International Public Management Journal 4 (2001) 119–134

International Public Management Journal

The new public management: context and practice in Africa

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Received 17 December 2000; received in revised form 25 February 2001; accepted 29 March 2001

Abstract

Many governments have embraced the NPM as the framework or paradigm through which governments are modernized and the public sector re-engineered. Indeed, the NPM offers important lessons and analyses for public management throughout the world and African countries are no exception to the process of implementation of efforts aimed at achieving the outcomes embodied in the said NPM. This article explores the relationship between the basic context of the NPM, as applied in practice to public sector reform in Africa, and discusses the impact stemming therefrom. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the new public management (NPM) has been entrenched in theory and practice across the world. Many governments and several international organizations have embraced the NPM as the framework or paradigm through which governments are modernized and the public sector re-engineered to "strengthen the connections between government and the mechanisms, both in government and civil society, that are responsible for how well government works" (Armacost, 2000, v).

Indeed, the NPM offers important lessons and analyses for public management throughout the world and African countries are no exception to the process of implementation of efforts aimed at achieving the outcomes embodied in the said NPM. This article explores the

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PII: S1096-7494(01)00053-8

relationship between the basic context of the NPM, as applied in practice to public sector reform in Africa, and discusses the impact stemming therefrom. Let us begin by first contextualizing the NPM concept to locate the framework against which the objectives of this article are to be accomplished.

2. The context of the NPM

The NPM represents the culmination of a revolution in public management that emerged in the 1980s. Rather than focusing on controlling bureaucracies and delivering services, public managers are now responding to the desires of ordinary citizens and politicians to be "the entrepreneurs of a new, leaner, and increasingly privatized government" (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, 549). As such, the NPM is clearly linked to the notion of trust in economic rationalism through the creation of public value for public money.

The NPM concept is centered on the proposition that a distinct activity-management-can be applied to the public sector, as it has been applied in the private sector, and that it includes a number of elements (Aucoin, 1990; Bale and Dale, 1998):

1. The adoption of private sector management practices in the public sector;
2. An emphasis on efficiency;
3. A movement away from input controls, rules, and procedures toward output measurement and performance targets;
4. A preference for private ownership, contestable provision, and contracting out of public services; and
5. The devolution of management control with improved reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

The basic foundation of the NPM is the use of the economic market as a model for political and administrative relationships. The institutional aspects of the NPM are heavily influenced by the assumptions of public choice theory, principal-agent theory, and transaction cost economics (Kaboolian, 1998). The NPM movement is driven to maximize productive and allocative efficiencies that are hampered by public agencies that are unresponsive to the demands of citizens and led by bureaucrats with the power and incentives to expand their administrative empires. In addition, the NPM makes a rigid formal separation between policy-making and service delivery (Self, 1993; Kelly, 1998). It is used to describe a "management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results" (Manning, 2000, 1).

According to the Public Management Committee of the OECD (1995) and as summarized by Mathiasen (1999), the NPM is aimed at fostering a performance-oriented culture in a less centralized public sector and is characterized by:

1. A closer focus on results in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of service;
2. The replacement of highly centralized, hierarchical structures by decentralized management environments where decisions on resource allocation and service delivery are made closer to the point of delivery, and which provide scope for feedback from clients and other interest groups;

3. The flexibility to explore alternatives to direct public provision and regulation that might yield more cost-effective policy outcomes;
4. A greater focus on efficiency in the services provided directly by the public sector, involving the establishment of productivity targets and the creation of competitive environments within and among public sector organizations; and
5. The strengthening of strategic capacities at the center to guide the evolution of the state and allow it to respond to external changes and diverse interests automatically, flexibly, and at least cost.

The NPM is also therefore related to the notion of re-engineering the public sector or the reinventing of government. Re-engineering is a management philosophy that seeks to revamp the process through which public organizations operate in order to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and competitive ability. It calls for changes in the structure of public organizations, their culture, management systems, and other aspects in support of the new initiative. In addition, it encompasses client-oriented, mission-driven, quality-enhanced, and exercise-participatory management, using resources in new ways to heighten efficiency and effectiveness (Barzelay, 1992; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Halachmi, 1995).

