THE PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SECTOR AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article reviews literature on governance in order to facilitate an analysis of the governance of the South African public healthcare sector. Some of the key theoretical perspectives have been presented on how best to organise the state and its bureaucracy. Theorists have long interrogated in what way public institutions foster or impede economic growth. Evans and Rauch point out for example, that the role of bureaucratic authority structures in facilitating economic growth has been a sociological concern since Max Weber's classic contributions almost 100 years ago. These debates and others are explored in this article with specific reference to the provision of equitable public healthcare. Weber's theory on rational bureaucracy as well as New Public Management will be reviewed as these theories offer two distinct approaches to governance.

Key Words: Governance, Bureaucracy, New Public Management, Healthcare, Public Health Sector

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Introduction

Public healthcare in South Africa remains an area in need of development. The practice of providing healthcare in a racially discriminatory manner during Apartheid has resulted in a society where the standard of healthcare and healthcare facilities remains lacking. According to Pillay, McCoy and Asia (2001) the newly democratically elected government of 1994 inherited a highly fragmented and bureaucratic system that provided healthcare services in an inequitable manner. Healthcare services for Whites were better than those for Blacks and those in the rural areas were significantly worse off in terms of access to healthcare services compared to their urban counterparts.

However, since 1994, the South African government has put in place a legislative framework to guide the realisation of equal access to quality healthcare. For example, the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), in particular its Bill of Rights, acknowledges the injustices of the past, and binds the state to work towards the progressive realisation of basic human rights, including the right to health (Section 27):

1) Everyone has the right to have access to:
    (a) Healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare;
    (b) Sufficient food and water; and
    (c) Social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance.
2) The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights; and

3) No one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

Besides establishing a comprehensive legislative framework, Harrison (2009: 2) explains that the public health sector underwent substantial reorganisation post-1994 which involved the rationalisation and amalgamation of previously separate health administrations located in the various Bantustans of South Africa.

Harrison (2009) indicates that despite progress made in establishing a legislative framework protecting people's rights to equal access to healthcare, many programmes that have been implemented have been thwarted by the severity of health issues facing the population of South Africa. HIV/AIDS for example, has reduced life expectancy by almost 20 years. The country is plagued by four other health problems described in the Lancet report (2009) as the quadruple burden of disease; TB (directly related to HIV/AIDS), maternal, infant and child mortality, injury and violence and non-communicable diseases. These diseases place an additional responsibility on an already burdened and underdeveloped public healthcare delivery system, struggling to overcome poor administrative management, low morale and lack of funding (Chopra, Lawn, Sanders, Barron, Karim, Bradshaw, Jewkes, Karim, Flisher, Mayosi, Tollman, Churchyard, Coovadia, 2009: 1023).

The Department of Health has developed policies that focus on specific healthcare functions, norms and standards. There are a number of policy documents and programmes that pertain to the provision of healthcare, (such as the Patients' Rights Charter, The Health Sector Strategic Framework

1999-2004, even the White Paper for the Transformation of the Health Sector in South Africa released in April 1997), and most recently the National Health Insurance policy. How these are implemented are issues of governance.

The introduction of new legislation regarding transformation and service delivery brought about a change in which the South African public service functioned. The publication of the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (Notice 1227 of 1995) serves as a point of departure for the transformation of the South African public service. One of the important political changes post-1994 was the translation of the 1993 Interim Constitution into a final constitution that guarantees amongst others access to health services for all citizens. The National Health Act (NHA) (Act 61 of 2003) can be regarded as a fundamental policy determining the legislative framework for healthcare delivery in South Africa, replacing all previous health policy. The White Paper on the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa (1997), established a detailed framework for healthcare delivery, and identified the manner in which Government intends to transform South Africa's healthcare system. It remains one of the most important policy documents and is a benchmark that guides health sector transformation today.

Governance

According to Abdellatif (2003: 5), the concept of governance "encompasses the functioning and capability of the public sector, as well as the rules and institutions that create the framework for the conduct of both public and private business, including accountability for economic and financial performance, and regulatory frameworks relating to companies, corporations, and partnerships". The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines governance as "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences" (Abdellatif, 2003: 4).

Loffler (2009: 216) states that governance is not a new term. The significance awarded to governance depends on the particular historical period, or the approach of the state and people of that period towards the exercise of control over their freedom and what they expected of their government. Sivaraman (2013: 109) argues that because complexities in the world have increased with global, political, economic and social integration, the concept of governance has become indefinable but intuitively understandable with respect to government, companies and institutions. Pierre and Peters (2000:1) suggest that the term governance was first used in

France in the fourteenth century where it meant 'seat in government'.

