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NPM Falters in Fiji

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7 Synonyms

- 8 Controls; New Public Management; Public enter-
- 9 prise restructuring; Traditional context

10 Definition

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New Public Management has been the preferred model for the delivery of public services since 1980.

Public enterprise restructuring involves restructuring public enterprises in order to make them more commercially viable and better providers of public services.

Traditional context refers here to a nonwestern, developing island context.

20 Introduction

- 21 New Public Management (NPM) has virtually
- 22 replaced traditional public administration as the
- 23 preferred model for the delivery of public value
- since 1979 and 1980 when the UK and the USA,

respectively, adopted a radically different 25 approach to management in the public sector. 26 Small government with larger private sector par- 27 ticipation in public service delivery has become 28 the "blueprint" for economic development. Con- 29 temporary reforms have largely focused on the 30 public sector with governments aiming to intro- 31 duce greater economy, effectiveness, transpar- 32 ency, accountability, and efficiency in the public 33 service. In the process, governments have 34 attempted to reduce both their commitment to 35 and participation in economic enterprise. Public 36 sector reforms, and in particular the restructuring 37 of Public Enterprises, have thus become a world- 38 wide phenomenon. NPM, which attempts to 39 address deficiencies found in traditional public 40 administration, assumes that the market is prefer- 41 able to government as a coordinator of social 42 relations and public service delivery "since it 43 involves transactions that are voluntary, lateral 44 and decentralized, in contrast to the compulsory, 45 hierarchical and centralized activities of govern- 46 ment" (Beetham 1987, p. 33). This reliance on the 47 market as an automatic "adjuster" raises a number 48 of issues in the use of NPM in traditional settings 49 like Fiji. This paper analyzes critically the main 50 features of the NPM "model" and questions its 51 suitability in the restructuring of Public Enter- 52 prises in a traditional context like Fiji.



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The Fiji Context

Fiji has gone through five coups de 'tat since gaining its independence from Britain in 1970. It is a developing island economy comprising 14 provinces with persisting tribal and kinship relationships still influencing national decisionmaking. In addition to this, Fiji has a sizeable Indo-Fijian population (37%) who are largely descendants of indentured laborers who came from India from 1879-1916 to supply the labor needs of the colonial administration (Norton 1990, p. 22). Institutions of public accountability destroyed, disrupted, and compromised after the 1987 coup (Lal 2000). From 1987 to 1995, national focus was on stabilizing the political landscape, enacting the 1990 constitution, organizing the 1992 and 1994 general elections, and consolidating the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) government and Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's leadership. Only in 1996 was the Public Enterprise Act enacted. Thirteen years later, only five of which dedicated strengthening were to reestablishing necessary accountability mechanisms, another coup in 2000 shattered all expectations of predictability in the institutions of accountability and good governance. Both the coups were justified in the name of protecting the Indigenous community from the hegemonic designs of the Indo-Fijians. Provincialism, paternalism, political patronage, and nepotism thus became a part of everyday life making it extremely difficult to identify and expect conventional objectivity in public decision-making. This was bolstered by affirmative action programs and Indigenous considerations which became elevated to unprecedented levels. The hallowed principles of meritocracy and considered objectivity, therefore, virtually ceased to operate in the public sector in Fiji. A coup was executed in December 2006 partly in reaction to this increasingly overwhelming tendency for compromising objectivity in government conduct. At this point in time, Fiji has an interim-government that operates in a constitutional vacuum with a standing promise to draft a constitution that ensures nonparticularism

in public decision-making. These factors, coupled with the fact that Fiji is not endowed with an abundance of potential service providers who could effectively deliver on competitively 103 acquired government contracts, make it virtually impossible for the market mechanism to operate 105 effectively in Fiji.

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The New Public Management Model

Public sector reforms have been part of discourse 108 on management in the public sector for the past 109 two decades even though the management and 110 organization ideas contained in New Public Man- 111 agement (NPM) can be traced back to earlier 112 debates in public administration (Savoie 1995, 113 pp. 119–20). NPM attempts to introduce manage- 114 ment structures, practices, and principles that are 115 based on the precepts of freedom to choose and 116 freedom to manage. It has been linked to the "New Right" in recognition of its attempts to incorporate 118 normative concerns in what essentially remains 119 the business philosophy of maximizing returns. 120 This new ideology can also be referred to as the 121 "Enlightened Left" in recognition of the fact that it has been embraced by traditionally left-leaning 123 governments in their attempts to amalgamate the 124 imperatives of both business and society (Appana 125 2003).

