

FASHION, LEARNING AND VALUES IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Reflections on South African and international experience

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1. Introduction: 'New Public Management' and South Africa's 'New Public Administration'

For policymakers and senior managers, the difference between learning by rote and learning to think independently is central. In rote learning we learn how to exactly reproduce something, we copy. This is fine for some purposes: we need to know exactly where the keys on the keyboard are, otherwise we produce nonsense or type very slowly; and we must reproduce our signature consistently otherwise our cheques or credit card payments may be rejected. But for most purposes in policy and senior management we need to make intelligent judgments about cases that consist of a unique new set of circumstances, not completely the same as anything we saw before. We have to think critically, to judge how far previous examples or various general ideas are relevant to the new case. By 'critically' I mean relying on evidence, good logic and considered values, not automatic opposition. A good critic gives both praise and criticism, according to when they seem due. Automatic opposition is uncritical; so is automatically following fashion.

Let us look at the rise and spread of the doctrines and practice called New Public Management, NPM. These emerged in the 1980s especially in New Zealand, Australia and Britain and in sister forms in the USA. They spread widely, especially in the 1990s, around many OECD countries and from them to lower-income countries, not least in Africa, partly through promotion by international agencies like the World Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat and management consultancy groups. At one stage NPM's proponents claimed to have intellectually defeated the older public management and to be in the process of replacing it.

NPM has done a lot to shake-up sleepy and self-serving public organizations, often by using ideas from the private sector. It provides many options for trying to achieve cost-effective delivery of public goods, like separate organizations for policy and implementation, performance contracts, internal markets, sub-contracting, and much more (see e.g. Khandwalla 1999). It has a strong inter-organizational

¹ Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Parts of this paper draw on Gasper (2000a), Gasper (2001), and my contribution to Gasper, Schwella & Tangri (2002).

focus, as is needed in public management. But it has been spread somewhat like a religion: it was *assumed* to be modern, relevant and superior, so there was no need felt to prove that it suits the case concerned; to query this was held to show that you were outdated and reactionary.

Christopher Pollitt records in his study ‘Justification by Works or by Faith?’ how thin was the empirical backing for NPM while it was being evangelized worldwide. No thorough pilot studies had been done, let alone ones giving clear lessons and based on consultation also with medium and lower-level staff or customers about their experience in the experiments. Governments pushed ahead with massive changes on the basis of high hopes, misleading comparisons, a few examples, often heard of from abroad, assurances from highly paid consultants, and the views of some top civil servants and politicians far from the delivery line.

By now, NPM has lost much of its gloss, as experience mounts. In New Zealand, in many respects NPM’s furthest frontier, the costs of a too narrow approach to public management have been major and there is considerable backlash. The picture of the public and semi-public utilities such as the railways in Britain—complex new organizational systems, lavish remuneration of managers and sometimes of investors, and often unimpressive, sometimes even disastrous, records of public service—means that copying British-style NPM has lost much of its credibility. One previously strong proselytiser for NPM -- including as the lead author of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s lead publication on public sector reform (Commonwealth Secretariat 1995) -- now notes, for example, the massive transaction costs of radical reforms, which can outweigh their intended efficiency gains (Manning 2001: 301). In the South the advocated reforms rested on tacit assumptions which were far less often fulfilled than in their OECD home: the existence of solid traditional public sector management skills and routines within the state and of highly organized publics which could discipline it (*ibid.*: 303-5). Manning draws consolation from the argument that the amount of damage NPM which admittedly did in some cases (p.298) cannot have been too great since it has not in reality been widely implemented in developing countries. ‘The excessive claims of NPM did little damage in the long run, [but] this was more by luck than by judgement’ (p.308).

NPM was sold – and bought – as if it were a well-established package. It was sold – and bought – as if it was a consistent system, even though it was a patchwork of different elements and tendencies, some for example market based and some hierarchy based; it assumed but did not cultivate public service commitment and loyalty. How can we do better than too readily and unselectively swallowing new Northern nostrums? Good public management requires thinking critically, thinking caringly, and thinking creatively. It also involves learning how to learn; sometimes unlearning, whatever we should discard; and helping others learn. Section 2 will look at one system for more critical and creative thinking; and Section 3 examines a complementary method, the careful dissection of key concepts, with special reference to the terms ‘public’ and ‘management’. I will use examples from the story of ‘New Public

Management' and from a different 1990s phenomenon, South Africa's 'New Public Administration Initiative'.

NPM and the interest in it were partly a reaction to failures. In Africa, for example, public enterprises have presented in large part a picture of inefficiency, losses, budgetary burdens, and poor services (Gasper, Schwella & Tangri, 2002). Dominant foreign sources of capital and of ideas have demanded privatisation, as a general principle, insisting that it could slash the government deficit and depoliticize business decisions. But, apart from job-losses and fears among political leaders about losing patronage opportunities, privatisation may have other dangers: non-indigenous control, given the weakness of local capital; continuing monopoly, given the smallness of most markets; withdrawal of some services, at least at prices accessible to ordinary people; and massive enrichment of tiny insider groups. Foreign profit-driven corporations might lack long-term loyalty to local development. But the big private players have been backed by a predominant market ideology, embodied in organizations like the IMF and some major consultancy groups. The IMF, convinced of the ideology and not hindered by much local knowledge, may automatically press to privatize (Stiglitz 2002). Most countries have lacked the room for maneuver and the managerial and research capacity to effectively prepare and defend their own agenda, defining and using a wider range of options. What is happening in South Africa in public management has much interest then for other African countries, even when we take into account the differences in conditions.

Amongst the promising examples in South Africa are the independent lines it has evolved on reorganizing state-owned enterprises, and its approach in education for public management.² "Government's policy with regard to State Owned Enterprises is more properly referred to as a restructuring programme, and not in the more simplistic terms of privatization. The programme was and remains designed around a multiple array of strategies, or mixes of options, that are designed to ensure the maximization of [stakeholder] interests defined in economic, social and development terms..." (Ministry of Public Enterprises, 2000). For example, when Telkom was 30 percent privatized this raised US \$1.2 billion, part of which has been used to extend the network to rural areas and townships. Telkom has made heavy net contributions to the public finances, while massively extending access, as required in its licence. It has moved from having one black manager for 60,000 employees in 1993, to having 50% black management (Gasper, Schwella & Tangri 2002; see also Horwitz 2001).

