

# THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT - EUROPEAN VISIONS ON THE NEW NORMAL

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**Abstract:** *First of all, the new normal cannot be reached through business as usual. Secondly, we would have liked to have produced this more necessary than ever reflection, but we are glad that a Romanian economist, very active, had this initiative - of confessing a truth that can no longer be avoided. It is, therefore, increasingly clear that the changing world may deny the old approaches, as the success of the new normal will depend, to a large extent, on our liberation from the many theoretical pitfalls that empirical studies of present realities make, confirms that they are inadequate restrictions or alert levels for the management and governance of the world to come.*

*The fundamental problem of our times is to live the moment of accumulations of many reprehensible events, which we considered transient or easily manageable, emphasizing, to the point of refusal, the benefits (European integration, globalization, international cooperation, multilateralism etc.). We now live, against the background of the COVID 19 Pandemic, the understanding or awareness of the fact that, between challenges and opportunities, we can no longer put the equal sign, in terms of the Keynesian paradigm, specific to the global economy since the middle of the twentieth century.*

*We have been talking about the paradigm shift for at least two decades, but we still remain at the intuition anchored in the normal, currently in collapse.*

*In this context, in our paper we will direct the analysis in the direction of the general approach, at European level, of the thematic concept, the new public management, by reporting to its specific concepts: the European visions on the new normal.*

**Keywords:** *the “new public management”; the “new normal”; European visions; crisis after crisis; resetting the European Union.*

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## 1. Premises, foundations and guidelines

The 80s and 90s meant stopping the growth of the public sector and adopting measures to reform it, which coincided with a new theoretical orientation, implemented in practice, of the new public management (NMP). Once again, the United Kingdom and the United States were the initiators of this wave of change in public administration. The Thatcher administration in the United Kingdom and the Reagan administration in the United States imposed a new vision on the public sector, which later spread to many other countries, especially in Europe.

In this context, the *new public manager* is associated and owes the rise of the economic paradigm shift, more precisely the gradual replacement of Keynesianism with economic neo-classicism. The new orientation, in the public sector, received different names, *the new public management, managerialism, public market administration, entrepreneurial governance*. The new orientation is inseparable from *public-choice criticism* of traditional public sector institutions: offices, public enterprises and regulations restricting access through licensing<sup>1</sup>.

The general lines of the new managerial orientation focus, to a large extent, on the achievement of the results, on the objectives and the responsibility of the managers for achieving these objectives; managers make political decisions, not just technical ones; measuring performance through clear performance indicators; introduction of competition in the public sector, governance and less implementation, privatization of public enterprises. The traditional administration owes, from a theoretical point of view, to the Weberian paradigm of bureaucracy and the conception according to which politics must be separated from the technical; according to this conception, the civil service (civil service) had to be independent, neutral in relation to political objectives, borrowing the Weberian concept of axiological neutrality, taken over by the positivism of the social sciences (the sociologist is a social engineer,

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<sup>1</sup> David OSBORNE, Ted GAEBLER, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, Plume, 1993.

unrelated to the field of goals, but exclusively with that of the means). The theoretical bases of the new orientation in public management are neo-classical economics and private management; the theory of rational choice, *the public-choice models* follow, as a consequence, as assumptions of the neo-classical economy, respectively developments of its models in the sphere of the public sector. Social elections at all levels are considered natural, given, therefore public sector employees make choices, assume responsibilities, are not just technical agents of policies established at other levels.

In 1990, Christopher Hood first used the term *new public management* (NMP). Basically, he compared the changes in management styles in public administrations in OECD countries in the 1980s, and observed a substantial number of changes, which took place and highlighted the similarities between them, which led him to combine them. Under one concept, although he noted that the countries analyzed had reformed their administration in different ways.

In the literature we also found the concept that the NMP is not a coherent and consistent model of reform, which is why it was presented as “*a group of ideas, variations of a theme or a conglomeration of ideas*”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of *reinventing government* has manifested itself in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and in Europe. As Osborne and Gaebler remarked, the emergence of entrepreneurial governance “*is an inevitable evolution*” and “*reinventing governance remains the only possible option*”. The *new approaches to public management* are described as a *modernization of public organizations*: “*governments in the most developed countries are in the process of reconsidering or revising fundamental assumptions regarding the public / private sector*”. We can speak, from this point of view, of the discovery of *a new model in terms of the public sector, a model of managerialism*, which differs from the traditional bureaucratic administration. The main components of the

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<sup>1</sup> Kerstin SAHLIN-ANDERSON, “National, International and Transnational Constructions of New Public Management” in *New Public Management – The Transformation of Ideas and Practice*, Tom Christensen and Per Laegreid (eds.), England, Cornwall, Editura Ashgate, 2003, p. 51.

new trend are the following: the freedom of managers to coordinate, act and guarantee problem solving; implementation of explicit performance criteria and measures; the significant importance given to control and results; intensification of competition due to fixed-term contracts and public tendering procedures; adapting the management style in the private sector; introduction of discipline and control in the use of resources.