The literature on NPM does not exhibit unifor- 127 mity on exactly what it constitutes, but the following ideas and initiatives appear to characterize 129 NPM: use of hands-on professional management, 130 managerial autonomy, decentralization, use of explicit measures of performance that are output 132 based, use of finance-based performance contracts and incentives systems, emphasis on discipline 134 and parsimony in the use of resources, infusion 135 of competition through disaggregation and delayering of government bureaus, use of contracts for public service provision by organiza- 138 tions external to the department/bureau in question, emphasis on citizen choice, and use of 140 other private sector-type management practices 141 (Hood 1991; Pollitt 1995; Boston, et al. 1996). 142 On the other hand, there appears to be general 143 unanimity on NPM's fundamental objectives of 144



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creating an innovative, flexible, problem-solving, and more entrepreneurial culture that is better adapted and more adaptable to a changing environment (Barzely 1992; Kettl 1997; Rosenbloom 1998). The NPM model, therefore, attempts to address the more obvious and disruptive shortcomings of traditional public administration. Its main features are analyzed in use in some detail in the next section.

Professional Management

The emphasis of NPM is on the use of hands-on professional management where a successful manager with a proven track record is located and given active, visible, and discretionary control over a public entity with clear allocation of responsibilities, and corresponding accountability appears to place total reliance on the professional manager to meet performance expectations. In line with the tenet of "freedom to manage," the NPM manager can choose whatever approaches and techniques he considers appropriate in order to meet expectations. And in a clear attempt to move away from the rules/procedures focus of traditional public sector management, the evaluation focus is on output controls with the need to stress results rather than procedures. Thus, like in most private sector approaches, managerial performance is gauged ex post on the basis of results that are evaluated against targets that have been mutually spelt out prior to commencement of duties.

With the restructure of Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) into Airports Fiji Ltd. (AFL) and Civil Aviation Authority of the Fiji Islands (CAAFI) in 1998, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) were sought for both entities in an attempt to recruit the best two people for the crucial positions on which the whole civil aviation industry and, therefore, tourism (Fiji's largest industry) hinged. A foreigner was recruited for AFL whereas a local filled the CAAFI post. A marked difference was seen in the degree of freedom that each demanded as CEO on their employment contracts. This created an immediate inequity in powers. decision-making Furthermore,

governments changed, new CEOs were recruited 190 to meet the requirements and expectations of these governments. This was more so with AFL, which 192 has now got its fourteenth CEO in twenty years, 193 largely because it is a commercial entity with all 194 its ramifications. CAAFI, on the other hand, has 195 had a less turbulent history because it merely 196 carries out the regulatory functions of civil aviation in Fiji and has no real commercial signifi-Furthermore, NPM's insistence on 199 recruiting managers with proven track records 200 has repeatedly been compromised in the appointment of CEOs. The CEO/AFL appointed in July 2003 had been a dedicated bureaucrat in the Prime Minister's (PM's) office. The most potent justification for his appointment could be seen in the 205 fact that AFL was a fragmented organization that 206 needed an "outsider" with considerable human 207 relations skills to refocus it. It is, however, difficult not to propose that the same qualifications 209 could have been found in someone else with the 210 necessary track record. Additionally, there was 211 considerable appeal in speculations that his appointment had a lot to do with his proximity to the PM and the Sogosogo Duavata ni 214 Lewenivanua (SDL) government's "blueprint" objectives of the time. The CEO/AFL position is 216 currently held by an acting appointee.