To progress with an agenda of public service and national development—for example, adopting privatisation where appropriate and not otherwise, and regulating it effectively—requires substantial

² See also the critiques of Northern NPM orthodoxy, especially for public services in a country like South Africa, by leading South African civil servants, in Mokgoro (2002) and Ngema (2002); and a critical sifting of Northern management literature on leadership in Diphofa (2003).

resources of national commitment and inspiration, of public service capacity, ideas and ethics, and a coherent ideology different from the fundamentalism of the global market. When we look at the great success stories of East and South East Asia, we see in every case that those resources were mobilized, invested in, and used. For: Who will regulate the regulators? What will make and keep them—and the publicly oriented but effective managers who are needed—trained, motivated, and loyal? In the private profit-driven sector, big money buys influence, seeks out good staff, invests massively in their loyalty and skills, pays for research and for publicists to spread ideas. The public sector (including all publicly-oriented organizations, not just state-owned ones) has to invest seriously and steadily in ideas, institutions and training, if it is not to be dominated by forces of private wealth.

In the early 1990s South African training and education for public policy and public management were still parts of the apartheid world. Starting with the New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI) from 1991, exemplified in the deservedly influential 1991 Mount Grace conference papers, great advances were made through the 1990s in reaching further beyond only whites and in establishing programmes for post-apartheid. This involved three moves intellectually: from ‘government’ thinking to ‘governance’ thinking, namely, societal management through the interaction of many agencies and social forces; from rule-following ‘administration’ to outcomes-oriented ‘management’; and from a detached ‘education’ separated from ‘training’ to more fruitfully interrelated streams of work (Cawthra 1999; see also Swilling & Wooldridge, 1997). A notion of public management was created. In addition, the old division between white-oriented ‘Public Administration’ and black-oriented ‘Development Administration’ was abolished. Both had been devalued by their apartheid separation. In South African parlance, the ‘public and development discipline’ was created. It has contributed substantially to South Africa’s remarkable transition and its ability to think relatively independently and effectively in public policy and management (see e.g. Wessels and Pauw eds 1999).

By the end of the decade, the ‘New Public Management’ promoted by international agencies, and competition from international educational providers, notably offering general management education, had arrived in South Africa. The reactive vision of NPAI and the ‘public and development’ movement did not yet establish a sufficient approach. The jargon-terms ‘the public and development sectors’ and ‘the public and development discipline’ left much obscure. ‘Public and development’, that noun-free, adjective-heavy emergent field, had to reflect on its intellectual identity for the longer-term. Otherwise it could be sidelined or even eaten by competitors, such as adjective-free, heavy-noun ‘management’. Terms for the new movement have evolved, from ‘public policy and development administration’ in the early 90s, to ‘public and development management’ by the mid 90s, with ‘policy’ and ‘administration’ trumped

by ‘management’; and then to ‘public management’, with ‘public’ swallowing ‘development’.³ The danger is of ‘public’ itself being swallowed, leaving just ‘management’. Section 3 considers this rise of ‘management’ and threat to ‘development’. I will argue for the need above all to retain and strengthen ‘public’, clarifying and promoting a number of dimensions of the concept, beyond merely ‘State’ and State-society interaction; and also for keeping alternative senses of ‘development’ and ‘management’ to the fore, to prevent monopolization of these terms by the ideas of the corporate world.

2. Critical and uncritical thinking

Learning in public management in the past: nature and limitations

Christopher Hood has examined why and how administrative doctrines often get adopted without a good basis of evidence. His book with Michael Jackson called *Administrative Argument* suggests that politically successful arguments in the past about principles for administration have rarely been based on extensive reliable data or careful logic and comparison with alternatives. More often they have relied on appeals to authority, metaphors, proverbs, and selected supportive examples. Yet as Herbert Simon pointed out in his *Administrative Behavior*, for every one of these administration proverbs there is a contradictory one, equally plausible, that is ignored – until the next wave in administrative fashion when those opposite views may become a new orthodoxy. *Administrative Argument* catalogues 99 proverb-like doctrines in administration, about who should do what or how, and discusses what influences which doctrines get picked out when. Simon wanted to establish administration on a more scientific basis, by precise large-scale testing of which doctrines work when and where. But the record of that sort of work in academic public administration has been rather indecisive and short of influence, since it rarely gives bold, inspiring, sweeping conclusions—situations and criteria have so many aspects, vary so much and keep on changing.

Far more influential, argue Hood and Jackson, have been approaches which contain attractively-packaged sets of administration proverbs and satisfy all or most the following six requirements. First, they must pick up a felt mood of the time. NPM matched a desire to ‘jack up’ the public sector and cut costs. In some countries, for example, the swing voter group was now relatively well-off and averse to more taxes.

Second, the approaches use persuasive metaphors and build on appealing and widespread ‘common-sense’ ideas. NPM stressed masterful ‘management’ (the word comes from the training of

³ JUPMET, the organization founded in 1995-6 which actively links the six postgraduate schools of public administration / management in South Africa, adopted ‘Public Management’ in its title.

horses) rather than more modest 'administration', and equated budget-cutting with fitness and losing weight: 'mean' became redefined as 'lean'. It relied on simple pictures provided by economists, that people are restless calculators oriented to financial incentives and predominantly self-interested. Only vivid simple images are likely to capture the imagination of enough people and be remembered and used. This is how business management 'gurus' work. Metaphors also genuinely help people to think and to be more creative.

Third, they should be stated in general terms which allow different groups to interpret the package differently, in line with their concerns. NPM's 'performance' talk could appeal both to cost-cutters, interested in financial performance, and to quality-raisers.

Fourth, the approach promotes the private interests of some influential groups while declaring that it serves the public good. NPM schemes, for example, have involved not just well-intentioned copying of a current fashion but sometimes large rewards for top public officials, who have moved towards private sector type remuneration packages and who after leaving the public sector have frequently entered interested-party private companies.

