

Relevance of Classical Management Theories to Modern Public Administration: A Review

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Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of management theories of the 19th and early 20th centuries that are commonly referred to as classical organization theories. These ideas are contrasted with the human relations school of thought that achieved great popularity in the 1930s and 1940s. The study asserts that there are valuable lessons that modern public bureaucracies and other public institutions can draw from these early theoretical frameworks. Public organizations molded on the classical organizational management theoretical perspectives have proven remarkably stable in different circumstances around the world. However, they are now increasingly expected to adapt to new and unforeseen circumstances by integrating the foundations inherited from the past and the lessons learnt over the past three decades. Such an approach will enable public institutions to adapt to rapid changing circumstances and in the process be well equipped to meet the demands of their citizens at the levels of theory and practice.

Keywords: Classical organization theory, human relations perspectives, rationality, rule of law, public administration.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the analysis of management theories of the 19th and early 20th centuries universally referred to as classical organization theories. These ideas are contrasted with the human relations school of thought that achieved great popularity in the 1930s and 1940s. The paper's final focus is on the lessons that can be drawn for modern public administration from these early theoretical frameworks.

This paper is concerned with the examination of a wide range of processes, approaches, governmental and political activities commonly referred to as 'public administration.' Public administration is simply defined as all processes, organizations, and individuals associated with carrying out laws and other rules adopted or issued by legislatures, the courts and the political executives (Gordon, 1978).

The intent, of course, is not to discuss all the topics which fall under the heading of public administration, for that would be an impossible task given the eclectic nature of the field. The paper confines itself to discussing only the major topics and approaches. An effort was made to differentiate between the study and practice of public administration.

The beginning of the study of public administration is usually traced back to the late 1800s. From roughly 1887 to the early 1920s, public administration was viewed as distinct and separate from politics. This concept of a dichotomy between politics and administration owes its origin to the works of Woodrow Wilson (1887) and Frank Goodnow (1900). Wilson (1887) contends that administrative concerns are not necessarily political questions. He wrote that:

The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics ; it at most points stands apart even from the debatable ground of constitutional study (Wilson, 1887:209-210).

Basic to much of Wilson's thought was his perception of administration as neutral and free from politics and policy formulation. In his bid to create a more professional and efficient administration, he advocated for the development of a science of administration whose objective would be the discovery of general principles to guide administrators in the efficient performance of their duties.

Goodnow's *Politics and Administration*, published in 1900, was a passionate plea aimed at ensuring honest and responsive political parties. As did Wilson, he held the view that the bureaucracy was to administer - impartially and nonpolitically - the programs enacted by the legislative branch.

The two writers were writing during the American reform movement which had a strong bias against the excesses of the politicians. A good part of their justification to separate politics from administration was motivated by the need to give greater latitude to the administrative officials to exercise their own independent powers and discretion.

Despite public administration theorists' later discomfort with Wilson's dichotomy, there is no doubt that his paradigm dominated the thinking of most scholars and practitioners in the

classical public administration period. Apart from conceptually divorcing political matters from administrative concerns, many of the scientific procedures that were recommended during this period were suggested with a view to improving the efficiency of public sector operations with basic principles being borrowed from the private sector. This was in line with Wilson's assertions that business principles were applicable to the public sector.

More recently, the literature on public administration tended to emphasize the interconnectedness of politics and administration rather than their separation. Systems theory scholars emphasise the fact that all parts of the political system are interrelated. Like public policy-making theory, they recognize that not all decisions are made in the legislature. They contend that a good number of them are made in the administrative offices buildings. It is now widely accepted that decisions made by the political executive tend to be structured and at times determined by information gathered and disseminated by administrative officials.

The shift away from the distinction between politics and administration reflects not only an academic unease with the dichotomy, but a practical realization that the administrative arm of government has as its main functions not only the implementation of policies but also the giving of expert advice to the political arm to facilitate its policy-making process (Gulick , 1937).

Public administration as an academic field is still in its embryonic stage groping for its own identity. Most writers contend that public administration is not in itself a distinct field, but a hybrid that bridges other disciplines. They note that over the years, it has borrowed heavily from other disciplines, notably sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. As Gordon argues, there are blurred boundaries between public administration and these other fields. There is a controversy over just where public administration belongs intellectually and institutionally (Gordon, 1978).

The paper is not meant to be a treatise on the field of public administration. Rather, it is simply a review of the discipline and its focus is on issues that have largely shaped the current conceptualizations of modern public administration.

