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# Lessons from the New Public Management in Commonwealth Nations

**ABSTRACT:** The New Public Management (NPM) is unlike any other public sector reform for the simple fact that it is practitioner-driven as well as a global movement. However, what works in one public sector circumstance may not work in another political, social, or economic setting. By surveying the Commonwealth countries I find that NPM reforms are taking place in all Commonwealth countries regardless of their various stages of economic and political development. This evidence confirms that the administrative reform of NPM measures is truly a global public sector reform movement.

## INTRODUCTION

This conference, which was entitled "The New Public Management in International Perspective," started with the working hypothesis that there is a set of public management reforms that are being put into practice all over the world. Various definitions of those reforms were presented, such as Jones and Thompson's five R's (restructuring, reengineering, reinvention, realignment, and rethinking) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Public Management Service's "new paradigm aimed at fostering a performance-oriented culture in a less centralized public sector" (Mathiasen, 1997). Almost all the evidence of the New Public Management presented at the conference came from the economically-advanced countries of the OECD. However, to claim that the New Public Management is indeed global, it will be necessary to have evidence from

other countries as well. It is here that the Commonwealth has an important role to play.

Apart from the United Nations, the Commonwealth is the world's largest and most diverse assembly of nations. It encompasses 53 nations, with a population of 1.5 billion—a quarter of humanity. Categorized economically, it includes four members of the OECD (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom), three of the newly-industrialized countries of Asia (Malaysia, Singapore, and, until July 1997, Hong Kong), and a large contingent from the developing world. The latter includes the Indian subcontinent (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), many small and island states, particularly in the Caribbean, as well as much of Africa (for example, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). The only regions of the world without a Commonwealth presence are Latin America and the former Soviet bloc.

The Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), a voluntary association of individuals and organizations interested in the practice and study of public management, was founded in 1994. It held major conferences on the New Public Management in 1994 and 1996. The first conference heard 34 papers from representatives of 23 countries, the second 78 papers from representatives of 26 countries. I served as rapporteur at both of CAPAM's conferences, and this paper is based on both conference reports (Borins, 1994; Borins and Warrington, 1996) and some of the papers presented.<sup>1</sup>

This paper draws on the wide range of evidence presented at both CAPAM conferences about how the various elements of the New Public Management are being implemented throughout the Commonwealth. For each component of the New Public Management, I also present results of initiatives reported at the two conferences and point out issues to be resolved in the future. The paper also discusses instances where the implementation of the New Public Management differs among the various types of countries in the Commonwealth.

In the report on the first CAPAM conference (Borins, 1994), I too developed a definition of the New Public Management paradigm. As Barzelay (1992) noted, exposition of the paradigm is made somewhat complicated because its components are inter-related and there is no obvious hierarchy of ideas, no one key principle from which all others are derived. In my definition, I attempted to keep the number of components of the paradigm reasonably small, and to define them generally, so that they cut across traditional ways of organizing the public sector. Based on the evidence presented at the first CAPAM conference, I outlined a New Public Management paradigm having the following five components:

1. *providing* high-quality services that citizens value;
2. *increasing* managerial autonomy, particularly by reducing central agency controls;

3. *demanding*, measuring, and rewarding both organizational and individual performance;
4. *providing* the human and technological resources that managers need to meet their performance targets; and
5. *maintaining* receptiveness to competition and open-mindedness about which public purposes should be performed by public servants as opposed to the private sector.

The next section of the paper discusses Commonwealth experience presented at either conference with respect to each element of paradigm. This paper cites as evidence only material presented at either conference. Thus, the fact that a given practice is not cited for a given country does not mean that the practice is absent there. If one wanted to know what is going on in each country, it would be necessary to do a complete international survey. The OECD has done such surveys for its members and the Commonwealth Secretariat has also done comprehensive studies of a number of Commonwealth countries.<sup>2</sup>

### PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE

It is useful to distinguish two steps in providing high-quality service, the first finding out what the public sector's customers want and the second using that information to improve current practice. The two conferences discussed numerous ways to find out what customers want. The most direct method is customer surveys and/or focus groups, cited in the U.K. Employment Service (Fogden, 1996) and Ghana (Dodoo, 1996). The U.K. Employment Service has also been using mystery shoppers. Malaysia has established consultative panels that have customer representatives and meet several times during the year (Ng, 1996). Another way of finding out what customers want is by noting what they don't want, or what displeases them. Ghana has established a Public Complaints Unit in its public service (Dodoo, 1996) and Singapore has established a Service Improvement Unit to investigate and respond to complaints (Quah, 1994; Lim, 1996). Malaysia has also set up a Public Complaints Bureau, which is overseen by a Permanent Committee on Public Complaints, consisting of senior public servants and chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Government (Ahmad Sarji, 1996; Ng, 1996). Sri Lanka has established mobile offices for senior public servants to go out into the countryside to hear public complaints (Mendis, 1996). In addition to surveying customers, both Malaysia (Ng, 1996) and Canada (Smith, 1996b) have begun to listen to suggestions from public servants about how to improve service. Finally, both Malaysia (Ng, 1996) and the U.K. Employment Service (Fogden, 1996) are benchmarking, that is, comparing their service to other organizations known to provide high-quality service.