Fifth, examples and comparisons are used to give reasoned support, but only selected ones which support the pre-set conclusions. The examples often come as easy-to-remember stories, parables of failure or success, like we see in much management-guru literature. NPM presented inspirational stories: of the bad old ways and the shining modern alternative. It ignored cases which didn't fit.

Sixth, the approach is proposed in a forceful dramatic way, which induces people to accept its story and conclusions even in the absence of solid evidence; for example by insisting that a crisis demands immediate action. At a time of fear of being outcompeted by Japan and others, the ideas which Tom Peters's famous *In Search of Excellence* (1982) put forward from study of a few successful American companies had considerable impact, even in public management and other countries. (Ten years later most of the companies had collapsed.)

These six factors help explain, propose Hood and Jackson, how packages of ideas from business management and economics—NPM drew from both sources—have often become more influential in public management than ideas from the public administration discipline itself, which were more complex, unmarketed, and harder to use. Economics-based reasoning has had the added advantage that, given its boldly oversimplified picture of people's motives, it builds impressive-looking mathematical models of behaviour which give definite predictions. This provides a direction and a feeling of decisiveness. Yet the oversimplification is dangerous.

How might we do any better: think independently and yet influence and motivate? One lesson, especially from the study of public administration, is the importance of being empirical, case-specific, and respecting complexity. From the history of ideas and administration, we see the need for sensitivity to key

concepts and how they have emerged. Another lesson, not least from economics, is the power of a systematic approach to thinking. And from business management especially we can draw a lesson about the power of metaphors and stories, for seeing new angles, communicating, and persuading. How can we combine these requirements? I will make some suggestions, and will indicate in particular how a fairly simple system of argument analysis can often help.

A system for thinking critically

In a classic study on *Towards a Philosophy of Administration*, Christopher Hodgkinson showed how administration consists in large part of the clarification, testing, communication and follow-up of evaluative statements. Hence strong skills for handling language, logic, and discussing values are essential. Systems of pat answers inhibit us from thinking and learning. We need methods that help us to identify and check meanings and assumptions and to construct and assess counter-arguments.

The following system uses two tables for analysis. The first table is for examining carefully the components and meanings in a statement or text. Only if we have clarified meanings are we ready to check logic. The second table is for then formulating the structure of the argument, to see how and how well the components fit together.⁴

Just as when we proof-read our own work we normally miss some errors, when routinely reading a complex text we normally miss many significant aspects. Often our minds too readily repeat the old scenarios with which we are familiar, rather than freshly and precisely examine what lies in front of us. In the first part of the system we therefore look closely, line-by-line and word-by-word, at the selected text or key extract. We place it in the first column of a table and divide it into sections. This helps us to get close to a position and examine all its parts in detail, and yet keep a critical distance, so as to be able to think about it in a detached way.

⁴ The first table adapts the method of argument analysis in Scriven (1976). The second adapts the format for viewing policy arguments in Dunn (1994).

Table 1: A format for systematic investigation of a text's meanings and main components

THE TEXT	COMMENTS ON MEANINGS	A REWORDING OF KEY COMPONENTS, TO TEST MEANINGS	MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS IDENTIFIED IN THE TEXT
Section 1			
Section 2			
.....			

In the second column of this table one identifies and comments on key words and phrases. Some people say ‘New Public Management’ was in fact largely *old private* management, which is often different from what successful modern private sector companies try for. Bringing business practices into public administration has been tried since the late 19th century; and many NPM components, like performance-related pay, were widespread even much earlier. Hood and Jackson suggest that NPM presented itself as ‘New’ in order to avoid attention to the mixed record of previous attempts on the same lines and to why they had declined.

One important guideline is to examine the major figures-of-speech, the cases where words are not used with their literal meaning. Some figures are found on the surface. (The previous sentence is itself a figure of speech, a metaphor.) Some lie deeper, more subtly ingrained (notice the metaphors in both these clauses), such as the original analogy of ‘management’ to close manual control, of animals.

Another guideline is to identify language which gives or suggests praise or criticism, because it often points towards the conclusions of the text. Sometimes we can usefully invest in making a third column, in which one takes the key words and phrases and rewords them more neutrally or with an opposite evaluative direction. Thinking about alternative choices of words helps to clarify the conclusions which the actual choice of words led towards; and it helps one to find possible counter-arguments, other ways of viewing the same situation, against which the text should be compared when we judge it overall.

In the final column one then identifies the main conclusions and assumptions of the text, both the stated ones and those which are unstated or hinted at. So overall the first table can look like Table 1.

The second part of the method takes the results from the first table: the identified meanings, components, assumptions and conclusions. In a second table we then lay out for each important conclusion the basis on which it is proposed--the asserted or assumed data and principles--and the possible counter-arguments. The possible counterarguments (rebuttals) can either be direct doubts about the identified data and principle(s), or other doubts or exceptions concerning the claim. They provide the seeds of possible alternative positions, either as revisions of the original position or radically different.

Table 2: A format for synthesis of a text's propositions and investigation of their cogency

<i>I Claim [this conclusion],</i>	<i>Given this Data (empirical facts)</i>	<i>and this Principle (or principles =general, theoretical and/or value statements);</i>	<i>Unless (/except when) one or more of these counter-arguments applies</i>
Conclusion 1	Data 1.1, (1.2, ...)	Principle 1.1, (1.2, ...)	Rebuttal 1.1, (1.2, 1.3, ...)
Conclusion 2	Data 2.1, (2.2, ...)	Principle 2.1, (2.2, ...)	Rebuttal 2.1, (2.2, 2.3, ...)
.....

The system is presented in more detail in Gasper (2000b) through an examination of texts from Southern African policy debates. The procedure typically generates significant added insight about what a text says, and provides a basis for evaluating and when necessary changing it. For example, Gasper (2003) analyses the section on corruption in the important mid 1990s study with which the Commonwealth Secretariat launched its publications series for improving public service management. Sentence-by-sentence and sometimes word-by-word examination takes us behind the screens of euphemism in international agency discourse and shows the tensions in the negotiated text. It reveals how, behind diplomatically general formulations, low-income countries are treated as empirically different (supposedly more corrupt and in need of systemic and cultural change) yet on the other hand subjected to the same policy approach as specified for high-income countries: an economic perspective that focuses on altering the balance of prospective risks and rewards attached to corrupt behaviour.

