Theoretical Paradigms in the Reform of the New Zealand Public Service: Is post-NPM still a myth?

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New Zealand is frequently cited as the archetypical example of New Public Management (NPM), having gone 'further and faster' than other jurisdictions in radically reforming their public service in the late 1980s. These reforms have been credited with significant gains in efficiency and responsiveness, while introducing new challenges and worsening others. Successive reforms over the past thirty years have tinkered with the model without fundamentally altering the underlying paradigm, such that authors refer to the 'myth of post-NPM in New Zealand'. In 2019, however, New Zealand began to undertake substantial public service reforms in the NPM-inspired State Sector Act 1988. The government has now repealed and replaced this Act with the Public Service Act 2020. By textually analysing government documents, this paper analyses the different theoretical roots of New Zealand's ongoing administrative reforms. It debates the extent of their theoretical 'coherence' and the way in which the amalgamation of several 'administrative doctrines' closely resembles a new administrative paradigm often referred to in the literature as 'Post-NPM'. We conclude that the Act directly dialogues with and draws inspiration from recent academic debates, drawing from a range of theoretical sources (such as New Public Governance, Digital Era Governance, and the New Public Service).

Introduction

New Zealand's public service has been the subject of ongoing reform that frequently draws inspiration from theories of public administration scholarship. Public administration literature describes a series of 'administrative doctrines' or 'paradigms': notably Traditional Public Administration ('TPA'), New Public Management (NPM), and post-NPM. These doctrines can be mapped onto successive iterations of the public service's foundational legislation, starting with the TPA of the Public Service Act 1912. In 2011, Gill and Hood asked the question of whether post-NPM in New Zealand was a myth, following on from Chapman and Duncan (2007), who asked whether the famous 'New Zealand model' had been replaced with a 'new New Zealand model'. In both cases the authors concluded that, while changes had occurred, New Zealand still largely retained practices consistent with the NPM paradigm for which is was known. The most recent repeal and replacement has resulted in the Public Service Act 2020, heralded as the most significant change to the public service in over 30 years. Given New Zealand's reputation in terms

of theoretically coherent public service reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011), this paper examines the basis for this latest reform to determine the extent to which it aligns to what has been described in the literature as post-New Public Management ('post-NPM') ideas.

There are at least four levels of analysis when it comes to administrative reforms (Pollitt 2002 p.477-8). The discursive level refers to the overall agenda, or to what sorts of concepts people are talking and writing about. The decisional level is slightly more institutionalized and describes the public adoption of techniques or institutions by government authorities in charters or legislations. The practical level refers to the use of working practices and legislative implementation, and the results level of analysis focuses on outputs and outcomes of public sector activity. This paper focuses on the discursive and decisional level of analysis. Given that the Public Service Act was only enacted in August 2020, there is no available data on the practical and results levels. Having a detailed overview of the discursive and decisional dimensions of the reform is not only indicative of its intentions and future direction, but it can also provide a useful stepping stone for future practice and outcome-oriented investigations.

The role of the discursive dimension of administrative reforms has been broadly perceived in the literature as an important area of study (Hupe and Van Dooren, 2010, Pollitt, 2013). In addition to setting the overall tone and intentions for practical implementation, reform discourses are indicative of broader paradigmatic changes in the philosophical orientation of governments. While the 80s and 90s have been broadly perceived to bring liberal, utilitarian and managerialist approaches to the organization of governments around the world, there is still a lot of debate about the theoretical and philosophical sources of most recent trends.

This article will engage with this debate by identifying the main 'administrative doctrines' underlying New Zealand's most recent administrative reforms. Administrative 'doctrines' are here understood as 'prescriptions for action' or ideas about how governments should be organized (Hood and Jackson, 1991 p.). Following the research agenda proposed by Hood and Jackson (1991) we evaluate what doctrines underlie current New Zealand reforms and whether they can be said to compose a coherent 'philosophy' or 'set of doctrines with relatively coherent justifications' (Hood and Jackson 1991 p.13). By mapping the ideational or discursive landscape of a country often presented as a reform pioneer, we intend to contribute to broader debates around the emergence and overall design of general trends of public administration reform around the world (Reiter & Klenk, 2018; Donadelli, Cunha & Dussauge-Laguna, 2020).

