The New Public Management Paradigm Concept Analysis and Implications in the context of Cambodian Public Service Reform

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Abstract

This article discusses the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) concepts in the context of public service reform in Cambodia. There are three main concepts for discussion, which includes contracting out, decentralization and privatization of the public service. It is found that the idea of NPM was largely influenced by development partners and donors who are the main sources of funding for project development and implementation. Even though the government has been trying to adopt this modern concept of public management, the implementation itself has been significantly affected by the political culture, rampant corruption, and the lack of understanding of public service providers. It is recommended that institutional and legal-framework pre-adjustment, capacity building, and especially strong government determination before the implementation of such NPM concepts as contracting out, decentralization and privatization be applied.

Key words: New Public Management Paradigm, business-like, Public Service Delivery, Privatization, Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D), Contracting out

Introduction

Woodrow Wilson's concept of business-like Public Administration has had a profound impact on the paradigms of public administration, aiming to provide quality public service to citizens. New Public Management (NPM) Paradigm is among the newly-emerging concepts sharing common characteristics Woodrow Wilson's study "The Study of Public Administration". According to OECD (1995), NPM started between the 1970s and 1980s in the United Kingdom and the United States and was later practiced in the public administrative reforms by most OECD member countries. The countries' public service reforms resulted from poor economic performance, taxation problems, low public trust in the governments' responsiveness, and the low efficiency and effectiveness of governments' programs (Keating, 2001). It has been implemented as a result of governments' inability to manage the public sector through

bureaucratic waste, inefficient allocation of public resources, and low accountability to the public (Promberger & Rauskala, 2003).

Cambodia, a developing country in Southeast Asia, has experienced many decades of civil war. In 1975, the Cambodian administrative system was completely controlled by a communist traditional bureaucratic system in which people were deprived of public services which disappeared from the system and "all legal institutions and frameworks were destroyed including administrative system" Hauerstein (2014, p. 25). As a result, the post-war society witnessed a severe loss of key social infrastructure and human resources, poverty and other complex societal issues, all of which require profound attention from the government, including central and sub-national governments, and many other stakeholders: such as development partners, civil society, donors, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens, but still the administration was, in general, "poorly developed" (Rusten et al, 2004, p.132).

According to the Cambodian Council for Administrative Reform (CAR, 2006), the government has introduced modern mechanism of public service delivery which involves the implementation of one window service, Deconcentration and Decentralization (D&D) of public service, public enterprise with economic characteristics performance-based system, contracting out, and privatization.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the concepts of NPM and discuss whether it is applicable in the context of the Cambodian public service reform particularly in terms of contracting out, decentralization, and privatization. With this regard, the paper will seek to firstly investigate the concepts of NPM in depth, following by a literature review entailing various critics of NPM, and then overview the history of public service reform and its implementation in Cambodia, and finally discuss the NPM concepts of contracting out, decentralization, and privatization in the Cambodian public service reform.

I. Concepts of New Public Management

Concepts of NPM have been viewed as applying the values of private sector management and values in public service delivery through market-based and competition-based principles because the complex problems of efficiency and weak performance in government service cannot be simply solved by using the principle of bureaucracy (Hugues, 1998 &

Siddiquee, 2013 and Minogue, 2001). As a proponent of NPM, Starling (2011) indicates the new public management paradigm including five key perceptions: (1) high-quality public service; (2) the autonomy of public managers; (3) performance-based organizations; (4) sufficient human and technological resources, and; (5) competitive service.

NPM's market-oriented mechanism is also supported by Public Choice theory which believes that justified solutions of the private sector can be applied to that of the public sector through privatization. To illustrate, Minogue (2001) named some NPM tools: contracting out, privatization of public service, civil service reform, organization efficiency reform, merit-based system, and public-private partnership. Moreover, Meier and Bohte (2007, p. 205) give strong justification and assumption of privatization through "contracting out government services to private corporations [which] can improve competence because private corporations must produce superior services or they will cease to attract business." Privatization, according to Hope (2001, p.125), refers to "the transfer of operational control and responsibilities for government functions and services to the private sector – private voluntary organizations or private enterprises."

NPM theorists believe that improved socio-economic outcomes result from decentralization, the reduction of the government's roles, and application of market-oriented management (Hughes, 1998). Besides, new public management methods, according to Fatemin and Behmanesh (2012), must include clear structure of management and careful evaluation as well as reliable measurement of organizational measurement.

