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New public management: challenges for the Maldives

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Abbreviations

CSIP	Customer Service Improvement Projects
NPM	new public management
PA	performance appraisal
PS21	Public Service for the 21st Century
PSD	Public Service Division
PSTG	Public Sector Training Group

Introduction

This article discusses the experience of a small island state in implementing new public management (NPM) concepts, currently being used in public service reform programs in a host of developed and developing countries. The article begins by outlining the theoretical concepts of NPM. It highlights concerns about the applicability of private sector managerial concepts in public sector organisations and discusses the general application of NPM concepts in public sector organisations in several countries. The article concludes with a discussion of the application of NPM concepts in the Maldives public service and the challenges likely to be faced in their implementation.

New public management: a theoretical framework

The central managerial paradigms identified by theorists as influencing reform in the public service, specifically in the context of the Westminster model of government, include the doctrine of 'managerialism' and 'new public management' (Hood 1991; Aucoin 1990, 1995; Pollitt 1990; Boston et al. 1991; Lovell 1994; Farnham and Horton 1993). The essence of managerialism lies in the assumption that there is a set of managerial principles and tools that can be applied to both public and private sector organisations. (Boston et al. 1991:9) The 'managerialist' school of thought argues that modern complex organisations can be reformed to achieve organisational objectives through the implementation of

management structures and practices that 'de-bureaucratise' organisational systems. (Aucoin 1990:117) The managerialists therefore advocate the application of managerial principles within the bureaucracy to ensure effective delivery of services. Thus, managerialism has come to be applied in the public sector for the same reason as in the private sector—that is, a growing focus on results, performance and outcomes. (Aucoin 1995:9–10)

The end result of managerialist policies has been a reform agenda, which one commentator calls 'the de-Sir Humphreyfying of the Westminster model' (Hood 1990:205), and the introduction of new public management (NPM). At the macro level, however, reforms have largely been driven by governments' response to global demand for more competitive national economies, and continuous demands from the public for increased services. (Aucoin 1990:115; Ingraham 1995:239)

One manifestation of such pragmatic thinking occurred in the form of privatisation. (Aucoin 1990:48–9) The economic component of managerialism was reflected in the emergence of strict accountancy procedures, value-for-money programs and the delegation of financial responsibility and accountability from central to regional and local bodies. (Farnham and Horton 1993:47) Another component of the managerialist philosophy has been the introduction of mission statements, strategic plans and goal-oriented programs, all of which impart to managerialism a 'rationalistic' nature. (Farnham and Horton 1993:48)

The managerial strategies that have since emerged have been related to 'neo-Taylorism', referring to the similarities between the policies adopted in the public services of the United States and Britain under the Reagan and Thatcher administrations and theories propagated by Frederick Winslow Taylor. (Pollitt 1990:15) These governments' application of performance indicators, performance review and merit pay resembles Taylor's central ideas on measuring work to control and reward work efforts. (Pollitt 1990:16) During the past decade, these theories have converged in what has come to be termed 'new public management'. (Boston 1995; Farnham and Horton 1993; Hood 1991; Pollitt, 1990) New public management has also been referred to as 'new managerialism'. (Farnham and Horton 1993:51)

The doctrinal components of NPM include standards and measures of performance, greater emphasis on output controls, greater competition, and stress on private sector styles of management practice. The practices associated with these NPM concepts are further categorised into two streams: first, contract management; and second, the improvement of existing organisations and services. (Lovell 1994:9) Contract management refers to the practice of contracting out public services to the private sector. (Boston et al. 1995) Advocates of contract management have tended to see it as a dual strategy approach, with scientific or objective techniques such as work measurement and performance pay on the one hand, and emphasis on developing the skills of human resources

and the creation of an atmosphere of employee participation in the work place on the other. (Lovell 1994:9)

In the rhetoric of managerialism, these principles are perceived to have transformed the public sector, so that it is increasingly governed by practices that empower citizens, emphasise participative management and orient organisations towards meeting the needs of customers. Such approaches place a closer focus on results in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and quality of service. They also demand that highly centralised hierarchical structures be replaced with decentralised management environments, with organisational performance measured in terms of outputs and greater emphasis placed on problem prevention. (Osborne and Gaebler 1992:120; OECD 1996a:9-13)

Thus, NPM has brought a results-oriented focus to the public service, through the introduction of mission statements and strategic plans, performance reviews, an efficiency drive to improve the functioning of existing organisations, and a stronger focus on improving the potential of employees.