2. Classical and Neo-Classical Theories of Public Administration

This section will now review the various theories that fall under the classical and neo-classical perspectives.

2.1 Scientific Management

In the early 1900s, an organization theory that emphasised rationalism, efficiency and productivity through established rules and scientific principles received great prominence. This theory known as scientific management owes its origins to Frederick Winson Taylor. Taylor (1911) identified the basic social problem of his day as one of efficiency. His Scientific management focused on the discovery of basic principles of motion involved in the performance of physical tasks with a view to determine the one best way of performing any task most efficiently. Although he blamed both management and the worker for inefficiency, he reserved his sternest criticism for management.

According to Taylor, management is deficient both in terms of its lack of knowledge as to what constitutes a proper day's work and its indifference about proper managerial practices. To correct these deficiencies, Taylor charged management with the basic responsibility for developing the required scientific management principles. The principles are as follows:

1. The development of a science of management;
2. The selection and training of the workman;
3. Bringing science and the workman together; and
4. An equal division of work and responsibility between management and worker (Taylor 1911).

In pursuit of these objectives, Taylor sought to establish a scientific approach to management. This was to be achieved by employing scientifically determined techniques. From the longer slate of techniques he offered, the time-and-motion studies, wage incentive systems and functional organization have received public acclaim.

According to Taylor, the scientific management techniques would replace rule-of-thumb management practices so prevalent during his time. He believed that scientific management principles would create a better and more harmonious working relationship between workers and employers (Frank B. Copley, 1993)

Although Taylor advocated cooperation in the workplace, he was adamant that authority must not be shared equally by management and the workers. He preferred a vertical hierarchy through which top management made its wishes known to those below.

Taylor's ideas have met with a great deal of success and criticism. By the early 1900s, interest in scientific management had reached its peak. His book *The Principles of Scientific Management* was translated into many languages (Tayoor, 1911) . In the United States, the Taylor Society was formed in 1912, with the objective of spreading the 'virtues' of scientific management techniques. The impact of his principles was felt in both public and private organizations.

Taylor's scientific approach to analysing a task addressed a pressing problem of that time: how to judge whether an employee had put in a fair day's work. He believed that money motivated workers. Knowing what amounted to a fair day's work, he supported the individual piecework system as the basis for pay. If workers met a specified production standard, they were paid a standard wage rate. Workers producing more than the set standard were paid a higher rate for all the units produced. Underscored here is that scientific management focuses on ways to improve the performance of individual workers.

As Taylor's scientific management concepts continued to receive greater public attention, it also attracted a lot of opposition. That opposition was led by labour movements. In his works, Taylor had persistently argued that unions fostered the restriction of output by making the work of the least efficient the standard of performance.

The unions reacted to the application of scientific management principles by staging massive

protests. The protests led to a congressional inquiry that ended in legislation prohibiting the use of techniques of scientific management in federal agencies in the United States of America.

Despite its positive contributions, Taylor's scientific management has been attacked for its mechanistic approach to management (Rose, 1975). Human relations theorists have roundly criticized Taylor for neglecting the human factor in the organization. His assumption that the worker would rationally pursue his self-interests relatively uncontaminated by his feelings, attitudes, and private goals failed to take into account other human factors and social considerations that affect human behaviour in organizations. Subsequent research has highlighted that individual behaviour in the organization is influenced by a whole range of variables like social and psychological factors that Taylor adjudged irrelevant to productivity.

Scientific Management contributions

The Scientific management perspective was a strong driver of efficiency for organisations and countries undergoing industrialisation. Its influence was first felt in the private sector, but was quickly adopted by the public sector. Scientific management contributed to the view that there is “one best way” of achieving results.

Scientific management in public administration contributed to the efficient mass production of standardised public services, payments issued on time and with minimal errors, public works projects undertaken according to plan, standardised curricula in public schools, efficient tax-collection agencies free from corruption or leakage of public funds. This approach contributed to the efficient functioning of public organisations and was particularly appropriate for managing tangible public services provided directly by government agencies without intermediaries. The assumption, of course, is that scientific management works best in relatively stable and predictable environments.

Scientific management remains valid today for predictable services that lend themselves to precise routine, repetition and codification. However these types of service represent a declining fraction of government services. Today, an increasing range of public services are information-and knowledge-based. They require direct interaction between user and provider. The quality and the nature of the service depend on the accumulated knowledge and know-how of the public servant providing it. They defy codification, except in the broadest terms. They require the exercise of a high level of discretion that the classical theory of public administration was trying to prevent.