The next step, after listening to the customer, is to use what they say as the basis for action to improve service. Following the U.K.'s lead in implementing its Citizen's Charter, other countries are establishing charters, or guarantees of standards of service clients can expect. Malaysia has been particularly energetic in this regard; a national Clients' Charter was established in 1993, and using this as a framework, 390 agencies at all levels have promulgated their own clients' charters (Ahmad Sarji, 1996). Reinforcing the use of charters, Malaysian government agencies have also been applying for certification under the ISO 9000 series of standards.

Improving customer service also involves the use of information technology, training, and organizational change. Barnes (1996) described Ontario's Service Ontario electronic kiosks, at which citizens can renew drivers' licences, pay fines, and register address changes. Lim (1996) reported that the Singapore government is working with Singapore Airlines, an organization well-regarded for its service, to train staff in counter and telephone service. Kaul (1996) found that many Commonwealth governments are providing training for public servants in customer care; he generalized from this to argue that providing high-quality service is now becoming an integral part of the value system for public servants. Draper (1996) noted that, either on a government-wide basis or within individual departments, senior-level service quality managers are being appointed.

Finally, one-stop shopping for a variety of public sector "products" is becoming an important way to improve service. Customer surveys have made it clear that people prefer convenient user-friendly service at an electronic kiosk or a counter and have no interest in which department or group of departments are inside the electronic box or behind the counter. Malaysia has established one-stop payment, licensing, and investment centres (Ahmad Sarji, 1996); Singapore now provides one-stop change of address reporting for all public services (Lim, 1996); and Canada has established business service centres at which both the federal and provincial governments provide a wide range of services to business (McIntosh, 1996). All of these one-stop shopping initiatives require collaboration among government departments at a given level and often among different levels of government. This will necessitate a change of the traditional "separate departmental smokestacks" model of government.

## Results

There are two ways to measure the results of service quality initiatives, each driven by the methodology used to improve performance. If a charter is used, service results will likely be described in terms of whether the charter's standards have been met. If the service quality initiative is based on consumer surveys, it is likely that performance will be measured in terms of surveys of client acceptance or satisfaction. Two examples of consumer acceptance measures are Barnes (1996) showing a 94% client approval rating for users of the Service Ontario

kiosks and Fogden (1996) indicating an 84% client satisfaction rating for the U.K. Employment Service, which was substantially higher than the ratings for other public services and utilities, such as the Post Office (72%), British Gas (69%), British Telecom (60%), or British Rail (40%). Performance measures based on charter standards and performance measures based on client satisfaction ratings could reinforce one another if the charter standards are themselves developed on the basis of client surveys.

### Future Concerns

In the Commonwealth OECD countries, initiatives like citizen's charters were a response to citizen discontent with the quality of public services; however, those charters may tend to perpetuate citizen discontent, even if the quality of public service is in fact increasing (Manning, 1996). If there is little public recognition of improvements in the quality of public services, politicians will be unlikely to invest their time and energy in supporting service quality initiatives. It may be the case now that citizens are noticing improvements in the quality of *particular services*, but see those improvements as exceptional, and still complain about the quality of public services *in general*. In other words, they may perceive islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity or, worse, incompetence. The question is at what point will standards of service have improved sufficiently for the public to acknowledge that the quality of service in general has improved—that is, a sea of excellence.

Quality service initiatives in the private sector often involve offering different products in different markets, and sometimes withdrawing entirely from a market (e.g., banks offering “gold” credit cards to those who want a wide variety of services, basic credit cards to those who don't, and not offering credit cards at all to people who are considered to be credit risks). In contrast, governments are required to serve all citizens (Larson, 1996). However, some governments have begun experiments with differentiating service, for example, by providing faster turnaround on passport applications in return for a higher fee, or providing toll roads for those willing to pay to save time. Such initiatives would likely be more controversial in the health or education areas. Nevertheless, it may be possible for government agencies to provide a higher quality of service to citizens who *voluntarily* pay for it and, if the higher quality of service more than covers its costs, use the surpluses to improve the quality or reduce the price of basic service. Thus the higher price that “rush” passport application processing commands could be used to lower the price or speed up the turnaround for a regular passport application. In that instance, government departments or agencies would begin to do what parastatals have long been doing, namely internal cross-subsidization. In addition, this would be consistent with the egalitarian “difference principle” espoused by the social philosopher John Rawls in his influential book *A Theory of Justice* (1971)—

namely to permit differences in treatment of citizens only when they benefit the least advantaged citizen.

In contrast to the situation in the OECD countries, there is much less dissatisfaction with services in many newly industrialized and less developed countries. Here the stimulus to service improvements appears to originate from public officials—ministers and civil servants—rather than from widespread voter agitation. In countries where the rule of law is tenuous or where newly-democratic governments are seeking to establish themselves after a long period of one-party or personal rule, concern with service delivery may be associated less with the *quality* of services, measured by the timeliness, efficiency, and courtesy with which they are delivered, and more with the *integrity* of the service, gauged by the prevalence of corruption or discrimination and the consistency of delivery.