Concerns about applicability

Any application of private sector practices in public organisations opens up a host of concerns about applicability. These concerns are rooted mainly in the inherent differences between public and private sector organisations. (Walsh 1991; Swiss 1992; Ingraham and Romzek 1994; Posner and Rothstein 1994; Rago 1994; Morgan and Murgatroyd 1994; Ingraham 1995)

These differences have been outlined as follows.

1. Private sector organisations are not publicly accountable and are therefore not subject to as many legal and political constraints as the public sector is.
2. Private businesses have tangible, clearly defined goals that derive mainly from the need to make a profit. Public organisations have less tangible and at times conflicting goals, often containing ethical values that cannot be easily measured.
3. Public organisations tend to be monopolies that can ensure participation and compliance from the public through coercion. (Chandler 1991:386)

A general point to be made here is that public sector organisations are characterised by a host of political, legal and judicial constraints, as well as their accountability to the general public. However, increasing public regulation of private sector activity in social, environmental and moral areas has exposed private sector organisations to many of the restrictions under which public sector organisations are used to operating. A number of authors have commented on this change in the operating contexts of private sector organisations, noting that private organisations are taking on more social and moral responsibility than ever before and have consequently become more conscious of the customer as citizen. (Farnham and Horton 1993:33; Chandler 1991:389)

At the same time, however, public organisations are increasingly being

confronted with private sector managerial concepts and practices. The emergence of the NPM initiative during the Reagan and Thatcher years in the United States and Britain highlights this development. The convergence can also be witnessed through an examination of the general managerial functions of both public and private organisations. The increasing similarity between the goals of public and private organisations in the areas of increasing efficiency, reducing costs and delivering quality services has prompted public organisations to adopt managerial principles hitherto applied in private sector organisations, with 'the language and practices of business increasingly becoming common to the public sector'. (Farnham and Horton 1993:51)

These insights may be further tested by a consideration of the role played in public versus private organisations by that well-known set of managerial functions identified with the acronym POSDCORB, coined by Gulick and Urwick in 1937 (cited in Allison 1979:459), referring to the functions of planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. One academic who has written extensively on NPM notes that in fact Gulick and Urwick first identified these managerial functions in the context of the public sector. (Pollitt 1990:4)

The purpose of this outline of the functions of general management has been to highlight the growing similarity between the managerial functions of public and private sector organisations. It is this growing similarity that has justified the increasing utilisation of private sector

managerial strategies in public organisations. The corresponding resemblance between the managerial functions of public and private sector organisations provides a strong basis for the argument for the application of private sector managerial concepts in public organisations.

Application of NPM in public sector organisations

NPM has been applied in public sector organisations in various forms. NPM emphasises increased efficiency and effectiveness, and de-bureaucratisation. It is results-oriented and calls for increased performance levels through the implementation of effective service delivery mechanisms and empowerment of employees.

In the 1990s, applications of NPM concepts were reported in public service reform programs in several OECD countries. (OECD 1996b:18) These programs focused on the need to make the public services 'leaner' and more effective. The next most frequently reported change in public service reform initiatives was brought about by the decentralisation of human resource management functions and the introduction of relatively new management development programs. (OECD 1996b:18) A broad emphasis was also placed on better human resource management and changes in operational policies and organisational structures.

