Inversions without End: The OECD and Global Public Management Reform[1]

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>…reform is a journey rather than a destination."
>*Governance in Transition*
>OECD, 1995

>But perhaps the most important lesson from the experience of the past two decades is that **reform is continuous.** As societies keep changing, governments must keep adapting.
>*Public Sector Modernisation: The Way Forward*
>OECD Policy Brief, November 2005

>And so these parties divided upon the midnight plain, each passing back the way the other had come, pursuing as all travelers must inversions without end upon other men's journeys.
>Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (1985)

Public sector reform is as old as the innovations of Hammurabi and the Mongols, indeed as old as the state and its administrative machinery. These reform efforts were typically driven by internal pressures or limited borrowings from regional rivals. Catherine the Great's attempts at administrative reforms in the 18th century were inspired by European and particularly French models. The emergence of a "global" mode of reform – in which reforms were modeled (or imposed) on systems from other

civilizations and far removed geographically probably can be dated from the British Empire and the export of its parliamentary and administrative systems, and was starkly displayed in the late 20th century Japanese attempt to modernize after the Meiji restoration (Westney, 1987).

The last fifty years has seen an intensification of this global mode of public sector reform, in that the process is now driven not by single states, but by international or global organizations, most iconically the World Bank, the EU, and the OECD. This paper focuses on the OECD and its work on public sector reform. As we note below, the OECD became a prominent global advocate for the New Public Management (NPM) through its governance committee, PUMA (the Directorate is known as GOV). While that broadly remains true today, the OECD has actually projected a much more complex narrative about the nature of governance and public sector reform than is commonly realized. There are only a handful of studies on the content of this narrative. This paper will examine the narrative in detail, and its master theme of "modernization under stress." The theme emphasizes the importance of emulation and borrowing among a family of nations that wish to move towards modernity together. At the same time, it has to invert that theme to respect particularities and avoid the impression that only one model of public sector reform is viable or worthy. The narrative is therefore a series of "inversions without end" as the OECD moves from the particular to the universal, from models to modalities, from reform to redemption.

The sheer scope of the OECD's work on public sector reform – budgeting, ethics, e-government, regulation, social policy – makes it necessary to focus on those documents that have periodically treated the general theme of reform and modernization, or what

broadly might be termed "governance." These documents in effect are reflections on the modern state as such. The OECD only entered the governance field after a 1979 conference in Madrid, and PUMA was only formally established in 1990. Since then, it has released a handful of documents on the general theme of governance or public sector modernization. The paper reviews the narratives constructed in four representative documents: <u>Governance in Transition</u> (1995), two policy briefs on modernizing government (2003, 2005), and the most recent review, <u>Modernising Government: The Way Forward</u> (2005). First, however, it briefly reviews the nature of the global management revolution that was launched in the 1990s, and the existing work on the OECD's role in that revolution. It concludes with observations on the key themes in the documents, as well as on how we should think about the influence of the OECD and global knowledge networks.

The Global Public Management Revolution

NPM took the world by storm in the 1990s, but there still is debate about what the movement – and it had a messianic quality – was and is actually about. Barzelay (1992: 5) argues that NPM calls for the replacement of a "bureaucratic paradigm" of carefully defined roles, reliance on rules and procedures, line and staff distinctions, tight financial control, and central agency oversight, with a more client-focused, service-oriented system. Bevir, Rhodes and Weller (2003) highlight the following features of NPM:

> The term refers to a focus on management, not policy, and on performance
> appraisal and efficiency; disaggregating public bureaucracies into agencies which
> deal with each other on a user pay basis; the use of quasi-markets and of
> contracting out to foster competition; cost-cutting; and a style of management
> that emphasizes, among other things, output targets, limited term contracts,
> monetary incentives and freedom to manage....It is said to be a global
> phenomenon. (1-2)

Kenneth Kernaghan (2000) provides a useful list that contrasts what he calls "bureaucratic" with "post-bureaucratic" organizations. The characteristics of post-bureaucratic organizations are citizen-centred, results-oriented, decentralized, and competitive structures and processes. Hood (1996) claimed that the key features were an emphasis on: hands-on management; performance; output measures; disaggregated bureaucracy into smaller, self-contained units; competition; the emulation of private sector practices; and discipline and parsimony in the use of resources. Kettl (2005) broadly agreed in describing the trends in new management thinking as productivity (how can governments produce more services with less tax money?); marketization (how can government use market-style incentives to root out the pathologies of government bureaucracy?); service orientation (how can government better connect with citizens?); decentralization (how can government make programs more responsive and effective?); accountability for results (how can governments improve their ability to deliver what they promise?); policy (how can government improve its capacity to devise and track policy?). To complicate matters even further, while much of the literature in the 1990s and early 2000s focused on NPM as a shorthand for describing shifts in public management theory and practice, Peters (2001) argued that NPM was in fact only a species of an even broader variety of changes in modes of governing. He discerned four emerging models: market, participatory state, flexible government (e.g., experimentation, low cost, virtual organizations, etc.), and deregulated government (e.g., more managerial freedom, entrepreneurial, creative, active). Each model diagnoses the governance/management problem differently, has different ideas about how the public sector should be organized and constructed, and offers different visions of the policy process.

