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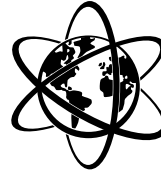
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Employment in the public and private sectors: toward a confusing hybridization process¹

Yves Emery and David Giauque

Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide a better insight into the trend towards hybridization of the public and private spheres. More specifically, its focus is to gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences between employment in the public and private sectors in the wake of recent changes. Public sector reforms within OECD countries have largely been inspired by principles and tools used in private enterprise. Most countries, as a result of financial and budgetary crises, want to modernize their public administration to make it more successful, efficient and effective. Moreover, we are witnessing the development of problem areas which are novel in the public sector, but familiar to the commercial sector. This article accordingly analyses the effects of this trend towards the integration of the public and private sectors in order to show its advantages and limitations for public sector employment.

Introduction and problem statement

Living organisms evolve according to a process of progressive differentiation, which enables them to develop their specific characteristics while compelling them to integrate into their environment or risk extinction. Applying this principle by analogy to the organizational world (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1974) over a period of several decades, this process of '*differentiation-integration*', which is inherently contradictory, enables a better understanding of the profound changes which public sector employment has been undergoing internationally for several years under pressure from the New Public Management movement.

In fact, at a time when public sector employment has reached a turning point in

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its development, when working conditions in the private and public sectors are becoming increasingly similar and when, as a result of historical developments, this convergence has latterly found expression in the similarity of problems facing employees in both the public and the private sector (staff reductions, budgetary cuts, major reorganization, etc.), an urgent need has arisen to stand back and reflect upon what has to date forged the specific characteristics of public sector employment, and to reflect specifically upon what in the future will constitute the principal elements of differentiation in an environment characterized by the hybridization of organizations and their reference points (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991).

- Public organizations which, under the impetus of New Public Management, are increasingly directed and organized on the basis of principles prevailing in the private economy and the commercial sphere (Giauque, 2003a).
- Private enterprises in search of renewed legitimacy, notably going through the adoption of ethical principles and social responsibility, which in some respects resemble the citizenship principles informing public sector activity.

Having summarized the main changes affecting public sector organizations under the impetus of the New Public Management movement, we will go on first to demonstrate that public and private sector employment will increasingly resemble each other in a number of respects driven by a process of integration, usually motivated by a belief in the superiority of the characteristics of private sector employment and organization. This integration phase is destined in some respects to suppress a type of *negative differentiation* specific to public sector employment, sustained by the more general differentiation of public bureaucratic organization. Secondly, we will highlight the consequences associated with this process of integration, a hybrid situation essentially marked by a type of confusion of references and developing paradoxes. Finally, we consider that public sector employment may be reconceptualized through a process of *positive differentiation*, based on the specificity of the public mission and the particular identity of civil servants, which constitute one of the keys to the motivation and commitment of civil servants in the 21st century.

In order to address this question, we will discuss three complementary facets of *public sector employment* which fall into the area of 'public-private' comparison which, in our view, constitutes a perspective from which it is possible to interpret the past and the future of public sector employment (Emery, 2003):

- first, the legal and statutory conditions of public sector employment, which clearly distinguish it, at least in our legal system for the past hundred years or so, from those employed in the private sector; these conditions have the capacity to constitute one of the essential elements – which are also in a process of profound transition – of the psychological contract of civil servants (Lemire et al., 2001);
- second, the conditions for exercising public sector employment, which Wright explains as one of the elements capable of differentiating the motivation of civil servants (Wright, 2001);

- and finally, the content and the meaning of public sector employment, with reference to what, independently of the conditions under which it is exercised, constitutes the core of the activity carried out in public sector organizations; and, hence, potentially, the core of the substantive (or intrinsic) motivation of civil servants (Herzberg et al., 1959; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998).

If the first two facets are subject to a forceful process of integration, we will demonstrate that the last one, which is referred to less often, harbours the foundations of a durable and robust differentiation of the specificity of public sector employment.

An evolving environment characterized by New Public Management

Before beginning our analysis to achieve a better understanding of the mechanisms of integration and differentiation, it would be helpful better to define the administrative changes which have arisen in the wake of the reforms inspired by the principles and tools of New Public Management (NPM).

Principles of New Public Management

Disregarding the differences between NPM 'models' (Ferlie et al., 1996; Mönks, 1998; Bolgiani, 2002), the administrative reforms undertaken in OECD countries often apply the same techniques and tools. Table 1 contains the characteristics of NPM which are the most frequently referred to and identified by various authors. The right-hand column shows the characteristics which have been subject to debate as to whether they should fall within the definition of NPM or not.