The replacement of New Zealand's 1988 State Sector Act with the 2020 Public Service Act has been framed as a substantial reform of the New Zealand public sector, providing a 'modern legislative framework' (Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, 2020, p. 1). The Act is described by its architects as providing a 'foundation for a Public Service that's unified around a clear constitutional role and includes operative provisions to support strong system leadership and flexibility. Ultimately, the Act is intended to help the Public Service join up services around New Zealanders' needs and maintain public trust and confidence in the Public Service.' (Cameron and Butler 2021, p. 19). There is a considerable amount of discourse surrounding the Act, outlining its purpose to create 'a more adaptive, agile and collaborative public service' and the enablers intended to serve that purpose including 'public service culture and behaviour' (Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, 2020, p. 1).

The reforms are focused around five key areas: unifying the public service, strengthening the relationship between the Crown and the Indigenous Māori people, employment and workforce, leadership, and improving organisational flexibility. These key areas form the subject foci of the documents analysed to derive the findings of this paper. The paper is based on the premise that

the analytical categorization of ideas is an artificial process. Although it recognizes that New Zealand's administrative reforms might be influenced by a random set of ideas about how to organize government, the paper tests the similarity and overall coherence of those ideas with recent descriptions of New Public Governance or Post-NPM.

New Zealand Context

The history of public administration in New Zealand can be mapped against the eras of reform identified in the literature. Indeed, the New Zealand public service has been noted for its tendency towards academic purity in its administrative doctrines, particularly NPM (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). The doctrines themselves are discussed in more detail below; this section is concerned with providing a more operational context to support discussion of the most recent slate of reforms.

The Public Service Act 1912 established the New Zealand public service in legislation for the first time, providing for a Public Service Commissioner who was tasked with making merit-based appointments to the head of department positions. Both this Act and the 1962 Act that would replace it were primarily concerned with the employment relations of public servants. This was consistent with the prevailing view of public administration as 'Traditional' or 'Weberian Public Administration', which was preoccupied with addressing the cronyism and nepotism that had previously dominated public service appointments and standardising operational service delivery in line with bureaucratic rules and procedures. The State Services Act 1962 contended with the role of various entities owned by the Crown in relation to the executive branch of government, as well as retaining or adjusting many of the previous public servant employment provisions. In its long title, this Act specified that the Public Service should, in addition to being "impartially selected, fairly remunerated, [and] administratively competent," be "imbued with a spirit of service to the community."

The State Sector Act 1988 provided the blueprint for New Zealand's NPM public service, founded on public choice theory and conceptions of public servants as rational, self-maximizing individuals. Over the thirty odd years the Act was in force, New Zealand's public service agencies became adept at delivering goods and services clearly delineated from the goods and services to be provided by other agencies and within distinct hierarchies of accountability (Gorringe 1994, Gregory 2006). However, these improvements in efficiency and responsiveness came at the cost of addressing more complex social problems that cut across agency boundaries and therefore required the kind of collective action that was precluded by emphasis on single-point accountability. Progress in this area was hampered by duplication of services, a plethora of priorities across government expressed to varying degrees of specificity, gaps in responsibility, inability to take a whole-of-government perspective for prioritisation and resourcing decisions, and a reliance on the commitment of individuals to cross-agency working (especially chief executives) (Jensen et al. 2014, 5).

In the first instance, attempts to remedy these issues were through more informal programmes, beginning with the 'Managing for Outcomes' initiative, which was gradually abandoned and replaced by the more amorphous 'sectoral approach' (Scott and Boyd, forthcoming 2021). A 2011 internal review of the public service identified many of the now familiar shortcomings of NPM, leading to a new programme focused on remedying these issues (State Services Commission 2011a). The Better Public Services Results program yielded numerous insights about both the persistent and emerging barriers to the provision of public services that the removal of bureaucracy and increase of discretion had not been sufficient to overcome (Scott and Merton, 2020).

In 2018 the New Zealand Government initiated a public consultation to contribute to a review of the 1988 Act, which would also make use of the new insights into interagency collaboration. By this point, the academic discipline of public administration was grappling with an increasingly complicated view of public servants that was not easily reconciled with the rational homo economicus public servant assumed by the NPM paradigm (Scott, Macaulay and Merton, forthcoming). The architects of the New Zealand public service reflected this with increasing attention to ideas of service, citizenship and the public interest, bringing a more humanist perspective or 'culture' view of politics in action (Suchman & Edelman, 1996). Having passed the Public Service Legislation Bill as an omnibus bill that repealed the State Sector Act 1988 and replaced it with the Public Service Act 2020, and amended the Public Finance Act 1989, the New Zealand public service has formalised its latest slate of reforms. The Act allows for new machinery of government arrangements intended to improve interagency collaboration and mandates a focus on system leadership across the public service. It entrenches public service principles and values under the auspices of 'a spirit of service' that is intended in turn to unite all public servants.

