The post-bureaucratic organization and public service values

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Recent public sector reforms, especially those associated with the new public management (n pm) movement, have increased concern about the state of public service values. This concern has arisen in large part because some advocates of public sector reform pay little or no attention to values and others focus narrowly on the application of private sector values to the public sector. However, a growing number of reform advocates are seeking to reconcile traditional public service values with 'new' values arising from new approaches to organizing and managing public organizations, including approaches based on private sector experience. This paper, in its examination of the implications of these new approaches for public service values, makes three major arguments. The first is that reformers should take careful and systematic account of the value implications of reforms. The second is that account should be taken not only of ethical values but of other types of values as well. The third argument is that a statement of key values (often described as a code of conduct), both for the public service as a whole and for individual public organizations, facilitates an assessment of the value consequences of reforms.

The first section of this paper provides a framework for analysing public sector reforms and for comparing the extent of these reforms over time and across jurisdictional boundaries. The second section explains the growing importance of public service values and classifies them into three major categories. The third section analyses the values implications of public sector reforms, and the final section draws learning points from this analysis, with particular reference to issues of public service ethics. This paper is in part a response to the recent call by Montgomery Van Wart (1998: xix) for contributions to the creation of a field of public administration values.

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The bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic framework shown in Figure 1 reflects the broad scope of recent reform initiatives and proposals (Kernaghan et al., forthcoming). It includes the major elements of npm, but in view of the controversy over npm’s meaning and scope, it avoids the frequent practice of equating npm
with public sector reform in general. The framework takes account of several models of public organization, including the market and participatory ones (Peters, 1995). The primary means by which public organizations can move towards the post-bureaucratic model have become well known to the public administration community, especially over the past decade. They include partnerships, empowerment, restructuring, re-engineering, information technology and continuous learning.

Many public organizations around the world have undergone significant reform by moving toward the post-bureaucratic model. The model is not a normative one in the sense that all public organizations are encouraged to conform as closely as possible to its several components. Nor is the model intended to serve as a new paradigm in the strict Kuhnian sense (Kuhn, 1970). Indeed, there is tension among some of the model’s components, e.g. the emphasis on coordination and collaboration versus the emphasis on decentralized authority and control. Moreover, an organization that uses the framework to analyse the current state of its structure, culture and management may decide, for sound reasons, to move towards the bureaucratic, rather than the post-bureaucratic, pole of certain continua. An organization may, for example, put relatively greater emphasis on accountability for process (i.e. for following the rules) after an embarrassing instance of unreasonable risk-taking. The framework is intended to serve (1) an analytical purpose by including the major elements of reform in public organiz-
tions; and (2) a practical purpose by helping public organizations assess where
they stand in relation to recent reform proposals.

The concept of an organizational profile is central to using the framework for
these two purposes. Figure 2 shows that for each public organization a profile can
be developed to depict that organization’s location on each of the continua of the
framework — and to compare its location to that of other organizations. The
framework can also be used to assess change in a single organization over time
(e.g. a department of agriculture in 2000 compared to 1990).

At a high level of generality, the framework can be used to compare a public
bureaucracy in one government with that in another (e.g. the Government of
Florida versus the Government of Texas) or the public bureaucracy in one
country with that in another. For example, the governments of Canada and the
United States will fall closer to the bureaucratic pole on most of the continua
compared to the governments of New Zealand, the United Kingdom and
Australia. It is notable that the Australian government has called for a shift
towards ‘high performance organizations’ that has many of the characteristics of
the post-bureaucratic model. According to David Kemp (the minister assisting
the prime minister with the Public Service), public service leaders should adopt
such characteristics of high-performing organizations as a focus on the customer,
a strong strategic vision, continual benchmarking and performance improve-
ments, values-based rather than rules-based management and an emphasis on
results in a competitive environment (Kemp, 1998: 2).

When assessing the benefits and costs of moving along the several continua
of the bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic framework, public organizations must
examine not only the structural and managerial implications of such movement,
but the political and value implications as well. For example, in considering a
shift from an organization-centred to a citizen-centred approach, it is essential to
examine the feasibility of new structures such as single window mechanisms for
service delivery and new management approaches such as employee empower-
ment. But it is essential also to examine the implications of reform for political
control of the public service and for such core public service values as account-
ability and integrity. While these four major dimensions of public administration
cannot in practice be easily separated, for analytical purposes this paper focuses
on the value dimension.

