rates on international financial markets, high inflation, low levels of savings and investment, and shortages of basic consumer goods (World Bank, 1989). Zimbabwe was not an exception. While aid flows decreased against mounting debts and rising interest rates, a number of countries turned to the IMF and the World Bank as lenders of last resort.

But, going to the IMF and World Bank meant accepting structural adjustment packages (SAPs) with their associated conditions in order to get credits and debt rescheduling.

Hood (1991) notes that, NPM was seen as the first best model for policy implementation; a public management 'for all seasons.' Khodr (2013:1135) argues that, many managerial innovations are well packaged, but NPM was distinctive in that it carried overtones of the end of history. This may, suggest that we were fortunate to be in public management at a time when the truth had been discovered (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) One precondition for successful implementation of NPM programmes is the state capacity (Hughes, 2003). This means a condition where a country is able to take any reform measure decisively based on institutional, technical, administrative, and political factors.

Institutional capacity is characterised by the ability of a country to uphold the authority of governments, to legislate and implement laws and to hold public officials accountable (Wallis & Dollery, 2001). For technical capacity, it is evident when key decision-making bodies managed by qualified people are isolated from the pressures of unproductive clientele groups (Wallis & Dollery, 2001). Administrative capacity is marked by the ability to undertake basic administrative functions and provide basic social services to society. For Khodr (2013), this is critical in so far as the NPM reform package is concerned. Wallis and Dollery (2001) argue that, administrative incapacity is used as a pretext for some NPM interventions such as privatization, corporatization, and contracting out. However, some have observed that in the absence of the state's efficient role in discharging the minimal functions

such as provision of public goods and services, economic infrastructure, law and order, and judiciary, the state is unable to implement such programmes. Political capacity denotes the ability of a state to mediate conflict, respond to citizen demands, allow for representation of interests, promote political stability and enhance basic legitimacy of governance. Southern African countries fail to fulfil most of these requirements on these four capacities.

According to Grueing (2001), the most common attributes of NPM include accountability, customer satisfaction, performance auditing and management, decentralization, privatization, strategic planning and management, flexibility, separation of politics and administration, personnel management, contracting out, changed management style, improved financial management, and more use of information technology. All these attributes coupled with the ten principles introduced by (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), comprise the set of tools which public officials might be able to use. These could shift public sector organizations from their traditional hierarchal, rules-based, bureaucratic structures toward a more managerial system based on expediency, efficiency, economy, and output calculation. This change is much needed in the public administration of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe included) and developing countries.

There has been no systematic evaluation of NPM outcomes (Khodr; 2013). The most comprehensive overview of NPM-type reforms is offered by Batley (1999). He summarises the conclusions from a five-year review of the changing role of government in adjusting economies. The conclusions have emerged from new approaches to service delivery, including NPM-type reforms in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. The conclusions note that, the effect has been mixed at best with some improvements in efficiency and mixed effects on equity. While on the downside, he notes, in relation to bringing autonomy to service delivery agencies, that the transaction costs of radical reforms tend to outweigh the efficiency gains of unbundling, and that reforms that pursue the separation of purchasers from providers may have decreased accountability while inequity has grown.

It appears literature holds several explanations as to why NPM has delivered less in developing countries than expected. Hood (1991) notes that the social changes observable in the late 1980s are the most plausible explanation of the rise of NPM in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These were producing a more white-collar and more socially heterogeneous population (Hood; 1991). Viewed from another dimension, traditional public service values may be eroded if lower trust raises the cost of transactions substantially. The underperformance of NPM in developing countries could be the marginal nature of its impact under any circumstances.

For the case of New Zealand, it may be difficult to assert exactly what has improved as a result of the systemic changes (Boston, 2000). The big money savings was associated with privatization and the associated new public policy. In Southern Africa's developing countries, running costs represent a larger proportion of budgetary expenditures than in the OECD. Failure of the NPM reform efforts in the developing countries can also be attributed to politics, organizational culture, and institutional design. Khodr (2013:1137) notes that, while

NPM may have been effective in addressing some administrative issues, but it has not dealt with other types of relevant concerns that are central to public administration and the public sector in particular.

There are some influencing factors that should be considered in the process of the application of national performance review like the national historical background, societal, cultural norms and values, and political systems. NPM proponents have focused attention more on market efficiency and performance, based on benchmarking governments. They have considered NPM applicable to all settings and contexts although some have argued that there is no best model of public management. Mathiasen (1999) contended that, administrative reforms must take into account national differences and local circumstances not only in developing countries but also in OECD countries. For example in countries where patronage and favouritism are the norms, devolution or decentralization might not be feasible. The obstacles to NPM reform in developing countries are often not related to inability to optimize given resources but rather to knowledge questions focusing on how to improve the way special characteristics of knowledge are used in these solution strategies.