### INCREASING MANAGERIAL AUTONOMY

The two most ambitious programs to increase managerial autonomy are New Zealand's state sector reforms involving the separation of advising functions, located in ministries, from operational responsibilities, located in agencies, and the United Kingdom's Next Steps Program, which assigns operations to agencies whose chief executives are given clear performance targets and increased autonomy to meet them. Currently, there are 125 Next Steps agencies, encompassing 72% of the public service. Several papers evaluating these reforms were presented at the 1996 CAPAM conference; they will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

While these programs have received the most attention, they are not the only initiatives to increase managerial autonomy. Relaxation of central agency controls on human resources was also reported in Australia (Dawkins, 1994), Trinidad and Tobago (Draper, 1994), and Zimbabwe (Sibanda, 1994). Australia is providing greater flexibility in working conditions, as evidenced by more parental leave, part-time work, and flexi-time arrangements, as well as a move from collective bargaining for the entire public service to workplace bargaining (Ives, 1994).

This trend is also apparent in financial management. Both Australia (Dawkins, 1994) and the U.K. (Mottram, 1994) allow managers freedom to manage the consolidated running costs of their programs. Namibia is permitting year-to-year budget transfers (Geingob, 1994) and Australia and Malta (Fenech-Adami, 1994) have established three-year forward estimates.

Both Singapore and Ghana are attempting to emulate New Zealand and the U.K. Singapore has just begun a move towards autonomous agencies. Their operating budgets will be based on target outputs where they are quantifiable, with increases for projected GDP growth less a productivity dividend. In line with this move, the Public Service Commission, which previously was responsible for all appointments and promotions, has devolved authority for all but the most senior

appointments to the departments. As a result, ministries have been able quickly to fill vacancies with their own recruits. The next steps will involve devolution of financial management as well as lifting person-year controls (Lim, 1996).

Ghana has recently put in place its Civil Service Performance Improvement Program. The program includes a new Civil Service Law that creates a clear distinction between the policy and regulatory functions of ministries and the executive functions of operating agencies, a requirement that all ministries and their agencies produce performance improvement plans, and the implementation of performance contracts for the public servants who head ministries and agencies. In addition, the Ministry of Finance established a Public Financial Management Reform Program aimed at strengthening the budget and accounting systems. Implementing agencies will be required to produce annual corporate plans which define output measures and set targets for financial performance, volume of output, quality of service, and efficiency (Dodoo, 1996).

### **DEMANDING, MEASURING, AND REWARDING BOTH ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE**

The counterpoise to greater managerial autonomy is a rigorous scrutiny of performance, both organizational and individual. Performance measurement is now at the heart of relationships between central and line agencies, in preference to process controls and pre-audit. Thus, a critical task for practitioners of the New Public Management is defining, at the organizational level, appropriate performance indicators and targets. This involves choosing measureable indicators that are meaningful to the customer, in that they capture the major dimensions of service, such as punctuality, predictability, or accuracy. The set of indicators should provide a full and accurate picture of performance, but it should be no larger than is necessary. Targets should be reachable with effort and, over time, they should become more demanding, so as to stimulate continuous improvement (McGrath, 1996; Shand, 1996). Government auditors, who in the past often restricted their attention to compliance auditing, are now seeking to become involved in the definition of performance indicators and the evaluation of performance (Higgins, 1996; Price and McAdams, 1996).

Financial performance is one area where the Commonwealth OECD countries have made some significant reforms. Department and agency heads in the United Kingdom and Australia are being required to return an efficiency dividend of 1.5% per annum on running costs to the Treasury. In Australia, this dividend amounts to about AUD 80 million per annum. New Zealand now charges departments for their use of capital, including depreciation, a policy that has resulted in much more economical use of capital (Laking, 1994). Australia is requiring departments to pay for internal government services, such as legal advice, also leading to the more careful use of resources (Dawkins, 1994). Both New Zealand and the United Kingdom

have moved their agencies from cash to accrual accounting, which forces them to be more aware of the future cost implications of current resource commitments and puts them on a more equal footing with the private sector (Laking, 1994; Mottram, 1994).

### **Results Achieved**

An example of this approach applied comprehensively is Australia's radical transformation of the management of its state-owned enterprises by giving managers more autonomy, requiring them to produce mission statements and financial targets, encouraging benchmarking, and increasing private sector competition. Dawkins cited some impressive results: 10% per annum increases in labor productivity between 1987 and 1992, 24% lower real prices for air travel and for international telephone calls in 1993 than in 1987, and increased profitability of the state-owned sector from AUD 170 million in 1988-89 to AUD 5.2 billion in 1993-94 (Dawkins, 1994).