Table 1 Principal characteristics of NPM (table drawn from Gruening, 2001)

Characteristics of NPM generally referred to (identified by most experts)	Characteristics subject to debate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Desire to implement budgetary cuts, stricter and more precise financial management ● Greater administrative responsibility with a view to higher productivity ● Greater proximity to the customer ● Decentralization of production ● Strategic planning and management ● Introduction of competition and competitiveness ● Performance measurement ● Change of management styles ● Contracting out ● Greater managerial flexibility (freedom of management) ● Analytical accounting ● Creation of incentives in personnel management ● Separation of politics from administration ● Greater use of information technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partial privatization ● Budgetary restrictions ● Greater regulation of public bodies ● Rationalization and restructuring of the administrative hierarchy ● Democratization and citizen participation ● Rationalization of legal procedures ● Analysis and more systematic evaluation of public policy

The factors which present greater difficulty, and which do not always feature in the definition of NPM, mainly concern (right-hand column in Table 1) issues related to the legal status of service providers, their regulation where they do occur, the evaluation of public policy and the role which may be played by citizens, customers or taxpayers in the reform process. These principles, which concern the more 'macro' aspects of public sector management, are sometimes integrated into thought processes, or simply excluded. That largely depends on the political options taken by the countries which have engaged in the administrative reforms.

We will now go on to examine the main effects of the NPM movement on public sector employment in its various facets.

Effects of NPM on public sector employment: a marked process of integration

Public sector employment has been changed considerably by the NPM movement in virtually all OECD countries (PUMA, 2001). This transformation operates at both quantitative and qualitative levels:

- quantitative, because civil service staff are undergoing changes in almost every country and are falling in numbers. Neo-liberal principles, which focus on slimmed-down government and budgetary problems, combine to put pressure on staff, which fell in most countries between 1990 and 2001 by 1 percent to 4 percent (with the notable exceptions of Luxembourg and Ireland) (PUMA, 2002). The ambition of this article is not, however, to consider the quantitative aspect of the transformation of public sector employment;
- qualitative, meaning in relation to the specific characteristics which, since the creation of modern bureaucracies at the end of the 19th century in most OECD countries, differentiated between public sector employment and that in the private sector. We should recall briefly that there was previously a form of *lack of differentiation* between public and private sector employment and that it was often public authorities, indeed the courts, which contributed to the creation of a specific regime for the civil service.

This article will examine the qualitative development of public sector employment, looking in turn at the legal (statutory) aspects of public sector employment, the conditions under which it is exercised and finally its specific content (Emery and Giaucque, 2003).

The status of civil servants: a clear trend towards integration

If the NPM has, to a greater or lesser extent, changed all aspects of public sector management and indeed political management (Grünenfelder, 1997) with particular effect in the areas of accountancy and financial management, it has given a decisive boost to the transformation of human resources management (*'gestion des ressources humaines'* – GRH), even if the reforms affecting it precede NPM. The origins of new GRH practice lie in the statutory basis specific to the exercise of public office. Although a full picture of the changes under way is beyond the scope of this

article, a number of publications enable us to highlight the main trends which can be identified in relation to this 'legal' aspect of public sector employment. In summarizing the official work of the OECD as well as specialist writers (Polet, 1999; Bodiguel et al., 2000; PUMA, 2001; Bossaert et al., 2003), the trend towards integration emerges clearly, whereas the status of public sector employment has long been marked by its differentiation from legitimate conditions in private companies. It is a differentiation motivated in particular by the specific missions entrusted to public sector organizations (see below); it conforms to Weber's concept of the bureaucratic system (Weber, 1971), and it continues to exist quite clearly in some countries such as France, or indeed for officials of the European Commission, who have a public employment system known as a *career*, characterized by the traditional elements of the civil service, including entry competition, membership of a corps and career progression (grade).

This process of integration, known depending on the context as *alignment* or *normalization*, takes two distinct forms.

First, the proportion of staff carrying out public functions but subject to an employment relationship based on private law, has a tendency to increase, even to become a substantial majority, leaving only certain specific functions (magistrates, judges, etc.) with the traditional status of civil servant. This is referred to, in Italy for example, as 'privatization' of the civil service, a process of integration whose effect is ultimately the more or less complete abolition of the status of public office, so that only contractual relationships under common law remain. We should note in passing that the term 'privatization' is somewhat deceptive in that the missions and tasks which are carried out remain for the most part within the remit of government, which continues to take responsibility for them, whether directly, or indirectly through regulatory mechanisms;

Second, where employment relationships remain subject to public law, as is the case in particular in Switzerland, the very content of public status, namely the conditions of engagement, remuneration, training and career progression, tend to take a clear lead from practices current in private enterprise. This has prompted some authors (Bossaert et al., 2003) to remark that the civil service is still alive, despite these transformations. This statement bears witness to an alignment in substance which in no way renounces the specific framework of public law, motivated in particular by missions characteristic of public sector organizations, the exercise of tasks which are the prerogative of the state, and the principles of public action (continuity, neutrality, etc.), of which public law is the best guarantor.

