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The Impact of Managerial Reform on Informal Relationships in the Public Sector

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Comparative Perspective in Canada, Morocco and Cameroon

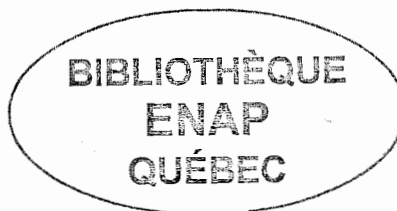
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Managerial reform is based upon a cultural view that conforms to Western type societies' dominant values. Reforms deal with many issues like management by results, autonomy, flexibility, individual leadership, market model, democratic and collective mechanisms for sending signals to the government, modification of the power pattern, decreasing the permanence of budgets and employment in the public sector, employees' commitment to the policies administered by the organisation instead of commitment to their organisations, and deregulating the internal management of government.

One important research assumption is that management practices, just as the development of the public organisation, rely partly on these dominant values. Individuals make their own interpretations of their organisational reality, of their role in the organisation, of the expectations of the administrative and social system, and of their political importance.

When we read on Managerial Reform in the public sector, we assume that the words and the concepts used share a common meaning, although we know how much administrative systems are different. For many authors, (Laurent, 1980; Martinet, 1990) there exists a typical European view of the organisations, and an American one. The American point of view tends to see organisations as having a concrete existence while the European point of view tends to have a more "personalist" vision of the organisation. In any case, organisations (and this includes public organisations) are creations of the mind. Nobody ever saw any organisation, but many think of it as having its own life and having its own existence; this seems to be particularly evident in America.

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We learned with Morgan (1989) how much our way of thinking determines our understanding of the world and our vision of the organisation. So the image we use to define and illustrate what is an organisation pushes us into a specific model of thinking and behaving. Hofstede (1991) proposed us studies illustrating differences in culture related to hierarchical distance, individualism versus collectivism, feminine and masculine behaviour and tolerance to uncertainty. Consequently it is interesting in to look for what is used when management reforms are proposed.

The essence of management reforms, as determined in the principles of New Public Management, is related to some factors that are universal, international and probably should be generalized the entire world over. Peters (1996) proposes four emergent models that most reforms include, that are not exclusive and that show us the possibilities of what can be done. First is “flexible government” that can also be considered as the antithesis of patterns of public-sector management in the recent past; second is “autonomy for the individual”; third is “market models” (referring to privatisation); fourth is “the participatory approach” that considers the hierarchical, ruled-based organisations usually encountered in the public sector are severe impediments to effective management and governance.

Our preoccupation manifests itself with the question of knowing if these models apply anywhere anytime, on one hand, and to know if these models are understood the same way everywhere and by everybody, with the assumption that it is not the case.

This preoccupation is particularly obvious in third world countries. Do the civil servants' values fit with the proposed models? They use the same words, they speak the same language: they are preoccupied by the effectiveness of their actions, by the efficiency or the economy. That talk about empowerment, decentralisation, autonomy responsibility and accountability, they discuss with representatives of the World Bank or the IMF in order to get their projects accepted. These words used by the managers are the same, but what if the understanding is different?

One question we have is that, if the proposals that come with reforms do not please the public managers' values, what will they do? They can resist passively, which can be dangerous, or they can interpret the concepts proposed the way that better fits with them. They can pay lip service to the reform, saying how it is fantastic but doing little when the time comes for implementation. They can use management's magic words in order to show their competence and to protect themselves from the critics.

I was involved, years ago, as coordinator in a program on Total Quality Management in the public sector. Once, someone called from a hospital because they wanted a training program. I explained the whole program, the concepts and principles, and the last day was a practical exercise in order to prepare the implementation in the hospital. They accepted the whole program minus the implementation discussion, saying they were not there to implement anything but just to know what to say if they had to meet government inspectors. I realized that for them, knowing the words and playing with the concepts was everything. Years later, I had the same impression while working with public managers of different countries: feeling that they put forth words of efficiency, effectiveness and so on without changing anything in their old behaviour.

The usual concepts related to Management reforms include, as we have seen, a lot more possibilities for the individual manager, in the sense of his autonomy, his responsibility, his power, and his results and so on. These concepts largely refer to a push towards individualism away from the collective security generally provided by the traditional public administration systems. Using at the same time the findings provided by Hofstede, Morgan or Laurent, we assume that the public managers of different countries will react to new management systems by using their value core and their social model for behaviour and understanding. As a consequence they should have very different perceptions of the elements related to the Management reforms.