The globalization of the principles and practices of public management is part of a broader process of change, determined by the evolutions of the world economy in which production is internationalized and capital flows freely between countries. This evolution was essentially driven by the computer revolution that contributed to raising national barriers. Structural and institutional reforms have become inevitable, the international context has facilitated an exchange of know-how in the field of political governance, so that now “*governments can use the experience of other countries to define their own political options.*”

This convergence can take two forms:

- 1) national governments try to adapt *to international practices in order to stay “in the race”*;
- 2) national governments try *to take over the best practices of international counterparts.*

In this sense, there has been a global trend of imitation, a trend in which some administrations copy the most popular and best performing systems. Thus, the developments and reforms that have taken place in the Anglo-Saxon states (in the United Kingdom and the United States in particular) have received a great deal of attention from all over the world.

The models are not taken over completely, only parts of the compatible systems are borrowed. Thus, for example in the current NMP, in developing countries, management principles or new ways of measuring fundamental economic or public sector performance have often been transferred, which could not be transferred to the same extent<sup>1</sup>. At the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

level of developed democracies, the areas where measures are most often taken are: financial and management reforms (Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands), decentralization, delegation and devolution.<sup>1</sup>

The advantages of implementing NMP concepts in the Romanian administrative system are noticeable at least at several levels:

- at *system level*, in general, NMP brings the novelty of classic concepts of *public management and public marketing*. Public marketing demonstrates that each action initiated goes through four stages: 1) analysis and forecast - within the NMP, information will be obtained through information systems and refers to demand (market surveys), competition, resources (internal feedback), innovations (research); 2) planning - will be very decentralized and focused, a context in which the institutions and the state must, rather, ensure the institutional and legal framework rather than direct; 3) implementation - focusing on organizational behavior and human resource management to improve performance; 4) control - as advantages, in terms of NMP, it is a way of assessing responsibility, feedback and adaptation. The adaptation will materialize through market mechanisms.
- at *the level of human resources*, the clear advantage of NMP is that it is based on internal motivation due to the influence of human resources, compared to the current Romanian system, which is based mainly on external motivation - a complicated network of rules and regulations.
- at *organizational level*, in practice, decisions under the auspices of the NMP are economically motivated, based on market needs and forces. This aspect can be an advantage over the current Romanian system where, in practice, decisions are strongly determined politically, although they should be substantiated and formulated by professional public managers.

As organizational means, the clear advantage of the NMP is that it has, as an existential component, highly decentralized networks and systems,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/15/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_37405\\_35405455\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37405,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/15/0,2340,en_2649_37405_35405455_1_1_1_37405,00.html)

compared to the bureaucratic system which has a strict pyramidal hierarchy.

The current Romanian administrative system is based on a historical budget, and the quality and quantity of services provided and provided depends on these specific constraints. The advantage of NMP is that it is based on results, like the quality and quantity of the necessary services provided. The strategic public management has as objective the obtaining of positive effects, respectively the utility of the services offered to the population.

## **2. The characteristics of the new public management (NMP)**

NMP reform directions can be summarized as follows: *disaggregation, competition, performance stimulation*<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, contracting is identified as the basic characteristic of NMP, as opposed to authority, which is used mainly in the case of traditional administration.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the NMP tends to replace administration-specific long-term contracts (in the case of human resources, for example, civil servants' contracts are indefinite) with short-term contracts (similar, but not so "short", to contracts governing exchanges of goods and services - "on the spot" or "spot market contracting"), with specific, measurable objectives, contracts specific to the market and corporate governance. This has very important implications for competition, allowing the introduction of market-specific mechanisms in the public sector. Contracting refers both to the external contracting of public services (contracting-out), for example the contracting of a highway with public money following a public tender, but also to the contracting within the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick DUNLEAVY, Helen MARGETTS, Simon BASTOW, Jane TINKLER, *New Public Management Is Dead-Long Live Digital - Era Governance*, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, July 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Susanne G. SCOTT, Vicki R. LANE, *A Stakeholder Approach to Organizational Identity*, The Academy of Management Review 25(1):43, January 2000.

public sector. In the case of the latter, it is about hiring specialized agencies with the hierarchically superior authority, establishing objectives and performance indicators, but also about hiring staff, usually at managerial levels.