Here we look further at the same Commonwealth Secretariat publication, not this time at a single passage but at a series of passages and at the messages on public sector management from the document as a whole.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's advocacy of public sector reform -- and privatisation

Under the carefully edited surface of *From Problem to Solution* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995) lay mixed messages. Some parts of the study were oriented to privatisation, and were in tension with other parts which believed instead in internal public sector reform. This emerges from studying the whole report with an eye for key passages, which one finds particularly near its beginning and end; and by then analysing the identified passages in parallel to each other, as shown in Table 3. The table probes the meanings conveyed by terms, including in its third column by re-wording to see what difference the actual choice of words made. Some rewordings used in the table are intensifications or clarifications of the position in the text but some are doubts and proto-rebuttals.

The mixed messages could reflect the involvement of different editorial hands, with some coming in at a later stage to counteract or tone down the strong criticisms of government activity; as in the sections on page 8 of the study which are examined in the table. We find however still a main message, re-emerging in key passages towards the end of the document (pp. 51, 53, 67) where the recommended roles of the various different policy options are stated in relation to each other. While many policy measures are presented in the report, often in detail, ultimately privatisation seems to receive pride of place: both in the short term by being the first option to consider, before others, and in the long run as the assumed final option to which governments will be forced to turn, as the others arguably become less and less effective.

Due to length limitations I have not presented also a second table containing a synthesis of the identified components into a tidied set of explicit propositions and possible counter-arguments. Interested readers may like to undertake that exercise for themselves; and to read Manning (2001)'s partial retraction of *From Problem to Solution's* recommendations, after more exposure to experience of how the proposed solutions could generate major new problems.

Table 3: Examination of the Commonwealth Secretariat's published position on public sector management

THE TEXTS (extracts from Commonwealth Secretariat 1995)	COMMENTS ON MEANING AND STYLE	POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE WORDINGS	IDENTIFICATION OF TEXT'S CONCLUSIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS
<i>FROM PROBLEM TO SOLUTION</i> [Title of the report]	1. Meaning: not just a diagnosis of weaknesses but an identification of cures. 2. Connotation: that there is a single shared problem and a single shared solution – even though some parts of the report rebut this.	From Problems to Solutions	Assumption: This report reveals the single shared problem and single shared solution. Background: The existence of a Management Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat (CS) encourages the idea of important commonality in problems and solutions in member countries.
<i>Within a few decades, government expenditures had acquired a reputation worldwide, with a few notable exceptions, for poor products, services and attitudes.</i> (p.4)	1 Within a few decades since what? Implicitly, the independence of former Imperial possessions. 2. Only a few exceptions - is this true? It is truer for ex-colonies, but still overstated.	One or two generations after independence, the public sector throughout ex-colonies is known for poor performance.	Assumptions on audience: - The primary function of the report is to channel ideas from North to South, without being so crude as to say so openly. - While the rich North is unlikely to pay much attention to the CS, the poor South is both problematic and open to influence, especially if neither point is too openly stated.
<i>Traditionally, the shortcomings of the public service have been seen as organisational problems capable of solution by appropriate applications of political will, powerful ideas, and managerial determination. Recent years have seen a new problem identified – government itself.</i> (p.6)	'have been seen as' is used to record the traditional view; more emphatic and supportive is the term 'identified', used for the new view. Later the 'new problem identified' is specified as government over-ambition, but here it is introduced in a more dramatic and anti-government way, as 'government itself'.	The traditional view sees public sector problems as soluble. The stronger new view sees them as inherent to government. [Hence privatisation would be the main line of response, rather than public sector reform – contrary to the focus of most of the report; see the extract below from p.51.]	(Implied) Conclusion: Our starting point presumption should be that government is a problem not a solution.
<i>It has been argued with increasing force that it is the over-ambitious scale of government, seeking to intervene and provide services in areas where it has no proven track record of success, that is the problem.</i> (p.6 continued)	1. 'with increasing force' implies strength, not just intensity, of argument; so support is implied for this view. An opposed view is reported on p.8 in sceptical fashion. 2. 'a new problem' has quickly been turned into 'the problem': as in the report's title.	Governments are doing too much that they are unfitted to do.	Implied conclusion: Governments are doing too much that they are unfitted to do. [Remark: If governments work only in areas of already proven success, they will never find new ones.]
<i>The overriding concern with economic growth has led to a re-focusing and narrowing of national goals, suggesting that there must also be a re-focusing and narrowing of government institutions and responsibilities.</i> (p.6 continued)	'Overriding concern': - Is this true? Note the emergence also of e.g. 'Human Development'; - Overriding concern by whom? Business sectors? 'Must be': no choice is left.	In some economically regressing countries, governments have felt obliged to concentrate on a few economic issues. Business sectors in many countries would like government to do that.	Implied conclusion: governments must do less.
<i>...Despite consensus on the need for change, there continues to be controversy on the appropriate role of the state.</i> (p.6, later)	The fact of controversy weakens the earlier claim of an 'overriding concern'; as we will see on p.8.	Not everyone agrees with the business sectors.	Conclusion: People understand that the old situation must be changed, but some remain confused by old arguments for it.

