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**CHANGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES -
IS A HYBRID MODEL A BETTER ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES?**

**Dr Kerry Brown
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia**

**Ms Jennifer Waterhouse
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia**

**Ms Christine Flynn
Department of Main Roads
Brisbane, Australia**

Please address correspondence to:

**Dr Kerry Brown
School of Management
Queensland University of Technology
GPO Box 2434
Brisbane, Australia. 4001
Telephone: 61 7 3864 2939
Fax: 61 7 3864 1313
e-mail: ka.brown@qut.edu.au**

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Abstract

During the last two decades the public sector has come under increasing pressure to improve performance and demonstrate greater transparency and accountability. This pressure has resulted in public sector organisations facing shifts in ways of operating. Various corporate change strategies have been adopted by different public sector agencies, many of these cloning managerial practices from the private sector. These changes in public sector organisations have enormous significance for regional economic and social development. While there is a growing body of knowledge dealing with the management of corporate change there are still significant gaps in understanding the process. While there is much written on public versus private corporate change, there is little distinguishing between change in different types of public sector organisations. This paper analyses change management processes and seeks to determine whether a hybrid model of ‘new public management’ delivers more favourable outcomes than a model focused on cost reduction and private sector prejudice for the bottom line.

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During the late 20th century, governments have been faced with an emerging public conviction that public sectors are too large and inefficient (Capling, Considine and Crozier, 1998). In response to such pressure and faced with a more complex operating environment, public sectors have been reformed by adopting managerial principles grouped under the rubric of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). These principles are aimed at changing the public sector in three areas, summarised by Maor (1999) as first, a change from hierarchical to economically based structures, second from regulative to economically based processes and third, from legally based to economically based values. In seeking to achieve these goals, the public sector has employed various means such as downsizing, devolution of managerial responsibility (Yeatman, 1994) and introducing such managerialist methods as Total Quality Management (TQM) and reengineering (O'Donnell 1996). Many of these practices first emerged in the private sector with the result that the public sector has moved increasingly to resemble its private sector counterparts. Di Maggio and Powell (1983) describe this trend as a process of engaging in isomorphic behaviour. The extent to which such practices have been adopted has significantly varied between, not only public sectors of various countries, but institutions within those countries. Debates with regard to NPM and the variety of forms adopted have been based on the argument that while NPM has encouraged private sector isomorphism, there may be risks associated with adopting wide-scale private sector practices.

The Department of Main Roads in Queensland Australia (DMR) has undertaken a unique change management strategy that adopts many of the underlying principles of NPM while at the same time preserving certain elements of more traditional public sector culture. This paper reports on initial findings of a longitudinal study being conducted to determine whether a hybrid model of NPM delivers more favourable outcomes than a model focused solely on cost reduction and private sector prejudice for the bottom line. To place these findings within the NPM context, this paper commences with an overview of the current debate in regard to the perceived benefits and deficiencies of NPM. The discussion highlights the differences between the public and private sectors and the risks associated with the public sector too closely mirroring the management practices of the private sector. In particular, issues in regard to public sector requirements for transparency in reporting, accountability, politicisation and the non-market structure of governance will be considered. As a means of meeting the challenges posed by these constraints, the hybrid model of NPM is presented and the findings and learnings to date are considered.

New Public Management – Principles, Manifestations and Implementation Dilemmas

It has been proposed that one of the most significant contextual schisms between public and private sector management has been the over-arching presence of political interests in the public sector (Dahl and Lindblom, 1953). Controls in the private sector are, in the main, set by market mechanisms and specific regulatory processes, while the activities of public management have been determined by structures and processes put in place by bureaucratic agencies or government legislation (Cole 1988). The organisational structure of the public sector has been based on Weber's (1978) contention that bureaucracies are capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency. Lane (1998) argues that Weber's notion of

efficiency was supported by the belief that devotion to the specific duty of public office leads to commitment and therefore efficiency. Public choice theory proposes that it has been political self-interest, not public concern for providing a range of community services to citizens, which has caused the growth of government in the post-war era (Cole, 1988). Further, it is argued this growth has been accompanied by inefficiencies aggravated by the absence of market competition (Cole, 1988). This rationale has been used as one of the primary arguments for the adoption of managerialist practices from the private sector under the umbrella of 'new public management'.