To clearly define NPM's principles, Hood (1991, p.4) illustrates some components of its doctrine with their justifications as follows:

Table 1: Doctrinal components of new public management

Doctrine	Meaning	Typical Justification
1. 'Hands-on professional management' in the public sector	Active, visible, discretionary control of organizations from named persons at the top, 'free to manage'	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility for action, not diffusion of power
Explicit standards and measures of performance	Definition of goals, targets, indicators of success, preferably expressed in quantitative terms, especially for professional services	Accountability requires clear statement of goals; efficiency requires 'hand look' at objectives
Greater emphasis on output controls	Resource allocation and rewards linked to measured performance; breakup of centralized bureaucracy-wide personnel management	Need to stress results rather than procedures
4. Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector	Break up of formerly 'monolithic' units, unbundling of U-form management systems into corporatized units around products, operating on decentralized 'one-line' budgets and dealing with one another on an 'armslength' basis	Need to create 'manageable' units, separate provision and production interests, gain efficiency advantages of use of contract or franchise arrangements inside as well as outside the public sector
5. Shift to greater competition in public sector	Move to term contracts and public tendering procedures	Rivalry as the key to lower costs and better standards
6. Stress on private-styles of management practice	Move away from military- style 'public serving ethic', greater flexibility in hiring and rewards; greater use of PR techniques	Need to use 'proven' private sector management tools in the public sector
7. Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use	Cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, resisting union demands, limiting 'compliance costs' to business	Need to check resource demands of public sector and 'do more with less'

Source: Hood, C. (1991). A Public Management for all Seasons? Public Administration. 69, 3-19

II. Literature Review

While NPM has been introduced and adopted in various parts of the world, it evokes not only impressive results but also distinctive criticisms by different scholars in the field of public administration.

Although NPM has been popular in most developed countries, it is experimental in Asian nations as well as many other developing countries. In Southeast Asia, for instance, Malaysia has started to privatize many of its public projects since 1983 (Singaravelloo, 2012); Macao's NPM initiative has been adopted since 1999 (Berman, 2011), and; Hong Kong has adopted its major NPM reform initiative since the 1990s (Lee, 2011). However, there is little evidence which suggests successful results of public administration reform using the NPM model in developing countries - particularly in Southeast Asia - because the concept of efficiency and effectiveness is strongly infected by corruption, interference of politicians and elite groups, and weak governance (Berman, 2011).

Studying the relationship between privatization and public-private partnerships in Malaysia, Singaravelloo (2012) asserts privatization proves an impressive achievement in replacing government service. He illustrates a case of private Japanese companies which helped train Malaysian civil servants as part of narrowing down the roles of government to govern the country but to facilitate the operation and monitor the performance of the companies taking over the public organizations.

However, critics of NPM practice argue that instead of generating efficiencies and lower cost of public service, NPM's practice of market-oriented mechanism leads to increasing state burdens and higher cost of service provision (Siddiquee, 2013). The attempts to privatize government services have been associated with extensive corruption, and this becomes even more complex especially when privatization is captured by the monopoly of interest groups (Meier and Bohte, 2007). Similarly, Hoods (1991) asserts that NPM has been used as a tool for the benefit of the elite rather than the general public. The elite, according to Hoods, are top public managers, senior officials and business elites. Hoods provides a solution for this criticism by citing Pollitt's (1990) argument to embrace the power of public service customers by the means of direct democracy, whereby they can directly select the leaders of various levels through elections.

In terms of accountability, critics see that the principal-agent approach of NPM fragments accountability to the public, as there is no clear accountability among different players such as non-government organizations, government agencies and private sectors. Those players are usually accountable to their fund providers and therefore are unlikely to respond to the people's needs (Craig and Porters, 2006; Moe, 1991; Jutting, 2003).

Despite containing efficiency among the core values of NPM, it has been criticized for its excessive emphasis on efficiency and the lack of concern for democratic values as well as civil rights and other such core values of public service as equality, and accountability, fairness, representation and participation (Fry & Raadschelders, 2014; Siddiquee, 2013; Gregory 2002).

Besides, while McCourt and Minogue (2001) embrace the essence of Deconcentration and Decentralisation (D&D) for the implementation of NPM in developing countries, Schneider (2002, p.1) argues "Decentralization biases political conflict" and decentralisation in terms of political transfer allows the rich or central power to politically pressurize lower levels of government. However, while UNDP views decentralization as a basic value of good governance in local levels, Smith (1985) argues that whether decentralisation is successful relies on the economic, socio-cultural and political situation of a country. Likewise, Huntington (1968) stresses that in developing countries, power must be concentrated because such countries do not have strong institutions and clear accountability of work and their systems are not complex enough to be able to adapt to modernized environments and processes. In contrast, if countries with a simple system try to adopt modern concepts of development without pre-adjusting their institutional capability, they will create extra burdens which prevent development.