<p><i>NEW ROLES – CONCERNS FOR CHANGE</i> <i>In some countries, concern has been expressed that the extensive changes in the role of government currently being considered are not always based on a sufficient awareness of local conditions. The political leadership of some developing countries have argued that failures in development planning are not because of the level of state intervention but because of its nature... in not allowing for popular participation, in not addressing the unique social environments, and in not encouraging transparency and accountability.</i> <p>(p.8)</p> </p>	<p>The subsection records doubts raised in ‘the South’ about New Public Management. However, the title seems to reduce the doubts to worries over change, mere conservatism.</p> <p>The doubts are attributed to ‘The political leadership’ [with the earlier ‘some countries’ now identified as ‘some developing countries’], as if the doubts are not shared by many others too.</p>	<p>In some poor countries, leaders afraid of change defend their traditional policies, by arguing that these policies have been poorly implemented and could be handled better.</p>	<p>Implied Conclusion: the arguments against reducing the role of government are weak.</p>
<p><i>Government was not in error in setting itself its tasks, the argument runs, it failed in the manner in which it sought to undertake them. It is the style of management and not the role of government which is the problem. The reasons for government involvement in economic and social management have not disappeared. The lack of domestic private capital, the risk of foreign domination of the economy...</i> <p>(p.8 contd.)</p> </p>	<p>‘the argument runs’: distance is taken from this position, in contrast to way in which the opposed position was presented earlier (it ‘has been argued with increasing force’)</p>	<p>Old arguments for extensive government involvement in economic and social management continue to be recited – regardless of the worldwide record of poor performance ...</p>	
<p><i>Against that background, pressure to review and reduce the role of government may appear to threaten a system in which there is already insufficient experience, inadequate resources and a volatile political environment and could be destabilising; incremental improvement of the basics may be more pertinent.</i> <p>(later on p.8)</p> </p>	<p>‘may appear to threaten’, and ‘may be more pertinent’: again we find a distanced, somewhat sceptical reporting of this viewpoint – but it is included, not ignored, even if rather as an afterthought or response to comments</p>	<p>... -- together with new arguments that changing the role of government would be destabilizing, given all the problems that make government’s performance so weak!</p>	
<p>..... <i>Where there is no strategic reason why an activity should be privatised, corporatisation or contracting out should be considered.</i> (p.51)</p>	<p>The recommended sequence of discussion is: first consider privatisation. ‘Strategic reasons’ can be political too.</p>	<p>First, consider privatisation: that is the starting point for discussion.</p>	<p>Implied Conclusion: In the short run, privatisation is the base case, the reference point; and in the long run, privatisation is the road ahead.</p>
<p><i>In some limited situations, where contracting out is not feasible because of market weaknesses or political restrictions, the development of internal markets is being explored with, as yet, uncertain results.</i> (p.53)</p>	<p>Similarly, where there is not full privatisation of management, privatisation of supply (‘contracting-out’) is the presumed most plausible solution.</p>	<p>If not privatising, then consider contracting-out to the private sector. Only in a few cases are other possibilities worth considering.</p>	
<p><i>This increasingly diverse public service will be less and less amenable to hierarchical management or to control by every more detailed contractual relationships.</i> (p.67)</p>	<p>And therefore the case for privatisation will increase, according to this study.</p>	<p>But in the long run, corporatisation or contracting out will be less and less satisfactory.</p>	

3. Analysing key terms: meanings of ‘public’, ‘management’ and ‘public management’

An essential part of critical thinking is the thoughtful re-investigation of key terms. None is more key in public policy, administration and management than ‘public’ itself, yet its meaning is subject to much confusion. In almost the same breath we say ‘public’ for ‘State’, as in ‘the public sector’, and then discuss how this public sector deals with those outside it, ‘the public’. Despite its claim to newness, NPM showed too little thought here, due to its reliance on a generalized model of the market and on the conventional economics conception of public goods. More reflective positions may well vary from country to country. One cannot draw an answer from off a foreign shelf (Ngema 2002). In South Africa the meaning of ‘public’ has for historic reasons its own special confusions. There appears no consistent stance on whether the public sector is more than the State sector and whether it includes NGOs and CBOs or not; hence the addition sometimes to ‘public sector’ of the phrase ‘and development sectors’.

Different understandings of what is feasible and desirable for a political community lead to different delineations of the public sphere. We will see limitations of the neoclassical economics concept of ‘public good’ (non-rivalrous and non-excludable goods) for discussing the choices involved. For public administration we need rather to consider public goods as identified priorities within a political community, whose supply is to be promoted through some form of ‘public action’. State action is only one such form: the State is (in principle) merely a tool of a political community, one available tool amongst others. Ideals of ‘public service’ and public-spiritedness are critically important for this operation of community and State. Shrinkage of the notion of ‘public’ to that in neoclassical economics matches a domination of the political community by wealth.

Conceptions of ‘public’ reflect conceptions of political community

‘Public’ comes from the Latin *publicus*, derived in turn from *pubes* meaning adult (cf. ‘puberty’). It now has a complex of meanings (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1996), including three as an adjective: (1) of or concerning the people as a whole, (2) of or involved in the affairs of the community, and (3) provided by or concerning local or central government (as in ‘the public sector’; but not provided just for government itself, instead provided with an orientation to the whole public; similarly, public goods are not only provided by the State). In addition there are two meanings as a noun: (4) the community in general, and (5) a section of the community having a particular interest or in some special connection.

Conceptions of ‘public’ reflect theories of what is a political community and of how it can and should perform. The term ‘the community’ becomes dangerous when given a *Gemeinschaft* interpretation, requiring a whole shared culture: dangerous because it is used to exclude. ‘Public’ requires rather a

Gesellschaft interpretation, of citizens living together and co-operating according to common rules. It is a reference to a political community, not to cultural homogeneity. The perception in some recent ‘New Public Management’ of citizens as only customers is another dangerous reduction.⁵

Let us identify alternative criteria for using the term ‘public’, and some of the issues which arise.

1. *Non-profit*. But many public agencies, with public purposes according to other criteria in this list, operate on a profit basis.
2. *Inter-organizational*: the public arena is characteristically multi-actor, multi-jurisdiction, multi-authority. This is a secondary characteristic, a consequence of more central features.
3. *That which is managed or held in common*. This criterion seems more central, but omits one basic feature of the term, its critical, normative, force: people declare that issue X *is* a matter of public concern, i.e. should be subject to community attention and steering even if it presently is not; and conversely that issue Y is *not*, i.e. should not be, a matter for public concern even if it presently is subject to community regulation.
4. *That which should be managed in common*. This fourth criterion is therefore essential, as partner to the third. Questions arising include: ‘Should’ by what criteria? In common amongst whom? Managed in which respects? By which modalities? The remaining three criteria represent lines for discussing the question of what should be in the public arena.
5. *Everything in a polity that is not ‘private’*. By itself this criterion gives no answers but provides a line for thought and critique. Feminists have noted, for example, how the costs borne by women have often been treated as ‘private’ and hence not a topic for public discussion or action.
6. *Activities or matters which affect other people, especially otherwise than through markets*. Which effects are considered significant in type or quantity, which affected groups are considered significant, and as judged by whom? These notions vary and evolve. Activities which only benefit oneself are in this conception not considered ‘public’.
7. *Activities or matters which harm other people*. In this narrower interpretation, behaviours should be treated as in the ‘private’ sphere as long as no one else is harmed.