It is important to consider though, that the managers can answer using artificial values. They can answer saying what they feel has to be said instead of what they really think. We assume this should be more visible with general answers, but much less with ones referring to specific behaviour.

One of the most specific elements of the management reform is “Managing by Results.” This consists in: 1. a strategic framework that defines where the organisation is going 2. an emphasis on delegation, risk management and responsibility 3. a concentration on results by eliminating useless controls 4. implantation of a monitoring and communication system.

All these imply more autonomy, more liberty, more accountability, and consequently the whole figure looks like a model of what occidental public managers may long for

instead of those from the third world. The necessary mechanisms required are: having clear and well known objectives, getting performance indicators to evaluate results, having reliable information systems and reports to be accountable. Accountability is an important part of this way of defining modern management. Then we see a radical transformation of the public administration systems in order to get more effectiveness, more efficiency, more adaptability, and more innovative capacity.

Obviously the gain should be obtained through a change in the culture of these organisations, with more importance given to informal relationships, to the manager's autonomy, while the control comes more from accountability systems than the simple observation of formal rules. These objectives cannot be attained by the simple elaboration of new rules determining what should be done in the future. All the same, it is important that they correspond to what the public managers find normal and desirable, and this is why we talk about cultural change.

If the new public management is the major framework that influences administrative modernisations in many countries (Jones, Schedler and Wade, 1993; Ciulla Lamark, 2000; Aucoin, 1995), we have to admit that it includes a set of rules that is favouring managers' and organisations' autonomy, accountability and individual responsibility. This type of management model promotes different behaviours, and we are wondering up to what point public manager's values and perceptions support the operative mode that should result.

Hence the role given to the persons becomes more and more central in the administrative reform process while processes, technologies and techniques are just

tools to help the people. On this point Popovitch (1998) writes that the transition toward change is difficult, without a unique way to succeed, and that there exist some basic necessary conditions.

The public manager's role in a specific country will then be the result of the application of formal rules, a reference to a paradigm that explains and defines what should be the public management system, and personal values that give sense to the two preceding elements. When facing a reform project, each one tries to adapt himself to what fits his framework, even if the reform projects are developed everywhere according to the same principles and rules. This adaptation is made through dimensions as subjective as paradigms or personal values and as objective as the nature of the actual administrative system.

Canada has public management systems that are typically North American, as opposed to Cameroon and Morocco. The latter two had a strong European influence, particularly French, and public administration in these countries holds a high degree of law and administrative procedures in its focus with an emphasis on the status of the managers (Martinet, 1990). In opposition, the North American systems are more oriented to functions, and the emphasis is more on tasks, jobs, decisions and the role of the managers. This was evident in the administrative reform project in Central African Republic (Adamolekun in Balogun & Mutahaba, 1989) that ENAP led for years.

The role of the public manager is consequently different as a result of the administrative system that surrounds him but the system of social representation he or

she favours, the perception of reality and the values proposed also play a significant role in the process (Adler, 1986). How do these public managers perceive power and authority? What is their perception of their formal role, their perception of their functional responsibility? How do they view interpersonal relationships? How do they manage these plural relationships between knowledge, theory and principles, on the one hand, and their personal values and their action, on the other? Finally, how do they see the role of law, or human resources management are among the questions that can help us identify the dynamics beyond the reforms if they show great differences between the groups?

Methodology

We used a questionnaire to make civil servants elaborate priorities between professional life active elements and theories that confront them. What is more or less important? We use their answers to compare the results and then draw an image of them and of their conception of public administration. Their perception of the public administration and of their role helps us to understand if it fits with the principles of Administrative reforms.

The questionnaire was first written in French, and passed through a series of pre-tests with students at the master's level in ENAP (Quebec); it was translated into Arabic on a back-to-back basis (Brislin et al., 1973). The author had help from a civil servant at the embassy in Ottawa and a professor of public administration to test the validity of the final copy. Half the people in Morocco preferred working with the French version. In Cameroon and in Canada all the questionnaires used were in French.

The civil servants in these countries, who filled out the questionnaire, are public managers who attend courses or training sessions at ENAP¹ in Canada, at AIPM² in Cameroon and at ENA³ in Morocco. The questionnaires are distributed during the sessions and the people who do not have administrative functions are eliminated. The Canadian sample for these preliminary results is made up of 111 people (data collected in 1999), the Cameroon one of 100 (data collected in 2000) and the Moroccan one, 102 (data collected 2001). The questionnaire includes 71 questions, of which six are nominative.

There are five possible answers, rated 1 to 5: 1, completely disagree with the statement; 2, rather disagree with the statement; 3, neutral in relation to the statement; 4, rather agree with the statement; 5, completely agree with the statement.