The NPM can also be regarded as a normative reconceptualization of public sector management consisting of several inter-related components. It emerged in response to the economic and social realities which governments everywhere have had to face during the past two decades (Borins, 1995). Those realities include:

1. Too large and expensive public sectors;
2. The need to utilize information technology to increase efficiency;
3. The demand by the public for quality service;
4. The general collapse of centrally planned economic systems which underscored the poor performance of government services worldwide; and
5. The quest for personal growth and job satisfaction by public sector employees (Borins, 1995; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995).

Other intellectual and practical justifications for the NPM have also evolved along the lines of the New Public Service (NPS) being a mutually reinforcing and normative model of managing and service delivery in the public sector where values such as efficiency and productivity should not be lost, but should be placed in the larger context of democracy, community, and the public interest and, according to Denhardt and Denhardt (2000, 553–557), be based on the following tenets:

1. Serve, rather than steer: Public servants should help citizens articulate and meet their shared interests, rather than attempt to control or steer society in new directions;
2. The public interest is the aim, not the by-product: Public managers should contribute to building a collective, shared notion of the public interest which should result in the creation of shared interests and shared responsibility;
3. Think strategically, act democratically: Policies and programs meeting public needs can be most effectively and responsibly achieved through collective efforts and collaborative processes;
4. Serve citizens, not customers: Public servants should not merely respond to the

demands of "customers" but focus on building relationships of trust and collaboration with and among citizens;
5. Accountability isn't simple: Public servants should be attentive not only to the market but also to statutory and constitutional law, community values, political norms, professional standards, and citizen interests;
6. Value people, not just productivity: Public organizations and the networks in which they participate are more likely to succeed in the long run if they are operated through processes of collaboration and shared leadership based on respect for all people; and
7. Value citizenship and public service above entrepreneurship: The public interest is better advanced by public servants and citizens committed to making meaningful contributions to society rather than by entrepreneurial managers acting as if public money were their own.

All of the foregoing features of the NPM are being applied around the world, in a sweeping manner, as governments use the management reform process to reshape the role of the state and its relationship with citizens. That process, as Kettl (2000, 1–3) has summarized it, has embodied six core characteristics:

1. Productivity: How can governments produce more services with less tax money;
2. Marketization: How can government use market-style incentives to root out the pathologies of government bureaucracy;
3. Service orientation: How can government better connect with citizens to make programs more responsive to the needs of the latter;
4. Decentralization: How can government make programs more responsive and effective by shifting programs to lower levels of government or shifting responsibility within public agencies to give frontline managers greater incentive and ability to respond to the needs of citizens;
5. Policy: How can government improve its capacity to devise and track policy; and
6. Accountability for results: How can governments improve their ability to deliver what they promise.

These characteristics duly suggest that the NPM movement puts particular emphasis on seeking to solve problems which have to do with governance. Kettl (2000) has convincingly demonstrated that the governance issue here is derived from the implicit assumption that the government of the past century will not effectively tackle the problems of the next and the success or failure of the NPM movement will, ultimately, depend on how deeply its reforms become part of a nation's governance systems such as the political institutions and civil society. Seeking and/or maintaining good governance through the reform initiatives inspired by the NPM is the ultimate goal of this global public management revolution.

3. The NPM and public sector reform in Africa

Since the early 1980s, significant efforts have been made in sub-Saharan Africa toward the reform and transformation of public sector management. Those efforts have been driven primarily by the fact that state bureaucracies in Africa underperform; are invariably too large and corrupt; and lack a sense of responsibility and accountability (Hope, 1997, 2001; Hope and Chikulo, 1999). All societies need a capable public management structure to keep order, collect revenue, and carry out programs. The sub-Saharan Africa region, for the most part, lacks these public management endowments (Goldsmith, 1999).

The specific factors influencing the NPM reforms in sub-Saharan Africa are derived from the crisis of governance that has been plaguing most of the countries in the region. Those factors have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (Hope, 1997, 2001; Hope and Chikulo, 2000; Amoako, 2000; Bangura, 1999) and only a brief summary will be offered below.