Among the main innovations, which may be identified within a significant number of public statutes drawn from conditions of employment in the private sector, we would highlight the following elements:

- transformation of the employment relationship, the move from unilateral engagement under public law to engagement by contract under public law, entered into for an indefinite period; in certain instances, in particular for middle and senior ranks, a move to fixed-term contracts containing the objectives to be achieved (Farnham et al., 1996);
- emphasis on performance, introduction of targets and criteria for the evaluation of work, evaluation by the hierarchy; in some instances, as in Belgium, renewal of

the mandate is related to the extent to which objectives have been achieved (Hondeghe, 2003);

- systems of incentivization, including financial methods of recognition (salary increases according to performance, bonus systems (OCDE/PUMA, 1997; Emery, 2004);
- considerable simplification of disciplinary procedures, which are in some instances completely abolished;
- incentives for training and mobility within the public sector organization (a certain 'guarantee of employment' remains, but with no guarantee of occupation of a specific position).

The status of civil servants, and with it the resulting human resource management practice, has thus undergone profound changes in the direction of integration which are, for the most part, irreversible (OCDE, 1997; Emery and Giauque, 2003). Clearly, the depth of the reforms varies greatly from one country to another, based on the premise that the way of dealing with the civil service at legal and management levels is particularly revealing about the political and administrative culture prevailing in a given context (Nomden, 2003). As far as this first facet of public sector employment is concerned, however, it can be said that certain elements of public status remain, even in countries such as Sweden, which have gone a long way down the road of integration (privatization) (Bossaert et al., 2003).

The very clear trend towards the integration of public sector and private sector employment is usually legitimized by the notion — whether based in reality or forming part of the rhetoric of modernization — that the initial differentiation of public sector employment has led progressively, over the decades, to a differentiation which is perceived as *negative*, that is to say that it has engendered characteristics in public sector employment which are prejudicial in the long term compared with employment in the private sector. Because it belongs by definition to public sector organizations, which are occupied by civil servants, public sector employment provides a catalyst for criticism, already longstanding, of the public sector in general (Blau, 1963, Crozier, 1980). It has, however, been criticized with more particular reference to dysfunction induced by the status of civil servant and excessive protection of staff, including where there has been recognized incompetence, automatic career and salary progression bearing no relation to services professionally provided; all those well-known phenomena which, in the mind of theoreticians as well as lawyers and politicians responsible for drawing up the statutes governing the civil service, were barely anticipated and in no way corresponded to the intended outcome (Moor, 1992).

In this context of progressive compartmentalization of the civil service and private sector employees, characteristic in the 20th century of most developed countries, a very strong collective image is now developing which is not very favourable to civil servants, who are seen as too numerous, inefficient and arrogant, strong because of the public authority which they represent and equipped with regulatory provisions which are particularly opaque and impenetrable (Pfister, 1988; Bitoun, 2001). These criticisms, most of which have emerged from the administrative apparatus itself,

rather than from the status of civil servant, as we will see in the next paragraph, have, however, frequently been associated with specific privileges which public sector employment provides, and this is characterized above all by security of employment (Emery et al., 1997). Necessary to guarantee a certain level of protection of civil servants, as well as continuity in the exercise of its functions, this security remains in almost all countries, beyond the process of integration which we have referred to here. Even in Switzerland where, according to the OECD (PUMA 2001), alignment with private law practices is supposed to be complete, it appears that in reality federal civil servants benefit from greater protection than employees subject to common law. This reflects the extent to which this aspect of differentiation is fundamental and probably consubstantial with the concept of public sector employment at the heart of the nation state operating under democratic principles.