Inside national structures, managers' titles are not always equivalent and organisational systems present technical differences. Nonetheless, public managers taking training or courses can be expected to be the most dynamic inside their peer groups on one hand, and can be expected to be middle level but not too high on the other, so it makes comparable groups at that level.

Men outnumber women although less in the Canadian sample. The majority have are graduate and half of them are inside the 35-45 years old group, with more than ten years of experience. For the above mentioned questions, we made a variance analysis (ANOVA) taking as independent variable nationality, which is determinant (Laurent, 1986). These questions refer to the themes related to the new management, like results, clear objectives or power.

The length of the questionnaire, just like themes repetition, makes it harder for the manager to give himself a perfect profile without contradictions, and that constitutes a significant understanding element. We try to evaluate their perception of principles

¹ ENAP. École nationale d'administration publique, Université du Québec

² AIPM. Advanced institute of Public Management. CENAM. Cameroon

³ ENA. École nationale d'administration. Institut supérieur d'Administration. Maroc

that look universal, not to evaluate their behaviour. These results do not presume an administrative practice, just the answers they accepted to give us.

Results

Obviously, Canadian managers are very different from their Cameroon and Morocco counterparts. Out of 65 questions, their difference was statistically different from both other groups in 37 cases, different from the Cameroon group in 11 more cases and different from the Moroccan group in 6 more cases. In only 11 cases, were three groups left with no statistically significant difference between them.

Differences between Canadians and others appear important in relation with three conceptual groups. First, the formal role of the manager were the pattern shows Canadians prefer less formal definitions of their role, less precise definition of plans and hierarchical power. Second, they have a different point of view on their formal status inside the administrative system. Third, they give more importance to informal relations, particularly in respect to human relations.

Cameroon managers are different in the field of autonomy, for example with the concept of giving place to the employees, defining their tasks or letting them participate in objectives elaboration, which they accept less than others. Moroccan managers are different when it is time to shortcut the system, and they do not consider as much as the others that their personal values were at the base of their appointment as manager.

Mean Results Table

Question	Canada	Morocco Cameroon	
	1. When department members respective roles become complex, detailed function descriptions bring a useful clarification	4,01	4,64
6. The public manager is first and foremost in charge of the application of administrative rules	2,89	4,23	4,51
8. It is advisable to systematically avoid any organizational structure leading a subordinate to have two direct supervisors	3,63	4,38	4,44
23. It is essential to elaborate detailed plans for subordinates in order for them to know what they have to do	3,14	4,27	4,56
17. Public administration involves a dominant part of routine	2,74	4,23	4,59
54. The public manager is first of all a cob in the administrative system (rouage d'un système administratif)	3,00	3,75	3,99
4. A public manager is a reflection of the government in place by his attitude and his effectiveness	3,01	4,24	3,69
7. Individual productivity of public managers is usually inferior to private managers productivity	2,07	3,92	3,70
25. It is important that the manager should be able to give precise answers for the majority of job related questions subordinates may come up with	3,05	4,49	4,56
16. For the manager, interpersonal relations in his work unit are a major concern	4,25	3,79	3,59
52. Managing interpersonal relations is the most demanding part of a manager's daily work	4,22	3,42	3,24
50. The public manager is responsible for keeping the operations of his bureau secret	2,99	3,80	3,90
26. The public manager must be autonomous to be efficient	4,45	4,04	4,30
44. The public manager is the first responsible for subordinates assignments and tasks	3,69	4,18	3,53
2. To establish effective work relations it is often necessary to bypass the hierarchical line	2,86	2,69	4,20
64. My personal qualities are the ones that made me reach the position I am occupying now	4,14	3,93	3,53

Formal Role of the Manager

- 1. When department members respective roles become complex, detailed function descriptions bring a useful clarification
- 6. The public manager is first and foremost in charge of the application of administrative rules
- 8. It is advisable to systematically avoid any organizational structure leading a subordinate to have two direct supervisors
- 23. It is essential to elaborate detailed plans for subordinates in order for them to know what they have to do

In these four cases, we find a significant difference between the Canadian group and the two others: they agree much less to these principles than their counterparts in Cameroon and Morocco. These questions illustrate a particular view of the manager's role. On a relative and comparative point of view, managers from Cameroon and Morocco prefer a more hierarchic, formal and specifically controlled management. There is little place here for empowerment, for autonomy, for participation and for delegation. The manager's role deals with prescribing behaviour, application of administrative rules, close employee control from his boss and detailed plans.