While there has been a decline in the popularity of NPM movement and a prominence of the interrelated concepts of governance and policy networks in the public management studies, NPM remains pivotal in reform strategies in the public sector in Southern Africa and other developing countries. Frederickson and Smith, (2003) note that, in spite of the successive failures of NPM in many different countries as a result of the ambiguities of politics and legislation, there have been repeated and continuous efforts to base public sector reform on the NPM.

7. NPM Implementation Strategies in Zimbabwe

The Kavran Public Service Review Commission was appointed in 1987 to review the structure and functioning of the public service. A report was presented with the following major findings:

- The services had become too large, cumbersome and wasteful,

- Scarce resources were being wasted through overlap and replication of functions,
- The service was secretive, inaccessible and lacked transparency,
- Services to the public were poor, shoddy and unresponsive,
- The management system had become antiquated, complex, and burdensome to the heads of ministries, and
- There was a substantial number of inexperienced cadres.

The report's findings were adopted and implementation was done in stages. The first stage started from 1991 to 1996 and was dominated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) scheme for improving government efficiency and effectiveness. The outcomes of the project included the following:

- Performance management training was conducted in some ministries,
- Job evaluation was conducted and compensation levels reviewed,
- Public Service Commission (PSC) regulations and procedures were redesigned to support performance management
- A training policy for civil servants was developed, and
- Client charters and mission statements were developed in all ministries.

The implementation of the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) started in 1991. The attendant ESAP's austerity measures like cost cutting and cost recovery influenced many adjustments in the public administration. The public service pay roll was reduced by twenty five thousand.. The second stage (1998 to 2004) coincided with the beginning of preparations towards the attainment of Vision 2020, through the goals of the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST). The Public Finance Management (PFMS) System was introduced to ministries and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in 1999. Performance standards by way of key result areas (KRA) were also introduced about the same time. The new performance appraisal system required employees to set objectives which were measurable, achievable and realistic. Financial rewards and promotions were linked to performance. In stage three of the civil service reform (2004 to 2014), the government approved the introduction and implementation of the results based management (RBM) system in the public sector, given effect by General Letter Number 6 of 2005 to all heads of ministries.

According Larbi (1999), unlike the context of NPM in developed countries, the political situation in some developing countries in Africa was characterised by policy inaction. He argued that, in countries such as, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Ghana, the political leadership's orientation was not in favour of the private sector and related policies.

.Perhaps, this may explain the reason why economic reforms took longer than was expected.

The Zimbabwe civil service has been cut by about 12 per cent (23,000 out of 192,000) since the commencement of its civil service reform in 1991 (Makumbe; 1997:21). Over 30 Sub-Saharan African countries have managed to reduce their average nominal wage bill from over 7 per cent of GDP in 1986 to just fewer than 6 per cent in 1996, following massive downsizing.

A study of reforms in Zimbabwe's health sector also noted that the governance and institutional contexts pose severe constraints in decentralizing management (Russell et al., 1997). Non-clinical health services such as cleaning, laundry, catering, security, maintenance and billing were contracted out, while clinical services were contracted out on a limited scale (Russell et. al., 1997). Zimbabwe also embarked on widespread contracting out of municipal services, partly on the initiative of the central government in response to its economic structural adjustment programme.

In a bid to reform the public sector the government of Zimbabwe requested the World Bank in 2009, to assist in implementing the Human Resource Management Actionable Governance Indicators Instrument (HRM AGI) The HRM AGI is a subset of the World Bank which assesses the institutional arrangements and organisational capacity of a human resources management regime. The assessment is based on agreed principles of good human resources management design and effective practice. This instrument is designed to diagnose potential areas of concern, assess the problem, provide feedback to initiate or further reform, and provide learning on good HRM practices.

Aziz, (2010) argues that, although the report produced does not highlight implementation issues, the fact that these reforms were driven by the government of Zimbabwe suggests political buy-in by the inclusive government. This is critical for effective reform. The HRM AGI reported that the current system has a number of strengths and weaknesses. The report identified weak accountability for HRM practices, recruitment procedures which lacked credibility and competition, HRM policies that failed to ensure retention of the best staff and poor wage bill management.

Some scholars criticise reforms meant to improve public administration that are externally-driven. Instead, emphasis should be on creating space in which reform can take place as opposed to pushing reform technicalities. Andrews(2010) He, criticised the idea of what he termed 'institutional isomorphism' of public administration. This would imply attempting to produce institutions in developing countries identical to those in developed countries. He argues that there may be natural limits to which institutions in developing countries change, and that these limits should be respected.

