

Government service

Government



The literature on the introduction of the service perspective into the public sector at present explores a number of approaches to improving service

(Chance & Green, 2001;

Edwards, 2004;

Farrell, 2004;

Hultberg & Glendinning, 2003;

International Labor Office (ILO), 2006; Kelly, 2004;

Kernshall & Ross, 2003; Kunstelj & Vintar, 2004;

Marianov & Rios, et. al. , 2004; Ray & Muhanna, 2005;

Scharitzer & Korunka, 2002); Schieffelbusch, 2005;

Spall & McDonald, et. al. , 2005;

Suh & Lee, 2005;

Tam & Ho, 2003).

Some studies develop a model for improved service based on a changed conception of political power. Others adopt the market model and argue that the introduction of such private-sector management models as Total Quality Management will help the public sector. Other models offer new ways of looking at the issues dealt with by public service, including crime and hospital care. Finally, a number of approaches are directed only at the idea

that service can be improved if better data is collected and if technology is introduced into the service process.

On the basis of this literature, a number of “ interventions” are offered which may help a public sector agency improve service to its customers. A number of theoreticians argue that government service will not improve unless a fundamentally different notion of “ truth” and “ power” in systems is developed. According to these theorists, including Derrida and Lyotard, truth is “ contextual, relative and fragmented,” and this is especially true in complex systems (Farrell, 2004, p. 275).

Thus, “ the effective representation of complex systems must take into account the view that knowledge within a complex system is distributed across the system and that meaning is both normative and situation specific” (Farrell, 2004, p. 275). A government policy does not work because of coercion and persuasion, but because of legitimacy, which in turn instills in those following orders a sense of “ unquestioning recognition” of the validity of the “ power” (Farrell, p. 471).

Nonetheless, government policy today continues to be plagued or influenced by what is termed “ fugitive power,” which emerges from “ beyond the scope of legitimating structures” and indeed many decisions of policy are “ made outside conventional structures of government” (Farrell, p. 272). Ultimately, decisions or policies derive from “ storylines” linked to the discourse or analytic frameworks dealing with a problem, and the limitations placed upon storylines by discourse creates what Hujer calls “ discursive closure” of policy (Farrell, p. 272).

In the context of fugitive power expressed through discursive storylines lying outside policy frameworks, researchers are looking at how every element of discursive life from the most micro aspects of public opinion to scientific findings in the field of science can influence policy in different ways (Farrell, 2004). According to this highly theoretical approach to government policy, governments must be in tune with the fugitive power located in discourses beyond policy and to conform policy with reality and make such policy effective in real life.

An example of how government has begun to accommodate itself to realities, based on this more diffuse notion of power, is in the rationalization of government programs regarding work and the market to accord with market realities. Most policies, especially according to the “Anglo-Saxon approach” (ILO, 2006, p. 107), practiced in the US and England, is to pass a law that rationalizes the government policy structure “in order to create an infrastructure to provide better support for work-related learning” (ILO, p. 107).

The purpose of such rationalization “is to make information on learning and training opportunities more readily available and accessible” (ILO, p. 107). Policy in the US also encourages learning on the job by offering workers Individual Learning Accounts, which allocates money to workers “to enable him/her to purchase his/her training” (ILO, p. 129). In these programs, “the belief in the primacy of the market to deliver workforce development, especially training, means that government policies are restricted to programs which employers and individuals can either opt into or out of as they desire” (ILO, p. 107).

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This approach gives employers great freedom, but it can also limit progress in training as studies have determined that in the drive for reporting short-term profits companies may choose to reject such programs as too costly, or not closely enough linked to short-term profit (ILO, 2006). This overall policy framework in the US is contrasted to lifelong learning efforts undertaken in other countries, from Norway to Singapore, where partnerships with government and unions or employers “ provide comprehensive coverage of all facets of learning” (ILO, p. 130).

The drive by the SSA to introduce PRAs would appear to conform to the above approach, and include both opportunity and risk for various individual customers. Another manner in which public sector policy is conforming more generally to private sector management theory is through total quality management. To reformulate the management structure of an agency according to TQM would be a labor-intensive and difficult intervention, but some agencies have clearly seen the need to reformulate their operations.

The literature has developed a number of implementation strategies for TQM in public agencies (Scharitzer and Korunka, 2002). After being originally introduced in the industrial sector, TQM has spread through the service sector on into the public sector. Efforts to make public management more efficient according to TQM is called “ new public management” (NPM). Such reforms are primarily targeted to orient all management reform “ toward the customer” and also to develop the capability to constantly evaluate service performance and continually change service until it is satisfactory to the customer.