Conditions for the exercise of public sector employment: integration under the impetus of imitation on the part of public sector management

We are witnessing the hybridization of the public and private spheres in relation to the conditions for the exercise of employment, with a clear tendency towards integration, even if integration is not as apparent in this second dimension as in the first. In order to gain a good understanding of this movement of rapprochement between public and private sectors at the level of employment conditions, we have to bear in mind the principal instruments and tools offered by the NPM movement, which we defined above, and dwell on the consequences of NPM in terms of management, because that is what largely sets the terms of employment within the civil service. In order to do this, we will summarize the principal changes in terms of management which can be distinguished in the light of the many evaluations carried out within OECD countries in particular (Emery, 2000; Emery and Giauque, 2002; Giauque, 2003b; Pollitt, 2003; Ritz, 2003). Each of the changes which is summarized briefly has an impact, sometimes considerable, on the conditions for the exercise of public sector employment, essentially in a movement towards integration aimed at abolishing certain defects — real or imagined — in traditional bureaucratic organizations (Hablützel et al., 1995).

From management orientated towards inputs to management predicated on outputs and outcomes This is one of the most obvious effects of New Public Management. As far as public sector managers are concerned, they no longer concentrate purely on financial and budgetary 'inputs', which means focus on the management of a budget, but on production of quality services using working methods which enable the achievement of productivity and policy objectives defined at the outset and then evaluated on the basis of a whole raft of indicators. The conditions for carrying out the activity are profoundly changed as a result, because scrupulous follow-up of instructions and rules governing the work are challenged in favour of work orientated towards its outcome.

A system for measuring performance and greater quantification of administrative outcome The measurement, largely quantitative, of outcomes and perform-

ance of administrative services, has been developed to a considerable degree in OECD countries. The direction of public sector organizations has been modernized and has led to the construction of highly complex evaluative mechanisms. It must, nevertheless, be acknowledged that this direction is principally exercised on the basis of quantitative criteria or indices, abandoning as a result the more qualitative aspects of the work of public administration. These indicators represent an objective basis for evaluating the degree to which objectives have been achieved, especially for staff subject to management contracts which are orientated towards precise targets to be achieved.

Separatism, hierarchical simplification and the specialization of public organizations In terms of direction, the corollary of these trends is the redefinition of the frontiers of administrative services. These frontiers, in order to be evaluated, must focus on well-defined activities. We are therefore witnessing a movement of disentanglement of administration and specialization. At the same time, public sector organizations obtain greater management autonomy, which allows a certain distancing from political authorities.

A clear trend towards contractual approaches In order to authorize this specialization and acquisition of autonomy on the part of administrative services, the political authorities in some OECD countries take a contractual approach. Administrative services thus negotiate service agreements with government which stipulate the main strategic and operational tasks for which they are to be responsible, as well as the indicators on the basis of which they will later be evaluated to establish whether they have met their contractual requirements. Both for the management hierarchy and to a certain extent for non-management staff, these trends towards autonomy and contractual approaches noticeably influence the conditions for the exercise of public sector employment, offering considerably more room to manoeuvre while emphasizing the objective of the activities carried out.

Introduction of indicators or market mechanisms To a certain extent, and depending on the political options applied by the various governments, public sector organizations are increasingly subject to the laws of the market and commercial competition. In some activity sectors, they are occasionally placed in competition with private companies or firms, thus finding themselves in a competitive situation in a market in the provision of goods and services. This 'internal market' practice has been implemented in Anglo-Saxon countries, in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand in particular (Ranade, 1997; Ashton, 1999). In terms of the management of human resources in the public sector, financial incentives have also been introduced in a number of instances (Emery and Giaque, 1999, 2001).

Certification and quality control procedures The quality of public services has also been the subject of particular attention. Moreover, administrative services are finding that they have been integrated into the current trend towards certification of productive organizations. Administrative services have thus developed quality control procedures in order better to serve their users. Moreover, users are increasingly

viewed as customers. At this level too, the principles prevailing in the commercial world have made a real breakthrough into the public sector, providing a striking illustration of the process of integration, even if the criticisms associated with the transferability of these principles remain (Hufty, 1998).

It may be concluded from this list of the practical consequences associated with the principles and tools of NPM that the conditions of the exercise of employment in the public sector are tending closely to resemble those prevailing in the private sector. This statement is, it is true, hardly surprising, because NPM principles and tools are largely underpinned by the commercial logic characteristic of the private sector. In other words, it is possible to support the idea that we are witnessing a mimetic process between the public and private sectors, that the former is borrowing considerably more than merely a few management tools and instruments and that it is increasingly inspired by the working conditions prevalent within the traditional liberal enterprise.