3.1. Factors influencing NPM reforms

Perhaps the most influential factor has been the economic/fiscal crises that the African states have had to endure since the mid-1970s. Many of the countries have now started to grow economically again. However, for the majority, poverty and economic stagnation still loom large and there is still ongoing concern about balance of payments problems, the heavy burden of debt, the size of public expenditure relative to the declining sources of public revenue, and the increasing cost of delivering public services. These concerns about economic and fiscal matters have led, in turn, to NPM reforms encompassing an assault on the active role played by the state in managing the economy and in the direct provision of services.

The second factor influencing NPM reforms in Africa is derived from the political forces in play in many of the countries. There still exists a malfunctioning and unstable political order across too many parts of Africa and, consequently, there remains the need for the transformation of public management to create basic systems of governance, devise institutions that are more democratic, promote and build civil society, and reshape relationships with citizens (Hope, 1997, 2001; Kettl, 2000). In other words, moving toward modes of public management that support the rule of law, and transparent and accountable government, as well as a predictable legal framework with rules known in advance and a reliable and independent judiciary.

The next factor is the institutional one in the sense that complex institutional mechanisms exist that makes it difficult to implement various policies in a timely and effective manner. Successive African governments have complained that standard bureaucratic procedures frequently handicap their ability to respond effectively to global and national challenges. Indeed, part of the problem here has been the changing role of the public sector in Africa and the rapid acceptance by governments of their new role in driving the re-engineering process. In this context, NPM reforms have been aimed at creating management structures and institutional mechanisms within government that enhance the capacity and capability for effective policy management and successful policy implementation.

The final factor influencing NPM reforms in Africa comes from the influence of international experiences. Larbi, (1999) has argued that the wind of change toward market reforms and political pluralism that swept across the Western nations in the 1980s, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, had the sobering effect on crisis states, such as those in Africa, that public management reforms should be undertaken. Indeed, much of the structural adjustment and other measures of economic liberalization and state restructuring that have been occurring in Africa since the 1980s are the direct result of such influences.

4. The practice and impact of NPM reforms

This section assesses the practice and impact of selected strategies of NPM reforms as applied to the public sector in Africa. Based on the content of the previous sections of this article, we can summarize a point of departure here, as Bangura (1999, 5) has done, as follows: "New public management reforms seek to reconfigure the relations between states, markets, and societies by giving prominence to market forces, managerial efficiency, and accountable government."

4.1. Decentralization

A good summary of the concept of decentralization, including its costs and benefits, applicable to Africa can be found in Hope (2000, 2001); and Hope and Chikulo (2000). Much of the decentralization that has occurred in the last decade has been motivated by the political rationale that good governments are those closer to the people. The spread of multiparty political systems in Africa is creating demand for more local voice in decision-making. Political changes have therefore given voice to local demands and the need to bring economic and political systems closer to local communities.

Within the context of the NPM, decentralization is seen as the means through which governments are able to provide high quality services that citizens value; for increasing managerial autonomy, particularly by reducing central administrative controls; for demanding, measuring, and rewarding both organizational and individual performance; for enabling managers to acquire human and technological resources to meet performance targets; for creating a receptiveness to competition and an open-mindedness about which public purposes should be performed by public servants as opposed to the private sector (Borins, 1994); for empowering citizens through their enhanced participation in decision-making and development planning and management; for improving economic and managerial efficiency or effectiveness; and for enhancing better governance (Silverman, 1992).

The primary modes of decentralization in Africa that are attributed to NPM reforms are deconcentration; delegation; devolution; and privatization. Deconcentration is the passing down of selected administrative functions to lower levels or subnational units within government agencies or departments. It is the least extensive form of decentralization. However, it is the most common form of decentralization employed in the agriculture services, primary education, preventive health, and population subsectors (Silverman, 1992). In Botswana, for example, the central government has created and supervises district councils as well as a national Rural Development Council for the coordination and implementation of, among other things, rural development activities such as drought relief measures and agricultural development.