The HRM AGI reports that the Zimbabwe civil service is characterised by a plethora of instruments, regulations and procedures that govern various dimensions of the management of its human resources. Although the instruments cover most aspects of HRM, there are numerous and sometimes serious gaps where policies and procedures are inadequate to guide sound practice and instead lead to ad hoc decisions on specific issues. The political and socio-economic crisis that Zimbabwe has experienced over the past several years has also contributed significantly to deterioration in the functioning of the rule-based system. In terms of some key components of the NPM the HRM AGI reported that;

- There is considerable delegation to line ministries to carry out day-to-day management of civil servants.
- There is weak accountability for HRM practices, with high levels of discretion afforded to both politicians and senior civil servants without the necessary checks and balances.
- Recruitment procedures are often not openly competitive and selection stages are monopolised by the PSC. Most senior positions are only open to officers who are already in the system. There seems to be considerable confusion regarding selection procedures, which could contribute to unethical conduct among those selecting candidates for promotion.
- Although there is widespread use of performance appraisal, there is limited evidence of it improving employee motivation through strengthening the link between performance and career growth prospects.
- There is poor wage bill management and regular audits have not been effectively linked to meaningful management of the wage bill

A classification of 29 Sub-Saharan countries by levels of Civil Service Reform efforts in the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) report (2010:45) shows that, Zimbabwe is a hesitant reformer in Group C. Group A has advanced reformers, Group B committed reformers, Group C hesitant reformers and Group D beginners and non-starters. For Southern African countries, in the 29 selected countries, Zimbabwe ranked lowest. Those in Group A are Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa while those in group B are Zambia and Tanzania.

8. Challenges and Obstacles to the NPM's Implementation

The adoption of NPM in the 1990s was mired with several challenges and obstacles. The first phase of performance management implemented in 1992/3 met with stiff staff resistance to change. There was lack of effective communication between politicians and public administrators and inadequate training until the first phase was abandoned (Zungura; 2014).

Between 1997 and 1998 the second phase was launched in which Ministries developed visions, mission statements, organizational goals, corporate plans and client charters. Financial and material resources were not readily available to sustain the programme as well as lack of skilled human resources hence the second phase failed. Public officials were not clear on the distinction between performance management and appraisal.

As a result, the benefits of implementing performance management such as increased job satisfaction, improved service delivery and improved supervision have not been realized. Performance management has greatly been resisted by civil servants as it has tended to be used as a whip of control by management instead of improving performance. The results have not been plausible. Further, due to lack of budget support, performance incentives have been too weak to produce tangible impacts.

NPM gave rise to the practice of outsourcing and tendering as the government sought to improve efficiency through competitiveness in public services provision. In some cases, this did not yield desired results as the tender process became fertile ground for corruption. In the Herald a State owned daily newspaper (7 August 2014) the Minister of Finance and Economic Development described the State Procurement Board (SPB) as the 'capital city of corruption'. This is supported by Hughes (2003; 149-164) who contends that, in some cases the tender process can cost more than the saving achieved through competition. Zimbabwe has not benefitted much from the competition due to its ailing economy.

One of the common elements of new the NPM adopted by Zimbabwe was privatization. The privatization authority of Zimbabwe (PAZ) spearheaded the programme. The impact of privatized companies did not influence changes in the economy substantially. There was partial implementation of privatisation which could be attributed to political inertia (lack of political will).

NPM's concept of delegation provides greater flexibility and discretion to lower levels in the production of goods and services. Air Zimbabwe, National Railways of Zimbabwe and the Grain Marketing Board were delegated greater authority to spend money in the accomplishment of policy goals. It appears that these state owned enterprises have become a liability to the state which created them.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study undertaken for the purpose of this paper provides an interesting insight into the challenges that Zimbabwe faces in the implementation of NPM. There have been a myriad of problems and limitations in the implementation and yet it remains imperative to transform the traditional public sector institutions into more accountable and efficient public entities.

Zimbabwe has not committed itself fully to NPM. The country attempted to implement the new public management initiatives on a piece-meal basis. Although Bretton Woods attempted to introduce the concept, this did not yield desired results due to lack of funding, lack of political will for change of structures, administrative incapacity and corruption. The study shows a lack of technology as well as the administrative capacity to use the technology for monitoring of civil servants' performance.

There is an urgent need for improving synergy among state owned enterprises and ministries involved in administrative reform through funding and training. While few ministries like Health have developed their own modes of cooperation with foreign donors, there is need for improved synergies with sister ministries and departments. Zimbabwe may consider establishing a national framework for public administrative reform different from the Kavran Public Service Review Commission of 1989 which was an ad hoc entity whose recommendations were never implemented in full.

Treasury must set up a separate fund for public sector reforms until desired results are achieved. This national framework should be country specific, civil service driven and requires political buy-in. If properly developed and implemented the reform strategy may provide a template for developing countries that share the same concerns.

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