Hood (1991) describes New Public Management as comprising seven main principles:

- Hands-on professional management.
- Explicit standards and measures of performance.
- Greater emphasis on *output controls*
- A shift to *disaggregation* of units in the public sector.
- A shift to greater *competition* in the public sector.
- A stress on *private sector styles of management practice*.
- A stress on greater *discipline* and *parsimony* in resource use.

These doctrines represent the most typical manifestations of NPM that have been espoused, to a greater or lesser extent, in private sector organisations inter and intra-nationally (Hood, 1991). Outcomes of the shift to NPM have been argued to be increased accountability, greater transparency and improved efficiency (Doyle et al., 2000). While the goals alluded to by the tenets of NPM appear both economically and operationally rational, their roots lie in the private sector where, it is now suggested, the reasoning behind the adoption of various management strategies has now changed. It is contended that no longer is organisational

change in the private sector aimed at greater efficiency, but rather change is being directed to making organisations more similar (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Increasingly private sector organisations are attempting organisational change by cloning the techniques of other organisations in an effort to be more alike rather than relying on any objective evidence that such change produces greater productivity, cost reduction or efficiency (Burke, 1997).

Isomorphic efforts in the private sector have included downsizing, reengineering, devolvement of managerial responsibility and TQM. These practices have also formed the basis of the practical application of NPM philosophies in the private sector demonstrating the propensity of the public sector to replicate, through isomorphic behaviour, their private sector counterparts. The dilemma is that such private sector practices have not always been demonstrated to suit the public sector environment and that isomorphic behaviour of importing private sector principles and practices has not been effected because of a 'best practice' model but to 'express ideological commitment' (Stewart and Walsh, 1992, p. 500).

In espousing NPM principles, public sector organisations are adopting the same techniques of their private sector counterparts following in a similar way to uncertain performance outcomes. While NPM may hold the promise of improved performance, there have already been several examples of less than optimal political and organisational outcomes when its principles manifest themselves in private sector managerial strategies. Electoral failure (Hughes, 2000), and cultural 'clashes' when implementing TQM programs or performance based pay (O'Donnell, 1996, 1998) have been some of the outcomes of NPM programs when insufficient consideration has been given to the context in which public management operates, in particular issues of politicization and public sector culture. The following discussion investigates these issues further by establishing the unique environment of the public sector and analysing the benefits and drawbacks of some NPM practices.

Benefits and drawbacks of NPM

It has been proposed that the public sector experiences greater difficulties in regard to implementing corporate change than the private sector and that this is caused by the unique environment in which the public sector operates, for example, the need to deliver bureaucratically impartial outcomes (Doyle, Claydon et al., 2000). To meet the challenges of a global economy and the increasing public demand for a smaller but more responsive government, public sector organisations have been required to transform. This transformation has been greater than any shift experienced in the private sector starting, as it was, from a traditional bureaucratic base, where services were provided based on social values and equity (Doyle, Claydon and Buchanan, 2000). It is argued that NPM has also meant the introduction of managerialist practices that are ideologically opposed to the traditional public service ethos. Unlike their private sector counterparts, public sector organisations have not been required to be inured to the ideals of a competitive market. They are now being required to implement such practices as sub-contracting, the creation of internal markets, local pay bargaining and performance-related pay (Doyle et al., 2000). The impact of the degree of change demanded and the culturally opposing nature of such change has been evidenced in the example of the Australian Public Service where the introduction of performance based pay failed to achieve the desired strong performance culture (O'Donnell, 1998). The ideology behind individual performance based pay was demonstrated to undermine the culture of teamwork. Also of note was that the shift to an emphasis on individual employment relationships was unable to undermine the collective agency of the workforce and their commitment to unionism (O'Donnell, 1998). This demonstrates how NPM initiatives aimed

at improving performance can stall when insufficient attention is paid to the culture of the organization into which it is being implemented.