Dr. Basil Walker, Chief Executive of New Zealand's Foundation of Research, Science, and Technology, provided a practitioner's view of the effectiveness of the state sector reforms, both in his area and overall (Walker, 1996). The government created a small Ministry of Research, Science, and Technology to provide policy advice and set research priorities and a Foundation of Research, Science, and Technology to purchase research and development. Research within government departments was transferred to ten crown research institutes. The Crown Research Institutes are required to compete against other research institutes, universities, and private sector companies for research grants. Walker argued that the reforms have worked very well in this area, for the following reasons: the government has set long-term priorities for research and has substantially increased long-term funding commitments for priority areas; having provided these clear signals, the government has given long-term grants based on its priorities and on scientific merit, with price negotiated after the fact; and crown research institutes have not been required to pay dividends to the government, but have been allowed to reinvest surpluses. However, Walker noted that there have been occasional instabilities in the detailed allocation of funding and that there are still boundary issues to be resolved between public and private investment in science and, within the public sector, between the Foundation and other departments.

Walker evaluated the overall results of the New Zealand reforms as a mixed picture, but with the mix heavily weighted toward success. He found the following successes: the liberation of managers from central input controls has led, not to reckless behaviour, but to responsible and innovative management focused on major issues; accrual accounting systems with full-cost pricing for all inputs have led to a general reduction in the cost of doing business and increased efficiency, particularly in the utilization of capital; the devolution of staffing to departments has led, not to spiraling costs and widely divergent practices, but to a common core



of “good practice,” innovation in responding to staff aspirations, and a balanced use of outsourcing. Overall, departments have also focused on the quality and content of their work rather than expenditures per se. Laking (1994) agreed with Walker that the clarification of organizational missions and outputs that is such a critical component of New Zealand’s approach enables managers to focus their attention in the way that their private sector counterparts do. These evaluations are also similar to that reported in Pallot (1997).

However, there are still the following unresolved issues: weaknesses in horizontal coordination across departments; while purchase agreements are an effective accountability framework for a successful department, ministerial intervention has been necessary when departments encounter serious problems; and, despite the arm’s-length accountability framework for state-owned enterprises in which the minister is seen as shareholder, ministers do face public pressures to intervene. Walker noted that the New Zealand government has attempted to respond to these problems by achieving more horizontal coordination through the increased use of interdepartmental committees of officials and directives issued by Cabinet Office, permitting more ministerial intervention when departments have serious problems, and recognizing that state-owned enterprises have a wider set of objectives than privately-owned firms (Walker, 1996; Pallot, 1997).

In the United Kingdom, officials consider that the Next Steps program has been a success. For example, Mountfield reported that it has enabled agencies to deliver improved performance, measured by both cost reductions and improvements in service quality. He claimed that agencies are meeting an increasing proportion of their targets, which themselves are becoming more demanding year by year, and he believes efficiency as a whole is probably increasing by 3% per annum (Mountfield, 1996). Some academics are more critical. Talbot analyzed the data on key performance indicators and claimed that many were being redefined from year to year and that, in 1995, nearly half of those that were still being used had been set at lower levels than in 1994 (Talbot, 1996). However, studies such as these that aggregate all performance indicators for all agencies may be unhelpful because they do not distinguish between agencies and indicators that may be unlike in important respects; in effect, they combine apples and oranges, not to speak of cherries and peaches. A more useful way of looking at the problem would be to examine *each* agency and all its indicators, and then reach a conclusion as to whether that agency’s performance is or isn’t improving.

One event that has generated questions about the autonomy of Next Steps agencies concerns the former chief executive of the Prison Service. Three dangerous prisoners escaped from a high security prison; the Home Secretary ordered an enquiry which led to the dismissal of the chief executive, who later complained of undue ministerial micro-management. In his paper, Mountfield (1996) defended the minister, arguing that Next Steps never decreed a clear and immutable distinction between policy and operations and that, because the minister is ultimately

accountable to Parliament, the minister must be able to look closely at problem areas. This is consistent with Walker's observation that in New Zealand ministers tend to get involved when there are problems, and indeed is consistent with behaviour in private sector organizations as well. In my judgment, this case does not demonstrate that the Next Steps program has failed to increase managerial autonomy.

The discussion to this point has focused on organizational performance; in addition, a number of countries are extending performance evaluation to individuals, particularly at senior levels. Both the United Kingdom and New Zealand are moving from a tenure system to fixed-term contracts, generally of five years, and permitting competition from outside the public service for senior positions. By 1994, 9 of 37 agency heads in New Zealand had come from the private sector, and three from overseas. In addition, both New Zealand and the United Kingdom have been making greater use of performance pay at the senior levels (Laking, 1994; Mottram, 1994). A number of other Commonwealth members, both newly-industrialized countries such as Singapore (Lim, 1996) and Malaysia (Shafie, 1996) and developing countries such as Ghana (Doodoo, 1996), Grenada (Payne-Banfield, 1996), Malta (Fenech-Adami, 1994), and Zimbabwe (Mangwende, 1996) are also starting to use individual performance agreements with a view to subsequently instituting performance pay. However, evaluation of performance pay schemes has been less favourable than of other elements of the New Public Management. A 1993 OECD study found that many performance pay schemes were not functioning well because pay was not tied effectively to organizational strategy, because appraisals were perceived as subjective, because the amounts of money involved were often relatively small, and because individual rewards were seen to discourage teamwork (Shand, 1996; OECD, 1996). The OECD report expresses some ambivalence over whether it is possible to resolve the difficulties cited or whether performance pay is intrinsically at odds with a public service culture.

