

Prismatic society theory: bureaucratic systems in developing countries



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INTRODUCTION

Public management in developing countries is concerned with the management and organization of public sector institutions. A continuing challenge for many developing countries during the last four decades has been an increasing demand for more services, reduction of poverty, and economic growth. These phenomena made the state responsible for redistributing wealth and providing social welfare programs. Underdeveloped infrastructures, competition for scarce resources, and a dysfunctional private sector moved developing countries to take on the responsibilities of providing much needed employment for the growing professional and middle classes. Consequently, government expenditures increased sharply. In many developing countries, governments were criticized for their inefficient and ineffective delivery of public services. These public management failures were the result of fiscal irresponsibility and a certain level of political unaccountability. This lack of accountability stemmed from their legacy of colonialism which was reflected in a centralized and authoritarian government (Aucoin, 1990; Box et al., 2001).

The unsatisfactory performance, criticisms, and fiscal mismanagement of the public sector institutions served as the catalyst for public management reform in many developing countries. One such early reform measure was the development of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s (World Bank, 1991). The main goal of the SAPs program was to cut fiscal deficits, curtail government intervention in the economy, and develop sustainability through private sector initiatives. These goals would be achieved through smaller bureaucracies and improved allocation of public

resources. Implemented by developers, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), structural adjustment loan programs provided financial and development assistance to developing countries conditioned upon civil service reform, free market policies, and better management of delivering public services. In numerous developing countries the public sector usually serves as the example of organizational governance and politics (Spicer, 2004). Accordingly, it is the driving force of reform even though its institutions are often the object of public management reform. Many developing countries are faced with constantly changing global socioeconomic and political environments. As a result, it is incumbent on these countries to recognize their growing need for a more dynamic and malleable public sector focused on the continuous improvement of the public management and organization of their public sector institutions.

The History of Public Management

The origins of the field of public management are quite elusive to identify. Lynn (2003) contends that the founding of public management might start with any of the following statements: (1) The contemporary study of public management has its origins in the 1970s: in America, in the curriculums and research of the new public policy schools and efficiency driven managerial reforms originating in Britain and New Zealand (Aucoin, 1990; Pollitt, 1990). (2) What is now termed the field of public management has its roots in the scientific study of the modern administrative state in America beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Minogue, et al., 1998; Mosher, 1975; Waldo, 1955). (3) The origins of the field of public management are found in a systematic study and practice of cameralism

which began in seventeenth and eighteenth century Germany and Austria (Barker, 1964; Rosenberg, 1958). (4) The field of public management is rooted in bureaucratic government and administrative doctrines in ancient China and in medieval regimes in the Orient (Creel, 1964; Lepawsky, 1949). The term public management refers to a major segment of public administration or public affairs, which encompasses organizational structures, managerial practices, and the institutional values of public managers that implement the will of the sovereign authority (Lynn, 2003).

Public organizations are organizations that act as agents of the state, i. e. express or carry out the will of the government. States conventionally have three major branches (the legislature, executive, and judiciary) each one an organization. Nested within the executive is the public administration, a hierarchy of sub-organizations: Ministries, special agencies (whether dependent on ministries or answering directly to government leadership), commissions, state-owned enterprises, and so on. This paper concentrates in these sub-organizations of the executive-also called public agencies or bureaucracies. Of course, the way these public agencies sit within the hierarchy of the executive or relate to the other branches of government is important to the way they function.

Max Weber's seminal work entitled Bureaucracy (1946) outlines a framework that considers bureaucracy as a rational and efficient form of organization. Weber's ideal type bureaucracy is intended as a mental construct that categorizes thoughts and helps capture reality (Fry, 1998). The bureaucracy introduced the concept of hierarchy that carried out the goals of the organization and addressed the challenges of managing bureaucracies <https://assignbuster.com/prismatic-society-theory-bureaucratic-systems-in-developing-countries/>

(Behn, 1998). In his bureaucratic structure, which applied to public and private organizations, Weber describes the ideal role of its public official or bureaucrat. It outlines in detail the structure and environment of the bureaucracy, as well as an ideal job description and benefits package that would allow the public official to be effective (Shafritz and Hyde 1997; Weber 1946). The characteristics of the bureaucracy consist of administration that is carried out on a continuous basis through a hierarchical structure of authority referred to as a chain of command. The tasks in the bureaucracy are divided among specialized workers in order to improve productivity. At the same time, there are clear lines of authority and responsibility with positions reporting to superiors who are considered to have expert training. The control in the bureaucracy is predicated on impersonality, which means the treatment of people is based on merit principles. Thus, all citizens who are served by the organization are treated equally, according to rules, and records are maintained to assure that rules are followed.

Context for Public Sector Reforms in Developing Countries

Public sector reforms needs to be understood as a modernization of what was formerly called administrative reform. The public service (ministries, parastatals, and extra ministerial departments) has always been the tool available to African governments for the implementation of developmental goals. Formulation and implementation of public policies and development plans require enhanced capacity (Sharma and Mhalauli, 1993). However, the public service in contemporary Africa is faced with difficult challenges. It operates in a turbulent economic and political environment and has to continue to strengthen its capacity in various directions hence the

importance of public sector reforms. The content of the reform can be ideological, socio-psychological, technical and institutional (Hanekom, Rowland, and Bain, 2001). According to Turner and Hulme (1997), administrative reform strategies include restructuring, participation, human resource issues, accountability and public-private mix. Public sector reforms have been undertaken in different countries worldwide for: improving service delivery, enhancing productivity, accommodating political demands, meeting the requirements of economic development, bringing the government closer to the people's needs and aspirations, and strengthening overall good governance. The range and magnitude of these reforms are outcomes of advancing knowledge, ever growing organization theories, and requirements of good governance and introduction of new public management (Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), 1996).