The initiative to overcome this problem is to seek a change of organizational culture, however, culture change programs in the public sector have also been problematic due to both its bureaucratic base and issues of politicisation not applicable in the private sector (O'Donnell, 1996; Brooks and Bate, 1994). Total Quality Management initiatives have suffered setbacks in the public sector due to the inability of workplace management to set aside managerial prerogative and defer to the recommendations of total quality management teams. The evidence suggests that in not addressing the politicization and bureaucracy of public sector organizations, initiatives aimed at empowering more customer-focused work groups are destined to failure. This is especially the case where those same work groups are faced with the constant threat of privatization, cost-cutting and likely job loss (O'Donnell, 1996). Likewise, cultural change initiatives seeking a change-oriented public sector have been hindered by a culture that stresses stability and conservatism through bureaucratic processes aimed at minimising public uncertainty and risk (Brooks and Bate, 1997). This attachment to conformity has been based on the perceived need to deliver impartial outcomes to all individuals through the enforcement of bureaucratic rules and regulations (O'Faircheallaigh et al., 1999).

In seeking to distance themselves from such a bureaucratically impartial, seemingly unsympathetic, and therefore politically unattractive image, elected officials have been major instigators of public management reform through either legislation or initiatives aimed at 'professionalising' the ranks of senior bureaucrats through increasing their authority over policy issues. Increased policy autonomy however disguises greater ministerial control

through greater political intervention in administrative matters. Rather than allowing managers to manage then, senior civil servants have been faced with growing job insecurity creating a paradox of managerialist reforms where control over policy decisions has, in reality, been removed through insecurity of tenure (Maor, 1999). This process has led to the greater involvement of elected officials in the management of public sector departments (Maor, 1999). However, a threat exists to elected representatives who overlook that their main function is politics, not management. The conservative government of the Australian State of Victoria made a serious miscalculation when it neglected to factor in that the management of the public sector needs to assist any government's prime aim - re-election. In this case, the over-zealous adoption of NPM philosophies, particularly contracting out and privatization (Teicher and van Gramberg, 1998; Barrett and Blackwell, 1998) resulted in a backlash against the conservative government resulting in a surprise electoral defeat. This case also supports the argument that initiatives required to achieve political re-election often conflict with what is purported to be managerial "best practice" (Hughes and O'Neill, 2000).

The preceding discussion highlights issues of NPM primarily with regard to implementation and failure to fully consider the public sector context. In meeting the challenges of a changing environment, the public sector can be argued to require reform aimed at meeting public expectations of more responsiveness. This approach does not demand the 'blind' isomorphic adoption of private sector managerialism, but rather, to solve these dilemmas would appear to require a model that takes advantage of the benefits of a bureaucracy while eliminating its drawbacks. The major benefits of a bureaucracy are the equitable outcomes deliverable through adherence to strict rules and regulations (O'Faircheallaigh et al., 1999). On the other hand, the drawbacks have been an unresponsive public sector grown inefficient through political self-interest and lack of market competition. NPM has been seen as the way

forward to rid the public sector of the inefficiencies of bureaucracies by exposing it to the economic rationalities of the market (Yeatman, 1998). Yeatman (1998) has argued however, that there are difficulties in balancing economic rationalism with the need for a public sector more responsive to its stakeholders. NPM, in its current form, has been demonstrated not to possess all the answers to these dilemmas due to implementation difficulties, inadequate consideration of the environment in which the public sector operates and the human cost involved. It is contended here that a hybrid model of public management may encompass the better qualities of a bureaucracy while encouraging the market focus required to deliver more efficient and effective services.

Introducing a Hybrid Model of NPM

DMR provides an interesting and valuable case study of a very large public sector organisation employing more than 4,000 staff with an annual budget of A\$1.6 billion undergoing an innovative change management process initiated and driven from within the organisation. The organisation presents a change initiative that, from the outset, differs significantly from non-hybrid NPM models. The DMR initiative was not enforced through governmental directive; rather it was adopted as an internally driven reform measure. Additionally, DMR is a technical organization in that civil engineers have traditionally dominated its decision-making. As such the culture of these types of organizations have been staid and traditional thereby presenting increased challenges to change management efforts (Scott, Ponniah and Saud, 1997).

