Administrative Leadership, Neo-Managerialism, and the Public Management Movement

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In recent years, liberation and market-driven management have emerged as dominant approaches in the field of public management. It is argued that a new and more sophisticated form of managerialism described as "neo-managerialism" underpins these two approaches. It is also argued that neo-managerialism has a guiding influence on how champions of liberation and market-driven management conceptualize administrative leadership. Neo-managerialism fosters the idea that administrative leaders should assume the role of public entrepreneur. An argument is presented that public entrepreneurs of the neo-managerialist persuasion pose a threat to democratic governance.

Scholars in the public policy community have used a collection of different approaches to advance the understanding of public management research and practice.[1] These approaches may be broadly classified as quantitative/analytic management, political management, liberation management, and market-driven management. In recent years, liberation and market-driven management have emerged as the dominant approaches in the field. Consistent with arguments advanced by Kettl (1997) and others (Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996), I assert that the "managerialist ideology" or "managerialism" (Enteman, 1993; Pollitt, 1990) as it is often called, underpins the various public management approaches. I also argue that a more sophisticated form of managerialism, described as "neo-managerialism," is more prominent in both liberation and market-driven management. This neo-managerialism consists of an updated version of an older tradition embodied in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (Pollitt, 1990), as well as a complex mixture of public choice theory, agency theory, and transaction-cost economics (Boston, Martin, Pallott, and Walsh, 1996). I argue that neo-managerialism has a guiding influence on how public management scholars, especially proponents of liberation and market-driven management, perceive and conceptualize administrative leadership in the U.S. constitutional democracy. The peculiar type of administrative leadership cultivated and fostered by neo-managerialism is troublesome, especially when it is examined within the context of democratic governance.[2]

This discussion begins with a brief review of different public management approaches advocated by scholars within the public policy community. Special attention is devoted to liberation and market-driven management because of their prominence in global governmental reform efforts. I argue that neo-managerialism is the guiding force behind both liberation and market-driven management. Next, I present an argument that neo-managerialism fosters and perpetuates a certain view of administrative leadership. This view is discussed and critiqued from the perspective of democratic accountability and its dominant behavioral assumptions. The article closes with a few brief comments on the implications of neo-managerialism for the study and practice of public administration.

Approaches to Public Management

The public management approaches mentioned above—quantitative/analytic management, political management, liberation management, and market-driven management—are now discussed in more detail. Although somewhat crude, this broad classification scheme does allow us to make progress.

Quantitative/analytic management has its intellectual roots in policy analysis and the discipline of economics. This approach, aggressively marketed by founding faculties of public policy programs (see Lynn, 1996), places a heavy emphasis on the strategic use of sophisticated analytic techniques such as forecasting and cost-benefit analysis, among others (see Elmore, 1986; Quigley and Scotchmer, 1989). Proponents of quantitative/analytic management assert that systematic analysis reduces uncertainty in the decision-making process, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and quality of executive decision-making in the realm of "high policy" (Lynn, 1996, 56). Such decision-making is said to make a difference in the success of public policy and public agencies.

The next approach, *political management,* focuses on the politics of public management. This approach rejects outright the politics/administration dichotomy. It assumes that public managers have a legitimate right to exercise political power in the policy making process. During the early 1980s, political management emerged as the public management approach of choice for faculty at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. According to Alasdair Roberts (1995), Kennedy School faculty members forcefully argued that a "political and activist orientation" distinguished public management from traditional public administration (293). In making his claim, Alasdair Roberts (1995) offers a range of corroborating evidence, including the following quotation by Mark Moore (1983, 2-3), a leading proponent of political management:

> In traditional conceptions of 'public administration,' the fundamental responsibility of public managers was to develop efficient, programmatic means for accomplishing well-defined goals.... In contrast, our conception of 'public management' adds responsibility for goal setting and *political management* to the traditional responsibilities of public administration.... [W]e think it inevitable and desirable that public managers should assume responsibility for defining the purposes they seek to achieve, and therefore to participate in the *political dialogue* about their purposes and methods (Alasdair Roberts, 1995, 293. Emphasis added.).