Another popular method of deconcentration in NPM reforms is that of the breaking up of monolithic bureaucracies into agencies–the "agencification model" of public sector reform.

Leaving aside, for the purposes of this article, the debate on whether agencification is a pure form of deconcentration or contains elements of delegation, the "agencification model" has emerged as a choice mode of decentralization in many African countries. In South Africa and Zambia, for example, independent revenue authorities have been created with corporate outlooks on governance to increase the efficiency and accountability of tax collection beyond the bureaucracy of their Finance Ministries.

Delegation is the transfer of specific authority and decision-making powers to organizations that are outside the regular bureaucratic structure and that are only indirectly controlled by a government, such as parastatals, regional development corporations, and semiautonomous agencies, for example. Delegation is seen as a way of offering public goods and services through a more business-like organizational structure that makes use of managerial accounting techniques normally associated with private enterprise. It has been used extensively in Africa. In Kenya, for example, pubic corporations have been used to organize, finance, and manage large-scale agricultural projects such as tea production. In Lesotho, a parastatal was created to finance and manage a huge water development project in the country's highlands area. In Botswana and Ghana, autonomous hospitals with independent management boards have been established to improve efficiency in service delivery; improve responsiveness to users' needs and preferences through market-based initiatives such as user fees; and reduce the financial and managerial burden of large hospitals on the health ministries (Larbi, 1998, 1999).

Devolution is the granting of decision-making powers to lower authorities or managers and allowing them to take full responsibility without reference back to the authorizing government. This includes financial power as well as the authority to design and execute development projects and programs. Devolution is the strongest form of decentralization. Its essence is discretionary authority and it allows for the reduction of the levels of administration through which activities have to pass and no reference back to a central administrative machinery is required. Ghana, for example, has been putting into place a public financial management program which gives managers greater control of their budgets (Larbi, 1999), and Ethiopia has devolved very extensive legislative, executive, judicial, and fiscal powers to the regional authorities (Koehn, 1995).

Decentralization, through devolution, provides a mechanism that enables the population to participate in the process of governance, as well as a framework for allowing the community's interests to be represented in government decision-making structures (Hentic and Bernier, 1999). It is therefore a key element of NPM-type reforms. The more participatory the decision-making process, the more legitimacy it acquires in the eyes of all observers both domestic and international.

Privatization is taken here to mean the transfer of operational control and responsibilities for government functions and services to the private sector –private voluntary organizations or private enterprises. From a wider perspective, privatization encompasses a wide range of policies to encourage private sector participation in public service provision and eliminate or modify the monopoly status of public enterprises (Rondinelli and Kasarda, 1993). Privatization can be a complex process, frequently involving choices between the need to improve financial and economic efficiency; political opposition and varying degrees of unpopularity;

and distinguishing between sectors and services that are essentially in the public interest and those which should be hived off to the private sector (Hentic and Bernier, 1999).

Privatization in Africa has taken many forms. It has included the commercialization of government services which are contracted out to an outside agency; joint ventures between government agencies/ministries and private entities; the sale of some government services or functions, such as water supply or telecommunications, to the private sector; management contracts for the private sector to manage specific government functions or services such as postal services; the leasing of government assets that are used to provide public services; or the granting of concessions to private entities to operate and finance some public services delivery. During the past two decades, privatization has progressed globally and has come to be seen as highly desirable in Africa (Hope, 2001). "The process has been prompted in many cases by economic necessity and enabled by the political changes occurring across Africa" (White and Bhatia, 1998, 1). However, privatization is more of a management reform issue than a political one.

The primary reason for pursuing privatization in Africa is that state-owned enterprises or parastatals tend to be loss-making and divert scarce public funds that could be put to better use in meeting other public policy goals such as better health care and education services. In addition, public enterprises generally suffer from extensive corruption and bureaucratic management structures that get in the way of efficient service delivery. The most recent available data indicates that in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the total sales value of privatization transactions increased from approximately US$1 billion during the period 1988–93 to US$2.7 billion by the end of 1996 (Hope and Chikulo, 2000; White and Bhatia, 1998). Overall, the total number of public enterprises in Africa is estimated to have fallen by about 37% between 1990 and 1995 (Sarbib, 1997). This figure has certainly increased significantly since then.