Public service values
Values have long been an important concept in scholarly writings on public
administration, especially in the United States (Kaufman, 1956; Gilbert, 1959). In
most other countries, reference to public service values has historically been
much less explicit. However, since the mid-1980s, the concept of values has
become increasingly central to the study and practice of public administration in
many countries around the world. In some countries (e.g. Australia, Canada),
values discourse pervades the public service. There are several reasons for this
increased concern about values.
First, the private sector’s emphasis in the 1980s on the concept of corporate culture and the accompanying emphasis on values had a spillover effect on public organizations; many of these organizations developed a statement of values, sometimes as a stand-alone document but usually as an integral part of a strategic plan. Second, some public organizations have been successfully transformed by focusing on a change in their values rather than in their structures (Denhardt, 1993). Third, the increased emphasis of reformers on holding public servants relatively more accountable for results than for process led to a focus on values as a possible alternative to rules, directives and guidelines. Fourth, and more recent, has been the upsurge of concern about public service values, already noted, that has resulted from the perceived neglect or undermining of traditional public service values by certain proponents of public sector reform.

A fifth and final explanatory factor has been the steadily rising interest since the late 1960s in public service ethics — a concept so tightly intertwined with that of public service values that many commentators use the terms values and ethics interchangeably. As a result, many writings on public service ethics deal explicitly or implicitly with values issues, and many writings on public service values deal in part with ethics issues. It is important to distinguish between these two concepts. A value is defined here as ‘an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence’ (Rokeach, 1973: 5). Values are enduring beliefs that influence the choices we make from among available means and ends. Clearly, not all values are ethical values, that is, not all values relate to questions of right and wrong, good or evil. It is helpful, therefore, to distinguish ethical values from other types of values.

Public administration scholars have classified public service values in various ways. This paper utilizes a three-fold classification (Canada, 1996) in which ethical values (e.g. integrity, fairness) constitute a separate category; the other two categories are democratic values (e.g. impartiality, rule of law), and professional values (e.g. effectiveness, service). This classification provides a basis for taking account of the enduring importance of democratic and ethical values in public administration and of the emergence of new professional values. These categories of values are not watertight compartments; a few values fall into more than one category (e.g. accountability as both an ethical and a democratic value and excellence as both an ethical and a professional value).

A broad classification of public service values that cuts across all other classifications is a division into traditional or ‘old’ values and ‘new’ or ‘emerging’ values. For example, such values as integrity, efficiency, effectiveness, neutrality, responsiveness and accountability have in many countries been traditionally associated with the notion of public service (Gilbert, 1959; Kernaghan, 1978). While the relative significance of such traditional values has changed over time, their overall importance in the constellation of public service values has endured. However, during the past few decades and especially since the mid-1980s, new values (e.g. innovation, quality) have risen to prominence and certain traditional
values (e.g. accountability) have become relatively more important. A 1994 study showed that the top dozen values espoused by public organizations across Canada were, in order of priority, integrity/ethics, accountability/responsibility, respect, service, fairness/equity, innovation, teamwork, excellence, honesty, commitment/dedication, quality, and openness (Kernaghan, 1994: 620). While several traditional values (integrity, accountability, fairness) were found to be highly cherished, 'new' values such as service, innovation, teamwork and quality were also highly ranked.

In addition, the meaning of some traditional values has been altered; note, for example, the relatively greater focus on accountability for results than for process. Note also that the meaning of certain new values is very similar to that of certain old values. For example, in some governments, reference to the traditional value of representativeness has been substantially displaced by reference to equity. And the meaning of the traditional value of responsiveness is similar to that of the 'new' value of service. Thus, some of the so-called new values are not all that new — a fact that will facilitate the balancing and reconciliation of traditional and new values in public administration.

Several of the new public service values (e.g. service, innovation) are identical to prominent private sector values. This reflects the fact that many of the recent public sector reforms have been inspired by private sector experience. The post-bureaucratic model is heavily influenced by private sector thinking and practice and several of the major means of moving towards that model (e.g. re-engineering, customer/client orientation) are commonly viewed as private sector management techniques. It is notable also that the new values fall primarily into the category of professional values. In considering the desirability of moving along the various continua, public organizations need to keep in mind the impact of new approaches to organization and management on democratic and ethical values as well as on professional ones.

The three-fold classification into ethical, democratic and professional values enables account to be taken not only of traditional public service values but also of the recent emphasis around the world on new values, notably market values, in public administration. This classification may, therefore, be helpful in examining the suggestion by Gilman and Lewis (1996: 518) that 'there are fundamental values . . . [shared across cultures] that are closely associated with democracy, market economy, and professional bureaucracy'.