Supporters of the political management approach are quick to point out that their approach should not be confused with "bureaucratic politics."[3] "The politics of management," writes Philip B. Heymann (1987), "is broader than bureaucratic politics and involves more than obtaining discrete factorable decisions. It requires developing a coherent, defensible strategy." He also observes that "a wise manager is far less interested in the techniques of winning on a particular occasion than in the techniques of guiding an organization constructively over the years in a world of powerful political forces" (Heymann, 1987, xiii).

The last two approaches, *liberation management* and *market-driven management,* have received considerable attention in recent years. They have soared in popularity, largely because of their close association with the "global revolution in public management"—a revolution fueled by an interest in large-scale governmental reform (Kettl, 1997). Proponents of liberation and market-driven management proudly march under the banner of the "New Public Management" (see Aucoin, 1996; Hood, 1991, 1995a, b; Kettl, 1997; Löffler, 1997). While academicians within the public policy community would like to claim liberation and market-driven approaches as their own, this honor belongs primarily (but not exclusively) to external management consultants and public management practitioners (Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996).

The term *liberation management* was popularized by Thomas Peters (1992), but did not gain intellectual currency until Paul Light (1997) used it to describe one of his four "tides of reform." Liberation management is guided by the idea that public managers are highly skilled and committed individuals who already know how to manage. Consequently, the supposedly poor performance of public bureaucracies is not the result of managerial incompetence or malfeasance. Rather, it is the result of a "bad system," which is overburdened by a plethora of cumbersome and unnecessary rules, regulations, and other constraints. Succinctly stated, liberation management assumes that public managers are "good people trapped in bad systems" (Gore, 1993). To improve the performance of public bureaucracies, managers must be liberated from the shackles of governmental red tape; politicians and others must "let managers manage" (Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996; Kettl, 1997). How are public managers to secure their freedom from an evil and oppressive bureaucratic system? Supporters of liberation management offer a variety of interrelated strategies, which range from deregulating the internal management of public bureaucracies (see, Barzelay, 1992; DiIulio, 1994; B. Guy Peters, 1996; Wilson, 1989, 1994) to decentralizing and streamlining various management processes such as budgeting, personnel, and procurement (Kelman, 1990; Light, 1997; Orborne and Gaebler, 1992).

Market-driven management is influenced by two fundamental ideas. The first of these, competition, is guided by the neo-classical economics belief in the efficiency of markets (B. Guy Peters, 1996). When advocates of the market-driven approach refer to competition, they are usually referring to the "creation of internal markets in an attempt to reform the public sector from the inside" (Löffler, 1997, 7; also see B. Guy Peters, 1996, 28). Competition is considered a viable strategy for improving the performance of public bureaucracies because it lowers costs and increases efficiency (Hood, 1995a). Champions of the market-driven approach believe that public managers will increase their performance levels if exposed to market forces (Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996; Kettl, 1997).

The second idea relates to the universal or generic character of private-sector management. Underpinning this idea is the belief that private-sector practices and technologies are superior to those used in the public sector (see B. Guy Peters, 1996, 21). This idea has a long tradition that can be traced at least as far back as 1868, when a resolution of the National Manufacturers' Association affirmed that it was "indispensable that public affairs be conducted on business principles" (Nelson, 1982, 120; see also Haber, 1964; Terry, 1995). The perceived superiority of private-sector practices and technologies has led advocates of the market-driven approach to the inescapable conclusion that the distinction between public and private management is an illusion. According to this argument, "management is management" (B. Guy Peters, 1996, 28). This is held to be true whether one speaks of the management of public, private, or nonprofit organizations.