Despite these differences in interpretation and emphasis, it is clear that a new model of public management was being debated in the 1990s, one that emphasized efficiency, markets, decentralization, performance and results accountabilities, and service. The typically cited "leaders" in this "revolution" were New Zealand (Boston, 1996; Boston et al., 1999; Aucoin, 1995), and the United Kingdom (Savoie, 1994). Of equal interest in the discussion of NPM was how it spread and how deeply it was affecting governments around the world. "Since the 1980s, a global reform movement in public management has been vigorously underway" (Kettl, 2005: 1). Peters and Pierre (2000) noted: "Except perhaps during major wars there never has been the extent of administrative reform and reorganization that has been occurring during the period from approximately 1975 onward" (1).

The broad agreement that public management reform was occurring around the world was part of a larger debate about the causes and consequences of that reform. While it should have been obvious that there was a suspiciously uniform character to the reform movement, most analysis was purely comparative – looking at single countries and mapping their experiences against each other. Even in the case of central and Eastern Europe, where the role of international actors as drivers of political and administrative reform should have been clear, analysts only belatedly realized their importance. Schmitter, for example, admitted in 1996 that there had been far too much focus on internal, domestic developments and that is was now time to "to reconsider the impact of the international context upon regime change" (1996: 27). Risse-Kappen agreed, in noting that the "interaction between international norms and institutions, on the one hand,

and domestic politics, on the other, is not yet fully understood; work in this area has just begun" (1995: 31).

It should not be surprising therefore that there is relatively little work on the role of the OECD in facilitating the global management revolution. Hood (1998: 202) for example noted, somewhat cynically, that international organizations like the OECD and the World Bank had a vested interest in arguing on behalf of "best practice" models that they would then have a role in fostering and supporting. Premfors argued that PUMA had developed the dominant narrative of public sector reform and that it had "been very successful in stimulating interest and debate among both member governments and wider audiences and in formulating and propagating a particular mode of thinking about administrative reform" (1998: 142). Other scholars agreed: "PUMA has been one of the nodal points in an international network, bringing together civil servants, management consultants and academics (an occasionally politicians themselves) who are interested in public management. It has helped shape what has now become an international 'community of discourse' about public management reform….The World Bank, the IMF and the Commonwealth Institute have also been international disseminators of management reform ideas" (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000: 20-21). In a broader study of transnational discourse communities concerned with public sector reform, Hansen, Krause, Salsko-Iversen and Bislev (2002: 113) observe that international organizations and professional organizations share a "capacity to intervene from outside the specific politically and historically generated logics that any given governance institution, whether sub-national, national or supra-national is embedded in, and provide these institutions with notions about governance unmediated by territorial politics. Even if

these notions are subsequently negotiated locally, the very power to place them on the agenda in multiple contexts and at different levels constitutes a potentially globalizing force."

The more recent interest in global knowledge networks (Stone, 2004) has of course trained more attention on international organizations, the OECD among them (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, 2000; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002; Pollitt, 2006). However, apart from general observations that the OECD was a champion of NPM, there has been little sustained analysis of its vision of public sector management, and public sector reform.

The OECD and Public Management: Narratives and Inversions

PUMA was established in 1990 as one of the OECD's committees – at the time it stood for Public Management Committee. The title of the committee has now changed to Public Governance Committee, and has representatives of senior officials from central agencies from all 30 OECD's members. PUMA actually grew out of a pre-existing committee, TECO, which provided financial assistance to European countries to modernize both their societies and economies (Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). TECO had a large budget, but increasingly came under pressure as the OECD faced a financial crunch and financial aid seemed less relevant with the establishment of the EEC and eventually the EU. PUMA therefore was created to provide not financial aid, but advice and analysis around public management challenges and issues. Originally it was to last five years, and so it Governance Under Pressure report was the culmination as well as distillation of its

first period of life and activity. It was given an extension and eventually became a permanent feature of the OECD.

The Public Governance Committee oversees the work on public governance and meets twice a year. The Secretariat that conducts the work is known by the acronym GOV. The work consists principally, as most of the OECD's work does, of research and reports, workshops and conferences, and several networks (or working parties) of officials clustered around specific topics. The Working Party of Senior Budget Officials focuses on public sector budgeting and management issues. The Working Party on Human Resources Management addresses public sector management issues such as "leadership, building professionalism, civil service ethics, training and development, performance management and knowledge management." The Working Party on Regulatory Management and Reform works to build "good regulations in Member countries, emphasizing regulatory quality - combining both good regulation where needed to protect health, safety, and the environment and to enhance the functioning of markets, and deregulation where free markets work better." The Senior Officials from Centres of Government group brings together heads of prime minister's offices, cabinet secretaries, secretaries-general of governments and other senior officials, including ones from the Commission of the European Union. Finally, there is the Territorial Development Policy Committee, aimed as promoting regional competitiveness.