One finds all these criteria, and more, mentioned in public policy texts, typically without being distinguished (see e.g. the opening pages of Parsons 1995). Yet they do not all move together, and hence the field is not one with tidy, clear, or agreed boundaries.

Definitions of the field(s) of public policy and public administration reflect contested notions of the functioning and ordering of societies: about the capacity of markets; about duties to and for others;

⁵ The Commonwealth Secretariat report followed New Public Management in declaring ‘The term “customer” has a broad meaning: any citizen engaged with government’ (1995:37) – but why not then say ‘citizen’? The customer language can bias definition of the public to those who pay. It impoverishes the picture of relationships in a polity.

about the degree of sustainable public-spiritedness; about the capacity of States or other non-market action; and hence about the degree to which non-market action should be legitimated by extension of the label 'public'. In market-based social philosophies there is a large private sphere; to operate outside the market is only justified if it remedies culpable harm to others who are recognised as juridically distinct and important; public benefit is seen only as the sum of the private benefits of separate individuals; and the public sphere is only to provide a frame for markets and to remedy the (supposedly) exceptional market failures, typically by action that is itself organized on (quasi-) market principles. Public service becomes conceived purely on a supplier-customer model: to deliver contractually specified services (Swilling & Wooldridge 1997).

If instead we consider duties more extensive, markets frequently unsatisfactory, public-spiritedness sustainably high, and non-market action often efficacious, then the label 'public' will be extended broadly. Public administration can be seen as broader than government administration. For: 'Public is a pre-governmental concept which broadly describes the full range of human collective activities which are outside of our private homes and distinct from the market of the private pursuit of gain' (Frederickson, 1996: 299). This differs significantly from the modern economics concept of public goods.

Public goods

Mainstream economics has focused on the market, and requires goods that are rivalrous and excludable in order for its predictive and prescriptive claims to have more plausibility.⁶ The neo-classical theory of public goods then only offers a definition by contrast. Public goods are defined as problem cases: goods which are non-rivalrous and/or non-excludable. The pure public good (or bad) is both. It affects others, not only the producer and buyer, and the others cannot (feasibly) be excluded, nor does their 'participation' reduce the effects on producer and buyer. This combination makes 'free-riding' by all possible, and inhibits funding and hence provision of the good. Such a definition is not sufficient for understanding the public sphere and its constructed nature. It can be used to reduce public action to what neo-classical economics understands.

Firstly, which 'others' are considered is a matter for political choice. For long in South Africa, blacks were excluded from the polity and likely not to be counted for many purposes. In some cases, foreigners are not counted. Who is considered as 'the public' depends on the context and on prevailing values. Economics' utilitarian formation makes it potentially consistent with including all races; but its

⁶ Rivalrousness: my consumption of a good means that you cannot consume it. Excludability: access to a good can be controlled; exclusion is feasible at an affordable price.

reliance on the market leads it typically towards counting only those with money to make themselves heard.

Secondly, being non-rivalrous and non-excludable does not make a good publicly available; non-excludability often makes that more difficult. What makes such a good publicly available, and hence a public good in the ordinary sense of the term, is (a) a decision that it is important, and then (b) some form of public action. What is chosen for actual public provision is influenced by ideas about what *should be* publicly provided, including about what are merit goods. In all countries and times this covers far less than all non-excludables; and it also includes some excludables. Education and health care are both rivalrous and excludable services; yet both may be provided by public agents to be accessible to ordinary people, often at a subsidized price, because they are seen as deserving priority: as merit goods and because their ‘consumption’ brings important favourable external effects.

Let us take a further example, public spaces. They belong to the family of what Joseph Raz and John Gray call ‘inherently public goods’, which

‘do not necessarily satisfy the technical requirements of an economic public good.. [but] are ingredients in a worthwhile form of common life. Consider public parks in the context of a modern city [DG: a facility especially valued by many poorer people]... There are, of course, no insuperable technical obstacles to turning urban parks into private consumption goods... [But] Public spaces for recreation and for lingering, whether streets, squares or parks, are necessary ingredients in the common life of cities, as conceived in the European tradition and elsewhere. Where such public places atrophy or disappear, become too dangerous or too unsightly to be occupied... the common life of the city has been compromised or lost. This is a nemesis, long reached in many American urban settlements and not far off in some British and European cities, which market institutions can do little to prevent. It is only one example...of the indifference of market institutions to inherently public goods’ (Gray, 1993: 134).

So we have various types of definition of public goods:

- *analytic*: as in economic theory, to discuss what it considers to be exceptions as seen from its intellectual starting point, the model of the well-functioning market;
- *descriptive*: goods/services provided by public agents; or guaranteed by public bodies; or provided with a full or partial public subsidy;
- *prescriptive*: goods/services which should be provided/guaranteed/subsidized by public bodies.

Wuyts et al. (1992) do not adopt the neoclassical economics definition. Drawing on de Swaan (1988), they emphasise not merely that a good is hard to provide via markets but the aspects of prioritization and public action, including the processes of debate about what are to be accepted as public problems, what are the boundaries and responsibilities of the political community, and hence what are

public needs and ‘public goods’. These debates vary across time and place, as seen in Wuyts’s contrasting histories of the extension of water and sewer networks in 19th century European cities and 20th century Johannesburg. Richer groups in Europe’s expanding cities, increasingly residentially secluded by income, paid private entrepreneurs who installed water and sanitation systems for their neighbourhoods. Eventually these public goods were extended by legislation and State subsidy to low-income areas, given the richer groups’ wish to eliminate epidemics that endangered and inconvenienced them too, and the growth of concern from increasingly organized medical and State bureaucracies and general public opinion. In South African cities, richer groups ‘solved’ the problem of insanitary low-income areas not by extending public provision to them but, from the 1930s onwards, by forced removal of their populations to remote townships. It was bus transportation, to ensure timely arrival of black labour each day in the ‘white’ areas, which became a State-recognized public good and recipient of subsidies.

