

Reinventing Government: The Israeli Exception

The Case of Political Cultures and Public Policy–Making

Iris Geva-May
University of Haifa

ABSTRACT: In recent years, the institutionalization of norms of policy accountability and planning in the Israeli public administration has preoccupied a series of committees on public service reform and government reorganization. This paper discusses the background of the Israeli policy-making culture and its effect on recommendations for systematic policy planning, analysis, evaluation, and accountability. This account is interesting, partly, because it traces a reaction to institutional arrangements that are in many ways similar to those promoted by advocates of the New Public Management. Ironically, however, it explains the efforts to replace them with something more like traditional bureaucratic arrangements.

The complexity of modern government calls for sophisticated administration to identify sound policies and to carry them out efficiently. For example, when President Franklin Roosevelt presented his program to reorganize the executive branch to the United States Congress in 1937, four out of his five points were aimed at improving the ability of the central government machinery to define and to carry out public policy. Roosevelt emphasized that government could not function efficiently without an efficient and an accountable public administration,

comparing a government without good public administration to a house built on sand.

Is Israel's public administration a house built on sand? Or is it that public administration models cannot always be imitated in other contexts, as efficient or sophisticated as they may be? Public administration developments and related choices cannot escape cultural biases. In this regard, I support Coyle's clearly stated view that ". . .the match between organization[s] and the environment[s] is the key issue [that matters]. . ." (1997: 65) and that, as Thompson and Wildavsky argue, "An organizational act is rational if it supports one's organizational culture—one's way of life" (1986: 276). What is Israel's "way of life" and how much rationality is there in the way it has affected its public administration and its policy-making apparatus?

Israel is an anomaly. It is both a new state established in 1948, and a modern democratic society. Its newness means that Israel lacks strong administrative institutions, especially norms of systematic policy accountability and planning. A feeling that the Israeli government may be a house built on sand has caused a steady increase in general awareness of the need for much greater efficiency and accountability in the Israeli public service, as the state has advanced beyond its formative stage. Since Israel's beginnings, this lack has been a source of criticism, at first primarily from academe (especially Dror, 1968, 1969, 1971), and later by political parties and members of the parliament (Knesset). An essential feature of good public administration as envisaged by the traditional bureaucratic arrangements within administrative design in most developed countries is indeed almost entirely absent in Israel. Accountability simply does not have a high priority in Israel. Yehezkel Dror (1968) attributes this surprising fact to the troubles that beset the new state, to the lack of an administrative tradition, and to culture. Norms present in the various Jewish agencies prior to the establishment of the state of Israel continue to influence its functioning, that is, "getting around" the law; "helping" one's friends; "naive socialism," such as equal wages for all public employees (Weinshall & Kfir, 1994); improvisation; and ambiguity (Sharkansky, 1997, 1998).

The state of Israel and its governmental and public policy structures were created during the struggle for independence and survival. In the turmoil of establishment, organizing coherent arrangements for public policy-making and implementation was simply out of the question. Instead, policy, management structures, and processes were improvised from whatever was at hand—primarily British colonial institutions established by the Commonwealth Department in London (Israel was a British mandate until 1948) and the Jewish Agency which functioned parallel to British institutions. The Jewish Agency's main aim was to bring to Palestine Jews who had fled Europe before World War II or survived the Nazi death camps, settle them, provide them with financial support, and ensure their security.

These two establishments had completely different structures and processes. The Commonwealth Administration was a complex bureaucracy. Its forty state departments were based on administrative norms developed over the years by the Commonwealth Department and were characterized by a high degree of functional and jurisdictional specialization in policy making and policy implementation. The norms required that activities be performed by well trained, politically neutral professionals, and be controlled from above, that policy planning functions be delegated to staff specialists, and that the exercise of judgment be passed up the ranks. By contrast, the national Jewish Agency had only seven subdivisions and they widely overlapped in responsibility for policy making and implementation. This was especially the case in foreign affairs, social welfare, and settlement policies. The Jewish Agency's approach to policy making was entrepreneurial, decentralized, pragmatic, and risk taking, at times dangerously so (Reuveni, 1988; Kfir, 1995, 1997). The Jewish Agency was staffed by nonprofessional, politically engaged, passionate activists.