III. Cambodian Public Service Reform

1. History and Background of Cambodian Public Service Reform

As Rajiani and Jumbri (2011), cited in Haque (2007), state, most countries including Cambodia in Southeast Asia, occupied under colonization for decades, have experienced strong colonial bureaucracy while struggling to adapt their system to the market-based mechanism of NPM. After colonization, the French administrative system was applied by state leaders (Heady 2001).

In 1975, the Cambodian administrative system was completely controlled by a communist traditional bureaucratic system in which people were deprived of their basic rights and public services disappeared from the system (Hauerstein, 2014). Public infrastructure such as healthcare, education, and local economic activities were severely prohibited and destroyed. Post-genocide Cambodia experienced massive loss of major social infrastructure, and human resources which are fundamental in the reconstruction of the country. The new constitution of Cambodia was adopted in 1993 after experiencing many decades of civil war and peace deterioration (Hauerstein, 2014). The adoption of the constitution marked the reappearance of various state institutions and societal administrative structures and one of the constitution's elements is, in theory, to protect Cambodian citizens from the state, which is contrary to the Khmer Rouge traditional laws, which placed strong emphasis on protecting social order rather than individual freedom and autonomy (Hauerstein, 2014). The new Constitution consists of such important elements as decentralization of powers and procedural rights which serve as a strong basis for adopting comprehensive administrative law whereby citizens have the right to complain against any unlawful acts of government and therefore to ask for compensation.

Subsequently, the First Decentralization Law on the Administration and Management of Communes/Sangkat in Cambodia was adopted in 2001. The law led to another Commune/Sangkat Election law, which emphasized the roles of commune officials to better serve the public. Then, the four-year National Program for Administrative Reform (NPAR) was established and started from 2004 to 2008. The Program also included the reform of public service through contracting out, decentralization and deconcentration of public services, and privatization (CAR, 2006). Public service reform covers some specific issues regarding the relationship between public administrators and citizens. Since 2004, public administration reform in Cambodia has identified the issue of combating corruption in public service delivery whereby so-called merit-driven personnel systems have been applied to encourage improved performance and competence of public workers (United Nations, 2004).

In 2010, the second-edition Handbook for Civil Servants was published by the Council of Administrative Reform (CAR) with its ultimate goal "to serve people better" by altering civil service from ideas of service controllers to that of effective service providers through transparent, responsive, and efficient means by increasing public workers' motivation, loyalty,

and professionalism (CAR, 2010). The policy of employment status asserted a civil servant of public administration does not have any specific position in his or her work and "the Civil Service system is career-based" according to CAR (2010, p.13). Regarding recruitment requirements, civil service providers have to undergo a competitive examination and they are required to have at least a secondary diploma of general education. Promotion is not based on their work achievement but the seniority of their work. Promotions shall be generally made every two years. Public servants having exceptional abilities shall be considered regardless of their seniority.

These elements of the public service reform in Cambodia adopt the concepts of NPM, which have been practised in most industrialized nations, and the implementation of such concepts as decentralization and deconcentration, contracting out, and privatization of public service delivery are, therefore, the central points of discussion in this paper.

2. The Implementation of NPM in the Context of Cambodian Public Service Reform

This section investigates the implementation of NPM concepts of contracting out, decentralization and privatization of Cambodian public service reform. One of the aspects of NPM applied in Cambodia is "Contracting Out" in which foreign aid is provided to most non-governmental organization operating in Cambodia. It involves the implementation of projects funded by and cooperating with development partners and donors. The decentralization of public service delivery is another aspect of the reform, whereby the Cambodian central government allocates national budget, funds, resources and authorities to the sub-national governments including Communes/Sangkat and Districts/Khan to manage service delivery within their own territories of control (Pak 2007). For instance, under Seila Program¹, initiated by the Royal Government of Cambodia, the Carere Program² was established to manage sub-national projects involving collaboration among the central, provincial and local governments to implement decentralization. However, decentralization has not been so successful as local service providers,

² CARERE is a UNDP Cambodia Reintegration and Rehabilitation project created to plan, finance and implement decentralization for local government development in Cambodia.

¹ The Seila Program was initiated in 1996 by the Royal Government of Cambodia with the support from the UNDP and World Bank. It was launched to help alleviate poverty and enhance good governance with the support of various developing partners and donors.

politicians and government do not have sufficient knowledge of what accountability actually is (Pak, 2007).