As has often been noted, none of this machinery is coercive. The OECD is a talk shop, a venue, and network for exchanges of ideas and experiences supplemented by research. As discussed at greater length in the conclusion, this means that it wields influence primarily through "soft" policy instruments – information, naming and

shaming, and standards setting. But there were structural factors in the 1980s and 1990s

that gave the OECD and ultimately PUMA a receptive audience for these instruments

(and typically, with informational tools, an audience has to have an ear cocked in the first

place). The 1980s were particularly turbulent – the second oil shock which in turn

destabilized budgets in the western countries; the Reagan and Thatcher and Lange (New

Zealand) revolutions; the collapse of the Soviet Union. The rebuilding of central and

Eastern Europe initially involved economic policy interventions around privatization and

the creation of markets, but quickly raised concerns about transitions to democracy and

appropriate forms of governance and administration.

What follows is a textual analysis[2] of the rhetorical devices used in four

representative documents dealing broadly with governance and modernization. The first

document, Government in Transition (1995) is sufficiently important that it will be

treated separately. The other three (two short policy briefs and the most recent review of

a decade of reform) will be dealt with collectively. Government in Transition was a

unique document for several reasons. First, it was the culmination of five years of

PUMA's mandate, and was intended to be its singular product. Second, it was seminal,

since no such broad review of public management reform or modernization had been

attempted before. Third, it is universally recognized as having been uniquely influential,

particularly in popularizing NPM.

The textual analysis conducted on these documents is not meant to belittle them

simply as rhetorical flourishes without content. There were indeed realities to which these

reports were responding, and which they often describe and analyze faithfully. The point

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[2] For the purposes of this paper, we treat the documents as coherent wholes, as though a single author wrote them. Of course, complex documents of this type, especially ones emanating from organizations as baroque as the OECD, are a secretion of hundreds of small, cooperative efforts in research and drafting.

simply is that reality has to be framed and highlighted, and in so doing, some aspects are emphasized and some are not. Moreover, PUMA operates in a competitive environment both within the OECD (in terms the usual turf wars in any organization over funding, personnel), and internationally among other governmental and non-governmental organizations in the public sector reform business. To survive and thrive, it has to make its case persuasively. Part of that dark art is narrative, weaving the facts into a compelling story.

Governance in Transition had a tone of naked urgency and radicalism that one rarely finds in reports by international organizations. Its key premise was that a combination of fiscal pressures, rising public demands, falling public trust, and increasing global economic competition was creating a policy environment "marked by great turbulence, uncertainty and an accelerating pace of change" in which tradition "governance structures and managerial responses are increasingly ineffectual" (p. 15). Half measures were out of the question; only "fundamental change" would do. While the report acknowledged that countries had responded to these challenges differently, and that while there was no single best model of governance, nonetheless it was possible to identify "common reform trends." Principal among these trends was a focus on results and performance in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of service, and decentralization of public management.

The environment facing governments is described bleakly, like a sermon to dinosaurs on the cusp of the first ice age: "Organisations that do not learn to adapt themselves to ever-faster, multi-fronted change atrophy until external forces transform them. Governments no less than business have to adapt to an environment that is

becoming more turbulent, complex and difficult to predict. Global transformations, caused by, among other things, developments in technology, communications and trade, demand new abilities. Flexibility and nimbleness have become key objectives. Inherited forms of governance appear outmoded and inflexible" (p. 21). The report coyly declined to use the term "crisis" to describe this new environment, but it allowed that current pressures were considerable, and that those to come would be "at least equally impressive and challenging" (p. 22).

The bulk of the report is divided into chapters describing major reform efforts in the following areas: devolving authority; performance and accountability; developing competition and choice; service; human resources management; information technology; regulation; and strengthening steering functions. It acknowledged that countries differ at the level of individual reforms, but it strongly asserted that nonetheless there was a "remarkable degree of convergence overall" with "clear patterns of reform" (p. 25). The report had no doubts about the radical nature of these changes. They amounted to a "paradigm shift." The "fundamental, comprehensive nature of the changes described represents a move to a new order" (p. 27). Unsurprisingly, the report noted that change on this scale would inevitably generate resistance, and so devoted a chapter to implementing reform, highlighting the fact that public management reform is "a long haul, not a quick fix" (p. 80).

Governance in Transition was the first attempt at a broad overview of public management and governance issues in the OECD countries. From that point on PUMA concentrated on sectoral policy and administrative reforms, and would not take up the broad theme of governance per se until 2003, when it launched a series of Policy Briefs

"look at the evolving modernization agenda and how governments can best develop their capacity to achieve, and measure, the desired results." In the series, two publications are of direct relevance, and fed into the third. They were <u>Public Sector Modernizations</u> (2003), and <u>Public Sector Modernisation: The Way Forward</u> (2005).[3] They in turn both fed into the more detailed study, <u>Modernising Government: The Way Forward</u>.[4] Since they were written only years apart, and since the first two clearly were drawn upon for the longer report, we will treat them as a group.