Wherever the state's needs were well thought out and implementation plans and procedures were most urgent—security and agricultural settlement—policy analysis, evaluation, and implementation (PAEI) were relatively advanced. In other domains of public administration, they were practically nonexistent. Paradoxically, however, this tendency towards adhocism in policy formulation and implementation was reinforced by achievements in the domains in which the norms of systematic policy accountability and planning were most advanced. In the security domain, Israel triumphed despite being surrounded by its enemies. Resettlement was accomplished on an unprecedented scale. The initial existing population of 600,000 doubled in three years and tripled in ten (reaching two million in 1958). The current population is nearly six million. Economic growth, and high living standards, and so on have been achieved without formalizing or regularizing administrative practices and procedures. In other words, things have “worked out” fairly well despite the absence of administrative institutionalization.

These successes strengthened the entrepreneurial and nonprofessional administrative inclinations present at the creation of the Israeli state; they also tended to discredit expert analysis and formal planning. In 1948, the so-called experts had doubted that Israel could survive more than a few weeks or months; nevertheless, it did so (Sharef, 1962). Moreover, formal planning requires minimal levels of predictability and control. In its first 25 years, Israel was involved in six full-scale wars and frequent more limited military operations. These emergencies were unforeseeable and necessitated ad hoc maneuvers to cope with the public expenditures, manpower shortages, etc., that these events entailed. Immigration rates were equally uncontrollable. Under the Law of Return, any person of Jewish faith is automatically granted citizenship when s/he immigrates to Israel. Israel remains committed to defending Jews wherever they are in peril: 100,000 were brought to Israel from Yemen in 1951, 200,000 from Iraq in 1950, thousands from

Egypt after the war of 1956, 35,000 from Ethiopia in 1984. In 1991 14,300 people were flown to Israel within 36 hours in the so-called "Operation Solomon." Further, through 1996 over 800,000 immigrants (constituting approximately 20% of Israel's overall population) arrived from the former USSR (between 1990–1996).

Budgets, a source of predictability in most developed states, were especially uncertain in Israel. Revenue flows largely depended on voluntary contributions from abroad, loans, and reparations to victims of the Nazis, sources that were inherently unpredictable. Security problems caused rapid fluctuations in economic growth and inhibited foreign investment. Indeed, social and economic circumstances remain as unpredictable and uncontrollable as ever in this part of the world.

Finally, a single party dominated the government of Israel during the first 25 years of its existence. As with other modern democratic societies, (e.g., Japan), one-party dominance no doubt promoted pragmatism and reduced the influence of administrative experts and academe on public administration and policy-making practices (Dror, 1972; Downs & Larkey, 1986). Furthermore, the long history of one-party dominance may well explain the absence of parliamentary committees that are directly and exclusively devoted to public accountability, as is the case in Britain, Canada, or the U.S. (Professional Public Committee for the Re-assessment and Advancement of Public Service (PPC), 1989; Caiden 1969, 1991; Dror, 1968). Indeed, parliamentary committees, excepting only the State Comptroller's Committee, lack the power to oblige ministers or directors-general to give systematic periodic accounts of their ministries' activities. Even if parliamentary committees were empowered to hold the public service accountable to the public, they lack the professional staffs needed to oversee it adequately.

The absence of continuous scrutiny of administrative procedure may explain the low salience of the public service in Israel (Schwartz 1995, 1998; Geva-May, 1996). No guidelines, norms, rules, or laws exist to enforce evaluation or systematic policy analysis (PPC, 1989). In fact, programs and policies are ignored until they get into trouble, and even then are subjected to public scrutiny only where the programs involved are large and critical for important public concerns (Schwartz, 1995, 1998).