Since the 1980's, developed and developing countries have been embarking on public sector management reforms with a focus on the rationalization of the role and institutional character of the state. The public sector has been under pressure to adopt private sector orientations in order to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency- value for money, better quality services, increased productivity and faster delivery (Turner and Hulme, 1997). The World Bank and other donors in Africa have been concerned with finding alternative ways of organizing and managing the public services and redefining the role of the State to give more prominence to markets and competitions, and to the private and voluntary sectors (Turner and Hulme, 1997).

In the 1990s domestic and external forces started to exert considerable pressure on African governments to liberalize the political space.

Consequently, democratic systems were introduced, which embarked upon ambitious programmes of political, institutional and economic reforms. The objectives of those reforms involved changing the role of government, creating an enabling environment for private sector and civil society to flourish and establishing an effective civil service by increasing its competence, efficiency, fairness and quality of services. In good governance prescriptions, one finds public management reforms as a key ECA (2004). New public management is a label used to describe a management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results.

The Commonwealth public administration initiative is founded on realization that the public service is under pressure as it is faced with new tasks yet staffed by people geared to achieve old tasks¹⁶. Again, public services face ever-growing pressures from tax payers, politicians, and donors demanding to cut government budgets. Citizens have become more active and vocal consumers and are able to insist on lower costs accompanied by higher quality (Hughes, 2003). Therefore, the public service needs serious improvement to enable it rise up to the prevailing challenges. It must be equipped with the necessary resources, infrastructure, services and regulatory architecture necessary for national competitive success. The experiences of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and United Kingdom have been used as models for the rest of the world. Improvements have been recorded in Malta, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, and South Africa. Ayeni

(2002) documents public sector reform initiatives in 40 Commonwealth countries 17 of which are in Africa. Key reforms include decentralization, commercialization, privatization, bench-marking, organization and methods, fight against corruption, good governance, accountability, public financial management reform programme, public sector income policy and administration, functional reviews, job evaluation and salary review,, training, information technology, one-stop-shops, code of ethics for public officers, strengthening management capacity, service delivery improvement, ICT, computerization of human resources information, performance management systems, restructuring ministries and provinces (Aveni, 2003).

Dismal Performance of Bureaucratic Systems in Developing Countries

There are several factors to explain why reforms fail. Some of them include institutional capability. Programmes and strategies for Africa's economic recovery and development has not been implemented in full because public sector institutions have been afflicted by problems of corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, poor coordination poor management and institutional capacity, non-existent salary policies and political interference. These weaknesses have stifled the process of socio-economic development across the continent. Multiple accountabilities such as managerial, political and financial and public accountabilities are also viewed as another explanation. Declining public service ethics, social values and morale are other reasons advanced for the failure of public sector reforms in general (ECA, 2004).

According to Corkery (1995), one key reason for the failure of public sector reforms is that models derived from developed countries mostly under the sponsorship of IMF and World Bank are largely irrelevant because within the <https://assignbuster.com/prismatic-society-theory-bureaucratic-systems-in-developing-countries/>

more sophisticated institutional practices and procedures, any changes that have been introduced are supported by institutional safety nets which are not available in Africa. He further argues that private sector management practices imported in some countries have not always transplanted successfully because the parallel reform of monitoring and review procedures called by the introduction of these practices is not taking place simultaneously. The lack of political will for reforms translates into concrete actions why reforms fail. This argument is crucial for understanding problems of administrative reforms in Africa. However, this paper makes one contribution to these problems by highlighting the significance of the hybrid administrative system in explaining the failure of public sector reforms in Africa particularly those aimed at fighting against corruption.

CONCLUSION

The current administrative system in Africa need to be understood as a mixture of the traditional indigenous and western structures and values which continue to co-exist side by side. At independence, African governments inherited administrative structures which were geared overwhelmingly to the requirements of the ex-colonial powers. For Balogun (1986) most African countries had experienced a dilemma in terms of the administrative culture to adopt. To go back to the good old days of despotism and kingdoms or to come to terms with the western administrative system which co-existed with indigenous structures for close to a century. Political and administrative reforms were undertaken in many African countries due to changes in political objectives and greater volume of government role especially in development. Over four decades or so ago,

Riggs (1961) talked of a prismatic society in trying to clarify the impact of the ecology on administration. Although that was years ago, his argument is very relevant to the current dismal failure of administrative reforms in Africa. They are new 'innovations' in 'foreign' contexts. We are transferring institutions, procedures and systems to contexts which cannot handle the value systems which comes or works well with the new systems. As a result, there is a lot of expenditure in terms of money, personnel, time and effort to make things work. This raises a serious question on the role of law in changing people's behaviour.

From the above discussion, it is becoming clear that there is a huge discrepancy between the intentions of the reforms measures and the outputs as well as outcomes on the ground. The fight against corruption has become tough on the reform agenda of many developing countries. Most of them continue to experience high incidences and allegations of corruption cases when institutions and legal provisions to arrest the epidemic have been created and civic education on corruption has been top on the agenda. The one explanation isolated as an attempt to explain this discrepancy is the lack of fit between the value system that comes with the reform measures through aid and the reality on the ground. The role of learning institutions in providing values supportive of public sector reforms is instrumental. There is need to inculcate the above values and ethical standards in the youth through innovations in the curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.