This imitative process, however, which is producing a clear trend towards integration, is not materializing in such a clear and obvious fashion. Differentiation also subsists in the practice characteristic of public sector employment, which is, moreover, giving rise to a number of obvious contradictions with regard to NPM tools and principles as they are currently applied. Research intended systematically to capture the specificities of the exercise of employment in the public sector — and, more generally, in public sector organizations — demonstrates the deceptive power of a priori assumptions and the differences, which are sometimes glaring, between the evaluation made of it by public opinion and that made by public sector managers. Accordingly, some writers (Rainey and Bozeman, 2000) show that the allegedly increased complexity of the objectives characteristic of public sector organizations has not been demonstrated empirically. Moreover, the advanced formalization of public sector organizations, one of the characteristic features of public sector employment (Wright, 2001), does not appear inordinately to mark public sector managers, or at least any more than it does those in the private sector. But we would join these writers in emphasizing the extent to which the research is contradictory in an area in which the process of integration manifestly, however advanced, still leaves room for differentiation from public sector employment, and in particular for anything affecting human resources management for staff responsible for it, which brings us back to the preceding point.

In summary, we can say that the statutory conditions governing public sector employment, as well as the conditions for exercising it, are subject to a major and enduring process of integration, essentially legitimated by the desire to abolish a form of negative differentiation linked with the shortcomings traditionally associated on the one hand with the status of civil servant and with the dysfunction of the bureaucratic apparatus on the other. But this integration raises new problems, mainly linked with the *irreducible public sector specificity* which the research is beginning to reveal, as we will now see.

A form of integration giving rise to a situation characterized by confusion and paradox

In practice, the movement towards hybridization, which implies, as we have seen, a form of forced integration between the public and private sectors, is responsible for the emergence of a number of contradictions associated with the conditions of the exercise of employment in the public sector, paradoxes which considerably complicate the management of public sector organizations (Emery and Giauque, 2005).

NPM principles and tools are in fact underpinned by a particular philosophical perspective, which more than pays its dues to principles peculiar to neo-liberal logic. This is largely founded on the belief in the superiority of market mechanisms, competition and individual self-interest as an engine for motivation to work. Most of the watchwords of NPM follow a logic mainly derived from the business world and the commercial sector. Still more practically, NPM principles are underpinned by what is basically economic analysis taken from the *new political economy* (Frant, 1998). To submit the public ethos to a neo-liberal, commercial regime has significant implications in terms of public sector employment, in particular for professional identity, motivation and the involvement of the employees of the civil service. Increasingly obvious contradictions emerge, beyond initial positive reports. Among them, we would refer to the following, but the list is not exhaustive:

Giving greater importance to the figure of the customer in a sphere which puts emphasis on the user/taxpayer Civil servants are very attached to the figure of the user. In fact, a large part of the interest in work within the civil service is linked, as we have already emphasized, with its 'public' aspect, with the fact that its activities are carried out with a 'general interest' objective. Consequently, the user is the figure and the interlocutor of reference for public administration, not necessarily the customer, who is more the key figure in the commercial sphere. In other words, the current reference to customers, notably in political and management discourse, is comprehensible in terms of efforts towards the 'commercialization' of governmental activity, even if it is not necessarily a source of motivation for civil service staff. However, this key figure of the customer challenges the foundations of the identity of the civil servant, the very reason why he or she is working (Giauque, 2003c).

Promoting competition and organizational productivity The race for profitability in which most governments of OECD countries currently engage is a reality associated with the budgetary problems they are encountering at the beginning of the 21st century. This emphasis on productivity, efficiency and the rationalization of costs means that sight is lost of the other major aspect of the reality of public administration – the search for greater efficiency is itself linked to the impact of public policy on the social problems to be resolved. This impact does not lend itself easily to quantitative measurement. On the contrary, the evaluation of impact and outcomes of public policy very often cannot be carried out until many years after the introduction of a public policy and also (indeed even often) using qualitative indicators (Pollitt, 2003). The public ethos has also been influenced by this public policy approach, by impacts and outcomes. The current myopia with regard to outputs and performance

measurement can mean that sight is lost of the objectives specific to public service. Public sector organizations are at risk of losing their understanding of the meaning of the measures they are taking by attempting to create that meaning through systematic quantitative measurement of all services.

Towards the erosion of the public ethos and towards the imposition of new commercial values The final paradox we intend to highlight is in fact more a subject for discussion by academics and research in the public domain. Do the new underlying values of NPM principles and tools jeopardize those related to the traditional public ethos linked with the general interest, etc.? Some writers have no hesitation in responding in the affirmative, pointing to the 'clientelist' slippage to which NPM can contribute within public sector organizations (Lane, 1997; Clegg, 2000; du Gay, 2000). Others merely observe that commercial values do not belong, in historical terms, to the civil world (of public sector organizations) and that civil servants pay much less attention to the material values which are more prevalent in the private sector (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Boyne, 2002). Other books or publications confine themselves, very impartially, to commenting that the values brought by NPM principles and tools in fact contribute to a process of redefining the meaning of the activities carried out in the public sector, without at the same time adding a subjective judgement to that statement (Brereton and Temple, 1999; Goodwin, 2000; Berg, 2001). Whatever the truth of the matter is, it does seem that the arrival en masse of commercial values in the activities carried out by members of the civil service contributes to the redefinition of the identity of the civil service or public sector employment. We will doubtless have to wait several more years for a better evaluation of the impact of the commercial sphere and its values on the public sector.