**Public service reforms and public service values**

Value conflict is a pervasive reality for public administrators. There are frequent tensions and clashes among democratic, ethical and professional values and between old and new values. In assessing the value implications of public service reforms, administrators have to consider both the relative merits and the compatibility of a wide range of pertinent values. As explained later, it is helpful to identify core public service values and to establish priorities among them so as to narrow the range of values that decision-makers are obliged to consider. The
Canadian study mentioned earlier found that the value statements of 93 public organizations contained a total of 164 different values (Kernaghan, 1994: 630). There was substantial agreement among the organizations on the top dozen values but most organizations also espoused values related to their particular responsibilities (e.g. reliability for a statistics agency).

The value implications of moving along the continua of the bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic framework are illustrated here by reference to the value of accountability. A persuasive argument can be made that accountability is the dominant value in contemporary public administration. While accountability has long been a central public service value, it has taken on new life and new importance in the context of recent reforms. As noted earlier, accountability is widely viewed as both an ethical value and a democratic one. All those individuals and organizations in society who exercise power over us have a duty to account for the proper exercise of that power — and this duty is centrally important for public officials in a democratic system of government. A major challenge for public service reformers is to reconcile the traditional value of accountability, not only with other traditional values but with new values as well.

From among the several means mentioned earlier whereby public organizations can move towards the post-bureaucratic model, we shall focus here, by way of illustration, on partnerships and restructuring. Partnerships involving public organizations and various non-governmental entities (especially business organizations) are widely touted as an effective means of promoting citizen-centred service, collaboration, decentralization, non-departmental forms of organization and cost recovery. The use of partnerships can, therefore, foster such professional values as efficiency, teamwork and innovation. However, some partnerships — particularly truly collaborative ones in which public organizations share power and risk with their partners — have provoked concern about their implications for democratic and ethical values like accountability. Accountability must be established for the results of creating innovative partnerships involving political, financial or legal risk. Political risk is especially problematic in Westminster-style governments (e.g. Australia, Canada) where Cabinet ministers are, in principle, required to answer to the legislature for the errors of their administrative subordinates. Accountability must be established also for ensuring that partnerships are operated in an ethical manner, with due diligence, for example, to avoiding conflicts of interest.

Restructuring is another instrument that is widely used to move public organizations toward the post-bureaucratic model. While restructuring can promote such objectives as improved service, decentralization and cost recovery, it is especially important for creating non-departmental forms of organization. In the United Kingdom and New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, in Canada, operating departments of government have been replaced or supplemented by a variety of organizational mechanisms (e.g. executive agencies in the United Kingdom, state-owned enterprises in New Zealand and service agencies in Canada). There has been less pressure in this direction in the United States where government
agencies have historically enjoyed considerable autonomy within large cabinet departments.

New structural arrangements are usually portrayed as fostering professional values like effectiveness and service. However, concern has arisen about the impact of these arrangements on accountability. Particular concern is focused on the means whereby governments can ensure democratic accountability as more organizations are located at arm’s length from the political executive and towards the periphery of the public sector.

This brief examination of the implications for accountability of using partnerships and restructuring illustrates the kind of analysis that can be performed for other core values (e.g. integrity, neutrality) and for other instruments of reform (e.g. empowerment, technological innovation). Reformers need to conduct such analysis so as to take adequate account of both the growing importance of professional values and the enduring importance of democratic and ethical ones.

Preserving and diffusing values
The implications for ethical values and principles of the various reforms involved in moving toward the post-bureaucratic model have become a significant source of concern in countries around the world (Kamto, 1997; Hondeghem, 1998). This concern has reinforced the already high level of anxiety, noted earlier, about the state of public sector ethics.

Much of the recent concern has focused on the ethical consequences of increased business involvement in the conduct of government activities (e.g. contracting out, partnerships) and the application to the public sector of business values (e.g. risk taking) and business practices (e.g. empowerment). George Frederickson (1993: 250) has argued, in respect of the United States, that when ‘previously governmental functions are shifted to the private sector or shared, it is a safe bet that corruption will increase’. Alan Doig has noted that in Britain ‘the speed and direction of devolved managerial autonomy, together with the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture and of privatization . . . have raised questions about . . . the weakening of the public sector ethos, [and] the impact of private sector perspectives within a public sector context . . .’ (Doig, 1995: 207). And Maurice Kamto has observed that public service values associated with western governments are gradually being introduced into the governments of central and eastern Europe, but ‘these values are finding it hard to take root in the face of administrative corruption arising in substantial part from neoliberal ideology’ (Kamto, 1997: 298). He also blames neoliberal measures for increasing the ‘ethical deficit’ in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The application of business values and practices to the public sector impacts not only ethical values like integrity but democratic values like neutrality as well. For example, the appointment of business people to head public agencies and the increased mobility of employees between the public and private sectors threaten political neutrality by increasing the likelihood of partisanship and patronage.
Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Service, notes that ‘[i]ncreasing interaction between the public and private sectors demands that more attention should be placed on public service values and requiring external partners to respect those same values’ (OECD, 1998: Section 7). And in early 1998, the British government announced that it was planning new legislation to permit public servants to take legal action against ministers who threatened their political impartiality or asked them to do political work. This was a response to criticism of the increasing politicization of the public service and, in particular, the growing influence of political advisers appointed from outside the public service by ministers rather than by competition and promotion.