Africa's contemporary leaders have moved forcefully in the restructuring of their economies. Many countries, including Angola, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, for example, have all launched extensive privatization programs. Some francophone countries, including Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Senegal, have also completed major privatization programs involving their electricity, telecoms, water, and banking sectors (Samuel, 1999). A good summary of African infrastructure privatization can be found in African Development Bank (1999).

In the telecommunications sector, several countries, including Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, and Cote d'Ivoire, for example, have either concluded the privatization of their telecommunications enterprises or they are seeking strategic investors to do so. Particularly, in the area of wireless service, there has been considerably private sector activity through the bidding for cellular operators' licenses. The electricity sector's privatization has primarily been by way of management contracts followed by leases and demonopolization and build-own-operate (BOO). Countries such as Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mail, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone have opted for management contracts, lease arrangements are used in Cote d'Ivoire, and Morocco and Tunisia have independent power projects (African Development Bank, 1999).

The water and transportation sectors have also seen their share of privatization activities. In the water sector, the selected modality has been focused primarily on management contracts or leases. Some African countries, such as Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Morocco, for example, have privatized their water sectors on the basis of competition for concessions. In the transportation sector, some contracting out of road maintenance has been in practice in Kenya for several years before being adopted in Algeria and other African countries. The Tanzania Railway Corporation divested itself of noncore operations and is under private management while Cameroon has concluded a concession agreement with a French-South African joint venture to run its railway facilities. In the Sudan and Senegal, locomotive repairs and maintenance have been contracted out. Also, in such countries as Nigeria, Mozambique, Togo, and Guinea, for example, ports and/or airports have been privatized through lease arrangements or management contracts. Some airlines, including Kenya Airways, Royal Air Maroc, Air Tunisia, and South African Airways, for example, have also been privatized through various modalities (Samuel, 1999; African Development Bank, 1999).

Apart from infrastructure, privatization in Africa has also proceeded in other areas. Services in particular have been contracted out in significant numbers. In Botswana, for example, the parastatals have contracted out a number of services including those related to maintenance and security. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, nonclinical health services such as cleaning, laundry, catering, security, maintenance, and billing are contracted out, while some clinical services are contracted out on a limited scale (Larbi, 1999). Also, in Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana, for example, noncore state activities have been, or are being, transferred to the private sector and greater corporatization of public sector activities is taking place (Hope and Chikulo, 2000; Therkildsen, 1999).

Despite the fact that there are some obvious costs to decentralization (Hope, 2001, 2000), it has yielded significant benefits in those countries where properly implemented. In Africa, decentralization has drastically improved the reliability and delivery of services to the public including improved quality assurance. Moreover, through decentralization, and privatization in particular, the burden on government resources has eased somewhat leading to the use of those resources in other priority areas. For example, the privatization of Kenya Airways provided the Kenyan Treasury with US$76 million from the sale of 77% of its shares in 1996 and, due to enhanced efficiency and better performing management, some 400 new jobs have been created (Samuel, 1999).

Moreover, highly centralized forms of government generate administrative pathologies. Centralized states tend to be unresponsive to the needs of citizens. Restructuring the delivery of public services, by decentralizing functions and resources, thus becomes a central claim of the NPM based on the growing body of evidence indicating that the decentralization of government services can be far more efficient than their supply by bureaus. Undoubtedly, service delivery systems based on centralized bureaucracy have now been discredited and African governments have, commendably, been shifting their focus from hierarchy and control to participation and empowerment.

Decentralization in Africa has resulted in better governance, it has facilitated the development of more effective and efficient public sector management, it has increased popular participation in government, it has allowed for better mobilization and use of resources, and it has encouraged market-like responsiveness to the provision and consumption of public services (Hope, 2001). Its use as an instrument of NPM reforms must be expanded and deepened in Africa. Indeed, there is a growing momentum across the African continent for reform initiatives that shift resources, responsibility for service delivery, and accountability for results from central governments to more decentralized levels. In some cases, like Ethiopia and South Africa, for example, this has even been entrenched in federal-style constitutions.