In conclusion, what we can say is that hybridization, or the current integration of identifiable values into the public sector, cannot happen without the appearance of certain ethical, philosophical and political problems. In this context, integration also generates a new need for positive differentiation, which we will examine in greater depth in the following paragraph, and which would in our view help to minimize, or indeed eliminate some of the paradoxes we have identified.

Routes for positive differentiation of public sector employment, forging the identity and motivation of civil servants

After a century in which the civil service has continuously ogled the private sector in order to imitate its practices, the time has come for it to separate the wheat from the chaff, and retain from this process of integration only those practices which have been of demonstrable benefit to it (Ritz, 2003). On the other hand, the time has come to rethink public sector employment in order to build solid foundations for positive differentiation which can position it sustainably as a model and a source of inspiration for all types of organization. This positive differentiation may be supported on the one hand by a strengthening of the specific identity of civil servants, and on the other hand by re-energizing their motivation, two planks founded on the specificity of the public missions they carry out.

A different environment and form of management

Globally, a principal observation emerges from comparative research: the public sector cannot be managed in the same way as the private sector, because the private sector has its own characteristics which differentiate it. We can extract the principal ones, or at least those about which researchers are unanimous (Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Rainey, 1997; Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000).

At the level of environmental factors Public sector organizations evolve in a specific socio-political environment, in which more or less short-term political decisions, intrigues and alliances are legion. Moreover, legal and formal constraints are greater and political influences are felt more acutely. Administrative services are expected to deliver services which are not necessarily profitable, but they respond to a political logic and the regulation of society. Just like private sector enterprises, they have to be capable of managing the funds allotted to them efficiently, but they cannot ordain from one day to the next that production of certain goods or services should be abandoned for the sole reason that they cannot be made profitable. Here, again, the figure of the user remains topical, even if the service to the customer is validated at the level of an election (or electioneering) and managerial speech. Moreover, a large proportion of public services cannot be made subject to competition and the market, because they belong to the realm of state prerogative (levying taxes, police, social security, etc.). Their objectives, we should recall once more, are not only to satisfy one or more customers, they must also generate outcomes and impacts for certain populations and are therefore sometimes heavily associated with public policy. The goods and services delivered to the population must also be accessible to all, throughout the entire territory of the state, in an equitable manner and on the same terms. This amounts to remembering the obvious, that government cannot segment its population using criteria based on their wealth, where they live, etc.

At the level of factors associated with managerial processes For equally obvious reasons, public sector organizations find themselves in a restrictive managerial situation, because they have to be economically and politically accountable for their activities. The criteria for evaluating the services offered by administrative departments are therefore more complex and broadly more formal than in the private sector. Managerial autonomy in administrative services is 'shaky' to the extent that external intervention (by parliamentary groups or members, various interest and pressure groups) is always possible and can be frequent. Moreover, individual and collective incentives are not very well developed, particularly because of the difficulty in legitimizing the practices which are current, if controversial, in the private sector, and contrary to certain ethical principles belonging to the public sector.

Civil servants in search of a new identity and renewed motivation

In order to interrogate the identity and motivation of civil servants, it is not unhelpful to return briefly to what specialists consider as one of the central characteristics of the public sector, namely its 'ethos' or 'public spirit'. Public sector managers possess strong values linked to the general interest and service to the community. Numerous

publications bear witness to the fact that civil service employees are quicker to defend the general interest and service to the community. Moreover, the public interest, the general interest, form part of the values with which employees in the civil service readily identify. They also form the principal factors in the motivation of civil servants, analysed in particular through the concept of 'Public Service Motivation' (Perry and Wise, 1990; Aubert, 2003). The public ethos is therefore not merely rhetoric used deliberately by civil servants to protect themselves against attacks on their conditions of employment and their jobs. On the contrary, it would seem that these values form the heart of the professional identity of a majority of them.