The Neo-Managerialism Underpinning

A close inspection of the public management approaches discussed above reveals that they have at least one thing in common: Each is influenced by the "managerialist ideology" or "managerialism" (Enteman, 1993; Pollitt, 1990), as it is popularly known. The term managerialism has been used in numerous ways in the public management literature, and its origin is open to debate. Although the term is closely associated with James Burnham's book, *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), it is uncertain that Burnham himself ever used the term (see Enteman, 1993, ch. 7). Putting aside the term's mysterious origin, the question that immediately comes to mind is: What is managerialism?

The British scholar Christopher Pollitt (1990) has given this question considerable thought and has done some valuable work that is especially instructive here. In a searching critique of managerialism and its influence on the British and American public services, he builds an intriguing argument that managerialism "needs to be understood as an ideology, and one with some concrete and immediate consequences" (xi). Pollitt asserts that managerialism consists of a set of beliefs, values, and ideas about the state of the world and how it should be. He identifies five core beliefs of managerialism.

1) "The main route to social progress now lies through the achievement of continuing increases in economically defined productivity."
2) "Such productivity increases will mainly come from the application of ever-more-sophisticated technologies. These include information and organizational technologies as well as the technological 'hardware' for producing material goods. Organizationally, the large, multi-functional corporation or state agency has rapidly emerged as a dominant form."
3) "The application of these technologies can only be achieved with a labour force disciplined in accordance with the productivity ideal."
4) "Management is a separate and distinct organizational function and one that plays the crucial role in planning, implementing and measuring the necessary improvements in productivity. Business success will depend increasingly on the quality and professionalism of managers."
5) "To perform this crucial role managers must be granted reasonable 'room to manoeuver' (i.e., 'right to manage')" (2-3).

Pollitt argues that the managerialist belief system is supported by values that convey and reinforce the idea that management is "important" and "good." In his view, this widely held value suggests that "[b]etter management will make institutions perform, provide the key to national revival, help to identify and eliminate waste, to concentrate resources where benefits can be seen to be greatest, and give a clearest display where money is spent." In the ideal world of managerialism, "objectives are clear," "staffs are highly motivated," and "attention is given to monetary costs" and to the elimination of red tape. As one might expect, this ideal state

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is realized through the "introduction of good business practices" found in the private sector (Pollitt, 1990, 7).

Pollitt's discussion of managerialism draws attention to an updated version of the older tradition rooted in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor. This form of managerialism (or "neo-Taylorism" as Pollitt describes it) dominated governmental reform efforts in the United States and the United Kingdom during the 1980s. Neo-Taylorist initiatives, such as those proposed by former President Ronald Reagan's Grace Commission, were concerned with efficiency and administrative control. In recent years, however, the neo-Taylorism discussed by Pollitt has been combined with public choice theory (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962; Downs, 1957; Niskanen, 1971), transaction-cost economics (Williamson, 1985), and agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Mitnick, 1975; Terry Moe, 1984; Wood, 1989). The result has been the emergence of a new form of managerialism that I describe as "neo-managerialism," which is prominently displayed in liberation and market-driven management, the standard-bearers of the *New Public Management.*

Because neo-managerialism draws on—or "conservatively displaces" (Schon, 1963)—public choice theory, agency theory, and transaction-cost economics (the latter two theories are hereafter referred to as organizational economics), it has inherited many of their values and assumptions.[4] Public choice theory and organizational economics start with the basic assumption that human beings are rational economic actors driven by competitive self-interest. Since human beings are nothing more than "rational utility maximizers" (Buchanan, 1978, 17), they are in constant pursuit of wealth, power, status, and other personal gains (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Williamson, 1985). This "narrow model of human behavior" (Donaldson, 1990, 371) leads public choice and organizational economic theorists to conclude that the rational economic actor (in this case, the public manager) has the "inherent propensity to shirk, to be opportunistic, to maximize his or her self-interest, to act with guile, and to behave in a way that constitutes a moral hazard" (Donaldson, 1990, 372). The negative moral evaluation of human behavior deeply ingrained in these theories sends a strong message: Public managers require extensive policing (Mitnick, 1975) for they cannot—and should not—be trusted.