In sum, the central ideas underpinning public service reforms in OECD countries are

1. devolution of managerial authority to provide more flexibility in achieving public policy goals
2. a focus on results
3. a stronger service quality orientation
4. devolution of managerial authority to provide more flexibility in achieving public policy goals
5. a focus on results
6. a stronger service quality orientation
7. a focus on adapting organisational structures
8. heightened focus on the importance of an effective workforce and leadership
9. regulatory reform
10. strengthening of steering functions. (OECD 1997:78)

The establishment of a Citizen's Charter program or programs of a similar nature have become apparent in a host of countries in the OECD and elsewhere. The Citizen's Charter has become the foremost institutional mechanism for the orientation of operations towards meeting the needs and expectations of customers.

Several OECD countries have implemented Citizen's Charter programs. Existing programs include the Public Service Users' Charter of Belgium, the Quality Service Initiative of Canada, the Public Services Charter of France, the Quality Charter of Portugal, the Quality Observatory of Spain, the Citizen's Charter of the United Kingdom and the Customer Service Standards of the United States. (OECD 1996a:15)

There is now a considerable body of material that looks at how NPM practices have been introduced in countries

commonly referred to as 'developing'. In public service reforms in East Asia, in general, three common themes have been identified: increased emphasis on accountability; concern with performance measurement at both organisational and individual levels; and experimentation with new ideas and practices emanating from the private sector. (Turner 1995:2)

In the Malaysian public service, a Quality Control Circle program, Client's Charter program and total quality management program have been implemented. These programs focused on improving service quality and developing a 'quality culture' in public service organisations. The Malaysian Government's view of quality culture embraces such values as 'timeliness, innovativeness, meeting targets, responsiveness to customer needs and cost consciousness'. (Government of Malaysia 1996:686)

In Korea, lessons learned from private sector management have been gradually introduced in the public sector. (Ro 1995:25) Similarly, in the Philippines, the Civil Service Commission has been gradually instilling NPM ideas in the public service through the introduction of various projects and policy guidelines, the stated objective being to develop a new service-oriented culture in the public service. (Juridico 1995:93)

In Singapore, the 1991 establishment of the Service Improvement Unit and the 1995 implementation of the Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) initiative led to a total transformation of public service culture, with new and innovative techniques being introduced to ensure better work processes.

The two key objectives of PS21 were to nurture excellence in public service delivery, with high standards of quality, courtesy and responsiveness, and to employ modern management tools and techniques while paying attention to the morale and welfare of public officers in order to foster an environment conducive to continuous change leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness. (Singapore Prime Minister's Office 1997a:1)

Application of NPM in the Maldives public service

The Maldives has a public service of 23,500 employees (as of September 2003). This number includes teachers, doctors, nurses and the uniformed service. There are twenty ministerial portfolios, with over forty departments under the ministries. Six more departments function directly under the President's Office. Seven public enterprises function under the purview of a Minister.

Planning at both national and organisational levels has been initiated through the adoption of the Vision 2020 and National Development Plans and strategic plans at the organisational and sector levels, and a stronger focus has been given to the development of human resources.

In the Maldives, public service reform programs initiated in 1999 with the establishment of the Public Service Division (PSD)¹ have paved the way for the public service to move from a traditional regulation-oriented structure to one where long-term planning, good governance and

efficient use of resources have been brought to the forefront. The application of several concepts emanating from NPM is evident in a host of reform programs, including strategic planning and strategic management, customer service improvement, training and human resource development performance management, and financial management reform.

Strategic planning and strategic management

Strategic planning was introduced at the organisational level, through a high-level seminar held in February 2000. The objective of the seminar was to introduce the concept of strategic planning at the organisational level, and to train managers to draw up strategic plans in their respective departments. (Government of Maldives 2000a:12) Over the next two years, the PSD mediated and coordinated the efforts of ministries and departments to draw up the strategic plans and yearly action plans of government organisations. By the end of 2003, twenty per cent of government departments had formulated strategic plans and annual action plans. The challenge now is to sustain this effort and make strategic planning a central activity in all public service organisations.