That said, we would not subscribe to the idea that public sector employees possess values which are completely different to those existing in the private and voluntary sectors. On the contrary, we take the view that they now, more than prior to the reforms, face conflicting values leading to the redefinition of their professional identity. Their professional references, largely founded in the civic sphere (the logic of public service) and the industrial world (valuing work well done, technical competence, precision, professionalism), are currently being destabilized by the emergence of the commercial reference (commercial world) and its underlying economic and liberal logic (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). Not that the market has never come close to the mysteries of government; on the contrary, it has always developed in a role which is complementary to that of the state; it is rather that the 'marketplace' tends to centralize, whether in the regulation of our societies or in the functioning of public sector organizations (Henchsberg, 2001). The market, in that sense, is a real culture in itself, underpinned by precise axioms: substantial rationality, individualism, self-interest, individual pursuit of happiness, etc. The market and its operation have been in a way objectified, reified, personified, deified, so that it is no longer possible to think without making reference to it in the area of public sector management as well. Thus, the new identity of civil servants will be more hybrid than in the past, while retaining an anchorage strengthened by the traditional and sustainable values of public service. It must be emphasized that the content of missions, tasks and responsibilities entrusted to public servants will have barely changed in substance, beyond all the changes referred to in this contribution, in the course of recent years and in all probability this will continue to be so for the next decade.

In fact at this stage we have scarcely referred to the core of public sector employment, the content and meaning of the missions entrusted to civil servants, staff and colleagues in the exercise of their duties. This very content of public sector activity, which is fundamental to all approaches to motivation focused on the particular activity being exercised (Herzberg et al., 1959; Wright, 2001), is in our view given too little attention in the debate about the evolution of public sector employment. In fact, it harbours an extraordinary potential for positive differentiation and can provide 'additional meaning' which has hitherto been brought out only to a limited extent, apart from in some countries such as Canada, the responsibilities exercised by civil servants are promoted very directly, especially through publications and press marketing campaigns (Kernaghan, 1999).

If it were only a matter of drawing up a typology of public sector employment, an exercise which others have already carried out (Harmand, 1993), it would be clear at

once that public sector organizations, whether active at national, regional or local level, are characterized by an incomparable variety and diversity of spheres of activity and function, creating scope for professional development which is extremely attractive to civil servants always seeking to develop their employability further (Emery, 2002). Several research angles may be referred to which could sustain thinking intended to enhance the value of a precious differentiation of public sector employment at a time when competition in the job market sometimes makes public sector recruitment highly problematical (Demmke, 2004).

- 1 A link which has not been used enough between bringing to the fore the spheres of substantive policy and public sector professions. In most developed countries, the drawing up and analysis of public policy have expanded rapidly under the impetus of New Public Management, but also under the impetus of a discipline which has largely been 'democratized', now accessible to public sector actors, and politicians in particular, far more than it has been in the past (Knoepfel et al., 2001). Giving prominence to essential areas of public sector action reveals the societal problematics which originally underpinned them, thus contributing to this research the characteristic meaning of contemporary public sector employment. By locating them within a finite group of actors and resources intended to resolve a public problem, the public policy process plays an essential part both in identifying the great spheres of government activity, which have been known of for a long time in a very general way (security, health, education, economy, etc.), but in insufficient detail to imbue the public sector employment concerned with practical meaning; that process also plays an essential part in the research into clearer targeting of the missions pursued, thus combating the prejudiced view of public sector employment as the pursuit of vague and contradictory objectives;
- 2 GRH practices, still all too often based on an instrumental approach to motivation, in which the attractiveness of public sector employment and the productivity expected are primarily linked, independently of the activities carried out in practice, with conditions of employment in the wider sense (pay, hours of work, pension funds in particular). There is no need here to refer to the innumerable publications which, in the wake of the work of Herzberg on the enrichment of work, have consistently demonstrated that profound motivation develops on the basis of the content of the work carried out, and the meaning which can be given to it; and that purely financial motivation, associated with factors of hygiene, only produces circumstantial motivation which has to be endlessly reinforced by external controls (Roussel, 1996; Levy-Leboyer, 1998). Current GRH practice, which is focusing in a number of countries on a complete re-evaluation of public sector employment as a whole through detailed analysis of the functions carried out, offers highly detailed and valuable material for re-thinking how to give value to the content of work in public sector employment.
- 3 Training and skills development practices rapidly expanding in almost all public sector functions, despite a budgetary context which is often very difficult (Horton et al., 2002). These practices occasionally focus on detailed identification of spheres of activity and families of professions, revealing evolving networks

through employment mapping developed primarily on the basis of the skills acquired, and less in the more traditional acceptance of the 'career in administration', which focused on progression through career grades. Others, even more ambitious, seek to establish real management of knowledge within public sector organizations (Guénette et al., 2003). What these various approaches have in common is that they enable more refined analysis and valorization of the content of public sector employment, of the nature of the responsibilities exercised and the skills, indeed knowledge, needed to carry them out, which amount to assets capable of founding renewed motivation on the part of civil servants in the exercise of their functions.