4.2. Civil service reform

During the 1980s, many African countries concluded that their civil services were not providing public goods and services in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. Consequently, reform of the civil service became necessary to pursue and maintain the path of economic liberalization and good governance that had been embarked upon. In this new century, African governments are also beginning to realize that the globalization wave dictates that further and deeper reforms of their civil services are required in order to successfully ride the rising tide of borderless economic activities encompassed in that globalization wave.

NPM-type reforms have been, and are being, applied to African civil services because these civil services are seen as unprofessional, often lacking capacity to solve the tough new problems of their governments; too bloated in size in relationship to their outputs; suffering from dysfunctional rigidity; lacking in, and not caring about, measurement of their performance; preoccupied with their own rules and practices rather than promoting, protecting, and serving the public interest; and, generally, being too corrupt and intent on maintaining their own patrimonial and territorial interests.

Although some African governments had, from time to time embarked on civil service reform, for the majority, the efforts became concentrated in comprehensive strategies that were included in the economic liberalization packages of structural adjustment that were facilitated by the World Bank and IMF. The basic thrust of the reform process was, and continues to be, to build a professional, meritocratic, and qualified public workforce to ensure effective and efficient delivery of public services and combat bureaucratic corruption. Without such reform, the performance of the civil service and, hence, of their respective governments, will continue to be deficient. A government's performance can only be as good as the people who do its work. African governments, or any government for that matter, will perform poorly if there is a failure to recruit, retain, reward appropriately, and assure the integrity of highly skilled civil servants (Hope, 2001; World Bank, 2000; Kettl et al., 1996).

The key elements of the process of reform of the civil service in Africa have been centered around pay and employment measures; productivity enhancement; capacity building; training; improving accountability and transparency; and making management more effective. Pay and employment reform measures in Africa have been extensively discussed and documented in Lindauer and Nunberg (1994); Robinson (1990). Lienert and Modi (1997); and Goldsmith (1999), for example. Due to the concern with the fact that two major contributors to bureaucratic corruption in Africa are the erosion and the compression of salary scales of civil servants, pay and grading reform has been at the forefront of pay and employment measures in the attempts to reform the civil service.

Pay and grading reform generally has five objectives: (1) an increase in overall real pay levels; (2) the decompression of pay scales to improve the competitiveness of civil service pay at higher levels; (3) a new grading system based on job evaluations; (4) the introduction of performance-based pay; and (5) the improvement of pay policy-making and administration (de Merode and Thomas, 1994). The experience of pay and grading reform suggests some success in outcomes. In Ghana, Mozambique, and Guinea, for example, the net pay compression ratio of the civil service improved; the ratio of the highest-paid echelon to the lowest-paid widened; and real pay improved spectacularly. Similarly, in Tanzania and Uganda, average civil service salaries have increased by 300% and 75%, respectively, in real terms, since the early 1990s (Clarke and Wood, 2001).

Additionally, several countries, including the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, and Uganda, for example, have made considerable progress in simplifying their grading structures. That, in turn, has acted as a magnet to attract and motivate some top professionals including those with scarce skills such as physicians and accountants. Many countries have also been able to downsize their civil services and thereby reduce the number of surplus employees on the government payroll. A number of methods have been used in this regard including enforcing mandatory retirement ages, abolishing job guarantees for high school and university graduates, ensuring attrition through hiring freezes, introducing voluntary departure schemes, making outright dismissals, and eliminating "ghost" (fictitious) employees from the payroll (Hope, 2001). In Tanzania and Uganda, for example, the size of the civil service has declined by 23% and 55%, respectively, since the early 1990s (Clarke and Wood, 2001). Likewise, in Zambia, the size of the nonmilitary public service dropped from 137,000 in 1997 to 112,000 by the end of 1999 without affecting front-line service providers such as nurses, teachers, and the police who were exempt from retrenchment (IMF and World Bank, 2000).