The World Bank popularised the term governance (1989: 60) which signalled a new approach to development that was based on the belief that economic prosperity is not possible without a minimum level of rule-of-law and democracy. Today, governance is used in a variety of fields mainly due to changing social theories or as Chhotray and Stoker (2009: 2) point out that the world has changed and governance seeks to understand the implications of these changes, and how they might best be managed.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provides a very broad definition, merely stating that governance's primary interest lies in how effectively the state serves the needs of its people (1997: 2-3). By the same token the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) maintains that governance is the ability to develop an efficient and accountable public management process that is open to public participation aimed at strengthening rather than weakening the democratic system of governance (2005:1). Other scholars such as Hyden, Court and Mease (2004: 16) define governance as "the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public sphere, the area in which the state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions". The above definitions indicate that governance is associated with relational connotations in which the focus is on how government organises itself and its relationship with civil society.

Grindle (2007: 553) suggests that governance is significant for development and capacity to address difficult issues of poverty reduction which has become the buzz word for development professionals. Grindle mentions that while many are pleased to see development debates move beyond an earlier approach that promised development when poor countries 'get the policies right', the adoption of the governance paradigm implies a very wide range of institutional preconditions for economic and political development and for poverty to be significantly reduced. According to Chibba (2009: 79) the word governance does not carry a universally accepted definition, but views governance as encompassing two key overlapping dimensions. The first refers to all aspects of the way a nation is governed, including its institutions, policies, laws, regulations, processes and oversight mechanisms. The second dimension is its cultural and ideological setting, for governance is perceived and shaped by values, culture, traditions and ideology.

According to Chhotray and Stoker (2009: 16) the theory of governance is about the practice of collective decision making based on the expansion of networks and the altering of public-private borders that emerged in the late 1990s and is probably one of the core developments in public administration.

Public administration networks according to Wachhaus (2008: 152) "are structures or relationships that exhibit complexity because not only do they span organisational and institutional boundaries it also involves many actors simultaneously pursuing multiple agendas and designed to account for a lack of information or resources. These networks are different from hierarchies in that they facilitate interaction among participants for the exchange of information and resources so that collectively a common goal may be pursued". Sørensen (2006: 99) states that traditionally, politicians have been seen as democratically authorized sovereign rulers who govern society through their legitimate monopolised right to pass laws and regulations, while public administrators have been perceived as neutral and loyal servants who loyally implement laws and regulations. Seen from this role perspective Agger et al (2008: 23) suggest that "citizens and stakeholders are not supposed to play an active part in the governing process, and if they do, this is regarded as democratically illegitimate and problematic. Allowing them to take direct part in processes of public governance through various forms of network participation would undermine the parliamentary chain of governance which ensures an equal distribution of political influence the citizens as well as politicians". As such efforts to enhance civic engagement through governance networks that involve both public and private sectors do not bode well with the traditional image of what it means to be a politician and a public administrator. In other words, the surge of network governance calls for the development of new roles for politicians and administrators that allow for close interaction between public authorities as well as private actors in civil society.

Different Approaches to Governance

Traditional Bureaucratic Model of Public Administration

Weber (1922) reasoned that bureaucracy establishes the most efficient and rational way for government to organise human activity and is essential to the modern world. According to Weber (1947), the ideal type bureaucracy is the most efficient type of organisation for policy implementation as well as the most effective instrument of administration and political control. Weber studied bureaucracy from the point of view of authority which characterises every organisation. He distinguished between power and authority and regarded power as the exercise of coercion, and authority as the right to give orders and the expectation that it will be followed by those instructed. Weber examined different types of authority present in organisations and classified them as: (1) traditional authority – (because of people's beliefs in the age-old customs and traditions; (2)

charismatic authority – (because of the extraordinary personal qualities of the person in authority; and (3) rational-legal authority (granted through laws, statutes and regulations). Weber regarded rational-legal authority as more forceful and effective and it became the fundamental basis for effective organisation. From this, he developed his concept of the ideal bureaucratic organisation (Naidu 1996: 81-82).

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) point out that the literature on Weberian administration reveals some specific characteristics: (1) the reaffirmation of the state as main facilitator of solutions; (2) the reaffirmation of the role of representative democracy and the legitimating elements within the state apparatus; (3) the reaffirmation of the role of administrative law: and; (4) the preservation of the idea of public service.

Social concepts refer to a very broad range of ideas that relate to society as a whole such as the structure of society or social interactions. To this effect, Weber believed that the bureaucratisation of economic, political and social life was imminent, inevitable and had the most profound significance for civilisation. Weber argued that the modern state could not sustain itself without bureaucratic organisation. His model of bureaucracy described that social, economic and political control could be firmly established only by routine and authoritative administration of public policy. At the core of Weber's argument was an assumption that certain requisites of control had to be established in order for the modern state to exist. One of these requisites was economic infrastructure creation and its public administration and the other was absolute pacification through the establishment of bureaucratic systems of justice. Weber maintained that the state was a unique entity which exercised legitimate control over force and coercion through law. It did so, he believed, through the creation of bureaucratic organisations (Lewis, 1988: 46).