It is possible to discern six rhetorical themes that appear repeatedly in the three documents. Each of those themes is presented and discussed below, with representative examples from each of the documents (each document has multiple examples of each theme). However, they do not stand alone and isolated from each other – their organic relationship, and indeed their rhetorical power, comes from being elements of a larger, master narrative. Each of the documents expresses or reflects that narrative slightly differently, like different translations of the Bible. And yet the main lines of the narrative shine through in all three. It is a complex narrative, since it needs to balance opposing ideas and agendas, not least whether there should be convergence towards some single model or a range of different paths up the mountain. This is an excavation from the texts:

> *In the past years, all OECD countries have faced major pressures for*
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> *reform – technological, demographic, budgetary, political. All have*
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> *undertaken reform, though at varying rates and with varying success.*
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> *Mistakes were made along the way, particularly with a single-minded*

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[3] Both documents are available at
www.oecd.org/findDocument/0,2350,en_2649_37405_1_119696_1_1_37405,00.html
[4] This not available free on the web. It can be purchased, or it can be accessed by subscribers at SourceOECD.

devotion to efficiency and to instrumental reform. Certainly, there were

major surprises as the pioneers of reform forged ahead on the cold,

unforgiving plains of their administrative and political systems. We now

know some of the mistakes that were made, principally that there was not

enough attention to culture and the fragility of institutions, or to the

diverse paths towards modernity. But the pressures have not subsided, and

reform and modernization will have to continue. All OECD countries face

the same pressures, and they share the same basic principles – how they

respond to those pressures and implement those principles will always be

a matter of context. Reformers will face challenges, since change is never

easy. They must renew their efforts, develop better tools and better

calibration, and move forward, ever forward.

Theme 1: Reform is Driven by Pressure[5]

The animating theme of all three documents, and indeed of the narrative, is the

notion of "pressures" that have made reform inevitable and unavoidable. PB2003

mentions the word pressure 11 times in eight pages; PB2005 four times; WG 43 times in

205 pages of text. While there usually is reference to technology, the key pressures that

identified in the text are budgetary and citizenry. The budgetary pressures are privileged

as a historical source of public sector reforms, but clearly cannot be as prominent as they

were a decade ago. Nonetheless, MG (p. 21) does refer to continuing budgetary pressures

due to "demands on social transfer systems" exacerbated by the challenge of an ageing

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[5] The documents will be referred to in this section as PB2003, PB2005, and MG.

population. But clearly the main pressure that is cited in all three documents is a dissatisfied and somewhat truculent citizenry. The dissatisfaction manifests itself in different ways: demands for more services, demands for more efficient services, disgruntlement about high taxation, a vaguely defined set of inflated "expectations." Though the references are brief, the OECD portrays citizens as somewhat petulant *demandeurs*, whom government officials ignore at their peril. This is not to deny the power of public opinion or public outrage and even demonstrations of violence: the point is the rhetoric and the way it sets up the tone of argument. The nature of the pressure, its legitimacy and its implacable strength, makes reform less a choice than a necessity. Not to reform risks "being out of step" or "not adapting" – in other words to rupture the harmony that should exist between public institutions and citizens.

> *With these new challenges, public management is becoming a major policy issue. It is receiving an unprecedented level of attention in OECD countries and beyond, and the pressures for change will not ease off in the decades ahead. (PB2003, 2)*
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> *Budget worries triggered reform in many countries, but the underlying pressure for change came from social, economic and technological developments which left governments increasingly out of step with society's expectations. (PB2005, 1)*
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> *The impetus for change came from many different sources –including the social, economic and technological developments in the latter half of the 20th century– which put pressure on all governments to adapt to new problems, new capacities and new relationships between citizens and governments. The public were increasingly concerned about the quality of the services they received and the choices available to them. Citizens were also increasingly resistant to the government's growing share of the national economy. In some countries, an expectation that taxation would decline became generally accepted across the political spectrum. …More and more, governments became out of step with a changing society and with an educated and empowered citizenry looking to amend their social contract. (MG, 19)*

Theme 2: Surprises and Unintended Consequences

This is a theme that points largely to the past, but resonates with possible follies in the future, and so reinforces a sense of caution about what is possible. It projects the notion of early "pioneers" (PB2003 refers to "first-generation pioneers" and to "pioneer reformers") who were single-minded in their objectives – building sod huts of reform on the unforgiving prairie of management. They accomplished a great deal, but made mistakes – moreover, ones that in retrospect, seem surprising. It is upon their shoulders that modern reformers stand. This manouevre accomplishes several things. As mentioned, it exculpates the OECD from its youthful enthusiasm for NPM, but it also builds a platform for departures, and indeed a wider agenda of reform that engages not simply management but governance more widely. The early reformers may have cleared the forest, but neglected the ecology of the landscape. Ecological management is much more complicated and demanding.

> *These reforms have indeed had a major impact but they have also given rise to some unexpected problems of their own. Even a seemingly straightforward action such as simplifying a welfare benefit form and cutting the time taken to process it may, for example, encourage more people to apply for the benefit, increasing the workload and making it more difficult to cut waiting time. While more efficient government is certainly desirable, efficiency alone is not a guarantee of better government. (PB2003, 1)*

> *The first-generation pioneers of public sector reform also faced the challenge of adjusting to a rapidly-changing world economy. But then the rhetoric of the day identified government itself as "the problem". This led to an impression that there was a single generic cause – "bureaucracy"— to be addressed by a generic set of solutions – "reform" – to arrive at the desired result – "efficiency". This approach suggested a single change from an unreformed to a reformed efficient state, a coherent task with a specific purpose that would be completed when this goal was reached. Since the primary goal was economic efficiency, the pioneer reformers went to work on reducing public expenditure, freeing up the public sector labour market and making greater use of market-type mechanisms in government. (PB2003, 2)*