2.2 Principles of Administration

While Taylor concentrated on administrative process another school of thought whose focus was on 'principles of administration' was developing. This school of thought owes its origin to the works of Henri Fayol, a French mining engineer. (Fayol, 1949)

In his contribution Fayol describes various principles of administration: Division of labour, Authority, Discipline, Unity of command, Unity of direction, Subordination of individual interests to the common good, Remuneration, Centralization, Scalar chain of Command,

Order, Equity, Stability of tenure, Initiative and Morale (Gulick, Luther. and Urwick, L. eds. 1937; Norman Cuthbert, 1970).

Like Taylor, Fayol's principles were devoted to the achievement of efficiency. He intended that his principles be used as general guides to aid individual administrators in understanding their organizational contexts. Fayol's ideas were well received in France and the United States. In the United States, two members (Gulick and Urwick, eds. 1937) of the President's Committee of Administrative Science established under Roosevelt recognized Fayol's contributions and included his work in their famous treatise entitled *Papers on the Science of Administration*. In that study, one of the members, Gulick, borrowing from Fayol, summarized the functions of management as planning, organizing staffing, direction, coordinating, reporting and budgeting (POSDCORB). This famous acronym summarized a view of administration that has influenced the teaching and thinking of public administration theorists and practitioners for generations (Ibid, 1937).

The principles of administration have been criticised on a number of counts. A leading critic, Herbert Simon (1946) has argued that like proverbs, the principles are unclear and ambiguous, containing poorly defined terms. He further refutes the claim that they are scientific by noting that the principles were not the result of empirical research that sought to establish the basis of organizational effectiveness.

2.3 Max Weber's bureaucratic model

Max Weber too must be mentioned in regard to the 'principles of administration' approach. Weber is related to the classical approach in that he takes the position of most classical authors on the appropriate relationship between the politicians and the administrators. His insistence that the bureaucrat should be the neutral servant of his political masters is precisely the position embodied in the classical politics-administration dichotomy. His point of departure is his focus. Unlike Taylor and Fayol who concentrated on processes, Weber's focus is on administrative structure.

Weber begins his argument by distinguishing among three types of authority. There is the traditional society within which, as the term implies, rulers enjoy personal authority based on custom. It is based on respect for the eternal, in the rightness and appropriateness of the customary way of doing things. An example would be the authority of a tribal chief. The second is the charismatic authority in which the leader derives his/her authority from personal qualities. Followers submit to such authority because of their belief in the magical powers, revelations, or heroism of the leader (Weber, 1947).

Finally, there is legal authority under which the followers recognize the legal competence of the persons exercising authority. Those exercising authority are acting in accordance with their duties as established by a code of rules and regulations. It is upon this authority that Weber based the ideal-construct he termed bureaucracy.

From the longer roster of characteristics, provided by Weber, six deserve special mention:

- i. Hierarchy of authority: the locus of decision making is prestructured with decisions of

- various types being made at different levels of the organization. Each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one. Every official in that administrative hierarchy is accountable to his/her superior for his subordinates, which means that he/she has the right to issue directives that are relevant for official operations.
- ii. Division of labour: The clear cut division of labour makes it possible to employ only specialised experts in each particular position.
 - iii. Impersonality: Rational standards must govern operations without interference from personal considerations. The exclusion of personal considerations from official business is a prerequisite for impartiality as well as for efficiency. Impersonal detachment engenders equitable treatment of all clients.
 - iv. Technical qualifications: Employment in the bureaucratic organization is based on technical qualifications and is protected against arbitrary dismissal. Selection and promotion decisions are based on technical qualifications, competence, and performance of the candidates. Promotions are based on achievement and seniority.
 - v. Procedural Specifications: Explicit rules and regulations define the extent to which organizational members must follow organizationally defined techniques in dealing with the variety of situations they face (Jackson 1982).
 - vi. Continuity: Members are expected to pursue a career in the organization. The office constitutes a full-time salaried occupation with a career structure that offers the prospect of regular advancement (Beetham 1987).

(Weber, 1947)

These characteristics illustrate Max Weber's ideal type of rational and efficient organization. Goals are clear and explicit. Positions are arranged in pyramidal hierarchy, with authority increasing as one moves up the organization. The authority lies in the positions rather than in people who occupy them. Selection of members is based on their qualifications rather than on who they know. Promotions are based on seniority and performance. The officials working in a bureaucracy provide a continuous and neutral service essential to the proper functioning of the State.