There is particular concern about the extent to which it is possible to infuse programme delivery agencies (e.g. state-owned enterprises in New Zealand and service delivery agencies in Canada) with core public service values, especially if the organizations are headed by persons brought in from the private sector to manage them on a more ‘business-like’ basis. While New Zealand’s public sector reforms have been widely praised, they have also encountered some problems in applying a business model to the public sector. Following the enactment of the 1988 State Sector Act, the State Services Commission published a Public Service Code of Conduct in 1990 and the Public Service Principles, Conventions and Practice guidance series in 1995 (New Zealand, 1996: 42). Then, in mid-1997, in response to concern that chief executives were ignoring matters that were not specifically listed in their contract with the government, the head of the public service prescribed a broader set of obligations. These obligations included taking account of the political needs of the government as a whole, adhering to high personal ethical standards, and managing ‘their departments with long-term “stewardship” in mind’ (Larson, 1998). The recently established Canadian Food Inspection Agency worried about how it ‘would be able to advance public sector values while moving to a more entrepreneurial style of organization and management’ (Doering, 1998: 14). Its response was to set out its core values in its business plan. Democratic accountability is reinforced by the fact that the minister to whom the agency reports is responsible to Parliament for safeguarding these core values. It is notable, however, that no democratic values (e.g. accountability, neutrality) are explicitly included among the agency’s core values.

Some western democracies (e.g. New Zealand, 1995; United Kingdom, 1996) have responded to actual or anticipated problems arising from reforms by drafting or strengthening statements of values or codes of ethics. New Zealand’s reforms raised concerns ‘as to whether the traditional ethical concepts had at least partly gone by the board. There was a very clear need to reaffirm — and perhaps in some areas to reformulate — the ethical basis of the Public Service’ (New Zealand, 1996: 41). A learning point to be drawn from the experience of several countries is that governments need to take careful account of the value and ethical implications of reforms before implementing them. The bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic framework (Figure 1) provides a mechanism for doing this in a systematic and comprehensive manner. As argued here, use of the framework for
this purpose by a public service as a whole or by individual public organizations will be facilitated by identifying a limited number of core values that should be fostered. These values are usually set out in a formal document referred to in this paper as a statement of values; in some jurisdictions it is called a code of conduct.

There is significant congruence in the core public service values identified by different countries. It is not surprising that this congruence is more evident among the Westminster-style democracies of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom where ministerial responsibility is a central constitutional convention. The value statements of these three countries contain a mix of democratic, ethical and professional values. Foremost among the democratic values are accountability, responsiveness and impartiality while integrity, honesty and respect are the most prominent ethical values. New Zealand and the United Kingdom include such traditional professional values as efficiency and effectiveness whereas Australia, in the declaration of values in its 1999 Public Service Bill, includes the new professional values of achieving results and managing performance (Australia, 1999).

In Canada, another Westminster-style country, the federal government has no service-wide statement of values, but the values articulated formally by public service leaders are very similar to those of other Commonwealth countries. Prominent among these values are the public interest, service, honesty, integrity, fairness and equity (Bourgon, 1997). One of Canada’s provincial governments, the Government of Ontario, has formally adopted a Statement of Values and Ethics composed primarily of the top values identified in the cross-Canada study described earlier. The Ontario statement includes several of the new professional values (e.g. innovation, creativity and continuous improvement). The intention in Ontario is to diffuse the core values throughout the public service by integrating them into its planning and accountability processes and fostering open dialogue about their implementation in the day-to-day operations of the public service. This effort is integrally linked to the province’s ongoing reform initiatives and is led by its Restructuring Secretariat.

Despite the similarities in the core values of these governments, there are still significant differences in the content and format of their value statements. The British Civil Service Code, for example, is notable for its provisions on expectations for political executives (ministers) as well as for public servants. It reminds ministers of their duty to uphold the political impartiality of the public service and to give fair consideration to informed and impartial advice from public servants. In most value statements, advice as to the proper behaviour of politicians has to be inferred from advice to public servants. For example, New Zealand’s Public Service Code of Conduct requires public servants ‘to alert Ministers to the possible consequences of following particular policies, whether or not such advice accords with Ministers’ views’ (New Zealand, 1995: 11). The implicit advice to ministers is that public servants should not be punished for speaking truth to power.

