

12. Some Brief Comments on Global Trends Impacting on American Public Administration

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If we are to believe the textbooks and popular monographs we rely on to teach introductory courses in public administration, the development of the field is a story of historical “waves” of reform. Some versions of the story, reflecting the intellectual roots of the field in the early 1900s, provide a narrative frame stressing the progressive nature of the reform movements, with each wave bringing with it enhancements that have produced today’s vast and complex administrative state. Other versions reflect a more historicist perspective, regarding the reforms as manifestations of the political and managerial ideologies of the time. Still others imply a reactionary view, with each period of reform representing a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of the last. Then there is the cyclical view that posits the existence of the waves of reform that inevitably emerge every 20 to 30 years.

These and related reform-focused stories of public administration’s historical development have two common characteristics: parochialism and endogeny. Except for some passing reference to Woodrow Wilson’s comparative comments in his 1887 classic “The Study of Administration”, rarely is there any mention of non-American public administration. If our textbook “stories” are to be believed, we seem to have the field entirely to ourselves. This is not to say that students and scholars of American public administration have never wandered into the comparative or international arenas, but the lessons they bring back with them (if, indeed, they return¹) are rarely reintegrated into the mainstream American PA literature. That parochial navel-gazing has been reinforced by the fact that we generate our reforms from within; reform movements are sparked and nurtured by problems, ideas and events that are seem endogenous to the United States.² We have been a self-contained (and all too often self-satisfied) field, historically and intellectually isolated by choice from the rest of world.

But this situation no longer holds, for in the globalized world (much of it of our own making) there are forces pushing and pulling at our core understanding of public administration. The New Public Management (NPM), as Kettl has pointed out, is a global development. As interesting, is the fact that our particular version of NPM (“reinventing government”) is a rather anemic variation of the models developed in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, the Low Countries, and other nations. We are finally learning what comparativists the world over have known for decades -- that our assumption that the United States is at the center of the public administration world was - - and to some degree remains -- a figment of our parochial imagination.

¹ Some of the most prominent comparativists and international political science scholars of the past half century began their careers as students of American public administration.

² The key word here is “seem,” for the historical record (thanks to the work of Alasdair Roberts, Gerald Caiden and others) makes it clear that we have been greatly influenced by the models provided by others, especially the British.

As we emerge from our self-imposed intellectual confinement, however, we are being confronted with a world that is demanding more of public administration than just the managerial reforms and universalized focus on performance represented by the NPM movement. Globalization is proving to be much more complex and challenging than originally thought. While closely associated at first with expanding markets and economic interdependencies, there is a growing appreciation of globalization as a means rather than an end in itself – that is, as a peaceful process through which humankind seeks to achieve long-cherished goals that in the past most thought could only emerge through political (and often bloody) revolutions.

Thus, globalization has been associated with the process of democratization that has swept through world, as well as the universal clamoring for the effective promotion of human rights and justice. Globalization has pushed issues of governance to the forefront, and has made both legal and administrative reform within states a critical requirement for participation in the global economy and emerging global society. The NPM, it turns out, is merely one manifestation of globalization, and American public administration community is going to find it increasingly difficult to ignore the lessons and models it provides.

I believe the current trend is best captured by the idea of the “globalization of accountability,” or more specifically, the **globalization of the promises of accountability**. From our parochial perspective in the United States, accountability seems like an inherent characteristic of governance; but from a global perspective, accountability is an Anglo-American concept that has only recently emerged as an international standard.³ As important, the global attraction of accountability is not based on the particular mechanisms or forms found in the U.S., the U.K. and other “anglican” states, but in the “promises of accountability” implied in the globalized rhetoric of reform. In this rhetoric, accountability is associated with achieving not only greater performance from governments, but also justice, democracy and ethical behavior. In this sense, accountability has become a globalized “term of art” for reformers with a wide range of interests – and thus a significant factor in the future of public administration here and abroad.

The exhibit below briefly summarizes what I perceive to be the four major “promises of accountability” that have become globalized in recent years.