The model has been condemned from several quarters. Many scholars have pointed out that Weber's emphasis on the formal aspect of organization ignored the informal structure of relationships which characterize the reality of organizational life. The model's emphasis upon rule-bound behaviour can have undesirable consequences like goal displacement when rules become an end in themselves. Parsons draws attention to the possible conflict which might arise between a bureaucrat's authority derived from his position in the hierarchy, and that derived from technical expertise (Parsons 1960). To the extent that these do not match, other members of the organization will not know who to obey - the person with the right to command or the person with the greater expertise. Gouldner (1959), recognizes that individuals bring with them their own values which eventually impinge upon the bureaucracy and so the concept of a value-free bureaucracy is far-fetched.

2.4 The Neoclassical Theory of Organization

The Neo-classical approach is the extended form of classical approach of management (Sarker *et al.* 2013). It builds on the classical approach but broadens and expands it (Ibid.). Rather, neo-classical theory adds a more human element to the science of organisation and management. It grew out of the limitations of the classical theory. Based on the Hawthorne experiments, the neoclassical approach emphasised social or human relationships among operators, researchers and supervisors (Hersey and Blanchard 1997). The table below summaries the key features of classical and neoclassical theories:

Table 1: Features of Classical and Neo-Classical Theories

Points of Distinction	Classical Approach	Neo-Classical Approach
Organizational Focus	Functions and economic demand of workers	Emotion and human qualities of workers
Structure of organization	Impersonal and mechanistic	Social system
Application	Autocratic management and strict rules	Democratic process
Emphasis	Discipline and rationality	Personal security and social demand
Work goal of worker	Maximum remuneration and reward	Attainment of organisational goal
Concept about workers	Economic being	Social being
Content	Scientific management, administration and bureaucratic management.	Hawthorne experiment, human relations movement and organisational
Relations in organization	Formal	Informal
Nature of organization	Mechanistic	Organistic

Source: Sarker, Rafiul and Khan , 2013

From around 1930 to 1950, the classical theorists' assumptions came under serious attack from human relations theorists. The bond which united these theorists was their disdain for the human engineering approach of the scientific management framework and its degradation

of workers. Some were also not sympathetic to the Weberian ideal of hierarchy and his search for efficiency without a proper regard to the effect that such efficiency requirements have upon individuals' welfare and behaviour.

The human relations school, exemplified in the work of Argyris (1960), Herzberg (1964), Likert (1967), Maslow(1943), McGregor (1960), Vroom (1964), builds upon the earlier studies carried out by Mayo (1933), Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939). The work of these theorists has revealed the flaws in the work of classical writers. By concentrating on economic incentives, the classicalists ignored other important determinants of individual behaviour which are non-economic.

The human relations school grew out of a set of studies carried out at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago in collaboration with Harvard University in 1927. The major findings of the study were the discovery of the significance of social and group actors as influences upon individuals' work behaviour. In that study, it was found that non-pecuniary factors like happier working conditions, mental attitudes, group dynamics, all tended to influence the workers' productivity. (Elton Mayo, 1933)

The end result of the Hawthorne experiments was that it opened up a whole new dimension for management. The demonstration that a human being is a social animal led to the conclusion that there were advantages to treating workers as a responsible being rather than as a cog in a machine. Subsequent studies eventually emphasized the importance of social needs. As Jackson (1982) aptly points out, the human relations approach was concerned with putting human beings back into the bloodless organizations discussed by Weber and the classical administrative theorists.

A caveat is probably in order here. Though I have referred to a logical progression and a correlation of ideas, it is often difficult to draw causal linkages among them. The objective of Taylor's scientific management was to discover the basic principles of motion involved in the performance of physical tasks and then determines the one best way of performing any task. The primary tool in this endeavour was the time-and-motion study. Though its analysis was largely in the private sector, scientific management attracted a large number of enthusiasts in the public sector. In a way, scientific management was one of the first efforts to analyze work methods systematically and to estimate management influence on productivity. Although it was later abandoned as a comprehensive theory, it provided measurable impact on the subsequent development of management and organizational theories.