Also, some countries, such as South Africa and Ghana, for example, have moved toward competitive and open recruitment procedures with selection based on merit as an integral part of their employment reform measures. This helps to ensure that vacancies are filled on the basis of skills and competence rather than on other factors such as ethnicity and kinship, for example. Similar merit-based systems were put in place with respect to promotions. Merit-based promotions tend to attract more individuals into the civil service who have strong preferences for making an impact on their government's task of providing public goods. Together, merit-based recruitment and promotion serve as mutually reinforcing mechanisms to build commitment towards the goal of an efficient civil service. Other countries, such as Botswana, for example, have also decentralized some human resource management functions to ministries. Permanent secretaries of these ministries are, among other things, empowered to appoint, promote, and discipline their staff members.

Productivity enhancement strategies in Africa are primarily aimed at bringing about a greater customer-orientation in goods and services delivery and an improvement in the quality of those goods and services delivered while at the same time creating a much more positive attitude toward work by the civil servants. In Botswana, for example, the government introduced the productivity and quality improvement program in 1993 by creating work improvement teams (WITS) within various institutions and departments of ministries. WITS are based on the Japanese framework of Quality Control Circles. Similar types of quality circles can be found in Mauritius (Hope, 2001).

Other popular methods used for productivity enhancement in Africa are the introduction of performance management systems in government agencies and ministries and the use of performance contracts for individual employees and departments. Performance management systems are regarded as means of getting results from individuals, teams, and the organization at large within a given framework of planned goals, objectives, and standards. It allows for the setting of targets and the development of indicators against which performance can be later measured. Performance management systems have been put in place in Uganda, South Africa, and Ghana and are currently being rolled out in Botswana.

Performance contracts or agreements specify standards of performance or quantifiable targets which a government requires public officials or the management of public agencies or ministries to meet over a stated period of time. At the end of the stated period, performance can then be measured against these standards or targets. Performance contracts have been used in a number of African countries, including Ghana and Senegal, for example, particularly in their public enterprises. Other countries, such as Botswana, for example, also employ performance contracts to measure and assess the performance of Permanent Secretaries. By 2004, the majority of civil servants in Botswana will be subjected to performance contracts as the performance management system becomes fully implemented.

Capacity building has now taken center stage in what is regarded as the second phase of NPM-style reforms currently being implemented in Africa. Capacity building has come to the fore because African governments and donors have come to recognize the centrality of capacity in the development process in the region. Capacity is the combination of human resources and institutions that permits countries to achieve their development goals. Lacking capacity, a government cannot adequately perform the tasks that make an economy function. The need for capacity exists in virtually all areas of the public sector in Africa. Consequently, capacity building is important to generate the capability for those countries to develop indigenous and self-reliant development policies and strengthen the interface between government, civil society, and the private sector. Apart from the region-wide Partnerships for Capacity Building (PACT) being implemented by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACDF) based in Zimbabwe, other countries, such as Tanzania and Guinea, for example, have their own respective ongoing efforts for public sector capacity building financed through Adaptable Program Loans (APLs) from the World Bank.

Training is an integral part of efforts to build capacity in the African civil services. Many African countries now have institutes of public administration or administrative staff colleges to train their civil servants. Others, such as Botswana, have set up national productivity centers for training in productivity and quality improvement. Training provides an essential means through which African states can develop a career civil service in order to modernize and develop. As argued by Agere (1999), the strengthening of the civil service is an integral part of policy reform which can best be accomplished through the use of civil service training institutes which have a mandate to train civil servants in the management of the new responsibilities linked to good governance and economic liberalization.

An emphasis on improving accountability and transparency can be found in most civil service reform efforts in Africa. Anticorruption measures and the development of codes of conduct for public officials are two strategies most prevalent in that regard and, in some countries, such as Uganda, they are encompassed in national integrity systems (Hope, 2001; Hope and Chikulo, 1999). In both cases, the intent is to bring about a stronger allegiance to the nation-state and, hence, a commitment to the national interest rather than to personal and sectional interests; and produce civil servants who are vigilant, upright, honest, and just. In other words, they are meant to instill an atmosphere of public accountability and ethical behavior in civil servants so that they respect not only their obligations to be honest, obey the laws, and behave within the confines of bureaucratic rules and regulations, but also demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, honesty, fairness, justice, and openness.