Furthermore, seven important directions of reform, proposed by the NMP, are identified:

- *professional management* - managers have the responsibility for the results, but also the authority to make decisions, often political, not just technical; they make their decisions, they have points of view that they support in front of the public, they are not just technicians who apply the policies of others; they are invested in the function based on a managerial plan with objectives and performance indicators (governance plan), they publicly assume this plan and they realize how they implement it; they act like a CEO (chief executive officer) in the case of private companies, who are accountable to the board of directors that appointed them to office and, ultimately, to the general meeting of shareholders. Professional managers are accountable to the authority that appointed them, but they are the agents of the citizens and in this capacity, although not directly elected by them, they have the freedom to account to the citizens, through the media, for the course of the policies it promotes. By opposition, civil servants are only technicians, they cannot support political points of view in the exercise of their function and they cannot take public positions regarding the policies they technically implement.
- *explicit performance indicators and standards* (indicators refer to measuring progress, operationalize their implementation, while standards set, by comparison, the desirable levels (minimum or excellence) to be achieved, be they offices, government agencies or employees. In all areas, at all levels, the development of performance indicators is required to systematically, not informally and collegially, assess the progress of the organization or the individual towards the assumed objectives.
- *control of outputs rather than procedures* (emphasis is placed on control of results, agencies having more freedom to plan their budget, human resources, strategy so as to effectively track results).

- *disaggregation of the public service and fragmentation into specialized agencies* (disaggregation means the division of large ministerial departments into smaller agencies operating under conditions of managerial autonomy, each being responsible for providing well-defined services on underlying policy areas. The model was that of *Next Steps*, introduced in the United Kingdom by the Thatcher government in 1988. The basic idea is summarized in the government report, which recommends the establishment of agencies as follows: *of a budget established by a ministerial department*. It is assumed that such fragmented agencies will enter into a contractual or quasi-contractual relationship (setting “targets”, levels of achievement) with the hierarchical authority (department/ministry) to provide services, clear, with standards of quantity and quality well introduced, introducing flexibility and competition in the public sector. In addition, their employees can be largely contract staff, with explicit goals and performance levels attached. The disaggregation is consistent with the trends of contracting and the introduction of performance indicators in the public sector.

### **3. Criticisms of the new public management (NMP)**

The criticisms are based on the fact that the NMP is a strong ideological model (the assumptions on which it is based, namely that the public sector is similar to the private one, are false); the public sector operates according to a different ethic, which is to serve the public interest, of the citizen and not to provide services to customers; the interests of customers and citizens may not coincide at some point, or the public sector has a duty to serve the interests of citizens which is both general and diffuse, and can not always be accurately defined by specific indicators and objectives; the specifics of the public sector (impossibility to set clear objectives and performance indicators - profitability cannot be a criteria, the citizen is not a simple customer, the introduction of market mechanisms does not work in all cases). “*Public management cannot*



*be just a simple economic way to maximize customer satisfaction.”*<sup>1</sup> The public sector is not only indebted to this: it must reconcile a multitude of values and interests, redistribute resources according to fair principles and ensure respect for constitutional values.

In addition, the ethos of the public sector (lifelong employment, compliance with procedures, paid employment, loyalty to the system) has been altered by the introduction of performance-based financial systems, which have often led to perverse incentives - individualization, loss of the spirit of teamwork, of collective responsibility. Responsibility in the public sector is mediated by politicians, officials and agencies are accountable to politicians, and they to the electorate; managerialism alters this chain of responsibility, problematizing the integration of the objectives of each agency in the governing program and making the managers of disaggregated agencies accountable mainly to clients and the contracting authority immediately superior, but strictly in the letter of the contract concluded with it. On the other hand, the higher authority (ministerial department) does not have the capacity (human resources, expertise) to monitor the activity of the agencies, which makes their political responsibility weak, they being evaluated, rather, by clients, in quality of service providers. However, the integration of services into a coherent governance program is fading, agencies are becoming quasi-autonomous, and accountability to politicians and citizens is being diluted.

The *NMP* is part of the first generation of public sector reforms, being guided by its efficiency, especially by reducing costs; however, the public sector cannot be guided only by the increase in the quantity of products (outputs), services provided, but should be oriented towards increasing the quality of life rather than by increasing the quantity and quality of the service provided. However, the increase of the quality of life involves two problems: firstly, it is the integrated approach of some social problems that transgress the simply delimited lines of various services

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome B. MCKINNEY, Lawrence C. HOWARD, *Public Administration Balancing Power and Accountability*, 2nd Edition, Praeger, 1998.