This is not to imply that no such 'culture view' was evident in the public service previously. On the contrary, features such as 'a spirit of service' and contributing elements like the foundational principles and values of the public service had been present, really quite explicitly in some cases, since the first Public Service Act 1912. Key principles like political neutrality and merit-based appointments have especially long roots in many other Westminster systems. Broadly speaking, the newest reforms are contiguous with the rest of New Zealand's public administration reform journey. Rather than completely rejecting the structure and foundations provided by previous acts, the Public Service Act 2020 positions the public service to build on these to ultimately produce better outcomes for New Zealanders.

Administrative Doctrines and Philosophies

There are three broadly used 'philosophies' that are commonly employed to describe the different administrative eras of government reforms around the world. First, there is a trend commonly referred to as 'Traditional Public Administration' (TPA) or 'Progressive Public Administration' (Lodge and Gill 2011; Hood 1994). Based on administrative maxims most popular from the late 60s to the early 70s, TPA draws inspiration from the Weberian ideas of a de-personalised machinery of government, which tends to be highly focused on rules and pre-established procedures in a rigidly hierarchical structure. Exemplifying what has been most recently understood (and pejoratively framed) as 'bureaucracy', the traditional public servant would aspire to follow the legally established processes without too much concern about the efficiency or efficacy of final results.

In the late 70s, a new perspective emerged in direct contrast to the latter. Although there is no consensus on a conclusive definition, five central administrative tenets are consistently emphasised as characteristics of the so-called NPM reforms:

1. a shift from policy to management, meaning an increasing emphasis on cost-benefit considerations in the design and implementation of policies;
2. a shift from aggregation to disaggregation, as older public monopolies started to be substituted by disaggregated budgets leading to internal competition and rivalry, as well as to disaggregation of authority in specialised and autonomous units;
3. a shift from planning and public service welfarism to an emphasis on cutting costs and establishing labour discipline with an increased priority for technical skills;
4. a shift from process-based approaches to output control as the main performance management criteria; and (5) a separation of provision from production, emerging from

trends in outsourcing public services to the private sector, as well as actual privatization (Hood and Jackson 1991 p. 178)

Whether this original group of administrative reform ideas has been substantially altered in recent debates is still a largely contested topic. A commonly accepted notion, however, is that the so-called post-NPM trend emerged as a reaction to the shortcomings of previous reforms, particularly regarding the increased fragmentation and lack of control that resulted from NPM's disaggregation effects. Emphasis on coordination or steering by the centre of government, and a strengthened focus on responsiveness and democratic accountability towards citizens have been commonly identified as distinguishable features of post-NPM reforms (see Reiter and Klenk, 2018).

In a systematic literature review of 84 articles published in peer-reviewed journals about post-NPM, Reiter & Klenk (2018) conclude that to study the institutionalization of a new paradigm of administrative practice at least four elements have to be considered:

1. The organizational order of public administration both in functional and structural terms,
2. the political control of public sector organizations,
3. the relationship between public sector and citizens, and
4. the performance of the public sector.

When functional and structural organization is considered, the authors point to the '(re-) centralization of the vertical dimensions and functional integration of the horizontal dimension' (Reiter & Klenk, 2018, p. 8; Andersson and Liff, 2012: 837–838; Egeberg and Trondal, 2016: 585–586; Zafra-Gome´z et al., 2012: 714–715). In other words, in most recent debates of administrative reforms, there is an expectation that accountability relationships should be verticalized and centralized, while practical activities should integrate several units or departments in horizontal relationships.

The political control of public sector organizations is perceived by the literature to have diminished during NPM years, further aggravating coordination problems (Althaus and Vakil, 2013). In this context, the idea of politicians regaining control over previously autonomous departments is relatively consolidated in the post-NPM literature, implying a movement towards a 're-politicization of public service delivery' (Reiter & Klenk, 2018, p.10).

The relationship between public sectors and citizens is also considered in post-NPM analyses. Here the main change relates to a movement from the traditionally NPM consideration of citizens as 'clients' or 'customers' towards a renewed emphasis on their role as democratic 'citizens' - entitled to participation rights. Despite being less consolidated by the literature than the previous two trends, some consensus seems to exist towards a movement from output-based accountability and legitimacy (results-orientation of NPM) towards a process-based or input-oriented legitimacy building between civil servants and citizens (Christensen and Lægreid, 2011a: 141).