The shift from one-party dominance to multi-party coalitions has not yet resulted in increased administrative regularization, professionalism, or accountability. As in the U.S., Britain, France, India, and Israel changes of government have often triggered reform efforts. These attempts have typically followed changes of prime ministers, either from the same party (in 1966, Prime Minister Eshkol succeeded Ben Gurion—both of the Labor Party—and this allowed the initiation of the Central Committee for Governmental Re-organization) or between parties (in 1977 the Likud, the main right-wing party, came to power and attempted to initiate reorganization of government and budgeting systems). In

1996, when the Likud came to power again, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's government immediately declared its intention to establish analysis, planning, coordination and policy implementation units in the Prime Minister's Office. However, these efforts have seldom advanced far. The tendency has been to put off the difficult issues raised by administrative reform, perhaps because of the need to minimize disagreements within ruling coalitions consisting of many diverse, often antagonistic, parties.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT YEARS

Over the years, various position papers, analyses, reports, and evaluations produced by administrative experts, both in public service and in academe, have called for increased regularization, professionalism, and accountability of Israel's public service. The following concerns showed the need for administrative reform:

- the inability of existing systems to address emerging problems, e.g., technology transfers, changing human capital requirements, capital flows, etc.
- the inability of existing systems to solve current problems, e.g., rebellion in the West Bank, unprecedented unemployment, high inflation, growing emigration
- the inability of long-standing systems to prevent past failures, most notably the October War, when Israel was taken entirely by surprise and suffered initial defeat by the Egyptian armed forces
- the necessity of imitating procedures in other countries, dictated in part by the need to integrate into the global economy
- evidence that Israel's best achievements have been associated with the state's highest levels of administrative regularization, professionalism, and accountability, e.g., defense and agriculture
- the belief that in a democracy the public has the right to know how effectively policies have been formulated and carried out by government; accountability is and should be a major criterion for the soundness of a democratic state

Moreover, the evidence shows that administrative professionalism, as measured by formal training, promotes accountability (Geva-May, 1996; Schwartz, 1995). Geva-May (1996) reports increased self-reviewing and evaluation in the ministries of Health and Education, where the educational levels of employees are high. Schwartz (1995) reports significant differences in levels of accountability between the Ministry of Social Security, where the majority of employees are professionally trained, primarily economists and statisticians, and the Ministry of Welfare, where they are not.

THE PUBLIC PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RE-ASSESSMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE (PPC)

The Public Professional Committee for the Re/Assessment and Advancement of the Public Service in Israel (PPC), initiated in 1986, is the most important of the expert bodies calling for administrative reform. Its creation indicates a considerable perceptual shift in the outlook of the Israeli public administration. So far, its reports on priorities and policy-making patterns in the public service, coordination of government activities, ethics and values in the public service, and public service professionalism have only slightly affected the actual functioning of Israel's public service. That may now be changing.

The PPC was established by the Government of National Unity, a grand coalition led by Israel's two largest political parties, Labor and Likud. The Government of National Unity was created to solve two urgent problems: withdrawal from Lebanon and reduction of Israel's triple-digit inflation rate. Believing that both problems reflected deeper structural problems, however, the Government of National Unity charged the PPC with examining the administrative and decision-making patterns of Israel's public service.

The PPC was chaired by H. Kubersky, a highly respected former director general who over the years sat on several government committees. His participation was sought for his experience, credibility, and visibility. The committee consisted of academic leaders in the fields of public administration and policy,¹ directors-general of government ministries, and former ministers. In addition, the PPC was adequately funded throughout its existence and was supported by an expert staff composed of academics and practitioners. The PPC comprised eight working-groups (or subcommittees), each chaired by a PPC member. The topics assigned to the working-groups included: administrative doctrines and methodological guidelines; staff functions in the government at the macro- and microlevels; in-service and professional development of government employees; in-service and professional development of executives; government public relations; duties and rights of government employees; the advancement of women in the public service; and the advancement of minorities.