Customer service improvement projects (CSIPs)

As in the case of strategic planning, customer service concepts were introduced to public organisations through a seminar held in July 2000. The objectives of the seminar were to familiarise participants

with the concepts and practices of customer-oriented service, to identify areas for improvement in developing customer-oriented service in the participants' respective organisations, and to identify training and management requirements for the effective provision of customer-oriented service. (Government of Maldives 2000b:1) One of the most important recommendations of the seminar was to develop an action plan to improve the quality of services provided by government departments. Since then, each year, government ministries and departments have undertaken customer service improvement projects (CSIPs) aimed at improving service delivery.

Of the CSIPs implemented from 2000 to 2002, a majority were basic preparatory exercises aimed at gearing departmental management structure and staff towards meeting the needs of customers in service delivery. Hence, several CSIPs focused on training of staff, while many were targeted at the timely dissemination to the public of information regarding a department's mandate, activities and services. Several departments concentrated their projects on improving existing systems of service delivery. Examples include the Narcotics Control Board's project to publicise the rehabilitation process, the Ministry of Construction and Public Works' effort to improve the delivery of harbour services, the introduction of an online job matching service by the Ministry of Human Resources, Employment and Labour, and the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation's project to computerise the issuing of driving licenses. (Government of

Maldives 2001:2) Although efforts were made by some departments to draw up Customer Charters, no such charters have yet been implemented.

An assessment of the implementation of these CSIPs shows that very few departments have been responsive in initiating customer service projects. Initially, a total of 32 government departments were requested to formulate CSIPs. Table 1 provides detailed information on the number of projects submitted and completed by each department. As shown in Table 1, even though a high percentage (72 per cent) initiated customer service improvement activities in 2000, only 31 per cent of departments successfully completed at least one project. Table 1 also shows that the percentage of CSIPs initiated each year declined from 72 per cent in 2000 to 59 per cent in 2001 and 52 per cent in 2002. However, in 2002 a slight increase in the number of projects completed was recorded. The annual reports published by the PSD to publicise the CSIP initiatives have recognised departments that did take measures to improve their customer services.

Training and human resource development

In the areas of training and human resource development, two main strategies have been created. The first focuses on the seminars and workshops conducted at the executive level for managers of government departments; the second concentrates on the professional training programs that are organised and conducted by the PSD.

Executive-level seminars and workshops have been conducted to introduce managerial staff to modern management concepts and techniques, with seminar and workshop themes including strategic planning and strategic management, customer service, training needs analysis, the use of information technology in delivering public services, and financial management reform.

The professional training programs conducted and coordinated by the PSD are geared towards the training of mid-managerial and administrative support staff. The training programs are conducted by the Public Sector Training Group (PSTG), which was formed in association with the

Table 1 CSIPs implemented in 2000–02

	Offices that submitted customer service projects	Offices that completed at least one project
2000	23 (72%)	10 (31%)
2001	19 (59%)	7 (22%)
2002	16 (52%)	9 (29%)

Source: Government of Maldives, 2001, 2002a and 2003a. *Customer Service Project Report*, Research and Publications Unit, Public Service Division, The President's Office, Male'.

Faculty of Management at the Maldives College of Higher Education. The programs conducted by the PSTG are coordinated and evaluated by the Human Resource Development Unit of the PSD. In 2002, professional training programs were conducted in the areas of customer service, strategic planning, orientation for new employees, performance appraisal and training needs analysis.

Feedback obtained from participants in these programs indicated a high level of participant satisfaction. Two of the programs conducted in 2002 were made longer in 2003, in response to evaluations received from participants. Furthermore, three additional training programs were introduced in 2003, to meet greater public sector demand, especially in the fields of information technology and financial management.

Performance management

Performance management was first piloted in the public service in 1996 through the introduction of a performance appraisal system. The appraisal system included an evaluation of the performance of employees in key work areas and an annual appraisal-based salary increment.