## **PROVIDING THE HUMAN AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES MANAGERS NEED**

### **Human Resources**

In the area of human resources, there are contradictory trends. On the one hand, public services throughout the Commonwealth have been downsizing; on the other hand, there have been efforts to support the public servants who remain. Downsizing is occurring for several reasons. OECD countries, driven by severe debt problems, have been forced to reduce public sector expenditures; developing countries face even worse debt problems, as well as pressure from the IMF and World Bank to implement structural adjustment programs. Innovations in information technology are also leading to fewer jobs, particularly at the clerical and middle-management levels (Borins, 1995). For example, Singapore's computer-

ization program eliminated 5000 positions (Quah, 1994). In addition, public servants are also facing substantial wage restraint; in many developing countries, their current dollar wages have been frozen despite rapid inflation, with the result that their real wages have fallen dramatically, to the point where many public servants have taken second jobs and/or their integrity can readily be compromised. Ruth Hubbard, Chair of the Public Service Commission of Canada eloquently described the atmosphere in a public service facing substantial downsizing (Hubbard, 1996). There is a pervasive climate of uncertainty, particularly if the cuts take place over a long period of time; managers implementing policies that affect friends and colleagues feel a sense of isolation; and public servants become cynical if it appears that politicians have little interest in the impact of reforms on them. Another factor affecting their response to downsizing is the ability of the labor market to absorb redundant workers; even the Commonwealth OECD countries have experienced high unemployment rates, so that though former public servants learn new skills, they may have difficulty finding a setting in which to employ them. Of course, the situation is worse in developing countries (Sibanda, 1994).

Nevertheless, governments continue to undertake initiatives to improve the capacities of the public service that remains, by recruiting talented people, by undertaking employment equity initiatives, and by improving skills through constant training. Singapore entices high flyers with scholarships to either the National University of Singapore or elite universities overseas; after completion of their program, they are required to serve in the government. Singapore has also taken the boldest, if not most expensive, initiative in compensation policy by setting civil service salaries, at all levels, that are competitive with those in the private sector. Senior permanent secretaries are now earning in excess of \$300,000 per annum (Quah, 1994). Of course, Singapore's strong economy and debt-free public sector make possible compensation policies that most other countries could not afford. However, departments or agencies in other countries have taken advantage of their increased autonomy in human resource management to launch their own fast-track recruitment programs, for example Inland Revenue in the U.K. (Matheson, 1994). Despite extensive downsizing, the federal government of Canada maintains a high flyer recruitment program.

Employment equity initiatives are important, not only because they try to undo the damage caused by generations of systematic discrimination, but also because they will ultimately expand the pool of talent available to the government. For example, Australia has established a strategic plan targeted at women, the disabled, aboriginals, and those of non-English backgrounds (Ives, 1994). The transition from apartheid to democracy presents South Africa (Skweyiya, 1994) and Namibia (Geingob, 1994) with the need to undertake major employment equity initiatives. Both countries have had to merge numerous racially or geographically-defined public services into one national public service. South Africa is attempting to use vacancies and a limited number of new positions to increase

the presence of under-represented groups, especially Africans and women, in the public service. Bursaries are being given to encourage under-represented groups to join and training will be provided in basic skills and professional values (Skweyiya, 1994). Nevertheless, the government's policy of inter-racial reconciliation dictates a recognition that whites have a valuable contribution to make. This, coupled with the new government's overall fiscal constraints, places limits on how rapidly the public service can be transformed. The issue of diversity was itself the subject of a CAPAM regional conference for southern Africa (Borins and Ncholo, 1995).

A great variety of training initiatives are also occurring throughout the Commonwealth. Some are tied to specific government or organizational priorities, such as Singapore's customer service training, mentioned above; a similar program in the U.K. Employment Service (Fogden, 1996); and Ghana reinforcing economic deregulation by retraining the former regulators (Botchwey, 1994). Australia, the U.K. Inland Revenue, and Mauritius are all using competency-based training, in which people are trained in the skills appropriate to their organization rank (Ives, 1994; Matheson, 1994; Jugnauth, 1994). Finally, there is a growing trend towards creating learning organizations, in which learning is based on initiatives in organizational reform, policy innovation, or service enhancement (Hickey, 1996; Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1996; Halvorson and Rodriques, 1996).

### **Technological Resources**

In contrast to the mixed picture in the human resource area, there have been rapid advances in the application of information technology in the public sector. At the 1994 conference, reports of information technology initiatives dealt mainly with internal office automation in Singapore (Quah, 1994), Malaysia (Ahmad Sarji, 1994), Malta (Fenech-Adami, 1994), and Mauritius (Jugnauth, 1994). Interestingly, Singapore calculated a benefit-cost ratio for its computerization program of 2.71. The initiatives described at the 1996 conference went much farther, including customer service improvements, use of the Internet, and national information technology plans.