> *Most public administrations have become more efficient, more transparent and customer-oriented as a result. But perhaps surprisingly, these changes have not*

reduced governments' influence in society –indeed, government now has a different but larger presence in OECD countries than 20years ago. (PB2005, 1)

Despite these changes –and contrary to the expectations of some reformers– in most OECD countries, public expenditure did not shrink greatly. (MG, 20)

Theme 3: Reform Involves Multiple Goals

This theme is closely wedded to the previous one – the mistakes that were made, principally in the single-minded pursuit of efficiency, were in part due to the complexity of the reform process and the fact that it cannot focus on simply one goal. Multiple goals have to be pursued simultaneously, and consequently balanced carefully. A wider agenda of reform demands more sophisticated tools and analytical capacities.

To complicate matters, governments are now under pressure for more profound changes to meet the requirements of contemporary society. A concern for efficiency is being supplanted by problems of governance, strategy, risk management, ability to adapt to change, collaborative action and the need to understand the impact of policies on society. To respond to this challenge, member countries, and the OECD, need better analytical and empirical tools and more sophisticated strategies for change than they have generally had to date. (PB2003, 1)

And openness in itself does not necessarily improve governance, nor does it override all other public values. It should be balanced against other values of efficiency, equity, and responsibility. (PB2005, 3)

Theme 4: The Importance of Culture/Values and the Organic Nature of Reform

This theme is actually an amalgam of three related aspects of governance reform: the organic nature of government, the importance of taking account of organizational culture, and the role of values in organizations. This echoes the complexity theme cited earlier, that public sector reform cannot be mechanistic or purely instrumental, that it must take into account a very broad range of potential interaction effects as well as the less obvious dimensions of organizational behaviour.

The documents do not use the term "organic" but prefer the notion of a "whole of government" approach. In PB2005, this is presented as a "lesson" from two decades of reform efforts – that public administration and governance must be seen as part of an "interconnected whole." This suggests a sort of organizational ecology where changes in one part of the system will ripple through and affect others. This also reflects stronger appreciation of the constitutional integrity of the state. Whereas the reforms in the early 1990s tended to think in terms of "machinery of government" – that is, mechanistically, and in terms of a machine with parts that could be oiled, interchanged, altered, or even dispensed with, the new view being proposed by the OECD is that states have a constitutional personality that is in part founded in law, but is also an artifact of the integral operation of key systems or "levers" such as the budget process, the civil service management process, and the accountability process. These form interactive cycles, and so disruptions or changes in one will reverberate with the others.

An appreciation of the organic nature of government is complemented with an appreciation of the importance of culture within organizations. PB2003 notes, for example, that "it has long been recognized that the core public service is controlled more by culture than by rules, a situation that is likely to continue despite progress in target-setting, performance contracts and measurement." Moreover, these documents express an appreciation for the historical roots of administrative culture in the OECD countries (e.g., the neutrality of the public service) as something that was achieved over decades if not hundreds of years. In an odd way, this is testament both to the fragility and the resilience of public administrative systems. They are resilient in the sense that they can resist mere technical interventions that do not address real cultural change. Indeed, the documents are

forthright in acknowledging that a great deal of the public sector reform movement in the last twenty years was superficial – that it served the interest of certain groups to announce reforms, but not to invoke the pain and resistance of actually following through with those changes. By the same token, reforms that focus on behaviours without addressing the norms and cultures that underpin those behaviours will not be successful. But this notion of culture also signals fragility – if these cultural norms are ignored in the enthusiasm of instrumental change, then what is most distinctive and important about the public sector and how it contributes to modern society, may be lost.

Closely related to the idea of culture is the notion of values. The distinction is not clear in the documents, and the terms seem almost interchangeable, but whereas culture seems to be more connected to organizational norms and practices, values seem more closely aligned with specific democratic governance norms, such as a professional civil service, a dedication to the public interest, or leadership practices.

A key consequence of highlighting culture, values and the organic nature of governance is that public management or "modern governance" is not a goal that will be immediately attainable. It requires long-term commitment, thoughtful implementation, and patience. Moreover, if the interaction effects of an ecological view of governance are taken seriously, then it is likely that reform will be a project without end, since reformation of one part of the system will inevitably perturb other parts, which will then in turn have to be adjusted and reformed, which in turn will feed back and affect the others, *ad infinitum*.

> *The second problem was a failure to appreciate that, despite its size and complexity, government remains a single enterprise. Governments operate in a unified constitutional setting and coherent body of administrative law, and their performance is determined by the interaction of a few crucial levers such*

as the policy process, the budget process, the civil service management process and the accountability process, all within the ambient political/administrative culture. Because of that, a reform of one of these levers inevitably involves the others. (PB2003, 3)

The third problem was a failure to understand that public management arrangements not only deliver public services, but also enshrine deeper governance values and are therefore, in some respects, inseparable from the constitutional arrangements in which they are imbedded. (PB2003, 3)

We also need to acquire a better understanding of the time required for serious public management interventions: culture change is not achieved overnight, and may take several years. (PB2003, 3)

Systemic reform in the public sector requires clarity about the behaviour, attitudes and beliefs that are to be changed, an appreciation of how formidable the challenge of cultural change really is... (PB2003, 5)