In the USA, whereas shared public spaces in cities can be neglected, the provision of security and countering of crime have emerged as prioritized public goods. Tax-breaks and public funds are channelled to these sectors, whose products are increasingly commodities for sale by private suppliers. These booming new industries have a vested interest in the reproduction of classes of criminals and prisoners. The USA now has two million persons in prisons, often privately run.

Which are ‘public agents’ and ‘public bodies’? Families, numerous sorts of association, and NGOs/PVOs have proven ability to make major direct contributions to quality of life. Further, for State action to be beneficial, broader public action of various types is necessary: to generate the State action, discipline it, and complement it. Thus the conception of *public action* covers more than action by the State. For Mackintosh (1992) it is purposive collective action, not all of which will be publicly beneficial. For Dreze and Sen it is instead action for public benefit, which can be done by various agents, private agents too. Often, even typically, it will involve various organizations. We arrive at a broader conception, of governance: the ‘array of ways in which interplay between the State, the market, and society is ordered’ (‘Insights’, no.23, 1997; IDS Sussex).

‘Public’ refers to a *series* of contrasts with the untrammelled market, not only the issues of ownership or profit-orientation: in the criteria used, going beyond considering only market and market-equivalent impacts; in the greater scope of effects considered, concerning types of effect and the greater range of affected people considered; in the greater range of people to be involved in discussion and decision-making, within an arena for debate of matters of common concern, not an army or only a market; and thus overall in the broader range of values advocated, including public spirit and concern for others, not only self-interest and (at best) agreement-following. All of these extensions will be at risk if public management veers away from emphasizing and understanding the concept of ‘public’ and the processes

that define and constitute a public, a political community, and becomes instead more exclusively and conventionally managerial.

Balancing ‘management’ with ‘development’ and ‘policy’

In contrast to the term 'public', the historical origins of the term 'management' are in the training of horses.⁷ 'Management' was however a consciously imported term in the South African 'New Public Administration Initiative', and by the mid-1990s had even substantially displaced 'administration'. 'Public Management' was widely adopted, partly to assert a chosen focus within public administration, partly to assert difference from more traditional schools and departments.

Internationally, there is considerable confusion over the term 'public management' and no consistent usage internationally—hence in fact no consistent differences in usage between it and 'public administration'. Kettl & Milward's state-of-the-art survey of public management reveals many different definitions.⁸ In reality 'public management' is a name adopted by almost any new stream in public administration that reacts against the conventional shape which the field had acquired: State-centred, organization-focused, maintenance-oriented. 'Public management' is then used to at least suggest results-orientation, plus implicitly—but not always in practice—flexibility about means, and therefore sometimes—but regrettably far from always—foci on State-society issues and societal self-management too. It is certainly broader than market-inspired 'New Public Management', some of which seemed to be dated private management, imported to discipline a sector of which less was expected (Pollitt, 1993, 1995).

The term 'management' brought the connotation of private sector know-how, can-do spirit, and delivery of results. The danger of the term in the past quarter century has been the ideology that there is a universally valid 'management', adopted from a particular narrow vision of Anglo-American private sector practice, which should be imposed on all sectors and all countries: 'managerialism'. Pollitt provides an excellent diagnosis and critique. In South Africa, a depoliticised conception of 'management' fitted well with the adaptation by governing elites from the late 1970s onwards to the national and international opposition to the apartheid system, by transference of more and more functions and responsibilities outside the State (Tapscott, 1995, 1997).

⁷ The source words are the same as for 'manual' and 'manège': the Italian *maneggiare*, and *maneggio*, the training of a horse; from *mano* (hand), from the Latin *manus* [Webster's].

⁸ Kettl himself sees public management as having a program- (and hence inter-organizational) focus, not administration's organization-focus. Yet amongst his contributors, Weimer & Vining treat public management as intra-organizational design and executive functions (so excluding policy analysis); and Guy Peters shuns the term public management as unenlightening, and instead delineates several different old and new schools of thought within public administration.

Public administration itself has existed throughout its modern era, the past century, at the intersection of political science and generic management, and been widely considered as a sub-discipline of one or both. It can perhaps better be understood as an *inter-disciplinary field*--a field at the crossroads of several disciplines and a set of practical demands--which in comparison to general management requires stronger involvement also from law, economics, history, and some other disciplines too. For example for Erwin Schwella, public administration is a domain of study, to which many approaches can validly be taken, including economics perspectives, legal perspectives, management perspectives, and policy perspectives. He sees public management as then a sub-focus within public administration (Schwella 1999).

There is no need for full consensus on disciplinary identity and location: there are many legitimate intellectual bases, from various disciplines and the schools within them; there is room for different specializations and niches within public administration; and we gain through competition of ideas. A danger exists, however, given the ambiguity of 'management', of a narrowing of the whole field if 'public management' is used to mean both 1. a new-look, more relevant successor to public administration, which hence dominates whole departments and curricula and funding, and also 2. just one possible legitimate emphasis within public administration. For if public management is one possible emphasis, then it cannot sustain monopoly claims. And if it were a broad successor to public administration, then it must provide space for various foci, including for example a policy-level focus too.

'Development' was another conscious NPAI importation to old South African public administration. The 1991 Mount Grace Declaration called for 'an explicit developmental focus', and 'a more relevant approach to the issues of governance in a developing society'. It redefined SA as a developing society, the large majority of whose population lived in absolute poverty; so it merged public administration and development administration (Fitzgerald, 1995). Public management for a developing country like South Africa, fast undergoing massive changes of many types, cannot work well by copying nostrums from public management in the rich North. The South African constitution of 1996 requires the public service to be development-oriented (Section 195(1)).