The 'principles of administration' approach formed a logical complement to the scientific management movement. Whereas the focus of scientific management was the performance of physical tasks, that of 'principles of administration' approach was the formal organization structure. Accordingly, while the basic tool of analysis of Scientific management was the time-and-motion study that of the 'principles of administration' approach was the formal organization chart. The general problem addressed by the 'principles of administration' theorists was the identification of the tasks necessary to accomplish organizational objectives and the grouping and coordination of those tasks in such a way that one maximizes organizational efficiency. They sought to establish a 'science of administration' equally

applicable in the public and private sectors. Their analysis was of course not as systematic as those of Scientific Management. They attempted to derive specific applications from preordained general principles rather than rely on generalizations built inductively from an accumulation of specific observations as had scientific management.

Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy bears close resemblance to the kind of organization widely prescribed in the classical organization. He subscribed to a type of organization in which authority is delegated through hierarchical patterns. In the typical hierarchical organization, formal authority is located at the top. This was essentially the same view propounded by most classical writers.

The human relations approach sought to modify the hierarchical organizational structures so ardently espoused by classical authors. Its concern with the attitudes and sentiments of the worker and the importance it attached to social groups in determining individual behaviour marked a major shift in the study of organizations. By directing its attention to the social and psychological aspects of organizational behaviour the human relations approach appealed to a wider range of human needs that were considered important to motivate workers employed in organizations.

Contributors to this neo-classical approach recognised an organisation as a social system subject to the sentiments and cultural patterns of members of the organization. Group dynamics, leadership, motivation, participation and job environmental factors were also recognized as important variables. This approach changed the view that employees are mere tools and in the process advanced the notion that employees are valuable resources.

In sum, the various schools of thought modified in various ways, are very much with us today both in theory and practice of public administration. The classical theorists gave relatively little attention to the human aspects of organisation. Although they frequently recognised the need for leadership, initiative, benevolence, equity, esprit de corps and the need for harmony between the human and technical aspects on jobs, their main preoccupation was to ensure that employees hired would “fit the requirements of mechanical organisation ”(Morgan 1998:39). It is quite apparent that public institutions and private organizations exhibit elements of the various theories of organization reviewed above.

3. Lessons for Modern Public Administration

As a discipline, public administration took shape in a period characterised by rapid change associated with the industrial revolution, economic development and the building of modern states in the late 19th and early 20th century in Western Europe and North America. The classical model of public administration was founded on a number of conventions including respect for the rule of law, a strict separation of politics and administration and a meritorious public service operating under the principle of anonymity and political neutrality.

Public administrations shaped around this model share many characteristics. Government is seen as the primary agent responsible for serving the public good. The power structure is vertical and hierarchical. The public service is governed by precisely prescribed rules and is accountable to elected officials. Public servants are expected to exercise minimal direction in

the provision of services.

These dimensions offered by these theories were instrumental in shaping the modern state and its *modus operandi*. Issues derived from these frameworks, that shall become the focus of the next discussion are: the rule of law, dualism, citizenship, public interest, and the role of government.

Rule of law

The various theories reviewed are premised on the concept of the rule of law. The assumption is that in any rational society, the rule of law is the foundation of all administrative decisions that are made. In that scheme of things, the laws are not subjected to the whimsical machinations of the political elites. To wit, in a rule bound society, the expectation is that all citizens are treated equally before the law and no one is above the law. In the same vein, the public bureaucracy is expected to implement the various policies and administrative decisions in a fair and impartial manner guided by the various public administrative statutes that are protected by the rule of law. These rational assumptions, though widely acclaimed vary in their application in various countries and societies.

Public administrators are increasingly subjected to political pressures and other personal considerations and the strict application of rules and regulations based on the primacy of impartiality and decisions based on the rule of law may not always be the prevalent norm in some countries. Patrimonial tendencies in some countries loom large and act as a constant threat to the fair application of the rule of law principle and the ability of public institutions to operate unhindered in a professional manner (Bakker, J. I. 1988).

Dualism

Today, some characteristics of the classical public administration act as a barrier as governments try to adapt to the changing reality of the 21st century. Different time periods require different approaches. Past practices need to evolve with a view to taking into account the practical complex issues and realities that are characteristic of the 21st century.

The classical theories of public administration reflect the dualist way of looking at the world that was predominant in the 20th century. This view would see issues through binary perspectives: as being either public or private. In that configuration, private interests would be left to the market and to the dictates of individual initiatives (Bourgon 2011:10). Once the issues were of a public nature and were perceived to be in the public domain, the role of government would be to contain demand and rationalize the use of public resources in a fair and equitable manner. As a result, efficiency as the guiding principle of public administration and performance was expected to be achieved through rules and administrative mechanisms that are protected by the rule of law. A number of issues today overlap public, private and civic interest. Underscored here is that most of the issues that citizens face on a day to day basis require a pluralistic view of the world and a multifaceted approach to bring about viable solutions.