In 1998, the newly appointed Director General undertook an extensive review of the department and, as a result, commenced implementation of a change management program

entitled “The Three Frames”. These three frames included aligning DMR’s people, systems and structures, building relationships, both internal and external to the organisation and the introduction of a Balanced Scorecard (DMR internal correspondence, March 1999). The objective of these changes was to make the organisation more inclusive of broader ‘whole of government’ objectives in areas such as the environment, social justice and community relations. The “Three Frames” provided a concept map for developing and implementing a new approach to operating through more effective monitoring of performance, establishing a new ‘relational’ approach to undertaking day-to-day operations through the introduction of behavioural and cultural shifts, and aligning people, systems and structures to organisational goals. The alignment portion of the Three Frames is specifically aimed at maximising performance while the Relationship Frame endeavours, through a focus on both internal and external relationships, to make the organisation more responsive to the needs of its stakeholders and employees (DMR, 1998/99). The third frame, the Balanced Scorecard, provides a mechanism through which outcomes can be measured. The outcomes sought are high scores in all four areas of the Balanced Scorecard - finance, operational efficiency, customer/stakeholder satisfaction and human resources management (DMR, 1998/99). The balanced scorecard is based on the notion that failure in one frame will eventually act as a catalyst for failure in others therefore demanding a balanced focus on the entire organization.

While all seven NPM principles (Hood, 1991) have been espoused under the Three Frames approach, in operationalising the principles, DMR have created a hybrid model for cultural change in the public sector. The model does not eliminate the public sector ethic and it retains certain qualities of bureaucratic governance that take into account the context of public management while protecting against the human cost of organisational change. It has achieved this primarily through its focus on relationships within and external to the

organisation. The uniqueness of the Three Frames Approach suggests that DMR have not been tempted to undertake isomorphic behaviour but rather have ingeniously adapted private sector management practices for the context of public management. The Three Frames has provided a concept map for developing and implementing a new approach to operating within the department and with external stakeholders and has become a process overlay for all activities in the department. Ultimately it focuses on effective performance measurement as the outcome to be reported.

The Alignment Frame focuses on the alignment of structures, people and systems and seeks to align the organisation around effective structures, efficient systems and appropriately skilled people. It also identified blockages in any of these areas, for example silo protection, system ownership and personality blockages. Simultaneously it raised questions about individual values and intellect and moved the debate to a new and previously unexplored and unmentionable area – relationships (DMR, 2000a).

The Relational Frame in Main Roads was founded in the work on organisations as human systems, in particular the work of Margaret Wheatley (1994). Wheatley (1994) argues the spherical model is divided by a mythical “green line” - the divide between the rational, empirical, exterior world of systems, structure and processes above and the non-rational, constructivist and interior world of relationships, identity and information below. This is the area of behavioural change, where communication in all its aspects, relationship management and individual, cultural and workplace identities and values meet and sometimes collide (Wheatley, 1994). It is where organisational controls do not apply - mandated policy positions are not always observed; often the content of the confidential memorandum is

common knowledge around the organisation before the official document has left the CEO's office.

These two management systems are internal to Main Roads, while the third management system, the Balanced Scorecard is both internal and external. It is where government and the community of Queensland evaluate the performance of Main Roads. Based on the work of Kaplan and Norton (1997), performance is evaluated equally in four quadrants: Financial, delivery and operations, stakeholder relationships and people and learning (Kaplan and Norton, 1997). Main Roads has delivered historically in financial and delivery and operational quadrants - construction projects are built on time, to budget (most of the time) and are of high quality. These features were the focus of performance evaluation. The government budget processes were satisfied and electoral promises responding to community needs were fulfilled (DMR, 2000a).

Recently, equal emphasis has been placed on the quadrants of Stakeholder Satisfaction and People and Learning. Community satisfaction with the consultation prior, during and after construction of Main Roads projects is a major focus. Communities want more say in the why, where and how of road projects. They demand a say in how the taxpayer dollar is spent. A Community Consultation Framework has been established and a network of communication officers services all areas of Queensland - assisting in community consultation, evaluating community satisfaction with Main Roads and managing the media relationships (DMR, 2000a).

One of the most important areas of stakeholder relationships lies in the Main Roads relationship with the traditional indigenous owners of the land - the Australian Aborigines and

Torres Strait Islanders. Before any construction or maintenance work is able to take place, the traditional owners of the land adjoining the construction site must be consulted, and sacred sites identified and artefacts protected. This is a lengthy process involving understanding of aboriginal lore and protocols, especially in the manner of communication.