On all these issues the work of the PPC reflected the following basic principles:

- policy planning, evaluation, analysis, and implementation (PAEI) needed reform
- systems for advanced policy evaluation, analysis, and planning had to be established and institutionalized
- recommendations should be in line with basic democratic principles
- recommendations should be in line with advanced administration and public policy-making doctrines
- findings and recommendations should be formulated on a neutral, non-personal basis

- support should be mobilized from across the political and public service spectrum at all the stages of the PPC's work

The PPC regularly met twice a week to discuss and guide the work of the subcommittees, to evaluate and coordinate their findings, to consult with experts, and to prepare interim position papers, suggested priorities, and implementation plans. Several drafts of the PPC's final comprehensive report were discussed with members of the cabinet, other MKs and representatives of various interest groups. Finally, in 1989, the PPC issued a two-volume report that identified the shortcomings of the public service system and related agencies in Israel and, based on accepted public administration theories, offered detailed recommendations for their reform.

The PPC's recommendations aimed to solve problems caused by poor policy coordination among various ministries and agencies, by incompetent senior officials, and by inadequate policy planning and analysis. Therefore, they focused mainly on three chief topics: interdepartmental coordination, executive development, and policy formulation and execution.

Regarding interdepartmental coordination, the PPC recommended changes in the relations among the Government Commission,² the Budgeting Unit, and the ministries so that more responsibilities be allocated to the last-named. This, would be conditional on a higher degree of coordination on common issues of interest and centralized guidelines, more accountability procedures, and agreed working patterns (vol. 1, p. 8; pp. 124–127). Also recommended were different work-allocation patterns, whereby the central headquarters units would be involved in policy decision making, standard setting, and implementation assessment, while the other government offices would be concerned with policy and standards implementation.

Any recommendation on interdepartmental coordination was considered to be related, among other things, to personnel, particularly to executive development, and to management skill improvement (vol. 1, p. 9). The rationale underlying the recommendations by the subcommittee for this issue, chaired by Yehezkel Dror, was, "...people are the main factor that activates the public service and, ultimately, determines its nature. . ." (vol. 1, p. 80). Recommendations pertained to the recruitment of executives with higher academic degrees (at least with a Master's degree), more in-service training (at least 15 days a year), knowledge of the particular professional field, (e.g., economics, jurisprudence, technological development, health care administration, or welfare administration, etc.), the initiation of a College for National Public Policy for executive training, a "rotation" system among positions that individuals held in the system, and so on (vol. 1, pp. 80–86).

Two chapters of the PPC's final report were devoted to recommendations for the establishment of policy analysis, policy planning, and policy evaluation units.

Referring to PAEI capacity, the PPC offered the view that this is one of the “most urgent needs in public administration in Israel . . . and as an integral part of the work of the Prime Minister’s Office.”

The first recommendation was to introduce policy analysis, evaluation, research and planning in each of the governmental ministries and throughout the public service “. . .in order to entrench among and within the ministries coordinated processes of planning, budgeting, evaluation and research through the entire process of decision making, policy planning and policy implementation.” (vol. 1, p. 130).

The rationale for this recommendation is based on the principle that a government or related institutions should act in order to improve their learning and alternative choice making by systematically evaluating main projects and activities for the improvement of public administration. Responsibility for these issues should be of the directors-general.

The role of these units was expected also to raise the level of discussion, collaboration and coordination among ministries, and to improve the work of the Prime Minister’s Office.

The adoption of policy analysis and evaluation in all ministries should facilitate coordinated inter-ministry policies and budgets over the long term (suggested period of three years) according to alternatives and priorities.

The policy analysis unit should be located by the office of the director-general and should assist professionally in policy planning and implementation in the government ministries (vol. 1, p. 10).

Assessments of efficiency should be based on evaluation results. The PPC recommended that the evaluations ought to be done by units or persons who had not taken part in the planning process or by outside evaluators.