Although the neo-managerialism underpinning liberation and market-driven management incorporates public choice theory and organization economics, it does not forsake the age-old idea that efficiency, economy, and effectiveness must be priorities for public managers. Neo-managerialism does, however, represent a radical shift in focus regarding how these important values are achieved, demanding that managers abandon what Colin Diver (1982) describes as the "engineering model" of public management. According to Diver, the engineering model views public management as "a process of

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supervising the execution of previously defined governmental goals. The public manager is... an instrument of public policy, an instrument of technique" (Diver, 1982, 402-403). Neo-managerialism fosters the idea that public managers are (and should be) self-interested, opportunistic innovators and risk-takers who exploit information and situations to produce radical change. In other words, the neo-managerialism underpinning liberation and market-driven management cultivates the notion that public managers should assume an entrepreneurial leadership role.

Entrepreneurialism, Neo-Managerialism, and Democratic Governance: A Troublesome Threesome

Advocates of both liberation and market-driven management hold the entrepreneurial model in high esteem. Their admiration is clearly reflected in Osborne and Gaebler's best-selling book *Reinventing Government* (1992), which many consider the authoritative guide to liberation management (see Gore, 1993; Light, 1997). In this widely discussed and debated book, Osborne and Gaebler's affinity for and commitment to entrepreneurialism is indisputable. Throughout *Reinventing Government,* Osborne and Gaebler celebrate political leaders and public sector managers for their successful entrepreneurial activities. They recount numerous success stories to illustrate how public entrepreneurs cut red tape, empowered employees, made customer satisfaction a priority, and transformed their organizations into lean, mission-driven, results-oriented enterprises.

B. Guy Peters (1996) also notes the entrepreneurial model's privileged position among proponents of market-driven management. In his probing discussion of the "four emerging models of governing," Peters argues that entrepreneurialism (along with decentralization) is essential to the market model. Given the focus, objectives, and private-enterprise parentage of the market model, it seems only natural that public managers would gravitate toward entrepreneurialism. Indeed, advocates of market-driven management argue that public managers have little choice; entrepreneurialism is becoming vital to their survival as more emphasis is placed on opening up the internal markets of governmental agencies to greater competition (B. Guy Peters, 1996).

B. Guy Peters, as well as Osborne and Gaebler, are among a cacophony of voices linking enterpreneurialism to improved governmental performance (Doig and Hargrove, 1987; Eggers and O'Leary, 1995; Ramamurti, 1986; Nancy Roberts and King, 1996; Schneider, Tske and Mintrom, 1995). These voices have grown louder as the New Public Management rapidly reaches its climax. But the blaring, high-pitched nature of these voices should not prevent us from hearing the warning signals of the dangers of public entrepreneurship. These dangers are real when viewed from the chamber of democratic governance. In addition, the kind of entrepreneurial leader who is cultivated and nurtured by the neo-managerialism underpinning liberation and market-driven management has some troubling characteristics.

The entrepreneurial leadership model has been the focus of intense criticism since its emergence during the 1980s as an alternative to the "administrative management paradigm" (Ronald Moe, 1994, 112). Critics charge that the public entrepreneur's anti-traditionalist orientation and obsession with self-promotion, rule-breaking, power politics, risk-taking, and radical change conflicts with democratic theory (Ronald Moe, 1994; Reich, 1990; Stever, 1988; Terry, 1990, 1993, forthcoming). Diver (1982) speaks directly to this point:

> The entrepreneurial model has considerable appeal... however, its normative status is... problematic. In the ethical realm, the entrepreneurial model confronts massive resistance. The principal obstacle, of course, is its conflict with democratic theory. Public managers are, after all, public servants. Their acts must derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, as expressed through the Constitution and laws, not from any personal system of values, no matter how noble. Entrepreneurial manipulation of public authority in pursuit of personal gain offends this principle (404).