This seems to us very important because it defines a framework of action. Even in Western countries, like Canada, use of words like delegation, empowerment or autonomy is criticized because it gives birth to unexpected expectancies that lead further to cynicism. We have to question ourselves on the effect they can have in societies where public managers have a much more conformist and traditional conception of management, with a clear a dominant role devolved to the manager. One could imagine they will go on using the vocabulary because it is in the mood, because as a modern manager they have to, but then they will play the game according to their own rules, that resembles more to what it shown here. The will to give responsibility will disappear in front of the will to control closely from a hierarchical standpoint.

Bureaucracy

17. Public administration involves a dominant part of routine

54. The public manager is first of all a cob in the wheels of government(rouage d'un système administratif)

This thinking gets even stronger when considering the whole system conception they put emphasis on. In these cases too, Canadian public managers show an acceptance much less important of these descriptions. Routine, like what you find in the wheels of government is exactly the opposite of the philosophy of new public management, although these two countries, Morocco and Cameroon are involved since more than ten years in administrative reforms. In a way, actual perception of what is the administrative system is at the opposite of autonomy, responsibility and accountability. If we put together the two first set of answers, we get a static

perception of administrative systems where managers still prefer to control themselves their employees with rules, plans and job descriptions.

Image of the Manager

- 4. A public manager is a reflection of the government in place by his attitude and his effectiveness
- 7. Individual productivity of public managers is usually inferior to private managers productivity
- 25. It is important that the manager should be able to give precise answers for the majority of job related questions subordinates may come up with

This deals with the manager's status inside the hierarchy and the society. The public manager is a social symbol, who gives precise answers, take the right decisions and play a political role, according to our managers from Morocco and Cameroon while Canadians are much less prone to accept that. These answers are also related to a different administrative organisation and a different paradigm of public administration. On one hand, you have public administration systems where the emphasis is put on the civil servant's status, with rules and administrative laws to govern the managing systems and all the importance given to procedures. On the other you have public management systems where emphasis is put on the manager as an actor, his decisions and the result of the action. This last case gives more autonomy to the individual manager, while the first one gives predominance to the system. One may imagine that this is a part of the explication that sums up with the cultural explanation Hofstede (1991) provided us with the hierarchic distance.

Interpersonal Relationships

- 16. For the manager, interpersonal relationships in his work unit are a major concern
- 52. Managing interpersonal relations is the most demanding part of a manager's daily work
- 50. The public manager is responsible for keeping the operations of his bureau secret

In these cases, Canadian managers give a lot of importance to the human relations part of their job. Not only is it important, but it is difficult for them, while it does seem to be the case for the two other groups. It is interesting to dig into this result. On one hand, you have people whose concern for human relations is great and they find it difficult to deal with, on the other, the preoccupation is less central and it is not very difficult. Once, in Africa, inside an administrative reform project, we made a

comment to a unit director that his employees were arriving late and quitting soon. He said, “yes, this is a real problem” and then immediately he wrote a rule saying all people had to get into office in time and then put the sheet of paper besides the entrance door and his job was done.

It seems that we see things very differently in relation to this topic. If one of the bases for reform according to our conception is developing autonomy, accountability, and responsibility, we could assume that all this is based on a manager’s role conception that gives a lot of place to human relations, with motivation and leadership concepts. What we feel here is that the basis precluding all that is not evident in all societies. The third point on keeping operations secret is reinforcing that opinion. Keeping secrets is something that has to do with power, and is at the opposite of sharing information, motivating people by giving them a sense of what they work for or making them understand the *raison d’être* of their function. Secret is something that has to be kept in many occasions, what is important is the relative emphasis it gets into the manager’s mind.

Cameroon Distinct Point of View

26. The public manager must be autonomous to be efficient

44. The public manager is the first responsible for subordinates assignments and tasks

In these cases, managers think that the autonomy is not as important because they value more control. The prospect for decentralization is lesser in these circumstances because the will to control and to centralize is greater. The general idea beyond this is that we can establish systems that favour autonomy, responsibility, accountability, based on participation or on any development in the field of management; it will depend at the end of the people who have to implement it and the type of behaviour and system they value.

Managers in Cameroon value less than others autonomy, on one hand, and more than others establishing assignments and tasks, on the other. This gives an image of a more traditional style management, more guiding, more controlling and more hierarchy oriented.