The emphasis in most current value statements is on traditional democratic,
ethical and professional values. Few statements reflect the increased importance of new professional values such as innovation and creativity and little effort is made to reconcile traditional and new values. Part of the explanation for these apparent deficiencies is the view of some government officials that the ‘so-called new values’ are a passing fancy or are at best second-order values that are less central to successful governance than the traditional ones.

Another explanatory factor is the practical need to limit the number of values contained in a value statement and the length of the statement itself. Pressure to limit the number arises also from the fact, noted earlier, that individual organizations often supplement the service-wide values contained in the statement with values related to their particular functions. Some governments (e.g. Canada, Norway) leave the development of value statements to individual organizations rather than adopting a government-wide statement. This approach is less likely to foster shared values across the service as a whole, and individual organizations are less likely to include democratic values. In Canada, democratic values like loyalty and political neutrality are commonly identified as central public service values. Yet these values are rarely included in the value statements of individual organizations; neither value was ranked among the top 20 values in the Canadian study mentioned earlier.

Among the arguments for restricting the number of values is the need to ensure that they are easy to understand, remember, communicate, adapt and identify with (Canada, 1987: 11). Also, specifying a limited number of core values facilitates use of the bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic framework for assessing the value implications of public sector reforms. An additional argument, both for identifying core values and limiting their number, is that they can provide a source from which principles, rules and guidelines governing public service conduct can be derived. For example, impartiality, a democratic value, and fairness, an ethical value, underpin the principle that public servants should make decisions on a non-partisan basis. This principle, in turn, underpins rules and guidelines bearing on the political activities of public servants. Australia uses this approach in its 1999 Public Service Bill. The Bill’s explanatory note asserts that the values contained in the Bill ‘provide the philosophical underpinning’ and ‘articulate the culture and ethos’ of the public service. Among the values listed are apolitical public service, high ethical standards, accountability and responsiveness. These and other values underpin a code of conduct which is also contained in the Bill and which sets out a number of official duties, including honesty, compliance with the law, confidentiality and avoidance of conflict of interest.

A major theme in recent public service reforms has been the reduction of rules so that empowered public servants, held more accountable for results and less accountable for process, can be more creative, even entrepreneurial. However, some reforms create pressure for more, not fewer, rules (for example, in such areas as conflict of interest and non-partisanship). The fostering of shared values across the public service and in individual organizations can help to reduce the overall need for rules and to increase the use of the less intrusive management
instrument of guidelines. Public servants are more likely to comply with the rules that remain and to respect the intent of guidelines if they see the connection between the content of these rules and guidelines and fundamental public service values. For example, one approach to controlling conflict of interest is to provide lengthy and detailed rules against it. Another approach is to explain that the need to avoid conflict of interest is grounded in basic and enduring democratic and ethical values such as impartiality and fairness; to develop broad conflict-of-interest principles based on these values; and then to draw from these principles a limited number of rules and guidelines. ‘The best accountability systems recognize . . . that “control is normative . . . rooted in values and beliefs”’ (Mintzberg, 1996: 81).

It is unrealistic to expect that a written statement alone will be sufficient to foster shared values and high ethical standards in the public service. A statement of key values should be viewed as an essential component of a broad regime for preserving and promoting ethical behaviour (Kernaghan, 1996: 19–21; OECD, 1997: 4). This ethics regime could include not only a statement of values but also such measures as ethics codes, rules and guidelines; ethics training and education; ethics counsellors or ombudsmen; and the evaluation of ethical performance as a basis for appointments and promotions, especially at the senior leadership level. While statements of values (or codes of conduct) can serve important purposes, they can be severely undermined by leaders who do not model the organization’s values. Public servants are more effectively motivated by concrete examples of values-based leadership than by lofty declarations of values.

Nevertheless, a carefully crafted statement of values can provide a firm foundation on which a comprehensive ethics regime can be built. The core values contained in the statement indicate the key questions to be raised about the impact of the various reforms associated with movement toward the post-bureaucratic model of public organization. The other components of the regime (e.g. training) provide measures by which public organizations can manage the ethical challenges arising from these reforms.

Note
1. The Agency’s core values and operating principles are as follows:
   Workplace and People Values: Professionalism, Respect, Commitment and a Positive Outlook; Employment Values: Merit, Employment Equity, Mobility and Performance Recognition; and Leadership and Management Values: Openness, Integrity, Trust and Teamwork (Doering, 1998: 14).

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