Ministries were advised to institutionalize processes of evaluation, discussion and conclusion attainment, based on evaluation results.

The PPC stressed the budgeting unit’s role in any policy decision, and urged collaboration between the policy analysis and budgeting units in policy planning.

Another important recommendation concerned the professional level of those involved in policy analysis and evaluation. The PPC recommended that policy analysis, planning, and evaluation should be performed by highly qualified professionals. Moreover, the government ministries should train their staff in these aspects of policy making.

The PPC's recommendations were discussed with Labor leader Shimon Peres and Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir, both of whom approved them. Subsequently, the recommendations were presented to the government and unanimously approved. The Minister of Finance was appointed by the government to supervise their implementation. Two governmental subcommittees were designated to assist in this, mainly regarding cross-ministry coordination.

Despite this apparent high-level support, implementation of the PPC's recommendations was stalled for a time. Even apparently simple administrative matters, that is, transferring responsibility for PAEI, supervision of administration reform and policy direction of ministerial staff units from the Ministry of Finance to the Prime Minister's office, that is, to the Government Commission, were delayed. This recommendation, for instance, was only adopted after the 1996 elections with the ensuing change of government, and under pressure from the newly elected and influential director of the Government Commission, Y. Hollander. Nevertheless, other recommendations such as personnel training, academization, and women's advancement were slowly but steadily taken up by the Labor government from 1993–1995. The recommendation to found a College for National Public Policy was pursued by the director of the Government Commission, Professor Galnor and its chief scientist Prof. David Deri, professors of policy studies at the Hebrew University. An evaluation and planning unit was founded at the Ministry of Education³ as early as 1990 and other ministries, although few, such as the ministries of Health and Social Security began to commission evaluation projects from outside agencies. Despite the slow pace, some progress toward implementation of the PPC's proposals was made.

THE 1992 POSITION PAPER

In 1992, three years after the PPC report appeared, the Government Commission approached experts in academe and commissioned a position paper on ways of implementing the PPC recommendations for planning, policy analysis, evaluation, and implementation (Geva-May, 1992).

The position paper by Geva-May advised the following, in line with the PPC recommendations:

- The central functionary in charge of adoption of the PPC recommendations should take the view that by each director-general's office there should be a headquarters unit whose role should be planning, policy analysis/research and budgeting, and also feedback evaluation meant to provide data regarding goal feasibility, goal attainment, policy implementation, efficiency, and alternative choice.
- The unit should be independent, administratively and financially, in order to be able to abide by norms of reliability, objectivity, and ethics. In cases involving

the director-general directly, the evaluation should be commissioned from an external evaluator.

- Subunits for analysis and evaluation should be set up in the main divisions of the particular ministry. These should be involved in policy analysis and planning at the microlevel of their divisions and in internal evaluations; nevertheless, policy analysts/evaluators in each of these units should belong administratively to the head policy-analysis unit so as to protect their professional independence regardless of the division in which they work
- The work, and the findings of these subunits, should be coordinated and brought to the attention of the head policy-analysis unit.
- Database formation should be one of the major tasks of the head unit.
- The head unit and the subunits should have the budgetary freedom to employ and/or consult with experts and advisors.

Four years later, in 1996, based on the recommendations of the 1992 position paper, discussions were held between Geva-May and the director of the Government Commission concerning a tentative possible plan for implementation of the PPC's recommendations regarding accountability, systematic policy analysis and evaluation. First, we had to acknowledge that any tentative implementation project should take into consideration traditional and political obstacles, that is, mainly the Israeli "successful improvisation" culture or "know how to maneuver for opportunities outside the framework of formal rules" (Sharkansky, 1997: 3); lack of training and skilled personnel; and finally, little awareness (although differential) of the importance of evaluation and of systematic policy analysis strategies.