The fourth and final criteria identified by Reiter & Klenk (2018) refers to criteria of administrative performance. As argued by the authors, however, this discussion is still relatively unsettled. Although several authors would point to a movement away from the 'efficiency criteria,' the way in which performance shall be measured according to the new paradigm is still ambiguous. In this regard, the analysis of public service bargains (PSBs) might prove more enlightening. Defined as 'explicit or implicit agreements between public servants and those they serve', public service bargains may refer to how rewards are allocated, the types of competency required from civil

servants and the nature of their loyalty (Hood & Lodge, 2006, p.6). Figure 1 below from Lodge & Gill (2011, p. 151) illustrates the types of changes associated with each of these three criteria in the literature, comparing NPM to post-NPM. For example, emphasis on individualized performance pay rewards is thought to be changing towards team-based incentives.

Figure 1: Changing Emphases in Public Service Bargains

	NPM-Age PSB	Post-NPM-Age PSB
Reward	Emphasis on rivalry, individualized performance pay	Pullback of "hard edges" of performance pay, emphasis on collaboration/team-based incentives
Competency	Emphasis on delivery and getting things done	Emphasis on boundary spanning as part of "whole of government" activities, ability to understand and procure intelligent technical systems for "joined-up" solutions
Loyalty	Executing set targets/ agreements within discretionary space	Codification of rules/ethics, strengthening emphasis on "judge-type" character of public service

NPM, New Public Management; PSB, Public Service Bargains.

Source: Lodge & Gill, 2011, p. 151

Methodology

This paper adopts 'narrative analysis' as its methodological approach. Narrative analysis consists of analysis and interpretation of texts that can be seen and assessed as stories or 'tales of unsatisfactory pasts and better futures' (Pollitt, 2013, p. 901). The approach is particularly suited to administrative reform documents because the whole field is composed of competing narratives that are being re-narrated and advocated in order to present a coherent rationale for change. Scholarship around administrative reform often returns to storytelling analogies (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes, 2006; Borins, 2011a, 2011b), even when the scholars in question are not explicitly focused on narrative: see, for example, Macaulay's 'golden thread' (2020). The search for theoretical coherence can also be seen as a search for narrative coherence, if, as Bevir and Rhodes suggest, 'Narratives are the form theories take in the human sciences' (1999, 225).

For the purposes of this paper, three key doctrines of reform as described in public administration literature and supported by data drawn from practice - Traditional Public Administration, New Public Management and the emergent, as-yet amorphous post-New Public Management - are considered to be narratives. Seven key documents related to New Zealand's recent reforms are then thematically coded to determine their consistency with each of these three narratives. These documents are effectively the New Zealand equivalent to Pollitt's white papers; a Cabinet paper is similarly 'an official document stating government policy' (Pollitt 2013, 900).

In New Zealand's unicameral parliamentary democracy, Cabinet papers are a core instrument for communicating policy narratives and securing agreement from a minister's political colleagues on

key decisions. Papers are officially authored by a minister for other ministers, but are generally prepared by departments. All the Cabinet papers used in this analysis were proactively released by the authoring minister's office and are therefore publicly available, with the exception of three paragraphs across two papers that are 'redacted for confidentiality of advice' (Paper 3 and Paper 4).

The full suite of papers relating to the reforms is as follows:

- Paper 1 - Overview of Proposals
- Paper 2 - A Unified Public Service
- Paper 3 - Te Ao Tūmatanui - Our commitment to improving the public service's responsiveness to Māori
- Paper 4 - Public Service Employment and Workforce
- Paper 5 - Leadership of the Public Service
- Paper 6 - Organisations of the Public Service
- Paper 7 - Miscellaneous Provisions, Consequential Amendments, Transitional Provisions and Savings

Based on the literature review of administrative doctrines and philosophies outlined in the previous section, a code book was set up covering eight distinct categories in which each doctrine uses a different approach. These were performance management style, governance style, sources of expertise and service provision, accountability strategy, competencies, main goal, strategy, and value-base. For additional data richness, the given reasons for change were also coded as either failings of the previous act, unintended consequences, or substantial societal changes. A summary of the code-book is provided below:

Figure 2: Code book

	Traditional Public Administration	New Public Management	Post-New Public Management
Strategy	State Centred	Customer centred	Citizen centred
Governance style	Hierarchical (Unified, centralized)	Competitive/Market oriented (unbundling of agencies)	Egalitarian (networks, partnerships, co-production) ('Whole of government' – coordination)
Sources of expertise and service provision	Civil servants	Markets (consultants, contractors)	Delivery networks (Government, markets and citizens)
Performance Management/accountability	Implicit/qualitative performance standards	Explicit performance standards (often quantitative)	Joined – up targets / shared accountability
Sources of control	Procedural (rule-based)	Outputs/outcomes	Procedural/centralized/ value-based controls (ethics and impartiality)
Competencies	Loyalty/public sector ethos	Delivery, getting things done	Boundary-spanning
Key concepts	Public goods	Public choice	Public value