Under these conditions, the logic of engaging civil servants, long based on security of employment, the stability of the function carried out and (almost) certain career progression, typical elements of the public law relationship (Borgeat, 1996) but which tend to blur considerably as we have seen, would benefit from being reorientated sustainably towards what positively differentiate public sector employment from private sector employment, namely the content of the work and the meaning it holds. More than ever, in this context, characterized by a marked tendency towards integration, research should be renewed which bears on the values and motivation specific to civil servants. As well as the 'motivation to serve the public' line referred to above, that of the 'new psychological contract' within public services (Lemire et al., 2001) appears to be very promising.

It is essential to pursue the research aimed at a better understanding of new expectations of civil servants in order to avoid the process of integration ending in a loss of public identity and giving rise to a form of lasting demotivation associated with what we might call the *banalization of public sector employment*.

Civil servants as bearers of new public sector ethics

Reforms of the New Public Management type contribute to the restructuring of the potential relationship between civil servants and their functions, their tasks as well as their rights and their responsibilities. In a managerial context which favours new professional values — efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, risk-taking and innovation — public sector employees face an obligation to adapt. This new 'results ethic' (de Gaulejac, 2005) has superimposed itself and has, to a certain extent, become a substitute for old ethical values which were process-based and supposed to provide a framework for the conduct of civil servants. The appearance of these new ethical values presents numerous problems, in particular the fact that they increase the allegiance of public sector employees to their organization which, after all, dispenses sanctions and incentives based on the performance of its employees (Bodiguel, 2002; Piron, 2002).

The threats and dangers associated with this 'results ethic' are, of course, numerous and should not be underestimated. However, the new professional values have equal potential for the introduction of innovations which are attractive from a professional perspective. Impersonal bureaucratic rules, often experienced as barriers to innovation and creativity, become more flexible to allow more room for the creativity of participants, to their sense of personal responsibility and their profession-

alism. The public sector thus faces the obligation to redeploy ethical values which are able to take into account developments in the social and economic context, as well as the demands, often hitherto unheeded, of users, who increasingly see themselves as customers and who are more aware of their rights. The new public sector ethics, to which public sector employees must make their contribution, tend to allow more scope for individual responsibility and reflection by civil servants and rather less to 'the ethics of obedience', which characterized, and continue to characterize in some instances, the functioning of public sector administrations (Caron and Giauque, 2005). These emerging public sector ethics need to be overhauled in order to reaffirm the primacy of the general interest, the common good, while guaranteeing new professional values in line with the new principles and tools of New Public Management. The search for this balance is not easy; far from it. Contradictions and traps lie in wait here for reformers too. However, the search for a new way of settling ethical questions is an exciting challenge and is above all capable of renewing the working conditions of civil servants who are the guarantors and the creators of these new public sector ethics, which will make it possible to differentiate advantageously between public sector and private sector management.

Conclusion

In this article, we have identified a clear trend towards the integration of the public and private sectors, in particular following the introduction of management principles and tools drawn from existing practice in private companies. We have, however, also identified the irreducible specificity of the environment and operation of public sector organizations. We have seen that the encounter between these specificities and the principles and tools promulgated by the NPM movement is generating contradictions and paradoxes which could be a difficult experience for civil servants, endangering, in the long term, the foundations of the motivation of civil servants. We take the view, however, that it is now possible to create the conditions for developing a renewed and positive form of differentiation of public sector employment. The routes we refer to in this respect have the following principal features:

- construction of a new identity or a new 'public sector ethos' capable of contributing to the participation and involvement of public sector employees;
- renewal of the foundations of the motivation of public sector employees, relying more on the meaning and the objectives of public sector employment, giving value to the links between public policy and public sector professions, rethinking the valorization of the content of work which is characteristic of the public sector and, finally, orientating human resource management towards skills and their development;
- redefinition of new public sector ethics which are not solely orientated towards results, but which are instead capable of intelligently taking into consideration at the same time the imperatives and values appropriate for the defence of the 'general interest' and the new professional values which allow more scope for taking responsibility, creativity and initiative on the part of public sector employees.

These lines of thinking make possible the creation of a dynamic for the positive redifferentiation of public sector employment, a *sine qua non*, it seems to us, for returning its pedigree to public sector employment.

Notes

- 1 Translated from the article written in French under the title 'Emploi dans les secteurs public et privé: vers un processus confus d'hybridation'.

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