Other stakeholders include the private sector construction companies with which DMR undertakes strategic alliances to deliver major projects. For example, the Pacific Motorway or M1 is a major project completed in 2000. The result of political promises, the project saw the overlay of an eight lane highway on an existing six lane highway that is one of the busiest commuter highways in Australia, linking Brisbane the capital city of Queensland, to the famous tourist destination of the Gold Coast and Surfers Paradise. Parameters for the project were stringent - manage community needs, traffic flow was not to be hindered and death rates from road accidents were to be minimised. The cost of the M1 was to finally be around \$800 million. The Pacific Motorway project combined many of the elements of new public management, particularly contracting out and devolution of managerial responsibility (Waterhouse et al, 2000) and possessed great potential for public sector management failure. Waterhouse et al (2000) argued it was politically sensitive, having emerged from a previous plan that resulted in the electoral defeat of a government that had held a comfortable majority. The road was divided into six sections and construction on each one was contracted out creating the potential for long delays through ambit claims. Huge community protest over the project's predecessor did not augur well for community relations. These issues were overcome through extensive community consultation and input into the initial plans, as well as the establishment of relational style contracts and open communication with the construction companies. The result was the road being completed within a politically dictated

time span through the application of the Three Frames principles (Waterhouse et al., 2000).

The project has drawn attention internationally for its management.

Finally, in the stakeholder quadrant, there are the three levels of government, local, state and federal. Each government sector has its specific relationship with Main Roads, and the specific outcomes that it requires from the relationship: national highways, employment and skills outcomes, and regional or community development. Balancing the competing demands from three levels of government and the differing requirements of each sector is a challenging juggling act.

The final quadrant is that of People and Learning. Organisationally, Main Roads has focused almost exclusively on the professional development of its engineering and technical staff.

The current shift is towards broader capability building in all areas. Specific work is being done in diversity management - Main Roads has a much higher representation of males to female employees; there is a significant multicultural representation in the department (DMR 2000b).

There has been a strong focus and expenditure on leadership development in the department.

The leadership model being used is designed around relationship management skills with staff, contractors and community. It focuses on the accountability and performance of senior officers against each of the quadrants of the balanced scorecard. Each senior officer is accountable to the Director-General through the annual achievement planning process (DMR, 1999).

The leadership skills development focuses on honesty, feedback and behaviour, self-awareness and awareness of others, the ability to manage and value diversity. The congruence of espoused values and evidential behaviours is essential and all staff are being developed to recognise and challenge incongruence. Personality type indicators such as the Myers-Briggs model are used to educate management and staff about other ways to perceive and undertake the work. Community and other stakeholders should also be able to see evidence of this congruence.

Organisational culture is valued through organizational artifacts and honoring of the past history of the department while being able to move forward, leaving some pieces that are no longer useful behind. Storytelling is a traditional organizational skill, and the stories are used to give meaning and provide examples of successful applications of the Three Frames.

The successful implementation of this change effort to date suggests that it can be favourably contrasted with many recent NPM change initiatives in that it aligns with government priorities thereby reducing political risk and but also retains bureaucratic elements such as hierarchy (albeit flatter) and conformation to rules and regulations. While achieving both these ends, it also manages to create a greater level of community and other stakeholder consultation that delivers outcomes that are not only fair, but are seen to be so.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the principles of NPM and how these have been manifested in the public sector through the espousal of private sector management practices. It has been demonstrated that there are difficulties associated with implementing private sector

managerial practices into the public sector and that the reasoning behind the adoption of such practices is flawed. Rather than seeking to improve efficiency and effectiveness, isomorphic behaviour has occurred in the public sector aimed at making public sector entities more like their private sector counterparts. Such action is argued to have occurred through a desire to display 'ideological commitment' rather than an aspiration to adopt 'best practice'. It has been argued that attempts to implement NPM have often failed due to insufficient consideration of the contextual and cultural framework of the public sector and that these contextual factors militate against transferring unproblematically private sector practices into the public sector. The case of the Department of Main Roads in Queensland was then presented which represents a deviation from such isomorphic behaviour. It demonstrates that a hybrid model of NPM has been able to deliver superior outcomes for employees as well as political and public stakeholders. Such a model has taken advantage of the best of both bureaucracy and more egalitarian styles of management through the development of a relational culture while balancing its outcomes through the adoption of a Balanced Scorecard that focuses on finance, operational efficiency, customer/stakeholder satisfaction and human resources management.

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