Sources: Inspired by Benington & Hartley, 2011; Lodge & Gill, 2011; Reiter & Klenk, 2018; Christensen and Lægreid, 2011

Coding was completed by two coders for all papers. The first author was involved in the drafting of the Cabinet papers and therefore abstained from coding them. Once three coders had coded at least one paper, the results were compared to identify differing interpretations of the codes. After some adjustment of the code labels, as well as clarifying discussion between researchers about underlying meanings, all papers were coded or re-coded based on common understandings (see method described in Cavana et al. 2001). The coding process as much as possible focused on single dominant themes. The central rhetorical claims of each paragraph were coded based on best fit, with occasional double coding necessary (see 'closed coding', Cavana et al., 2001).

Unsurprisingly, not all of the text could be directly related to public administration paradigms or doctrines. For example, a paper might introduce a topic, provide a few sentences to describe the intent of the proposed changes, and then outline several paragraphs of detailed technical provisions that describe how that intent would be realised in implementation. Such an example would most likely result in only those first few sentences being coded. On average across the seven papers, 41% of the text was coded as relating to one of the three administrative paradigms - TPA, NPM, or Post-NPM. The data reported for each theme are given as percentages of the coded text, not the total text. They are also expressed as an average (mean) across the papers and between the coders.

Findings

Across eight thematic dimensions of the framework used to evaluate the dominance of various administrative doctrines in public service reform, New Zealand's 2020 Public Service Act was

most often described consistently with the post-NPM paradigm (51.67% of coded text). Notably, there were still significant elements of both TPA (19.41%) and NPM (9.05%) identified, suggesting that rather than a pure representation of a single paradigm, the Public Service Act represents a layering of multiple theoretical perspectives (see Table 2).

Table 2: Prevalence of TPA, NPM, and Post-NPM themes across all Cabinet papers

Paradigm	TPA	NPM	Post-NPM
Coded content across all Cabinet papers	19.41%	9.05%	51.67%

These high level findings mask variation across the eight coded thematic dimensions, with TPA and NPM prevalent in specific dimensions. In particular, we see the TPA concept of fairness as the leading goal of the reforms (ahead of efficiency and resilience), and several thematic dimensions where multiple paradigms were represented. A high-level overview is presented in Table 3, and further analysis in the paragraphs below.

Table 3: Prevalence of TPA, NPM, and Post-NPM themes across eight thematic dimensions

Paradigm	TPA	NPM	Post-NPM
Accountability strategy	Top-level accountability	Individual agency accountability	Shared accountability
	4.00%	1.18%	4.25%
Competencies	Loyalty/public sector ethos	Delivery/getting things done	Boundary spanning/intrinsic motivation
	1.36%	1.67%	5.45%
Governance style	Hierarchical	Decentralised/competitive	Horizontal or coordinated
	1.22%	0.53%	20.90%
Main goal	Fairness	Efficiency	Adaptation or resilience
	3.44%	1.76%	1.73%
Performance management style	Rules/process-based	Outputs/outcomes	Ethics/value-based
	2.90%	3.91%	7.06%
Sources of expertise and service provision	Civil servants	Markets (consultants and contractors)	Delivery networks (governments, markets and citizens)

	2.67%	0.00%	5.28%
Strategy	State-centred	Customer-centred	Citizen-centred
	3.66%	0.00%	6.23%
Value-base	Public goods	Public choice	Public value
	0.17%	0.00%	0.77%

In their approach to accountability strategy, the papers discussing the Act referred most often to shared accountability, accounting for an average of 4.25% of total coding, but top-level accountability was not far behind, with 4.00% of coding. Individual agency accountability, as a marker of NPM, appeared far less frequently. This parallel emphasis on individual leaders and simultaneously on collective action features is discussed further below.

Signals were even stronger in the area of competencies, where boundary-spanning and/or intrinsic motivation accounted for almost four percentage points more of the coding (5.45%) than either delivery/getting things done or loyalty/public sector ethos.

Likewise in sources of expertise and service provision, the post-NPM emphasis on delivery networks made up of representatives of government, markets and civil society was evident in 5.28% of total coding, compared to 2.67% for traditional conceptions of public servant expertise. Markets alone as a source of expertise or service provision did not appear at all in any of the Cabinet papers, a stark shift from NPM.