However, by World War II, criticism of Weber's ideas of rational bureaucracy began to surface. Farazmand (2002: 25) argued that Weber's bureaucratic organisation, while it may produce efficiency, has a tendency to dehumanise organisations, promote red tape, delay decision making and as well as being inflexible and rigid in rule application. Barnard (1938) argued that administrative efficiency could be increased through informal relations rather than through Weber's structural approach while March and Simon (1958) have emphasised that Weber has neglected human behaviour, they argue that by concentrating merely on structure and technicalities, administrative efficiency cannot be increased.

Not only is Weber's concept of bureaucracy criticised, according to Self (2010: 99) it has now outlived its usefulness in two important aspects. Firstly, the bureaucratic exercise of discretionary

powers has grown allowing bureaucracy to become increasingly involved with discretionary forms of intervention, arbitration and financial support often carried out in conjunction with interested parties. Secondly, the political environment of modern bureaucracy has been transformed by the weakened capacity of political leadership to direct or control bureaucracy from the top down and by the complex political pressures which surround the work of bureaucratic agencies.

According to Naidu (1996: 85) Weber was the first to explore the positive and negative consequences of bureaucratic administration and his bureaucracy was the most advanced form of organisation at that time. Weber wrote "bureaucracy is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of discipline and in its reliability" Weber was not however blind to the negative consequences of bureaucracy. In fact, he recognised the potential to do serious harm to valued social and political institutions. Naidu (1996) maintains that he was pessimistic about the ability of democratic institutions to maintain control over bureaucratic apparatus of the state mainly because of bureaucrats' technical expertise and control over the instruments of government. Weber nevertheless saw no viable alternative to bureaucracy in managing large-scale organisations with efficiency.

Parsons (1998: 91) shows that Weber's bureaucratic model was about uniformity and predictability. He states that this model provided public administration with a way of thinking about responsibility which was viewed as the notion of administration of the state organised in a hierarchical way. In Weber's bureaucratic model there was a place for everything and everything had its place. Civil servants knew their position and parliaments knew where things were and who was responsible for them. However, matters became more complex as these hierarchical forms of organisation began to give way to new patterns of inter-organisational relationships. Whereas in the past it was easy to identify who did what, when and how it becomes far more problematic when shifted away from the Weber' bureaucratic model.

In a more coherent argument on the Weber's bureaucratic model, Suleiman (2005: 29) describes Weber's model as top-down democracies that are simply too slow, too unresponsive and too incapable of change or innovation. The work of Osborne and Gaebler (1992) stated that the Weberian top-down administration was an outdated form of organisation associated with the factory system of the nineteenth century which was inflexible, slow and incapable of meeting the demands of modern citizens. Osborne and Gaebler (1992: 17) observe that Weber's bureaucratic model was relevant in its day as long as the tasks were simple, straightforward and the environment stable. But for the last 20 years cracks were beginning to appear in a world of rapid change, technological advancement and global economic competition.

This form of rigid, hierarchical specialised structure was shrouded in major contradictions. Naidu (1996: 86) points out that Weber pays no attention to the pattern of interaction of bureaucracy with the political, social, and cultural environment and ignores the social psychological influences on the behaviour of people in organisations. According to Berberoglu (2007: 16) Weber argued that the bureaucratic form of social organisation lends itself to control and domination of society and the individuals within it and generates as a by-product a social alienation that puts managers and workers, bureaucrats and citizens, in opposite camps, thus leading to conflict between those who control and govern and those who are controlled and governed at all levels of society.

New Public Management (NPM)

The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of a new managerial approach in public administration in response to the inadequacies of the traditional model of administration. According to Zhang (2007: 557) the concept of NPM movement originated from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom and later disseminated to the United States and other countries. The essence of NPM is borrowing and applying the concepts and techniques of private sector management into public sector management thus reducing the functions of the public sector through contracting out and privatising. The rigid, hierarchal, bureaucratic form of public administration which had dominated for most of the twentieth century began to be replaced with more flexible, market-based form of public management. Traditional public administration was discredited theoretically and practically, and the adoption of NPM introduced the emergence of a new paradigm in the public sector (Hughes 1998: 1).

According to Sharma (2007: 4) the emergence of NPM is associated with the changed role of the state and the growing demand for good governance practices worldwide. Hood (1991: 5) describes the emergence of NPM as a marriage of opposites. One partner was the new institutional economics which was built on the familiar story of the post-World War II development of public choice, transactions cost theory and principle agent theory. The new institutional economics movement helped to generate a set of administrative reform doctrines built on ideas of contestability, user choice, transparency and close concentration of incentive structures. The other partner in the marriage was the latest of a set of successive waves of business-type managerialism in the public sector. This movement helped to generate a set of administrative reform doctrines based on the ideas of professional management expertise over technical expertise, requiring high discretionary power to achieve results (free to manage), better

performance and the active measurement of organisational outputs.