Clearly, at first any tentative implementation project could be offered only on a pilot and voluntary basis, and only to those government ministries in which awareness of planning and accountability already existed; we suggested that the proposed steps should be presented to a forum of ministry directors-general, both to achieve full commitment and to offer political prestige to the pilot enterprise, and that the establishment of PAEI units should be jointly planned and tested. The effects of the PAEI approach were intended to be reported regularly to an extended forum of directors-general. We hoped that the positive impacts of systematic public policy management would attract additional ministries and related agencies. To date, these stepping stones have not been used.

THE "100 DAYS COMMITTEE"

Before the 1996 elections, the Labor Party Government appointed yet another committee designed to study, among other issues, the reorganization of government ministries. Its work lasted 100 days and it is known as the 100 Days Committee. Its main recommendations were to allocate functions to each

government ministry and to generate more systematic policy making. Beyond its reorganization mandate, the committee acted as a policy analysis think-tank for social, economic, educational, and budgetary policies. Led by a former director-general of the Ministry of Economics, Dr. Alon Liel, it depended on experts from academe and high officials in the public service to reach its conclusions and recommendations⁴ (see Table 4). They mainly suggested:

- the downsizing of the government units through the closing down of some ministries (e.g., Science and Technology, Police, Religious Affairs, etc.) and the reorganization of more comprehensive ministries to assume functions of the defunct ones (e.g., the new Ministry of Infrastructure should also include functions previously exercised by the Ministry of Communication, the Ministry of Transportation, etc.; the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice should include religious affairs previously controlled by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, etc.)
- the privatization of government units such as the workforce unit, the Government Publishing House, etc.
- transfer of new functions to the Prime Minister's Office such as the inclusion of the Government Commission (as suggested by the PPC), the R&D committee, the accountability unit, and others
- detailed recommendations pertained to the newly allocated functions of each one of the ministries, their policy and administrative span, and their overlapping concerns

To a great extent, the recommendations of the 100 Days Committee followed the PPC's recommendations in that they related to downsizing of workforce and functions, to reliance on expert centralized units, clear-cut allocation of functions, provision of guidelines, allocation of autonomy, and centralized research and assessment models.

The change of government after the 1996 elections interrupted the work of this committee, and despite the new government's proclaimed intention to act in a systematic, analytic, and coordinated manner on issues of policy analysis and policy making, recommendations have been taken up only partially. Despite their modest outcomes and the relatively slow implementation pace, both the initiation of the 100 Days Committee by the previous government and the adoption of some of findings by the new government reflect an increasing awareness in recent years of the need for systematic policy-making in the Israeli public administration.

DISCUSSION

Accountability is one of the chief traits of public administration in democratic societies. It means that the public has the right to know. It has the right to demand

information about policy intentions, policy plans, program implementation, expenditure of tax money, and fulfillment of pre-elections declarations (Geva-May, 1992; Chelimsky, 1985; Weiss, 1985; MacRae, 1979). Over the years, developed democratic countries have become increasingly aware of the contribution of systematic scientific research to planning and have promoted a means of advancing PAEI processes as an expression of efficient, equitable, and accountable management. They simplify and shorten policy processes, make forecasts more reliable (socially, politically, and economically), facilitate effective implementation, and, so, ensure the basic right of the public to know. In this context evaluation and policy analysis, although varying in extent and methodology, foster educated policy planning and accountability, and provide the basis for systematic decision making through informed alternative selection (Geva-May & Pal, 1998).

Strikingly, Israel's public administration structures and policy-making patterns have not changed dramatically since Dror (1968) observed that evaluation and accountability are certainly not among the priorities of its public administration. Another intriguing question is how can it be that in a stable democratic state, and in a country that produced leading scholars of public policy and administration such as Dror, Caiden, or Etzioni, their words have gone unheeded? Apparently prophets are without glory in their own countries. The causes are primarily historical and cultural. They have resulted from the absence of an established administrative tradition in a newly developing state beset by troubles, and in which a blend of old pre-existent norms, improvisation, and ambiguous approaches to policy-making that "worked out" quite well and have reinforced an ad-hoc culture (Dror, 1968; Weinshall & Kfir, 1994; Sharkansky, 1997, 1998).