With the introduction of the appraisal system in 1996, for the first time, supervisors were requested to assess their colleagues' work and performance. The singular achievement of the 1996 performance appraisal system was therefore the introduction and installation of a process of assessing employees across the public service. (Government of Maldives 1999:3)

To make the system more effective, however, several issues had to be revisited, including the opening up of an avenue of communication between the appraisers and employees in general, and increased training and education for government employees in the objectives and benefits of a good appraisal system.

The current system of Performance Appraisal (PA), piloted in several government departments from 2002, is a revision of the PA system initiated in 1996, and addresses many new aspects. Specific features of the new system are

- selection of core duties and tasks for end-of-year assessments for each employee
- linking core duties with organisational action plans
- establishing targets to be achieved by the end of the year
- open communication between supervisors and employees on selection of core duties and establishment of targets
- introduction of separate forms for managerial and support staff. (Government of Maldives 2003b:1)

Additional departments are piloting the new PA system in 2003. It is still too early to make an assessment of the system. However, government employees' perceptions of the implementation aspect of the system has not been very positive, as indicated in the final section of this paper.

Financial management reform

A sound financial system has been regarded as crucial for good governance. Hence, financial management reform is one

area that has been accorded high priority by the government. Three areas have been proposed for reform: a new public accounting system; program budgeting; and a new finance act and public enterprises act.

In June 2002, the PSD organised a seminar to raise awareness of the new public accounting system at the executive level of government. The new public accounting system will provide for the development of a computerised double-entry cash-based system with a central ledger consisting of four funds, one public bank account and a central cheque production unit within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

Another workshop was conducted in June 2003, on public expenditure management and budgeting aspects. Its main aims were to highlight public expenditure management topics such as budget formulation, execution and monitoring and social sector-related spending. It also outlined the rationale for introducing medium-term budgeting. (Government of Maldives 2003c)

The government is phasing in program management as a means of providing a more effective budget framework. Since 2002, budget forms to be submitted to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury have included separate sheets for the specification of program details for 2003. This was a first step towards linking budgeting with organisational and sector goals and outcomes.

Strengthening legislation on financial matters has been the third area of financial

management reform. In building the legislative framework for public accounting in the Maldives, a Public Finance Act and an Enterprise Bill were drafted in 2002 and are scheduled to be presented to the Law Commission.

Challenges: sustaining the reform initiatives

The previous section has shown that several NPM concepts and practices have been initiated in the Maldives public service through a broader reform agenda. The effectiveness of such initiatives depends on the extent and depth of their penetration at departmental level, through awareness creation and actual institutionalisation of relevant mechanisms and systems.

Bearing this in mind, the main framework for the implementation of reform initiatives in the Maldives public service has been the Government Reform Network, which has functioned as a focal point and change agent for all ministries and departments. Awareness creation exercises are conducted in seminars and work sessions in individual departments, with the wider aim of engaging the whole public service in reform efforts.

Since 2002, the target audience for the seminars conducted by the PSD has expanded beyond the Government Reform Network to include representatives from departments that function under the line ministries as well. The objective of this exercise has been to engage as many key people in the public service as possible, so as to hasten the implementation of reform

initiatives and obtain the commitment of key managers in each department.

The sustainability aspects of the reform initiatives outlined in the previous section were assessed through the perceptions of participants of a seminar held in October 2002. The 72 participants were all from the managerial and executives cadres of government. The seminar included presentations from departments that had implemented and experienced many of the reform initiatives discussed above, thus providing an opportunity for interdepartmental discussion of the reform initiatives' implementation and any successes achieved.

Table 2 provides information on seminar participants' perceptions of six main areas of reform. Evidently, a majority of the respondents are of the view that all six initiatives are important for reform. Over 90 per cent of respondents state that strategic planning, service delivery and the implementation of IT initiatives are important, while close to 90 per cent feel that financial management reform is equally important.

However, participants are generally of the view that only two of the reform initiatives—strategic planning and the IT initiative—are working satisfactorily. The general perception of performance management, people management, financial management and service delivery is that they are not working satisfactorily. The lowest score is for performance management—only 19 per cent of respondents are of the view that this initiative is working satisfactorily.