Another application of NPM in Cambodia is privatization of a number of public services. The government has privatized some public services in some important sectors such as transportation, road-building projects, education, and waste management. For instance, the government has approved a 50-year contract with a private company - Cintri³ - to manage waste in Phnom Penh. However, Cintri has been reported to lack capacity for effective waste management according to the Phnom Penh Post on 17th May 2014. While considerable public services have been ended, there has been a rise of competition between public enterprises and private ones in the above-mentioned sectors in Cambodia (Chhair, 2010). For instance, in the context of privatization of the education sector, the government has cooperated with private institutions, including language institutes, non-governmental organizations, schools and universities. In addition, road construction projects have also been handled by private companies, but there has been irregularity in implementation which involves corruption and lack of quality assurance; as a result, most of the roads are not long-lasting and not conducive for transportation.

IV. Discussion

For Pollitt (2003), "a technique or organisational structure which succeeds in one place may fail in another." Therefore, a successful practice of the NPM in developed countries does not imply it can be conducted in developing countries. There has to be concrete analysis of concepts before putting it in place. NPM sounds like an ideal concept for the development of public service reform. However, whether it is successful depends largely on the implementation of its concepts.

Despite the government's efforts for the rehabilitation of its administrative system, reform seems absolutely sluggish and problematic. According to Niazi (2011), there are major historical constraints on Cambodian administration as follows: the administration mainly associates political power with bureaucracy which has been controlled by "bureaucratic elites" without extensive people's participation; it excessively stresses security management, the behavioural control of services, and constrained managerial accountability, and; weak financial

³ The Cintri company solely took over waste management in Phnom Penh in 2002 and is contracted to manage the waste for 50 years.

management systems. Moreover, appointed officials at all levels are highly loyal to the central government while the national budget is dependent on donor aids (Niazi, 2011).

Transferring authorities to local government through decentralization reform is one of the most important factors in developing countries (McCourt and Minogue, 2001). However, in terms of the autonomy of public managers, D&D reform in Cambodia has transferred administrative and financial powers to sub-national councils but still most rural communes do not seem to possess the autonomy to utilize the transfer at all (Deline et al 2006). Decentralization generally enhances greater accountability among the public and the government (Manor 1999, p.67). In the Seila programme, the efforts of development partners do encourage greater accountability through decentralization. However, in the case of national transfer - like program budgets for development - accountability in Cambodia seems to be upward to the central government (Pak, 2007) and there is a lack of clear knowledge about program management and evaluation in public service delivery (Valerie, 2013). The problems of fragmented accountability in Cambodia, similar to other developing countries, are systematically political in nature in which horizontal accountability gives politicians the dominant power over sub-national governments.

Privatization becomes complicated with issues such as nepotism and rampant corruption existing in most privatized projects. Monopoly of services by private companies places extra burdens to the public. Moreover, according to the Asian Development Bank, one of the challenges to privatization in Cambodia is the lack of divestment planning. There is no clear responsibility and accountability during and after project implementation. That is in contrast with the principle of accountability of NPM which needs clear responsibility for action, as mentioned in Table 1. Successful privatization requires not only transparent competition but also strong implementation of prescribed rules, conditions and clear institutional adjustment; for example, Singaravelloo (2012), studying the implementation of privatization in Malaysia, suggests a method for the government's involvement in assuring the public interest by remaining a major shareholder despite a reduction of its share. In terms of privatization of the public service, the implementation of NPM needs to be preceded by amendment of relevant laws and regulations, and adoption of useful guidelines for private firms to abide by to assure successful privatization (Singaravelloo, 2012).

In his international journal on Public Administrative Reforms in Asia, Cheung (2005) concluded that tools and approaches of the old public administration and the new public administration were complementary to each other. Likewise, in the case of Cambodian administrative reforms, there should be both bureaucratic practices of the old administration and the market-based mechanism of NPM to assure efficiency and effectiveness of government projects. The combination of any paradigm implementation does not cause failure of reform, but makes it even more productive (Cheung, 2005, p. 276). In contrast, however, Cheung regards reforms in China as a failure because of "the absence of a rational-legal bureaucracy...as it also tries to bring about some post-Weberian features of flexibilities and market orientation."

Conclusion

NPM seems to be an ideal concept for public service reform as it provides various approaches for improving the efficiency of the service through private sector management styles. It illustrates clear mechanisms of public servants' performance, and it is applicable for developed and industrialized countries. However, many developing countries, including Cambodia, implement its concepts because of the influence of donors and development partners' preferences. The political culture, history and institutional systems are not ready or complex enough to adjust to the changes that the NPM requires. Corruption, horizontal accountability, and nepotism are still major constraints on change. Besides, the service providers, especially in local government, do not have enough understanding of to whom they should be accountable.

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