Four Promises of Accountability

<i>Promise of:</i>	
<i>Justice</i>	Assumes the opportunity to seek justice in light of some claimed injury will in fact result in justice.
<i>Performance</i>	Assumes that individuals or groups held to account for

³ The term itself has no equivalent in most other languages. In most countries it is translated as a synonym for “responsibility” or reduced to the equivalent of “accounting”. The Japanese had more ~~more~~ than a dozen words for “responsibility,” but they had to create a new word (actually a transliteration) to capture the notion of accountability that both the British and Americans introduced there in the 20th century. More recently, the Brazilian legal community had to create a new term to deal with the concept of accountability, for their previous reliance on “responsibilidade” proved insufficient in the globalized world of commerce where the Anglo-American concept dominates.

	their behavior and its consequences would in fact perform better.
<i>Democracy</i>	Assumes the creation of vertical, horizontal and transparent mechanisms of accountability is the key to democracy.
<i>Ethical Behavior</i>	Assumes corruption and inappropriate behavior can be prevented or corrected through various institutional schemes.

- In a growing number of contexts, accountability carries with it the **PROMISE OF JUSTICE** – or at least the opportunity to seek justice (i.e., “settle accounts”) in light of some claimed injury.
 - The context here is most often juridical, and leads to the establishment of formal and informal mechanisms for dealing with everything from the mundane tort claim in administrative courts to seeking justice for crimes against humanity through international tribunals.
 - Of special interest in recent years has been the creation of “truth and justice” commissions in nations that have emerged from years of oppression and strife. Whether we focus on the greatly admired South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission or its less notable counterparts in South America and Eastern Europe, the idea of seeking accountability is central to each as a means for seeking justice.
 - The implications of this development are hinted at in the increasing exposure of American public administrators to legal liability under revised doctrines of sovereign immunity. Such exposure has had an impact on expectations, behavior and anxieties about the globalization of that exposure (as reflected in the U.S. government’s reluctance to submit to the jurisdiction of the newly constitution International Court of Criminal Justice).
- In other contexts more familiar to students of public sector management, accountability indicates the **PROMISE OF PERFORMANCE**, and assumes that individuals or groups held to account for their behavior and its consequences would in fact perform better.
 - This trend is directly reflected in the globalized approach to administrative reform that links the various NPM programs as well as the emergence of what some are calling the “enterprising state” or the “hollow state.”
 - While the U.S. experience with NPM has been somewhat limited under the “reinvention” approach, the increased pressure to focus on performance (e.g., GPRA) and recent proposals for a massive outsourcing of federal government jobs indicate that this will become an even more salient factor in the near future.
- On a somewhat broader scale, accountability has become increasingly associated with the **PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY**.
 - Over the years our standards of assessing democratic governance have shifted from the expansion of individual liberties and citizen participation to the provision of institutional checks on government; accountability, in other

words, has moved from a secondary characteristic of democracy to a primary indicator.

- From the current literature focused on democratization, one gets the impression that the creation and effective operation of vertical (e.g., electoral) and horizontal (e.g., monitoring) mechanisms of accountability are the keys to democracy. In addition, global reform movements have raised the expectations for transparency in both public and private sector governance.
- Democratic answerability and responsiveness – always major issues for the American administrative state – is likely to reemerge as a central concern in a global environment. Under the jurisdiction of the WTO and other international trade regimes, many previously closed or obscure policymaking processes – especially those of administrative agencies – are likely to become points of contention.
- Lastly, accountability has evoked the **PROMISE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR** or (at minimum) the reduction of corrupted behavior.
 - This is nothing new for the U.S.: for at least the past two centuries, various forms of reporting requirements, codified norms, and answerability have emerged as the means for preventing or controlling corrupt or inappropriate behavior among public officials.
 - Anti-corruption and various transparency projects have had significant impacts – not merely on the behavior of individuals, but on the shape and performance of entire public personnel systems. The globalization of these efforts is likely to impose additional obligations and constraints on administrative operations.

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We are only now beginning to appreciate the immediate impact and long term implications of globalization on American public administration, and I believe we can enhance our understanding of the challenges it poses by focusing on these four “promises of accountability.”