These attacks have not gone unchallenged by champions of public entrepreneurship, who argue that critics overstate their case (Bellone and Goerl, 1993) and that "concerns about the darker side of public entrepreneurship may be misplaced" (Nancy Roberts and King, 1996, 154). These defenders argue that public entrepreneurship does not pose a threat to democracy, especially if it is "civic-regarding" (Bellone and Goerl, 1992, 130). Moreover, they argue that "it is not the public entrepreneur in general we should be concerned about; it is the public entrepreneur who lacks socioemotional maturity who warrants our concerns" (Roberts and King, 1996, 154).

Despite the vigorous, well-intentioned efforts to defend the virtues of public entrepreneurship, even its supporters concede that "[q]uestions of accountability are much more difficult to deal with in the case of executive and bureaucratic entrepreneurs" (Roberts and King, 1996, 208). The public entrepreneur's penchant for rule-breaking and for manipulating public authority for private gain has been, and continues to be, a threat to democratic governance. The danger is intensified by the emergence of public entrepreneurs of the neo-managerialist persuasion.

The neo-managerialism underpinning both liberation and market-driven management, as I argued earlier, consists of a complex mixture of public choice theory and organizational economics (agency theory and transaction-cost economics). These theories are guided by several behavioral assumptions: a) rational actors are motivated by self-interest; b) rational actors are opportunistic, deceitful, self-serving, slothful, and adept at exploiting others; and c) rational actors cannot be trusted because of the behaviors described above. I also argued that when promoters of liberation and market-driven management "conservatively displace" (Schon, 1963) public choice and organizational economic theories, they accept, for all intents and purposes, the behavioral assumptions undergirding these theories. This is the crux of the problem.

The entrepreneurial model is already suspect because its supporters have yet to provide persuasive arguments that address the nagging issue of democratic accountability. There is genuine concern among those committed to democratic ideals as to whether the public entrepreneur is able or willing to abandon self-interested behavior in favor of the public interest, however defined. Public entrepreneurs of the neo-managerialist persuasion only exacerbate the problem because the theories embedded in neo-managerialism are incapable of entertaining any notion of the public interest.[5] Since public choice theory and organization economics are committed to methodological individualism, and since self-interest is at the core of these theories, it stands to reason that the concept of the "public interest" or "public good" would have little intellectual standing. Peter Self (1989, 1993) certainly agrees with this point. He argues that the notion of the "public good is meaningless" to public choice theorists (Self, 1989, 23; see also Kelman, 1987). According to Self (1993), the "idea of 'public good' is seen [by public choice theorists] as some sort of holy grail, external to individual preferences or values waiting to be discovered by some co-operative inquiry. When allied with the state, this search for the public interest becomes an 'organismic monstrosity'" (232). Self's comments apply to organizational economics as well.

The inherently self-interested, risk-taking, and rule-breaking orientations of the public entrepreneur create a dilemma for advocates of both liberation and market-driven management. On the one hand, these qualities are celebrated; they help the public entrepreneur produce innovation and radical change. On the other hand, these same qualities contribute to the anxiety many Americans feel about bureaucratic power (see Kaufman, 1981; Terry, 1995). Such anxiety merely provides ammunition for those who believe that we need more, not fewer, constraints to keep public entrepreneurs accountable. The call for more constraints conflicts with the values, beliefs, and goals of liberation and market-driven management.[6]

The narrow view of human nature is also problematic. Public choice theory and organizational economics, as I argued earlier, assume that public managers are inclined to cheat, lie, and engage in other opportunistic behaviors. Is this the kind of image we want for public managers? I think most of us would answer with a resounding No! Any theory that perpetuates this negative view of public managers should be discarded, since it only contributes to the dangerous anti-government sentiment that is now so pervasive in the United States. Moreover, the negative model of human behavior contributes to the steady decline in the public's trust in government. This negative perspective is dangerous for widespread public distrust, hostility, and dissatisfaction harms democracy. Although the United States was founded with a mistrust of government, the current state of affairs is disturbing. Americans' confidence in government has reached an all time low (see Ruscio, 1996, 1997; Nye, Zellikow, and King, 1997); many believe that "government is getting worse instead of better, and that today's public officials do not measure up"(Orren, 1997, 78). The narrow view of human behavior embedded in the entrepreneurial model does not do much to change this perception. In fact, it is counterproductive to scholarly efforts aimed at fostering an image of public managers as trustworthy, ethical agents who administer the public's business with the common good in mind (Cook, 1996; Kass, 1990; Rohr, 1986; Terry, 1995; Wamsley et al., 1990).