Some will feel that the role of the two terms is different: 'public' as more about the field for management, 'development' as more about its purposes and philosophy. Although the separation of 'public' and 'development' may seem untidy to some, these are adjectives not different territories, and the 'public and development' label raises questions which give entry points for necessary discussion. The arguments for retention of the 'development' title take it as a guiding interdisciplinary perspective about secular change and possible progress/regress, not as a set of separate and second-class studies. It became a tainted term in South Africa through its association with the Bantustans policy of 'separate development' from the 1950. Later the strategy of broader black pacification and cooptation through ameliorative

programmes from the late 1970s used the banner of ‘development’ as a supposedly neutral, consensual, economically obligatory approach (Tapscott, 1995, 1997). ‘Development’ was there seen as economic development plus its socio-political requirements, for the good of all, as determined by development economist experts. Yet this past history provides important counter-opportunities now. ‘Development’ can also function as an explicit, vital banner for emphasizing the interests of the poor majority. Claims that it is for the general good, or even good for all, establish an arena for raising the questions: who benefits? management for whom, by whom, and with whom? This questioning is vital in a massively divided society which can easily drift away from any priority to the have-nots, through incorporation of a minority of them. The governing political movement in South Africa represents an amorphous, variegated political alliance, with no one group dominant or likely to be (Lodge, 1999). That leaves possibilities both for argumentation to have influence, and for sliding away from mass interests, towards a neo-liberal or a parasitic state (Ngema 2003). Notwithstanding Tapscott’s valid warnings about how the term ‘development’ can be used and misused, the other alternatives--abandoning the term or leaving it to be monopolized by others--are worse.⁹

Similarly, without an explicit ‘policy’ orientation, ‘public and development’ or especially ‘public management’ will be more likely to disappear into generic management. Policy direction is then far more likely to come from unconsidered sources, not least the values embodied in the market. Value concealment brings domination by the monied and by those who are powerful in other ways.

Is attention to labels worthwhile? Arguably, what one has won in practice one may not need to instal in a label; and what one has not achieved in practice is unlikely to be won through control of labels. However, the processes of thinking and the content of the choices which lie behind labels are important and influential; and the labels help to remind and to guide. Hence the critical look we have taken here at ‘new’, ‘public’ and ‘management’.

4. Conclusion: Thinking critically, caringly, and creatively

Good public policy, management and administration require thinking that is disciplined and yet creative, independent and yet committed. I have suggested that the early 1990s South African New Public Administration Initiative’s work in re-examining some central concepts and promoting independent thinking in public administration education made a significant contribution to the encouraging aspects of independent-minded, critical and motivated public management that we see in post-apartheid South

⁹ Tapscott, like several others, puts considerable weight on James Ferguson’s elegant study of one project in Lesotho in the 1980s. I critically evaluate Ferguson’s generalizations from this one case, in Gasper (1996).

Africa; and that these can be further strengthened. Mental liberation is needed to draw fuller benefits from political liberation.

The system for critical analysis of key texts which we examined in Section 2 is one widely usable way to strengthen skills of purposeful rigorous thinking. It can contribute also to reflection on value assumptions, and to creative generation of alternatives and positions that express one's considered value commitments. Close examination of, for example, the images and metaphors that we and others use is often helpful in generating new ideas; and skill in mobilizing insightful metaphors helps communication.

Case studies are also very important. They can build credibility and stimulate integrated understanding and creativity. We need studies not only of failures but of successful turn-arounds and innovative thinking in redesigning the State. When can for instance retrenched workers receive shares in commercialized public enterprises, so that they benefit from later success? Success stories in State redesign exist, including various from East Asia, Europe, North America, and India. Those from India deserve looking at, since from a country which is not more privileged than much of Africa, and less privileged than South Africa, yet which has some strong national ethos and traditions of analysis independent of Washington and London. (See e.g. Khandwalla, 1988, 1999.) Nevertheless, public servants in Africa may find African cases the most useful. Ramaite, Director General for Public Service in South Africa, rightly calls for 'a shift away from the uncritical application of...models from other contexts' and for 'active documentation of local and contextually relevant...practices' (2002: 19). His Ministry's new journal for public service managers, *Service Delivery Review*, exemplifies this approach.

Case studies are vital not only in helping to strengthen skills of independent thinking and creativity; they can also help to motivate, to build confidence and commitment. Reforms which assume selfishness and do not praise and foster altruism (e.g., which allow private sector practice in public sector hospitals), might in practice foster more selfishness and undermine existing altruism. Some schools of public management in South Africa teach courses on public service ethics and ethos. These are essential, not luxury extras, as part of the task of ensuring that 'civil service' does not mean 'uncivil and not much service'. As one vital but fragile element of social capital, 'public service ethics are much easier to destroy than to build up' (Mackintosh, 1995:50). The content of such courses must go well beyond official codes of ethics. 'Ethos' includes the feeling of pride in the job, the spirit of public service, loyalty and confidence; based on a philosophy of public management and not only on a tool kit, and on knowledge of relevant achievements in public service, at home and abroad. *Service Delivery Review* encouragingly espouses such an agenda. Its second issue, for example, was entitled 'RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme] for the Soul', echoing a call by South Africa's Deputy President.

To effect the sort of rethinking and reorientation of 'public' in South Africa that was sketched earlier, some strong markers and supplements were required. The New Public Administration Initiative

deliberately brought in new terms, notably ‘policy’, ‘development’ and ‘management’. Are they still needed? I suggested yes for ‘policy’ and ‘development’, which could be at risk. The concept of ‘public and development management’ has represented a historically necessary variant of and emphasis within public administration in South Africa, where the term ‘development’ can now play two crucial roles. First, it can underline the claims and interests of the majority of the population, as opposed to the majorities of capital. Secondly, the ‘State’ connotation historically of ‘public administration’ has required that ‘development’ be used as an indicator of the worlds of public action beyond traditional public administration: hence ‘public and development management’. In the case of ‘management’ the issue is not how to sustain the concept but how to put brakes on indiscriminate and uncritical use. We need to complement ‘management’ by policy and development, otherwise unthinkingly the driving values are likely to become those of the market or of other forces of privilege. To advance the ideals of ‘Batho Pele’ (People First), and support a society-centred governance model for less elitist, more mass-oriented reconstruction and development, we require as one element a public and development management vision that embodies the themes that ‘public’ is more than ‘State’, and ‘the public’ is more than the monied; that ‘development’ means improvements for ordinary and disadvantaged people; and that accountability is to the broad public, not only to *chefs* or the market.

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