(excessive concern for outputs - products - to the detriment of results - outcomes - changes in conditions, behaviors, attitudes, consequences of the implementation of some programs), and, secondly, there is the problem of distribution, of equitable allocation of services. Both issues tended to be ignored by the NMP, which was mainly concerned with efficiency in the strictly economic sense.

Practically, by restructuring the public service, the institutional complexity increased and the autonomous capacities/competences of the citizens in solving public problems decreased (the multiplication of agencies confuses the citizens, who no longer know where to address), which led to the NMP's failure to solve social problems. The disaggregation was followed by the reintegration of some services, under departmental control, in order to be able to pursue government policies. The competition was maintained, but, indirectly, by measuring performance and establishing rankings, while the stimulation is maintained, but in turn creates problems related to increasing inequalities in the public sector and unequal performance.

#### **4. Reversible trends in the new public management (NMP)**

It is easy to see that some of the NMP-specific reform trends have stagnated, and even some processes have become reversible after the long-awaited efficiency has in fact led to a weakening of the public position and the impossibility of implementing coherent policies in for the benefit of the citizens. A moment of crucial importance was the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Reversible trends are manifested by: re-absorption, in the public sector, of some activities that had been contracted in the private sector (outsourced) - re-nationalization of the company dealing with railway infrastructure in Great Britain and airport security in the United States, after the attacks from September 11th. Another trend has been, contrary to fragmentation (or disaggregation), to re-unify the various agencies to

promote coherent policies; and this time, the example of the United States Department of Homeland Security, which emerged as a result of the 9/11 attacks, through the unification of about 22 fragmented federal agencies targeting different aspects of internal security. The fragmentation proposed by the NMP has led to the duplication of many hierarchies, to the inefficiency and impossibility of adopting coherent policies; the example of the three railway regulatory agencies in the UK, covering fragmented areas (Balkanisation; *boutique bureaucracies*): railway safety, licensing of railway transport companies and investment in railway infrastructure.

Consequently, all these changes mean shifting the focus from the business-type efficiency of the administrative unit, which has led to disaggregation and fragmentation, on providing quality services to citizens, customers of public programs. Efficiency results, in particular, from the economy achieved by lowering costs and competitiveness; however, the fragmentation led to the creation of artificial public service domains, the “Balkanization” of services and the emergence of *boutique bureaucrats*, who institutionalized their own fields of activity, their own functions, without necessarily a real need, coming from society, in regarding that field.

The unification of agencies and the holistic approach of many public services becomes possible through the use, in the context of governance, of new media. The influence of modern communication media on public management is achieved through a wide range of cognitive, behavioral, organizational, political and cultural changes related to information systems - *the governance of the digital age*<sup>1</sup>. The governance of the digital age has proposed, instead, a focus on customer needs and the elimination of bureaucracy, not so much by introducing competition, but by using the media in the provision of public services. Thus, there are services that save time and facilitate customer access, such as “one stop”. The provision of “one-stop” services takes different forms, including “one-

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick DUNLEAVY, Helen MARGETTS, Simon BASTOW, Jane TINKLER, *op. cit.*

stop agencies” (multiple administrative services are provided by co-located staff), “single web windows” (an integrated customer-centric interface, where multiple services are electronically integrated). Also, such services require an increased transparency of public management processes.

At the same time, *the new public management* (NMP) could not determine the government's agility to adapt to the new global challenges, to update its structures to respond to changing needs and the volatility of the external environment. He remained concerned about efficiency and cost reduction, losing sight of the specifics of the public sector and governance mechanisms in favor of efficiency techniques, which cannot, however, replace the complex processes of collective decision-making and responsible implementation.

## **5. Coordinates of the new public management (NMP) and their impact on the Romanian public administration**

NMP integrates a series of principles and values essential and necessary to determine the performance of the management model in the private system: application of the principle of managerial responsibility, focus on the culture specific to public administration, managerial and financial autonomy, concern for compliance with *the rule of “4 C”*: *Consistency, Courage, Clarity, Consideration*<sup>1</sup>

In terms of managerial responsibility, it is determined by the needs and expectations of “customers” of today's public administration, which are profoundly different from those cultivated and displayed in the old Romanian system and based on a reversal of roles: expectations no longer come from administration, which in the past focused on

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<sup>1</sup> Cristina IFTIMOAIE, Virginia VERDINAȘ, Gabriela-Todora SANDU, Carmen URZICEANU, *Local Public Administration in Romania in the Perspective of European Integration*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 112.

compliance with the rules by “those led”, but they come from “consumers - customers, citizens”, who have different expectations of public services and how they are treated by the administration.