The adjunct issue of degree of managerial autonomy in NPM appears hazy in literature. On 219 the one extreme, the rules and proceduresensconced manager operates in a clearly prescribed, predictable work environment. On the 222 other end, managers enjoy a strong form of insti- 223 tutional autonomy where their decisions are not 224 subject to either prior approval or retrospective 225 appraisal. This form tends to raise the question 226 of democratic accountability of governments as it 227 weakens substantially the link between the public 228 manager and government. The lack of clarity in 229 this link between the bureaucrat and their political head in the traditional public administration model often led to "political interference" which has widely been cited as a "weakness" of that 233 model. It also tends to weaken the ability of governments in using public entities to fulfill their 235 roles as providers of public goods and custodians 236 of the public good. Thus, somewhere in the 237

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middle of this continuum lies a third positioning of the public manager where he/she has some degree of discretionary powers in decisionmaking while being held answerable to politicians who can direct them within prescribed limits. This is the type that is used predominantly, largely because of its political appeal. Restrictions are placed mutually between the CEO and the government (or Board) via contracts, which also allocate risks of blame between politicians and managers. This intermediate form is a hybrid that attempts to strike a delicate, and at times politically problematic, balance in creating the "decision space" for the public manager.

In Fiji, this "decision space" is determined not only by the formally negotiated employment contract of the CEO, but also by a number of subjective considerations that are linked to the context. AFL's fourth CEO was appointed by a board that he had chosen earlier in his capacity as the then (2000) interim Minister for Civil Aviation. There would, therefore, have been no negotiations on his powers. He subsequently proved this by getting involved in a major row with the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA) where he refused to entertain both negotiations and prounion court decisions. This refusal to implement court decisions stemmed from a firm belief that the AFL board would not act against him. There was silent acknowledgment of the reason for the paralysis of the board being the fact that the new Minister for Civil Aviation came from the same province as the controversial CEO. This embarrassment continued until 2003 when the government appeared to have been forced to appoint a new minister. Subsequent noncompliance by the CEO led to his belated dismissal in March 2003. Mechanisms for the evaluation of managerial performance are discussed later on in this entry.

Private Sector Styles of Management

NPM goes on to prescribe a greater use of private sector styles of management practices in the public sector. It specifically mentions short-term employment contracts, strategic planning, perforagreements, performance-based

systems, new Management Information Systems 283 (MIS), and a greater concern for corporate image 284 (Hood 1991; Boston, et al. 1996). These are 285 clearly aimed at changing worker attitudes from a public sector type complacency and status quo orientation to a more private sector type vigorous and proactive orientation. Monetary incentives rather than nonmonetary ones are emphasized in order to elicit compliance and generate worker enthusiasm. This was the primary source of motivation prescribed by scientific management which has a heavy influence on new institutional economics, which in turn, informed NPM. The prescriptions mentioned here are only a few in a whole range of options that the NPM manager is allowed to choose from in their efforts to deliver expected outcomes. In Fiji, the civil service culture was extremely difficult to supersede because it was heavily influenced by and imbued with traditional structures. Traditional chiefs, for instance, continued to be given precedence over commoners in public appointments. This was clearly an attempt to utilize traditional structures in a context of professional management. Even though this is not necessarily a weakness per se, a traditional chief is likely to raise potentially damaging traditional expectations within a modern workplace. This could compromise the professionalism required within NPM. The profit bottom-line, a distinguishing characteristic of private sector styles of management, is largely compromised in these instances. In addition to this, NPM does not prescribe clearly (apart from disaggregation and the use of contracts) the means to achieving its well-articulated ends. This opens up a host of alternatives that the manager can choose from. And managers with bureaucratic backgrounds that are closely linked to traditional structures would be tempted not to use unfamiliar entrepreneurial approaches in unstable settings. NPM attempts to overcome these problems by featuring explicit standards and measures of performance with a preference for output-based controls.

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Performance Measures and Output Controls

NPM lays great emphasis on placing responsibility and accountability at the same point on the public organization in a direct departure from traditional public administration where the doctrine of ministerial responsibility renders the public manager/official anonymous. This doctrine of ministerial responsibility means that the minister accepts responsibility for both the actions of the public servant as well as contractors who may carry out public work. The anonymity operates as a major impediment in affecting accountability in the public sector. However, with NPM, the principle of alternative delivery makes agents like the CEO/AFL and the CEO/CAAFI responsible to the ministers as well as any other partners involved in the arrangement (Lindquist and Paquet 2000). NPM also features explicit standards and measures of performance with a preference for output-based controls. This links a person's actions more closely with consequences that are also direct and range from firing to unprecedented rewards.