Finally, 40 years after Israel's establishment, the PPC officially recommended support for strategic planning in all government ministries and advocated analytic research and the establishment of systematic planning, budgeting, analysis, and evaluation. True, the controlling factors in the cultural environment have not changed much: the political circumstances are still dictated by great religious and ethnic diversity, social and security uncertainties, and the necessity for a multi-party government. Contradictory political conditions still lead to a preference for blurry policies and blurry policy decisions. In addition, there is still little demand for accountability, at the legislative, normative, or public opinion level.

Nonetheless, the initiation of the PPC and other attempts at public administration reform point to gradually emerging changes. Proponents of this conceptual shift base their rationale on the Israeli "way of life"—on tensions and problems—but they claim that these in particular should call for more systematic, intensive, and professional policy planning and for accountable public institutions. Indeed, in line with prevailing theory (Bardach, 1992; Dye, 1995; Geva-May &

Wildavsky, 1997; Lynn, 1987; Majone, 1989; Weimer & Vining, 1989; Wildavsky, 1987), they argue that good policy making may be based on good intuition and creativity, but it should also adhere to systematic approaches and follow guidelines such as those recommended by the PPC (PPC, vol. 2, p.79). The proponents' general view is that the problems in the Israeli public policy arena are a direct by-product of nonsystematic approaches, and that in light of future national needs and challenges the Israeli public administration cannot afford to disregard so-called sophisticated approaches to policy making.

The various developments taking place in the Israeli public administration in recent years, especially the PPC's recommendations, indicate that a systematic, bureaucratic approach might be the right answer for a new state that aspires to act efficiently in order keep up with developed countries founded on longer administrative and political traditions. Although these recommendations are still far from being fully implemented, it seems that the ripple effects of ideas and benefit-producing arrangements have already started to spur changes in the conceptual orientation of the Israeli public administration.

Ironically, developments in the public administration in Israel are an example of how New Public Management is not penetrating administrative cultures of nations everywhere in the same way, as many of its advocates believe. In fact, in Israel there is little appreciation of this movement. With a political and social agenda as packed as Israel's, administrative reform is not of first priority. Moreover, while it appears that the Israeli public service possesses many of the characteristics recommended by the NPM, its search for efficiency and systematic models in its "way of life" seems to lead it in the opposite direction—towards traditional bureaucratic arrangements. They might be a necessary basis for further development of the Israeli public administration.

In Lynn's view (1998: 236) ". . . comparative work across countries and sectors [may] accumulate fundamental differences among reforms [that] will begin to eclipse superficial similarities." Indeed, talk of change is heard all over the world due to criticism and pressures on public administration for quality improvement, effectiveness, and responsiveness, whether in the U.K., Japan, or South America. Nevertheless, public administration and policy-making patterns develop differently in different countries. The Israeli case shows that reforms in public administration are culture-bound, and that despite their novelty and appeal, the adoption of new modes and ready-made compact recipes is not necessarily the best solution for all at any given time.

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NOTES

1. The members were Professor Yehezkel Dror, Nixim Baruch, Professor Avraham Friedman, Dr. Aaron Kfir, Haim Kubersky, Meir Aharanov, Amos Eran, Meir Gabai LL, Ehud Ghera LL, and R. Guttman.
2. The Government Commission is an independent unit, at present attached to the Prime Minister's office, in charge of the coordination, legal, and administrative aspects of all the ministries. Its domain of operations is the public administration.
3. Iris Geva-May was appointed its first director in 1990.
4. It included Dr. Alon Liel, Chairman; Elazar Friedman; Shmuel Eyal; Amnon Noibach; Professor Dave Nahmias; Ruby Nathanson; Eli Gonen; and Benny Sharon.
5. Term as used by Douglas, 1982; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky, 1990.

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