Looking at the world through a dualistic mental map is embedded in the public administration

model inherited from the 20th century. It is reflected in the conventional separation between politics and administration and between policy decisions and their implementation. Political aspirations like reducing poverty, eliminating budget deficits or improving health systems can only be achieved through multiple interactions and cooperation between the private and public sectors.

The classical theory of public administration has internalised and institutionalised a dualistic view of the world reflected in multiple separations between means and ends, facts and values, thoughts and actions, policy decisions and implementation (Svara 2001). Today, governments need to address some of the most intricate and complex problems of our times.

Citizenship

A concept that has gained popularity in public administration discourse from the turn of the 20th is one that focused on citizens as the bearers of equal rights and obligations under the law. This was a major accomplishment. The law grants the rights and defines the obligations that come with citizenship. These rights include the right to vote and to select those who represent the interest of citizens and make decisions on their behalf.

The classical theory to public administration “crowds out” the contribution of citizens (Ostrom 2000) in many ways. It undervalues the role that people, families and communities play in producing public results and creating a society worth living in. In current contemporary times, citizenship has taken a broader definition and meaning in which it is viewed as an integrating concept (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). People are simultaneously members of their family, community country and are free to choose communities of interest, no matter where those communities reside (Dagger 1997). In the connected world of the 21st century, the concept of the *global citizen* has become the norm rather than the exception. The politics of citizenship is increasingly intertwined with the politics of participation with people acting as members of a community to achieve set results (Pranger 1968).

Public Interest

Under the classical theory of public administration, political authorities determined the public interest. Their decisions amounted to carrying out the political will (Bourgon 2011). In this regard, citizens played no direct role once they elected their representatives or once they conferred legitimacy on political authorities. Today, the public interest can best be described as a collective enterprise that involves government and many other actors. Governments achieve results in a world characterised by a broad dispersion of power and authority involving the public sector, the private sector, civil society and citizens (Stone 1997).

Increasingly, it is quite clear that no government controls all the levers of state power that are designed to address the complex problems that people really care about. Coordinating vast operations that extend beyond the control of government is one of the trademarks of public administration in the 21st century (Bourgon 2011). Over the last 30 years, a recurring theme in public sector reforms has been the growth of non-traditional, non-hierarchical and non-governmental approaches to service delivery (Kettl 2000). Underscored here is that public services today are increasingly indirect, intangible and complex. Therefore, some

well thought out coordinated measures that have the support of the average citizen are needed to meet the various societal demands (Bourgon 2011).

The Role of Government

The classical theory of public administration sees government as the primary provider of public services. This no longer resonates with the array of roles most governments are called upon to play in the 21st century. Today, the role of the government is to integrate the contribution of government, people and society in a common system of governance able to adapt to changing circumstances. In the final analysis, government has to co-evolve with society (Rotmans *et al.* 2001).

4. Conclusions

The classical theories inherited from the 20th century provided a solid foundation for modern public administration that includes the primacy of the rule of law, a commitment to due process in serving the public good, a concern for efficiency in service delivery and for probity in the use of public funds. It laid the basis for a strong system of accountability that runs through every level of public administration. The public administration systems molded on this classical theoretical framework have proven remarkably stable in different circumstances around the world. But the test of a strong theory is not just its staying power: it is its resilience, which implies an ability to adapt to new and unforeseen circumstances. Public administration as a discipline lags behind the changes taking place in practice. It needs to integrate the foundations inherited from the past, the lessons learned over the past 30 years and the imperatives of serving in the 21st century. Public organisations are not yet fully aligned, in theory or in practice, with the global context or with the complex problems they are expected to address (Bourgon 2008).

Public organisations inherited from the 20th century have shown a low adaptive capacity. They were built to mass produce public services and achieve predetermined results. They were not expected to adapt to rapid changing circumstances and therefore were ill-prepared to innovate or discover new ways of fulfilling their missions. Increasingly, the various environmental considerations that encapsulate political, technological, social and economic challenges facing public sector organizations require that public organizations adjust their internal systems in a manner that will enable them to adapt to inevitable changes thereby avoiding the pitfalls associated with the natural inclination to resist change.

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