Making management more effective entails providing public managers with the necessary tools to deliver public services in a more efficient and cost-effective manner. This includes management structures and institutional mechanisms that improve policy development, coordination, and implementation for better public sector outcomes. In addition to the need to have some control over human and financial resources, public managers in Africa are also being provided with efficiency tools such as better management information systems. Indeed, major improvements have been achieved through the use of information technology for efficient revenue collection, financial management and accounting, and interdepartmental communication systems (Kaul, 1996). In countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and Mauritius, for example, operational and management control systems are in place (Odedra, 1993). These are applications that are designed to improve operations, management control, and decision-making capabilities.

Reforming the civil service in Africa through NPM-style strategies is, ultimately, intended to make the civil service accountable, transparent, and responsive to the public in the delivery of public goods and services. The lessons of experience of civil service reform in developing countries, including those in Africa, suggests some mixed results with the application of strategies from the NPM menu (Manning, 2000). However, this ought not to have been surprising to anyone familiar with the African scene where there are varying levels of capacity and institutional frameworks for implementing development policy. Indeed, the application of NPM-style reforms is intended to rectify some of these deficiencies and improve civil service performance. Undoubtedly, many countries in Africa have benefited tremendously from civil service reform based on NPM-style activities (Hope, 2001). In particular, civil service wage bills have declined, there is greater penetration of information technology, and the concentration of bureaucratic power at the expense of accountability and transparency has diminished considerably in most countries. Nonetheless, like the developed countries, reforming the civil service in Africa is a work in progress and better assessment indicators will be available in the next few years as the second phase of reform measures take hold.

4.3. State transformation

During the past few decades, state transformation has been rapidly occurring in both the developed and developing countries, including in Africa. That transformation revolves around the nature and division of responsibility within and beyond government, and the extent to which the delivery of public goods and services is being met (Thynne, 2000). The fundamental change is related to the manner in which countries pursue growth and/or development, moving to a mode of operation where the state conducts itself more like the private sector through reforms such as those suggested by the NPM.

Since there is overwhelming evidence of a positive correlation between economic liberalization and development, the challenge for African countries has been one of unshackling their economic markets to further the process of liberalization and create the environment required for development to be sustained. This challenge takes on even greater importance in the context of globalization which refers to a world in which national economies, producers, and investors increasingly behave as if the world economy is borderless and consists of a single market and production area with regional or national subsectors, rather than a set of national economies linked by trade, investment, and financial flows (Hope, 2001).

To that end, many African countries have been putting in place modes of administration that avoid the errors of their previous statist frameworks. Under the best of circumstances, state intervention in Africa has been found to retard economic growth, restrict economic development, and often result in famine, starvation, malnutrition, and general deterioration in the quality of life (Hope, 2001). In other words, the state was an obstacle to development. State transformation in Africa now entails a redimensioning with the aim of creating what can be called smart government or modernized government. That is, the type of government that focuses on its strategic roles with an organizational design and managerial set up that permit it to perform its roles in an optimally effective and efficient manner.

5. Conclusion

The application of NPM-type reforms in Africa, despite their mixed results, has, from the point of view of this author, been mostly successful. Agreeably, there still exists such things as extensive bureaucratic corruption, for example. However, Hope (2001) cites data that indicate that African economies have been recording positive rates of economic growth during the past several years, foreign investment is returning, and the size and costs of running government are declining. These are all positive indicators and they did not emerge through divine intervention. They are, undoubtedly, the result of policy reforms, primarily NPM-type reforms, which have been implemented during the past two decades.

Over the next few years, and assuming no policy reversals, there will be even further gains recorded as a result of the application of the second phase of NPM-type reforms. Consequently, the conclusion here is that there is an improving performance of the state in Africa which, in no small measure, is attributable to NPM-type reforms.

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