Traditional thinking on public sector reform has often seen policy, people, money, and organisations as if they were independent components of public management. This study has made it clear that they are closely interlinked. It is important for reform strategies to take account of the interlinked nature of these components of government. (MG, 201)

Theme 5: Context Matters/Differences Among Countries

As we noted above, the OECD is widely regarded to have been a key international champion of NPM in the late 1990s, more so than the World Bank for example. Governance in Transition was a highpoint in that proselytizing for several reasons. NPM was less than a decade old, and was still a dominant force in the academic literature – the doubts and critiques would come later. The challenge of helping the "transition" states in central and Eastern Europe rested on the assumption that they would be brought up to "western" (i.e., a single set) of standards in economic structures, policy initiatives, and administrative practices, and it must be said that recipient countries were quite prepared to adopt foreign "models" in order to have access to donor funds.

A decade later the OECD was taking a more subtle approach, and indeed highlighting the divergent paths countries might take on the arduous journey of reform, as well as the importance of context for the reform process. Interestingly, the importance of context is only a minor theme in PB2003, but by 2005 is a major theme of both PB2005 and MG. This is listed as the second key lesson of two decades of reform, that modernization efforts must pay attention to the specific characteristics of each country, and be tailored to circumstances. Similar reform efforts in different contexts will yield different results. In the MG report, context becomes the major finding of the document: "The main lesson the emerges from this review is that modernization is context dependent…" (MG, 201). It is in this vein the that report is surprisingly critical of the "best practice" movement, because it usually involves the transfer of some universal remedy to contexts that may not be suited to them.

Naturally, if this conclusion were taken to its extreme, there would be little point in cross-country comparisons, or indeed, for the GOV directorate in the OECD. The MG report explicitly recognizes this, and suggests several ways around the conundrum. First, reforms that appear useful should be set against similar systems to see how they might be implemented in similar contexts. Borrowing and policy transfer therefore would occur among families of countries rather than as a movement to change them al towards a single standard simultaneously. Second, it should be recognized that convergence will occur at different rhythms among different countries and for different types of reforms. The report notes for example that strong convergence has occurred among the OECD countries in terms of budgeting practices (interestingly, in part because of an international context where governments pay higher borrowing costs if their fiscal position is

considered unsound), but not around accountability and control systems. Third, the only

way to assess the potential impact of a given reform is to have a clear sense of the

governmental and administrative context into which that reform will be introduced – this

requires that governments (perhaps with the OECD's help) should conduct further

research on their own internal systems, a diagnostique that will prevent the introduction

of reform antibodies that might be rejected by the body politic. Finally, more research has

to be conducted at the global level in order to understand the micro-dynamics of reform,

and measures need to be developed in order to grasp the real impacts on governance

systems of any given reform initiative. Clearly, this is a burden for the OECD (it

launched a "Management in Government: Comparative Country Data" in November

2005).

> *Modernisation is context dependent: OECD countries' reform experiences demonstrate that the same reform instruments perform differently and produce very diverse results in different country contexts. This variation in reform experiences reflects the disparate institutional structures and environments that confront the reformers. A strong lesson to emerge from this review is that modernisation is context dependent. Modernisation strategies need to be tailored to an individual country's context, needs and circumstances. (MG, 22)*

> *The main lesson that emerges from this review is that modernisation is context dependent: the nature of the problem and the solution are strongly influenced by the national country context. The design of reform strategies must be calibrated to the specific risks and dynamics of the national public administration system and take a whole-of-government approach. (MG, 201)*

> *One of the main lessons from the reform experience is that there is no single generic solution to the problems of public administration. Countries come from different starting points, with different cultures, and face different problems, so the solutions must also be tailor-made to fit their circumstances. (PB2005, 6)*

Theme 6: Change is Difficult/Challenging

This theme is less a single element in the reports than a thread that runs through

the entire cloth. The themes of complexity and the organic nature of governance signal

that public management reform is challenging at best, and verges on dangerous at worst. The repeated references to past mistakes also highlight the risks associated with reform (these comments are usually balanced with acknowledgements that much was nonetheless accomplished, but the message is clear that despite accomplishments, major mistakes were made). Even the strong emphasis in MG on context is a backhanded reference to the need for care and prudence in proposing best practices. As part of a narrative, of course, this goes well beyond the simple acknowledgement t hat change is difficult. It helps signal several messages. First, and somewhat paradoxically, the emphasis on danger and challenge reinforces the sense that reform efforts are necessary, like a pep talk to a SWAT team before it launches a mission. Second, it steels the will. The subtext is that resistance to change is understandable, but irrational. Reformers have to be prepared to encounter irrational resistance, and simply ride it through. Third, it subtly delegitimizes resistance to change, precisely by emphasizing it as a universal reaction. Again, considering it a universal reaction makes it a thoughtless reflex; it should be dealt with the same way a doctor deals with a patient's flinching before the needle. Finally, if resistance to change is universal, it is unlikely to be easily overcome, and so reform efforts will naturally stretch over time, and perhaps a very long time, before they are successful. Interestingly, the documents make little reference to building constituencies of support or collaboration – though this does not mean that these more cooperative strategies of change are being ruled out. Instead, governance reform seems a lonely vocation, doomed to opposition, fraught with uncertainty, and potentially disastrous if done incorrectly.