The employment package of the first CEO/AFL was reported to have been well above the quarter million-dollar mark. All successive AFL/CEOs have enjoyed the same types of relatively astronomical employment packages. This has the tendency to create envy and resentment in a context like Fiji where similar paying jobs are rare in the private sector. On the other hand, widespread public service experience and knowledge make it extremely difficult to accept that the compensation packages are matched by commensurate effort. In fact, there was a growing perception that public enterprise postings were being used by government to "reward the boys" for services rendered during the pre-2000 coup upheavals, the coup itself, and its aftermath when some \$25 million was disbursed without adequate control for agricultural assistance. These allegations also hound the post-2006 government even though the focus is largely on the appointment of military personnel to civilian posts.

On the other hand, for effectively evaluating 372 the performance of CEOs as well as Public Enter- 373 prises, it is important to have explicit standards 374 and measures of performance that are clearly spelt 375 out. Clear objectives and timeframes need to be 376 set for effective control as necessitated by the 377 accountability provisions of NPM. Setting clear 378 objectives in the public sector is a task fraught 379 with difficulties and contradictions. First, it is 380 difficult to lay out and quantify sociopolitical 381 objectives. Second, it is often politically imprudent to specify economic objectives especially if 383 they are likely to prove unpopular. And third, 384 political concerns of governments and economic 385 concerns of Public Enterprises might not be compatible as is seen in the requirement of Fiji's 387 "Blueprint" that 50% of all public contracts be awarded to ethnic Fijian businesses (Fiji live 389 2002; Te Karere 2000). The Blueprint hoped to 390 bring about 50/50 parity in the participation of 391 ethnic-Fijians in Fiji's business sector by the 392 year 2020; Public Contracts were seen as a 393 major means of accomplishing this. This not 394 only makes it difficult for the CEO to meet set 395 economic targets, but it also makes it difficult for 396 government to enforce the performance provi- 397 sions of the contract if targets are not met. On 398 the other hand, traditional positions and affilia- 399 tions made it extremely difficult to punish or 400 remove CEOs (and other public officials) for 401 non- or questionable performance as seen earlier 402 in the case of the AFL/CEO who was removed after performing without any controls from 404 January 2001 to March 2003.

Disaggregation and Competition

Furthermore, in an attempt to ensure the adapt- 407 ability of private sector styles of management in 408 the public sector, NPM proposes disaggregating 409 large public sector organizations into "corporatized units around products" funded separately and 411 interacting with one another on an "arms-length" basis. This is clearly aimed at streamlining and 413 removing size complications from cumbersome 414 public entities so that it becomes easier to manage 415 them in a private sector manner. However, in order 416 AU4 AU₅

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to disaggregate effectively, governments' commercial and noncommercial activities need to be clearly identified, demarcated, and separated. Justification for this is seen in the need to create manageable units and "to gain the efficiency advantages of franchise arrangements inside as well as outside the public sector" (Boston et al. 1996). Improved reporting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms need to accompany this shift. There are a number of problems associated with this especially in developing country contexts. First, it is not easy to demarcate exactly what government activities can be classified as "commercial" because private sector provision might not be feasible. Some activities like providing water are more problematic to commercialize than providing electricity. Second, disaggregation could easily lead to duplication in the use of scarce public resources that countries like Fiji can ill afford. The creation of AFL and CAAFI from CAAF in Fiji highlights this phenomenon to some extent as lots of new equipment was either "lost" or had to be purchased during the restructure. In an interesting twist, AFL's state-of-the-art air traffic control equipment was being used by Strategic Air Services Ltd. (SASL) to provide air traffic management services to AFL under extremely unclear and "uncommercial" terms. This stemmed from an over-emphasis on the requirements of the "Blueprint" to "assist" Ethnic-Fijian entry into the commercial sector. Here, state assets paid for and held by AFL were being used by a private company with virtually no returns for resource use to AFL.

451 Contractualism

NPM proposes the introduction of more competition in the public sector through the use of competitive public-tendering procedures, term contracts, and devolution so that costs are lowered and delivery standards improved through the introduction of market stimulus. Therefore, it exhibits a preference for private ownership, contestable provision, and contracting out of public services. However, despite the intentions of contractualism and the structures that have been

put in place to facilitate its use, principal/agent relationships are fraught with complications that inevitably affect the restructuring process as well as organizational performance. Agency Theory, a 465 key theory behind NPM, says that social and political life can be understood as a series of contractual arrangements between principals (parliament, ministers, CEOs, etc.), and agents (CEOs, workers, suppliers, etc.). These contracts should be professional rather than relational in anature for maximum benefits.