In addition to the Service Ontario kiosks described above, Malaysia is also providing electronic kiosks in post offices (Ahmad Sarji, 1996). Canada is using electronic data interchange for filing income tax returns, learning about and bidding for government contracts, and, in several provinces, land titles and personal property registration (Simpson, 1996). In 1994, few government departments in the Commonwealth were accessible by Internet; by 1996, many have instituted the use of electronic mail through the Internet and have established World Wide Web sites. The Canadian government has established bulletin boards and list-servers in several policy areas. One that is highly developed is HealthNet, a list-server that hosts discussions of procedures for remote diagnosis and radiographic transmissions, job postings, and requests for proposals. A HealthNet Community Access

pilot project is being launched, with the objective of providing networking opportunities for rural and remote health facilities. Industry Canada recently released *Strategis*, an on-line database with information about markets, industry sectors, new technologies and products, aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Canadian business.

Governments are now aware of the service and policy implications of the information highway. Malaysia is building a comprehensive telecommunications infrastructure within the public sector, called the Government Integrated Telecommunications Network (GITN), which will support such applications as video conferencing, electronic mail, bulletin boards, distance learning, and electronic transmission of medical information and records among government hospitals (Ahmad Sarji, 1996). Botswana, Canada, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, and Singapore are all formulating information technology plans to deal with policy issues such as the regulatory environment for the communications industry, privacy and security for users of networks, the roles of the public and private sectors in infrastructure investments, training for managers and the general public, and the need to extend the information highway to the disadvantaged (Alamango, 1996; Okot-Uma, 1996).

While some of the Commonwealth OECD countries, particularly Canada, have taken the lead, the Asian newly-industrialized countries are also in the forefront, and the developing countries are not being excluded. Countries that are putting in place new infrastructure can leap-frog the now outdated infrastructure of the more advanced countries. For example, Singapore is requiring new homes to have broadband wiring that can accommodate interactive cable TV, home shopping, distance learning, and the Internet, and it plans to extend broadband wiring to 90% of homes by the end of the decade (Lim, 1996). The Commonwealth Secretariat has supported the establishment of the Commonwealth Network for Information Technology for Development, or COMNET-IT, now headquartered in Malta. COMNET-IT's mission is to promote the computer networking of institutions and individuals with the purpose of accelerating social and economic development in the Commonwealth third world countries (Alamango, 1996). Internet access is being provided in third world countries, often in universities or in communities, rather than in individuals' homes, and using wireless technology.

## **RECEPTIVENESS TO COMPETITION AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS ABOUT WHERE PUBLIC PURPOSES SHOULD BE PERFORMED**

### **Using Competition in the United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom has gone much farther than the other Commonwealth countries in using competition within the public sector, through the use of market testing for internal service provision and the establishment of internal markets in health and education. The value of market-tested goods purchased by government

has increased from 25 million to 1.3 billion pounds between 1992 and 1994, with cost-savings of 20% or more. In many instances, the public sector continues to win contracts for market-tested goods, but the threat of private sector competition has improved public sector performance (Mottram, 1994).

Lacey's (1996) paper thoroughly documented the current outcomes and future prospects for an important experiment in injecting competition within the public sector, namely the reform of the National Health Service (NHS). These reforms, introduced in 1990, had the intent of separating funding from service delivery, thus bringing decisions about purchasing services as close to the consumer as possible. In the context of health, this meant ending direct government funding for hospitals and requiring them to compete with one another for contracts let by local health authorities and general practitioners, who are given funding by the government to buy hospital services on their patients' behalf. The government also promulgated the Patient's Charter, a citizen's charter laying down performance standards for the entire health system.

Lacey identified a number of outcomes of the reforms. There has been a shift in power within the medical system from hospitals and specialists to managers and primary care providers. There is evidence that waiting times for elective surgery have fallen. The government is also publishing "league tables" for hospitals, including such measures as their waiting times and speed in treating accidents and emergencies. Hospitals have become much more aware of both client needs and of the cost of meeting them. Health authorities and general practitioners are using contract negotiations to force hospitals to provide better service, and hospitals are responding by improving the range and quality of services provided. As a result of these negotiations and the increased monitoring of the cost and quality of services, the cost of managing the health system has increased substantially. However, Lacey attributes this in part to the pre-reform NHS being seriously under-managed and in part to the fixed costs of the new system. Lacey also thinks the reforms have increased equity in the system. In the past, specialists affiliated with hospitals had little incentive to reduce their waiting lists since that bolstered demand by patients with higher incomes for treatment in the specialists' private clinics. Now the hospitals employing specialists do have an incentive to reduce waiting lists.

Several issues and potential future scenarios must be kept in view. One reason hospitals have behaved competitively is that they have substantial excess capacity; if that excess capacity disappears, power in the market would shift back to the hospitals. In the past, rationing of health care was done by waiting lists and doctors' individual judgment about what should and should not be treated. Patients who have been promised empowerment by the Patient's Charter may find this rationing unacceptable. Finally, it is important to gather more information on the performance of the health system, not only in terms of costs, but also in terms of ultimate health outcomes.