> *Major change is uncomfortable and anxiety-producing, and because of this there is a natural instinct to resist it. Dedicated managerial attention can change officials'*

behaviour but it is only at the point where this behaviour has been internalised by individuals and groups – the point of cultural change – that it is likely to continue without such attention. So a reform that does not reach the critical point of internalisation will slip back to the prior state once the dedicated effort for change relaxes. And that is what happens to many attempted reforms. (PB2003, 6)

…politicians face hard and unpopular choices in some countries if long-term difficulties are to be avoided. (PB2005, 2)

Reforms cannot substitute for hard political choices*: For OECD countries, improving the cost-effectiveness and performance of their public sectors will help to reduce pressure on spending. As the past decade has shown, however, this in itself is unlikely to stem the continued upward pressure on expenditure generated by social entitlement programmes and social transfers. Public sector reform is not a substitute for the hard and, in many cases, unpopular choices that politicians have to make in some countries if long-term difficulties are to be avoided. (MG, 21)*

Citizens' expectations and demands of governments are growing, not diminishing: they expect openness, higher levels of service quality delivery, solutions to more complex problems, and the maintenance of existing social entitlements. Reforms to the public sector in the past 20 years have significantly improved efficiency, but governments of OECD countries now face a major challenge in finding new efficiency gains that will enable them to fund these growing demands on 21st century government. For the next 20 years, policy makers face hard political choices. Since most governments cannot increase their share of the economy, in some countries this will put pressure on entitlement programmes. These new demands on builders of public management systems will require leadership from officials with enhanced individual technical, managerial and political capacities who think and plan collectively and who can work well with other actors. (MG, 205)

Conclusions: The OECD and Global Governance

We divide out conclusions into two categories, those about the OECD and management reform and those on the contemporary nature of globalization and global governance.

The OECD has been actively involved in public sector management reform for almost twenty years, since PUMA was created in 1990. It is important to remind ourselves that the OECD has no authoritative capacity as such, and cannot order its

members to do anything (though more on this below). Accordingly, it has had to leverage its position in this field as an information broker, moreover a broker with distinct characteristics. First, it is an intergovernmental organization; its members are states. While membership currently sits at 30, the OECD has expanded its activities to embrace non-members as well. In the field of governance, for example, its is mounting a good governance initiative with Arab states; is involved with APEC in regulatory reform; has a South Eastern Europe Regional Program; and also has programs with Russia and China. So, despite its small formal membership, it is in fact global in scope and influence. Second, the OECD operates with a special mix of research and country participation. Governments broadly set its research agenda, and governments/members are usually involved in reviewing reports before they are published. But the OECD's comparative advantage is that it can draw on the willing support of its members (and other states) to provide "inside" information about what governments are doing in specific fields, and that information by definition is credible. The key instruments that the OECD uses to exercise influence are research based, informational ones: (1) ordinary seminars and workshops involving academic experts, government officials, or both; (2) "high-level" seminars of government officials and/or experts; (3) peer-to-peer visits by government delegations to study "best practices" in other governments; (4) didactic country reports that openly recommend certain changes in order to meet global stands (e.g., a 2005 report on China arguing for major reforms in public and corporate governance; (5) journals, newsletters, policy briefs (e.g., the OECD Journal on Budgeting); (6) the development and facilitation of networks of officials to exchange information (e.g., the network of Senior Budget Officials); (7) the development and issuance of "guidelines" in certain

areas that governments can voluntarily adopt (e.g., the Guidelines for Managing Conflict of Interest in the Public Service); (8) the construction of inventories, checklists, and frameworks that can guide decision-makers in specific fields (e.g., Public Sector Integrity: A Framework for Assessment); (9) surveys of governments and their practices; (10) databases and indicators. This is a formidable informational arsenal that would have to be invented if it did not already exist. However, it could probably not be invented outside of an organization like the OECD that combines a clubby atmosphere of governments with the more cerebral qualities of a think tank.

The OECD has used all of these instruments in the governance and public management field to exercise influence over "public sector modernization." Indeed, as we noted earlier, its 1995 Governance in Transition report was widely discussed around the world because it purported to be the first survey and overview of its kind describing what governments were doing in reforming public management, and because it unabashedly supported the prescriptions of NPM. There are different varieties of NPM, of course, and the OECD became an early intergovernmental champion of the "more market/less government" version (Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). Many still characterize the OECD's vision in these terms, but as we saw earlier, the organization's views on public sector reform have matured and become considerably more nuanced. Whereas the 1995 report made ritualistic references to contextual factors and the reality of different reform trajectories, the 2005 report elevated context to a prime theme and indeed a key conclusion. Whereas in 1995 the OECD did seem to be pushing universalistic solutions, by 2005 it was much more cautious, both about context as well as about organizational culture and the ecology of government institutions. From time to time, the OECD will

highlight the principles that bind its members and which allegedly form a common foundation of values about good governance (e.g., transparency, accountability), and it will occasionally chide governments for not meeting global standards, but its considered views on modernizing governance are no longer confined to a narrow interpretation of NPM.