Information asymmetry arises when agents 473 have access to information that principals do not, 474 or vice versa. This creates an incentive to exploit 475 the information gap for personal gains, which 476 could be detrimental to the greater good. When 477 Fiji Post and Telecommunications Ltd. (FPTL) 478 was disaggregated into Post Fiji and Telecom 479 Fiji Ltd. (PFL) in 1996, the first Chief Operating 480 Officer (COO) was an Israeli with dubious Amer- 481 ican academic qualifications. The fact that his 482 Master's Business Administration (MBA) was not authentic only came to light after questions 484 emerged within the organization due to tightening tension between the then Managing Director (MD) (Emori Nagova) and the COO (Aharon 487 Amit). This case serves to highlight the fact that 488 governments usually do not have the means to verify personal data provided by aspirants to key positions in Public Enterprises. They may even 491 choose to ignore the verification process because 492 of covertly articulated preferences from positions 493 of power. This can lead to the problem of adverse 494 selection, which consequently begins to plague 495 the organization. In the case of Telecom Fiji Ltd. 496 (TFL), COO Amit left the organization in disgrace before his contract had expired. There were unconfirmed reports that in a baffling twist, government paid him \$5 m for the unserved portion of his contract and "services rendered."

It is obvious that contractualism is used in 502 NPM partly to place restrictions and controls on 503 the behavior of agents (and to some extent principals). The assumption is that market forces would 505 enhance this control requirement in a free environment where contracts can be both contested 507 and enforced. Unfortunately, a joint economic 508 study by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) and the 509



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University of the South Pacific (USP) found that the nonenforceability of contracts and corruption are a major impediment to investment in Fiji (Fiji live 2003). Furthermore, Public Enterprises in Fiji do not have access to sizeable numbers of service providers. SASL, for instance, was awarded the contract to provide Air Traffic Management (ATM) services without having to go through a truly competitive public-tendering process. Air Terminal Services (ATS) provides groundhandling services based on a preferential contract that was signed prior to the restructure but continues to be operational because 51% of ATS shares are held by CAAFI. Furthermore, contracts tend to attempt to constrict the ambit within which service providers can operate. These centralizing tendencies grate against the devolutionary focus of managerialism creating tensions and confusions. In order to attempt to overcome these shortfalls, focus has to move on to the governance structures of NPM and the wider environment, but that falls beyond the ambit of this entry.

Conclusions 532

It can be seen here that NPM is faced with a 533 multitude of unique and not so unique problems 534 when it is used for the restructuring of public 535 enterprises in a traditional context like Fiji. Its 536 emphasis, on using private sector styles of man-537 agement with a professional manager hired on 538 contract, faces distinct problems. First, the hiring 539 itself can be compromised 540 uncontestable subjective considerations. Second, 541 it is difficult to determine and prescribe exactly how much "freedom" the manager should have. 543 Third, political objectives that governments are 544 preoccupied with cannot be articulated in concrete 545 terms for various reasons. They are also often 546 difficult to align with the economic imperatives 547 of management. This makes the appraisal of management performance an exercise fraught with 549 difficulties. On the other hand, it is extremely 550 diffigult atgainstniskinguadcochtableapperformance 551 because of traditional considerations that may

Furthermore, NPM's emphasis on market 554 control of organizational performance does not 555 operate in the expected manner for a number of 556 reasons. First, it is difficult to clearly demarcate 557 government's commercial and noncommercial activities for effective restructuring. Second, the 559 setting up of separate entities incurs additional 560 costs emanating from a forced duplication of resources. And third, the monitoring and accountability mechanisms that are then needed become 563 very complex and difficult to implement. In addi- 564 tion to this, market forces are introduced via competitive public-tendering processes. This is an exercise fraught with difficulties because of the 567 pitfalls of information asymmetry, uncertainty, 568 adverse selection, and moral hazard. On the other hand, the fact that the Fiji economy is not 570 endowed with an abundance of specialist service 571 providers makes NPM's reliance on the market, 572 and the use of public-tendering processes as well 573 as service contracts, virtually meaningless at times. Thus, there exist a range of factors that 575 render the use of NPM in public enterprise restructuring an extremely problematic proposition in a traditional context like Fiji.

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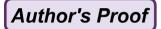
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