Conclusion

Those concerned with public management research and practice must not lose sight of the fact that ideas matter; they do have consequences (Selznick, 1992). The ideas embodied in both liberation and market-driven management may not serve democracy well. Consequently, the neo-managerialist version of the public entrepreneur bears scrutiny. At the level of democratic governance, public entrepreneurs pose a serious threat to democracy because of the nagging accountability problem. Unfortunately, we know far too little about how to ensure that public entrepreneurs remain accountable and faithful to democratic values (Ferman and Levin, 1987; Roberts and King, 1996). Although scholars, most notably Kevin Kearns (1996, ch. 7), have offered principles to guide the discretionary decision-making of public entrepreneurs, it is not at all clear whether they will faithfully adhere to such principles. My guess is that they will not, especially if such principles conflict with the public entrepreneur's personal agenda.

The behavioral assumptions embodied in the neo-managerialist version of the public entrepreneur is another area of concern. I noted earlier that these public entrepreneurs are heavily influenced by behavioral assumptions drawn from public choice and organizational economics. These assumptions provide an incomplete and distorted view of human beings. Human beings are more than rational economic actors driven by greed and self-interest as Herbert Simon (1998) so wisely informs us when he states:

> Economists (and others) argue that human behavior in organizations, like all other human behavior, is driven by self-interest, and hence appropriate mechanisms are required to link that self interest, expressed in the profit motive, to broader social goals and needs. The only effective mechanism for achieving this linkage, their argument continues, are economic markets, Adam Smith's "invisible hand" .... I find this argument badly flawed... its major motivational premise is simply false. Human beings make most decisions, not in terms of individual self-interest, but in terms of the perceived interest of the groups, families, organizations, ethnic groups, and national states with which they identify and to whom they are loyal (ii).

Finally, public entrepreneurs of the neo-managerialist persuasion are oblivious to other values highly prized in the U.S. constitutional democracy. Values such as fairness, justice, representation, or participation are not on the radar screen. This is indeed, troublesome.

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Notes

1. I am using "public policy community" in the manner advocated by Lynn (1996), to include the faculty and research associates of public policy programs affiliated with the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management.
2. See March and Olson (1995) for an insightful discussion of democratic governance. I embrace what March and Olson describe as the "institutional perspective" of governance (27-45).
3. For scholarly works on bureaucratic politics, see Downs (1967), Rourke (1969), and Seidman (1980).
4. Schon (1963) uses the term "displacement of concepts" to describe a strategy of theory development. According to Schon, the displacement occurs when an "old concept is shifted to a new situation in such a way as to change and extend itself" (1963, x). He identifies two different functions associated with the displacement of concepts. The first is labeled the "radical function" because it involves formulating new theories and generating new ideas. The second function, which is especially relevant for our purposes, is termed the "conservative displacement of concepts." It entails retaining as much as possible of an old concept in adapting the concept to a new situation. Schon states that this function is "most clearly seen in the development of theories" because "old theories underlie new ones" (1963, 111). He goes on to say that "[w]hen old theories are displaced to new situations, all aspects of the old theories tend to locate themselves projectively in the new situation" (111).
5. B. Guy Peters (1996, 43-6) contends that the "market model" does have a vision of the public interest, an argument I find interesting but not persuasive.
6. Roberts and King, leading advocates of public entrepreneurship, make a similar point (1996, ch. 9).

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