The category of governance style provided the clearest indication that the Public Service Act 2020 moves New Zealand's public service firmly past New Public Management. References to a horizontal or coordinated governance style accounted for an average of 20.90% of total coding, while hierarchical governance coding was 1.22% and decentralised or competitive governance covered 0.53%. As discussed below, this was the area where the coders reported having the greatest coding challenges, with individual paragraphs and often individual sentences representing both hierarchical and horizontal governance.

Variations in the main goal underlying parts of the reforms were somewhat lower, but this was also one of the only dimensions in which traditional tenets of public administration were more prevalent than post-NPM ones. The main goal of 3.44% of coded material was related to 'fairness', while only 1.76% and 1.73% had to do with efficiency and adaptation/resilience respectively. This is most likely due to a heavy emphasis in Paper 4 on both pay equity and diversity and inclusion, which at their core are both concerned with strengthening fairness in the conditions of the public service workforce. Additionally, due to the simplified nature of our code-book it might not have been sufficiently representative of the values intrinsic to Post-NPM doctrines, and the overlaps between different philosophies.   Alternatively, this may be explained by the national societal context, in which fairness has been described as the dominant value in New Zealand society (Fischer 2012).

The post-NPM ethics or value-based approach was far more prevalent in the coding than the traditional rules or process-based approach, accounting for an average of 7.06% compared to 2.90%. The style of performance management offers an interesting area of analysis because outcomes and outputs were coded separately, despite being considered in public administration literature as components of the same NPM performance management system. New Zealand's

form of NPM was characterised by a strong emphasis on accountability for outputs (Boston et al., 1996), and more recent discourse has called for this to be shifted to include a focus on outcomes (Scott and Boyd, 2019). Outputs and outcomes were coded separately to test the hypothesis that the Act may have represented a shift from the former to the latter. This was confirmed, with outcomes coded over twenty times more frequently in the text. However, both outputs and outcomes were only represented in 3.91% of codes combined, and so this finding should not be overemphasized.

Strategies indicated by the discourse surrounding the Act were mostly citizen-centred (6.23% of total coding), with some elements of State-centred strategy (3.66%). None of the coders coded any mention of customer-centred strategy in any of the seven papers; although referring to the same people, the reluctance to describe citizens as customers is a valid indication of departure from NPM.

Similarly, value-bases in the discourse were more likely to be public value, with some instances of public goods, although these both counted for much lower overall coverage of coding than many of the other dimensions used in this framework (0.77% and 0.17% respectively). Again, the NPM category - public choice in this case - did not appear in coding for any paper by any coder. New Zealand initially experimented with a variety of quasi-market models for providing greater public choice, but these had largely been unwound well before consideration of a new Public Service Act (Bevan and Scott 2021).

Overall, horizontal or coordinated governance style and ethics or value-based performance management style were the two most-coded themes, with boundary spanning and/or intrinsic motivation competencies also featuring strongly. This is in line with the hypothesis that the reforms constitute a more solid departure from New Public Management doctrines than has previously been evident in New Zealand and is well supported by the contextual discourse surrounding the reform beyond the cabinet papers analysed.

Both horizontal and vertical, but cooperative rather than competitive

There were thirteen instances of content that combined elements of accountability strategy and governance style that would intuitively otherwise seem to be mutually exclusive. The Cabinet papers called for accountability that was both top-down (TPA) and shared (post-NPM), and that was both hierarchical (TPA) and horizontal (post-NPM). For example, references to a Public Service Leadership Team exemplified a horizontal or coordinated governance style with shared accountability, as well as a hierarchical governance style with top-level accountability. The Team is made up of the chief executives of core public service departments, which is the highest level of management in the public service, reporting directly to ministers. The papers overall reflect a very top-down approach to encouraging collaboration in the public service, with the only provision for horizontal and coordinated governance at other levels pertaining to employment conditions. This is perhaps inevitable given New Zealand's pre-occupation with accountability (Halligan 2003, Gregory 2006), but the preference for top-down collaboration may create barriers for the fuzzier networked collaboration described by Osborne (2006). This continuous emphasis on hierarchy is likely to be specific to the New Zealand context of highly centralized administrative system. Notably in both thematic dimensions (accountability strategy, and governance style) there was an absence of text representing NPM themes.

Another interesting contradiction refers to the legal codification of an ethics and value-based perspective to performance management. Once again, the reform seems to adopt a traditional hierarchical and legalistic approach to the incorporation of trust and to the valorization of intrinsic

motivations to the management of performance. It remains to be seen whether these elements may become potentially contradictory during implementation.