Morocco Distinct Point of View

2. To establish effective work relations it is often necessary to bypass the hierarchical line
 64. My personal qualities are the ones that made me reach the position I am occupying now

It is interesting to look at the common points between those two variables. Taking shortcuts with hierarchy is a lot more valued by Moroccans than the two other groups, while they consider their personal quality as less significant to reach their position. These two elements show that the informal system is more considered, giving more importance to personal contact than trust into the administrative system. It looks as a system where “who you know” is more important than what you do or the way you do it. This does not seem to be in our understanding a proper basis for reform in the way we see it. It is hard to imagine, for instance, accountability and autonomy being compatible with this personalist type organisation.

Discussion

This paper is about the applicability of administrative reforms according to the national values of the public managers who have to support them. It shows significant differences between a Canadian group and two groups from Morocco and Cameroon. When we talk about administrative reforms, there is no significant difference between the models proposed in the literature. The countries that first put emphasis on New Public Management were Anglo-Saxons countries, like New Zealand and UK. One can assume these countries bear similar sets of values, high on individualism and low on hierarchical distance (Hofstede, 1991) and that they give place to administrative systems developed in consequence. This should be particularly true of the administrative reforms, which correspond to the latest development in administrative practice and hence include adjustments to modern values. Obviously, modern values mean here that they are the actual set that dominates in the countries that bear it.

The results presented here show that public managers have different values according to their nationality in relation with principles of management, related to their

functions as executives or their role inside the administrative system. Although the individuals selected correspond to what should be considered as the most dynamic groups in their country, the administrative values shown are pretty conservative, particularly in Cameroon and Morocco.

Conservative means here that we observe opinions more appropriate to a classical vision of public administration, closer to the principles of Taylor, Fayol and the hierarchical model of administration than what is proposed in the administrative reform models. These seem to present a vision of administrative systems where the supplementary effectiveness and efficiency may come from autonomy and accountability, less rules and more individual initiative, more emphasis with results and user satisfaction than compliance to administrative rules. One illustration of all this is the opposition of flexibility as a management model to the traditional procedure observance model that dominated (and is still very important) administrative life inside bureaucracies.

Values are something deep inside people behaviour, and we can expect that important differences in the values at the base of the administrative systems that reforms propose will lead to playing the system according to the own values of those who implement it. Concretely, talking about effectiveness, efficiency or economy in these countries will give place to hierarchical type behaviours that have probably little in common with the participative type management we refer to when saying these words. Decentralisation will refer to formal rules without effective responsibility at the lower levels of hierarchy, then privatisation will risk meaning the death of organisations if applied directly, flexible organisations will have epithets without being really flexible, and then a lot of people will complain about these solutions being impossible to implement into their countries.

What we observe in Morocco, like the bypass of hierarchical line or promotion based on something else than personal qualities is a perfect ingredient for creating theoretical systems not followed as they should be. Nevertheless, the author had the occasion in 1999 to evaluate the administrative reform in that country. They made significant improvements to their administrative system, particularly in relation to decentralisation, management and control procedures' simplification and human

resources management. They actually face problems due to excessive centralisation, due to a deep resistance to change, to traditional human resources management systems and they try to improve a very dynamic way. The difficulties they encounter are closely related to the values specificities described here. Procedures are heavy and the effort to simplify them encounter a strong resistance, although the people who manage the reform use state of the art change implementation models, with participation and group oriented techniques and with analysis of the users' needs.

Cameroon face in part the same type of problems with implementation, that can be due, according to what we see here, to a conception of management focused on formal authority, enforcement of rules and direct hierarchical control. We can find people managing the reforms who have very modern values (modern in the sense that they look as ours) who are using participative techniques to implement the elements of the reform, they have to stay on working on corporate values and proposing experimentations that will permit a new thinking to emerge.

This explains in part why administrative reforms are understood in many ways around the world. What we find in the USA is very different from what we find in UK, in part because the legislative power is a lot more independent, and in part because the problems faced are very different. There were little privatisations in the USA mainly because there was little to privatise, just like the reform in Canada has not been as extreme as in New Zealand because the problems met have never met the same sense of emergency.

When we add to these particularities the question of national values we face the issue of finding what the administrative system need in conjunction with what the implementers are willing to do and their counterparts ready to accept. National values do not always show oppositions, they show nuances and differences: we therefore have to ask ourselves what, inside a reform project, fits with the values and the administrative system encountered. Klingner and Pallavici (2001) illustrated how Human resources management as we know it is the fruit of an evolution and we have to consider that many countries are trying to make implementations without having integrated this evolution. According to them traditions and pressures applied to

development countries produce rigid and uniform systems that prevent administrative flexibility while neo-liberal pressure provokes the closing of state agencies.

The pressure toward administrative uniformity is at the opposite of the national values oriented reforms. The basic principles do not necessarily constitute a problem, while their adaptation to the actual values and the level of acceptance may be.

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