Hood (1991: 503) states that while there is no single accepted explanation of why NPM came about when it did, NPMs rise seems to be linked with four other administrative megatrends namely 1) attempts to slow down or reverse government growth in terms of overt public spending and staffing, 2) the shift towards privatisation and quasi-privatisation and away from core government institutions with renewed emphasis on subsidiarity in service provision, 3) the development of automation, particularly in information technology in the production and distribution of public services and 4) the development of a more international agenda, increasingly focused on general issues of public management, policy design, decision styles and intergovernmental cooperation on top of the older tradition of individual country specialisms in public administration. Hood (1989: 350) suggests that these trends are not jointly exhaustive of developments in this field – they overlap and are casually related. NPM therefore is often interpreted as a consequence of a shift to smaller government and as a form of intellectual privatisation of the study of public administration.

The traditional model of bureaucratic organisations and delivery of public services, such as the Weberian model of bureaucracy came under scrutiny. Hierarchy, centralisation, direct control and heavy emphasis on rules and procedures were replaced by the NPM framework which proposed to make public sector administration more efficient, effective and responsive Hood (1995). Garson and Overman (1983: 275) define NPM as an "interdisciplinary study of the generic aspects of administration . . . a blend of the planning, organising, and controlling functions of management with the management of human, financial, physical, information and political resources."

NPM, according to Vigoda (2003: 1) represents a "method in public administration that combines knowledge and experiences obtained in business management and other disciplines to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and general performance of public services in modern bureaucracies". Dent and Barry (2004: 7) suggest that "the attraction of NPM lies in the claim that it delivers improved public services and that it symbolises an empowerment of those it employs and those it seeks to serve". The term NPM according to Falconer (nd) "signifies a series of themes intended to reform the procedures and organisation of the bureaucracy/public sector to make it more competitive and efficient in the manner that resources are efficiently used and services timeously delivered". NPM is concerned with the state's role in delivering services to its citizens, and of the state's relationship with its citizens.

Robbins and Lapsky (2005: 111) identify several dimensions to NPM which include 1) reorganising and restructuring of public services, 2)

the arrival of a new management focus to displace old-style public administration, 3) a more explicit role for management in a top down, hierarchical functional concept, 4) the stress on quantification as a means of demonstrating efficiency gains and 5) of holding persons with responsibility accountable. Moreover Zhange (2007: 557-558) mentions that NPM ideas cover the retrenchment of public employees, reduces the scale of public expenditure, privatising, contracting out, shifting out government services to the outside, importing private sector instruments to the public sector, decentrailisation, deregulation and re-regulation, fostering a culture based on performance utilizing quality as measuring instruments, emphasizing results and outcomes, instead of processes, as well as emphasizing the priority of customers.

Dunn and Miller (2007) state that when NPM was introduced it was seen as a direct assault on the Weberian model of administration arguing that it was too rigid and inflexible to meet increased demands for economic efficiency and adaption of new demands from society. Furthermore, economic problems meant governments reassessed their bureaucracies and demanded change. Caiden (1991: 74) states that bureaucracy received the brunt of criticism, relating to the poor performance of public bureaucracies, the daily annoyances of restrictions, red-tape, unpleasant officials, poor service and corrupt officials.

One of the key characteristics of NPM according to Van de Walle and Hammerschmid (2011: 192) was to do away with hierarchist public sector monoliths, which were, in many cases inefficient. Hood (1991: 3) elaborating on the seven doctrines of NPM suggest that the core principle of NPM is that systems of public administration can be strengthened through the adoption of micro-management practices associated with the private sector. The new public management agenda places emphasis on professional management, performance management, greater output controls, decentralisation of units, greater competition, private sector management styles and efficiency and effectiveness.

Stein (2001: 36) argues that supporters of private provision maintain that the private sector can offer better services in a more efficient manner at less cost than the public sector. The private sector, it is argued, offers greater flexibility, involves less red tape and proposes innovative approaches which is lacking in public sector. In addition, the public sector lacks experienced personnel to provide quality services, and programme implementation will be more efficient under private sector control. However, arguments against private sector provision claim that savings are not always realised, service quality is compromised in favour of profits, privatisation diminishes the accountability of government officials, that it threatens the jobs of public service employees, and there is no guarantee that the competition necessary to yield cost savings exists.

Conclusion

This paper posits that public policy implementation is an outcome of governance and that governance can be implemented in a number of ways which may be affected by socio-economic conditions and various actors including the type of relationships that exist between the actors. It is argued that governance, is about developing the necessary institutions and processes necessary for policymaking and policy implementation.

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