Sentiment

The papers were also coded for sentiment or justifications for change; whether the changes were as a result of changes to society or the operating environment of the public service, addressed weaknesses or unintended consequences of the NPM-embodying State Sector Act of 1988, or strengthened and extended previous provisions. Most of the changes could not be coded in this way, and did not relate the recommended changes to changes in context or reactions to the past. 2.77% of the changes were explained as a result of societal changes, 9.58% as reactionary to the previous Act, and 2.59% as strengthening or extending previous provisions. It is difficult to make definitive conclusions regarding sentiment based on the low coding rate, but these findings are suggestive that the sentiment of the Cabinet paper authors including significant reactionary elements that sought to address key limitations or weaknesses of NPM. This indicates the importance of 'disappointment effects' as a relevant driver of change (Hood, 1994).

The fact that the units of analysis for this paper involved arguing for changes from the previous Act does form a limitation of this study. Many provisions that were retained from the previous Act were less likely to be discussed in the Cabinet paper because they represented the status quo and therefore did not warrant discussion to then form the basis for decision-making. There are probably many elements of continuation and 'path-dependence' that were not fully captured in the analysis.

Discussion

This paper confirms that New Zealand's 2020 Public Service Act marks a substantial paradigmatic and theoretical change from the State Sector Act that preceded it. Based on analysis at Pollitt's discursive and decisional levels (given that it is still too early to assess the practical or results levels), the discourse surrounding the Act is primarily aligned with what has been described in the literature as post-NPM, while retaining some elements of TPA and NPM. We take these findings as evidence that post-NPM in New Zealand is no longer the "myth" claimed in 2011 (Lodge & Gill, 2011). The Public Service Act suggests that post-NPM has arrived, but what will that mean in practice? As Zhou En Lai reportedly said when asked about the significance of the French revolution, it may be 'too early to tell' (as quoted in Scharma, 2004, p-xiii). Indeed, that is the foremost limitation of this study - by analysing public service reform in New Zealand at the discourse and decisional level, before changes have been implemented, it is too early to tell whether practice and results will change accordingly. Over time, the New Zealand public service journey should continue to be used as a source of study and insights, and further study (and the passage of time) is required to the paradigmatic coherence of practices and results.

Both old and new

While there are many aspects of the new Act that suggest the influence of a post-NPM paradigm, there are also many aspects that typify traditional public administration. As noted above, New Zealand appears to be simultaneously reasserting and protecting TPA traditions while also pushing toward something new.

As noted earlier, the Act prioritises horizontal coordination, but does so in a way that privileges hierarchical structures and takes a conservative understanding of leadership as top tiers, rather than a more complex (and post-NPM) view that recognises the value of leadership qualities at all

levels. It also tends to rely on legal codes and procedures for the valorization of ethics and intrinsic motivations.

The return and restatement of TPA principles is particularly interesting, reflecting a deeply traditional Westminster view. As previously commented:

> 'The purpose statement of the Act is entirely within the traditions of Wilsonian doctrine and would look at home in the Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1853), Hunt Commission (1912) or Haldane Report (1918). Indeed, it is a restatement of a list of functions in the New Zealand State Sector Act (1988, s1A), as well as bearing similarities to provisions in the State Services Act 1962 and Public Service Act 1912. Many of the principles, like political neutrality, merit-based appointment, and free and frank advice, similarly date to these earlier reports.' (Scott, Macauley and Merton, 2020)

The majority of coded text was representative of post-NPM, with TPA representing a sizable minority. Very little of the proposed changes could be characterised NPM. Sentiment in the text was often explicitly reactionary against the perceived weaknesses or unintended consequences of earlier NPM-related reforms. We believe these findings were strong enough to support the contention that post-NPM in New Zealand is no longer a myth and is indeed the best characterisation of the current discourse. The public administration literature typically describes the paradigms as sequential - NPM succeeded TPA, and now, if post-NPM has arrived, it must have succeeded and replaced NPM, and on the surface that is what our analysis shows.

However, as earlier mentioned, a limitation of the study is that the coded text explains the *changes* in New Zealand's public administrative system. Far more text is devoted to what should be different, than on documenting what aspects will be retained from the previous system. Therefore we would expect NPM to be somewhat under-represented in our analysis. It may be that New Zealand's reforms will, in practice, best be characterised as embracing post-NPM, restating and recommitting to certain TPA principles, while retaining the parts of NPM that were most effective. Perhaps we might more appropriately consider public administration paradigms not as succession but as a layering of increasing complexity.