The basic elements in relation to this aspect are: consulting the people who will have to implement a decision before it is taken, taking responsibility for achieving objectives (and not for fulfilling tasks), delegating operational decisions to the first level of existing competence (subsidiarity principle), favoring a reduction of rigidity and separation in the functioning of the administration both vertically (in terms of information) and horizontally (in terms of concertation and coordination of actions). The “4 C rule”, the basis of the common characteristics of the different management styles, must be taken into account. It is about the coherence of statements and facts, decisions, objectives and means. Courage, for a public manager, means decision making, initiative, tenacity, perseverance to put them into practice, the ability to withstand multiple pressures. Clarity, which must be manifested by a public manager, refers to the clarification of the organization's mission, vision and “rules of the game”, specifying the objectives pursued during the current period, meeting the strategic options and the dangers to be avoided. The consideration means, first of all, the attention paid to the people, the work of the collaborators, as well as the ideas and proposals received. Along with these, public managers in our country must pay special attention to strategic/critical thinking - that component of the profile of the public manager, which consists in broadening the immediate horizon to “think in perspective”.

Last but not least, the motivation of human resources is one of the essential functions for public managers, because they are the people who have the duty to clarify the mission of the public institution and to establish the objectives of human resources, tasks, competencies and responsibilities of each, determined performance levels, which must be obtained in the management and execution processes.

## **6. Instead of conclusions... differences between the concept of citizen and customer of a public service user...**

A citizen can be conceived as a concentration of rights and obligations in the person of an individual, within a constitutional state of law and within a hierarchy of laws and regulations.

A customer is defined by the needs that reside in an individual and the satisfaction of these needs, in a market situation, of supply and demand of goods and services and in a hierarchy of needs, when there is the individual's willingness to pay.

The citizen is part of a social contract, while the client is part of a market contract.

Accountability, in the public sector, is mediated by politicians, officials and agencies are accountable to politicians, and they to the electorate; managerialism alters this chain of responsibility, problematizing the integration of each agency's objectives into the governance program and making disaggregated agency managers accountable primarily to clients and the immediately superior contracting authority, but strictly in the letter of the contract. On the other hand, the higher authority (ministerial department) does not have the capacity (human resources, expertise) to monitor the activity of the agencies, which makes their political responsibility weak, they being evaluated, rather, by clients, in quality of service providers. However, the integration of services into a coherent governance program is fading, agencies are becoming quasi-autonomous, and accountability to politicians and citizens is being diluted. Under these conditions, the ministerial, political leadership becomes important because it channels the services of the agencies towards the realization of the governing political program.

The NMP is part of the first generation of public sector reforms, guided by its efficiency, in particular by reducing costs; however, the public sector cannot be guided only by increasing the quantity of products (outputs), services provided, but should be oriented towards increasing

the quality of life rather than increasing the quantity and quality of the service provided. However, the increase in quality of life has two problems: first, it is the integrated approach to social problems, which transgresses the simple delimited lines of various services (excessive concern for *outputs* - products - to the detriment of results - *outcomes* - changes in conditions, behaviors, attitudes, consequences of the implementation of some programs), and, secondly, there is the issue of distribution, of equitable allocation of services. Both issues tended to be ignored by the NMP, which was mainly concerned with efficiency, in a strictly economic sense.

The disaggregation was followed by the reintegration of some services, under departmental control, in order to be able to pursue government policies. Competition has been maintained, but indirectly, by measuring performance and establishing rankings, while stimulation is maintained, but in turn creates problems related to growing inequalities in the public sector and unequal performance.

In order to conclude, we consider it necessary to review, for example, *the results of the evaluation of public management reforms in New Zealand*.

New Zealand was one of the first states to implement the new reforms and to assess their impact on the public sector. Below, we will present some of the results obtained:

- *strengths*: more efficient production of goods and services; a public sector more sensitive to consumer requirements, delivering high quality services; increased financial discipline; improved fiscal control;
- *weaknesses*: alignment of products (outputs) with results (outcomes); poor alignment of budgetary strategies and agencies' expenditure; the potential conflict between the interest of the buyer and that of the owners of the property rights (between the client and the citizen); problems of detailed specification of contracts and unforeseen elements in the contracting of products (outputs); unforeseen consequences of the new regime (loss of team spirit); unequal performance of government agencies and departments.

- *improvement measures*: 1. integration of service delivery across different agencies; 2. solving fragmentation and integration of various functional programs at the level of agencies; 3. improving the system of training and professional development of civil servants.<sup>1</sup>

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