### **Redrawing the Margins of the State**

Countries throughout the Commonwealth have been rethinking the rationale for state intervention, and their conclusions have led to smaller public sectors. The most comprehensive re-examinations of the state was the Program Review undertaken in 1994 and 1995 by the Canadian federal government (Smith, 1996a). The rationale for every federal government program was considered in terms of the following six tests:

1. Public interest test: is the activity still useful for society?
2. Role of government test: should any government be involved in this activity?
3. Federalism test: is the federal government the appropriate level for this activity, or could another level of government do it better?
4. Partnership test: could this activity be done in whole or by part by another group in society?
5. Efficiency test: could this activity be carried out at less cost?
6. Affordability test: even if the other tests are met, is society able to pay for the program?

The Program Review reported to a special committee of senior ministers, who made the hard decisions. It was considered a success in that the federal government was able to make major spending cuts and put itself on a clear course to eliminating the deficit. Some examples of the application of the six tests were the abolition of some transportation and agricultural subsidies on the basis of the first test; selling the air navigation system to a non-profit corporation of its stakeholders on the basis of the second test; and transferring most airports to local authorities on the basis of the fourth test. One federal ministry which was greatly affected was Transport; as a result of the Program Review, it has been reduced from 20,000 staff to 3,000 and a budget of CAD 3 billion to CAD 1 billion.

There has been a great deal of privatization in the Commonwealth in the last fifteen years, in the OECD countries, newly-industrialized, and developing countries alike. There have been 47 privatizations in the U.K., including much of the transportation, communications, and energy industries. In 1991, the government of Uganda embarked on a major program to privatize many government enterprises and to improve the efficiency of those remaining in the public sector. By now 47 of the 107 enterprises slated for divestiture have been privatized, mainly in such areas as bus service, food production, financial services, and hotels. In every case, several competing firms have replaced government monopolies, and the range of choice and quality of service has improved (Khabusi, 1996). Malaysia introduced its Privatization Master Plan in 1991 and between 1991 and 1995, 29 agencies were privatized, entailing the transfer of 46,000 civil servants to the private sector. The government cites as benefits savings in annual operating expenditures of \$2.8 billion and revenues of \$8.6 billion from the sale of its shares, as well as produc-

tivity increases in the privatized entities (Ahmad Sarji, 1996). Singapore privatized its telecom, airline, and shipyards (Mohideen, 1994). Other major privatization programs were implemented in Zimbabwe as part of its Structural Adjustment Program (Sibanda, 1994), Ghana (Botchwey, 1994), Tanzania (Rupia, 1994), New Zealand (Laking, 1994), and Malta (Fenech-Adami, 1994).

In many instances, the question as to how a public purpose should be carried out has been answered, not by the either/or of public ownership or privatization, but by the both/and of partnerships, between government and either the private sector or non-governmental organizations. The U.K. is inviting the private sector to finance infrastructure development (Mottram, 1994). The Canadian federal government has established joint ventures with the private sector in space technology and student funding, franchised the retail component of the national post office to small businesses, and collaborates with voluntary organizations in managing the national parks (McIntosh, 1996).

Non-governmental organizations are playing an increasingly important role in implementing policy in developing countries. For example, India is turning to non-governmental organizations for program delivery in education, family planning, and rural development (Ranganathan, 1994). Ghana is beginning to use the traditional authority of village chieftains to deliver local government services (Kiggundu, 1994). The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has pioneered micro-credit among the rural poor, particularly women (Shams, 1994). Shams cited impressive results showing that recipients are using this credit to improve their housing, food, clothing, and education and to create jobs, that women who receive credit are becoming socially more assertive, and that loan recipients are not defaulting. Another strong indicator of its success is that the Grameen Bank approach is being replicated in other countries of Asia.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence from the Commonwealth has enabled us to study a wide range of countries at very different stages of economic development, and to find examples of the New Public Management in countries at every stage. Thus, we should have more confidence in asserting that the New Public Management is truly a global paradigm. The papers presented at the two CAPAM conferences have also provided more information about the results achieved by the New Public Management, which I would summarize as follows:

1. Initiatives to improve the quality of customer service in the public sector are well under way throughout the Commonwealth.
2. Many countries have increased their operating departments' autonomy in financial and human resource management. New Zealand and the United Kingdom have gone farthest in this direction with the state sector reforms and Next Steps



Agencies, respectively. These agencies have become more focused on their missions and have achieved cost reductions and service improvements. A number of other countries are now emulating their approach.

3. Many countries are at work defining appropriate performance measures in terms of organizational outputs. They are also moving to fixed terms, performance contracts, and performance pay for senior public servants. However, there is some evidence that, at least in the past, performance pay has not worked very well in the public sector.
4. In the area of human resources, downsizing and pay freezes or reductions threaten to undermine morale and performance; on the other hand, governments are attempting to support the public service through active recruitment programs, employment equity initiatives, and more sophisticated training packages.
5. The application of information technology in the public sector is advancing very rapidly, and governments everywhere are using it to improve service and communications with the public, through such technologies as electronic kiosks, electronic data interchange, and the Internet. The coming of the information highway is raising numerous policy issues, and many Commonwealth governments are formulating national information technology plans.
6. There has been a great deal of privatization throughout the Commonwealth; in addition, governments are increasingly using partnerships with the private sector or non-governmental organizations as an alternative method of service delivery. The U.K. has pioneered market testing and internal competition, with positive results in terms of lower cost and increased service.