An emerging synthesis...

One way to think about this layering is through the lens of Hegelian dialect, where the opposition of a thesis and antithesis results in a synthesis, where TPA represents a thesis, NPM its antithesis, and post-NPM as the emerging synthesis. Interestingly, Hood initially proposed NPM as the synthesis of a Hegelian dialectic between continental public management and Anglo-American liberal economics (Hood, 1991, p. 7).

Traditional public administration as a thesis focused on reducing uncertainty by adopting, as much as possible, the standard operating procedure approach that was emerging in 'scientific management.' Policies were determined centrally, and lower-level public servants had little discretion to ensure standardisation. While effective in its original intentions, the approach severely limited innovation, leading to the antithesis of new public management. The centralised, hierarchical, and low-discretion model of TPA was then opposed by the de-centralised, autonomous model of NPM. NPM reduced centralisation by aligning public servant incentives with ministers through agency structures. The new dominant conception of public servants was as self-maximising rational individuals, and they were therefore freed from the restrictions of bureaucracy in exchange of accountability for outputs. The synthesis of post-NPM will somehow balance and reconcile centralisation and decentralisation, deontological and consequential ethics,

and autonomy and alignment (Scott and Hughes, 2021), while also synthesising these into something new. The recurrence of Hegel's dialectic as a framing for paradigmatic change is consistent with Corbett and colleagues' view that narratives are reworked and repurposed over time (Corbett et al. 2020).

...Or too early to tell?

If traditional public administration was the thesis, and new public management was the antithesis, then whatever paradigm comes next must therefore be the synthesis. Although we can see so far that this emerging synthesis seems to be blending managerial autonomy with collective approaches, resulting in a management style that is both hierarchical and horizontal, this may be about the extent of observations that can be made about New Zealand's departure from the NPM approach for which it was famous.

A few factors indicate that the thesis of a new paradigm has not yet fully emerged. In the first instance: the prevalence of the label 'post-NPM'. When considering the paradigm to succeed NPM, Torfing and Triantafillou (2013) invoke William Shakespeare to ask 'what's in a name?', and yet 'post-NPM' suggests a move away from something rather than the arrival at somewhere new. Various scholars have tried their hand at pinning the new paradigm down more specifically, grouping their observations under labels like New Public Governance, Digital Era Governance, New Public Service, Public Value Governance, and so on. Some of these labels refer to a new paradigm in terms of slightly distinct characteristics. For example, New Public Governance emphasises the role of the 'third sector' non-profit organisations in the delivery of services (Osborne 2006), digitisation is a central tenet of Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006), and public participation receives greater attention in the New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000). The sometimes competing emphases of these paradigms, and the lack of consensus on any one term over and above post-NPM reveal a paradigm essentially still referred to as post-antithesis. This indicates quite simply a departure from the previous state, without a clear picture of what the next state might be or even whether it has yet been arrived at. It may well be that the synthesis of public service paradigms continues to defy arrival at something static and finite, instead being most useful or effective as an opening up and moving past of previous states – a sort of New Public Complexity. Dickinson (2016) characterised post-NPM as describing 'the plural nature of the contemporary state.' (p. 42) and 'while there has been extensive rhetoric concerning governance shifts, the reality is that rather than seeing wholesale shifts we are faced instead with overlapping layers of different reform processes.' (p. 44).

Alternatively, the different emphases of each paradigm may be analogous to the parable of the blind men and the elephant (Saxe 2016), with each author describing the same emerging paradigm from a different perspective. We may have to concur with Zhou En Lai; while the successor to NPM has been debated for 20 years, it may still be 'too early to tell' how this emerging paradigm should be conceptualised. Either way, New Zealand's continued embrace of introspection and reform suggest this case will still be of interest for illustrating at least the definite emergence of something new, even if that something new can only be described coherently in retrospect. In particular, further study of the implementation of the Act will help round out the manifestation of the emerging paradigm in New Zealand's public service journey at Pollitt's levels of practice and results. At least at the discursive and decisional level, NZ seems to have moved away from the tendency of 'academic purity' that characterized its NPM reforms and allowed for some level of hybridization of world-views in the 2020 Public Service Act. This slightly more 'clumsy solution' might not only be a positive indication of the increased awareness and reflexive capacity acquired after the radical NPM transformations, but it may also promote a more stable and realistic administrative perspective to potentially counterbalance the country's hyper-

innovative trends (Donadelli & Lodge, 2019). Post-NPM is, definitely, no longer a myth in NZ, but equally, it heralds a paradigm is itself still emerging, growing, and changing.

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