But this is not a surprising outcome. As already mentioned above, the performance appraisal system introduced in 1996 was discontinued in 1999 because the Cabinet felt that it was not achieving its original objectives. Since 2002, a revised system has been piloted in some government departments; it is still too early to gauge its effectiveness.

Seminar participants were then asked what they thought was needed to sustain reform initiatives in the public service? Table 3 presents a categorisation of the responses.

Most respondents focused on management and infrastructural changes

Table 2 Employee perceptions of reform initiatives

Reform initiatives	% who think initiative is important	% who think initiative is working satisfactorily
Strategic planning	96.6	63.8
Service delivery (customer service)	91.4	41.4
Financial management	87.9	36.2
Performance management	67.2	19.0
People management (training and HRD)	58.6	24.1

Source: Government of Maldives, 2002b. Executive Seminar on Sustaining Public Sector Reform, 30–31 October 2002, Male', Seminar Report, Public Service Division, The President's Office, Male'.

Table 3 What is needed to sustain public sector reform?

Categorised response	% of respondents
Management and infrastructural changes	40
Awareness and communication	30
Monitoring and evaluation	12.5
Values, work ethics and commitment	10
Training and HRD	7.5

Source: Government of Maldives, 2002b. Executive Seminar on Sustaining Public Sector Reform, 30–31 October 2002, Male', Seminar Report, Public Service Division, The President's Office, Male'.

(40 per cent), including making reform initiatives mandatory and consistent across sectors; providing effective leadership at all levels; granting greater autonomy in aspects of decision making; harmonising and integrating strategic plans; privatising relevant areas; and introducing public service awards at the national level.

Thirty per cent of respondents stressed the need to increase awareness and communication at the central and departmental levels and to run more public awareness campaigns. Suggestions relating to this category included the sensitisation of decision makers; public service awareness campaigns and fairs; easy access to employees and the public on reform issues; and the development of a shared understanding of the technical concepts behind reform initiatives.

Twelve per cent of participants stressed the importance of monitoring and feedback to sustaining reform efforts, while 10 per cent emphasised the significance of greater commitment to reform at the personal, political and institutional levels, and the inculcation of good work ethics and values among public service employees. A greater focus on training and HR development was

also mentioned (7.5 per cent of respondents) as an initiative necessary to sustaining reform initiatives.

Conclusions

This article has focused on the application of NPM concepts in the Maldives public service. It is evident that a strong focus has been placed on performance measurement, strategic planning and financial reform initiatives. In addition, efforts have been made to empower employees through awareness creation programs in the form of high-level seminars and professional training programs.

Reform initiatives have focused on improving the planning function at departmental level, performance management, people management and service delivery. The government has geared its efforts towards increasing awareness of the concepts and practices on which reform initiatives are based, through seminars, workshops and information sessions.

To sustain the government's reform efforts, its initiatives need to be made part

of the overall organisational milieu. Strategic planning and action planning need to be incorporated into the organisation not through intervention from the PSD, but rather as activities that are intrinsic to the organisation's everyday affairs.

Monitoring and evaluation of reform initiatives need to be strengthened at the central and departmental levels, with greater commitment from the departments. Planning at the departmental level also needs to be strengthened, and there needs to be better coordination of financial and human resources. Finally, there has to be a change in the public service culture to accommodate such reforms, with commitment to reform initiatives by department heads a key aspect of such cultural change. Even a good system will not work without the commitment of employees, especially of those at the managerial level.

The PSD, in cooperation with government departments, still has substantial work to do to facilitate and sustain reform efforts. Some reform initiatives need to be made mandatory across the public service; it is just as important, however, for proper mechanisms and training and awareness-raising programs to be institutionalised if reform initiatives are to be made sustainable over the long term.

Note

¹ The PSD is the central government agency entrusted with the mandate for modernising and reforming the public

service. The PSD is a division of the President's Office, and is centrally placed at the highest level of government. The annual action plans and reform strategies of the PSD are formulated with the advice of a ministerial-level advisory committee appointed by the President.

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