Even though there is substantial convergence among the Commonwealth countries on the New Public Management paradigm, their economic differences do have an impact on implementation. The Commonwealth OECD countries were pushed into the New Public Management by fiscal crises due to growing public debt and taxpayer resistance to higher taxes. In addition, demanding consumers have expected service quality in the public sector comparable to that in the private sector ("a queue is a queue is queue"). New Public Management initiatives have often had strong political leadership, whether from governments of the left or the right; they have often been stimulated by the ideas of economists, in particular their advocacy of competition rather than monopoly and the emphasis in public choice economics on changing the incentive system for public servants.

The Commonwealth's newly industrialized countries in Asia, Malaysia and Singapore, have achieved impressive records of economic growth in the last three decades.<sup>3</sup> This economic growth has given them stable currencies, little public sector debt, and large balance of payments and fiscal surpluses. The pressure on the public sector to improve its performance is not due to the exigencies of debt crises, but rather to the demands and attitudes of the society it serves. For example, Singapore's civil service remains cost-conscious and efficiency oriented. This

contrasts with the ballooning of the civil services of some of the OECD countries during their years of rapid economic growth in the Sixties and Seventies.

Singapore's current strong fiscal situation means that its public service can afford to make investments in either human or physical capital that western governments, burdened by debt, can no longer afford. For example, the policies of paying salaries that are competitive with the private sector, supporting a relatively large number of "high flyers" studying overseas, and major acquisitions of information technology are all expensive. Nonetheless, the government of Singapore would justify them as providing future benefits that are worth the investment, as evidenced by its benefit-cost analysis of its investments in information technology.

Where Singapore and Malaysia differ from the OECD countries is that, even though they have privatized a substantial number of activities, they are not putting as much emphasis on internal competition within the public service or on market testing. Perhaps this is reflective of cultural values influenced by Confucian thought, in which public servants are accorded greater deference. In addition, they both have a very strong tradition of collaboration between government and the private sector, as evidenced by the formulation of national economic strategies.

The Commonwealth's less developed countries appear to be deficient in many of the prerequisites for the New Public Management. Put most generally, they must establish what Dahrendorf (1990) calls civil society, namely "institutions which are autonomous in that they are not state-run, are not subject to the whims of kings and tyrants, but are sustained by citizens endowed with rights and the wherewithal to make use of them." This has a number of implications for the New Public Management. In some countries the applicability of the rule of law to all including public servants and equitable administration of the law cannot be taken for granted; as discussed above, this is not because of intrinsic weakness in the individuals, but because of systemic problems such as dramatic declines in the real incomes of public servants. In addition, initiatives to improve customer service presuppose demanding customers whose experience with private sector services influences their expectations of the public sector. Similarly, initiatives to contract out or privatize public services assume that there is a private sector large and sophisticated enough to bid competitively for functions or organizations that are being put on the auction block.

Despite these deficiencies, these countries are beginning to implement the New Public Management. In part it is due to pressure from the IMF and World Bank to undertake structural adjustment programs that include elements of the New Public Management. In addition, many of the Commonwealth's countries are attempting to put in place simultaneously both the New Public Management and its prerequisites. Thus, New Public Management initiatives in developing countries should be seen, not in isolation, but as part of comprehensive programs of constitutional and political reform and economic development. It is encouraging that in some cases they are developing indigenous solutions, such as the use of non-governmental

organizations in implementing education, family planning, and rural development programs, the latter by means of micro-credit agencies such as the Grameen Bank.

The New Public Management is very much a practitioners' movement, with initiatives being undertaken all over the world. One important role that academics can play is to observe and evaluate these initiatives. In doing this, we must gather as much information as we can from a wide variety of organizations and countries; the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management facilitates this imperative. Furthermore, information gathering will take time. Some initiatives (for example, the United Kingdom's Next Steps Agencies and New Zealand's state sector reforms) have been in place for quite some time; others, such as their replication in Ghana and Singapore, are just beginning. In addition, the earliest initiatives continue to evolve, particularly when new political parties come to power. I expect the New Public Management to continue to remain new for quite some time, and I expect the Commonwealth to provide an excellent vantage point from which to which this process of reform and renewal.

## NOTES

1. The 1994 rapporteur's summary and the papers presented at the 1994 conference were published in Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, *Government in Transition*, available from CAPAM, 1075 Bay St., Suite 402, Toronto, ON M5S 2B1; the papers presented at the 1996 conference have not been published but are also available from CAPAM, as is the rapporteur's summary. CAPAM's e-mail address is 103350.3543@compuserve.com.
2. The Commonwealth Secretariat's series is entitled *Current Good Practices and New Developments in Public Service Management* and it has published volumes dealing with Canada, Malta, Malaysia, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom.
3. This is also true of Hong Kong. However, because Hong Kong will leave the Commonwealth and become part of China on July 1, 1997, this section deals exclusively with Malaysia and Singapore.

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