Doubtless some of this is due to learning. As its own report points out, governments have not shrunk in the last two decades, and so a naïve NPMism would make little sense. As well, experience with the central and Eastern European transition states in the 1990s, with the EU accession process, and with the consequences of failed states around the world, shows that governance is hugely important for economic performance and social stability, let alone key services such as clean water and education. But I would argue that we need to talk organizational context into consideration as well – the GOV secretariat of the OECD is operating in governance "market" and needs to maintain and expand its position in that market in order to survive and thrive as an organization. The themes we saw in the reports, as well as the master narrative that binds those themes together, serve the OECD well from a marketing point of view. First, the emphasis on the difficulty and the challenge of public sector modernization essentially underscores the point that this is not for the uninformed or the faint-hearted. The repeated calls for more research and data and indicators reinforce the point. Second, the emphasis on context and variety, on the differences among governments and hence the different paths to reform, establishes a much wider agenda for the OECD over time than would a one-size-fits-all approach. The mid-1990s emphasis on a single value – efficiency – made for a relatively narrow range of recommendations. The new emphasis on ecology,

nuance, contradiction, and feedback loops creates "inversions without end," a potential

reform agenda that stretches far into the future. The minute calibrations required to get

reform right will almost never end, as one set of interventions or reforms calls forth the

need for ever new ones to deal with the ramifications of those past.

We close now with some observations on the contemporary nature of

globalization and global governance. A first, key point, is that the OECD's efforts in

proselytizing public management reform is part of a global explosion in the past twenty

years in knowledge networks around management and management reform, in both the

private (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002; Kipping and Engwall, 2002) and public

sectors (Kettl, 2005). These knowledge networks form dense matrixes of actors and

organizations that effectively become the discordant lattices of global coordination and

emergent forms of global governance (Stone, 2004; Slaughter, 2004). While the phrase

"governance without government" was coined some time ago (Rosenau and Czempiel,

1992), it increasingly is being drawn upon to describe a world where rules of every type,

at every level, seem to be multiplying into thick meshes of control. However, more and

more of these rules seem to be "soft law" – standards, norms, guidelines, and

frameworks. States are clearly involved, but are not necessarily prime movers or

dominant players in respective networks: "Governance in a world where boundaries are

largely in flux is being shaped and pursued in constellations of public and private actors

that include states, international organizations, professional associations, expert groups,

civil society groups and business corporations. Governance includes regulation but goes

well beyond. Governance is also about dense organizing, discursive and monitoring

activities that embed, frame, stabilize and reproduce rules and regulations" (Djelic and Sahlin-Adersson, 2006: 7).

The paradox is that that this form of dynamic and loose coupling of actors and organizations in the making of soft rules and non-coercive monitoring and compliance strategies is diffuse, messy, with a variable geometry – and yet it creates order. That order is fragile, unlike hierarchies of command and control backed up by force and sanctions, and so has to be constantly re-created and re-calibrated. The OECD is an important contributor to global governance that occurs without a global government. As an arena and a convener, it ceaselessly connects and re-connects government officials around the world, along with experts, NGOs, and business. Obviously, these actors do not always agree with each other, but the simply fact of meeting creates discursive spaces and a common language of concepts. More than that, however, the OECD is engaged in standards setting, a key instrument in soft law (Brunsson and Jacobssen, 2000). Despite the caution that we saw in Modernising Governance, the GOV secretariat is not at all shy of articulating "best practices," frameworks, guidelines, and "success" stories. The master narrative of reform both tells a story but also lays out a conceptual universe, complete with broad objectives and strategies. This is complemented by league tables, indicators, and roadmaps that encourage self-reflexivity and mutual adjustment. Over time, systems begin to look similar, and the managers of those systems learn from each other, speak a similar language, and ultimately begin to coordinate in policy terms, without a central coordinator.

A good example of the above is the OECD's Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Its website states:

The Anti-Corruption Network was established in 1998. The main objective of the ACN is to support its member countries in their fight against corruption by providing a regional forum for the promotion of anti-corruption activities, exchange of information, elaboration of best practices and donor coordination. The ACN includes countries from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The OECD member states are also taking part in the ACN activities. The main counterparts of the ACN are the national governments and anti-corruption authorities of the participating countries. Civil society, business associations, international organisations and international financial institutions (IFIs) are also taking an active part in the ACN.[6]

Countries submit reports that are then discussed by representatives of the ACN, which issues a set of recommendations. Countries respond to those recommendations (and are directly involved in shaping them), and then are expected to implement them. Monitoring reports are periodically issued, indicating the progress of implementation. Gradually, global standards on corruption and bribery leech out from the OECD member states and begin to morph into the legal systems of target states. This yields a loosely coupled or coordinated system of equivalent standards, that then becomes a regulatory regime dealing with such things as money laundering, government procurement rules, commissions to combat corruption, the training of judges and police officers, and so on.

There is a misconception in some of the literature on the OECD and transnational governance networks that standards work primarily through soft law and voluntary compliance. While a good deal of the OECD's practices do rely on these techniques, it also has the occasional opportunity to have a more robust effect on governance systems,

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[6] www.oecd.org/document/14/0,2340,en_36595778_36595872_36959886_1_1_1_1,00.html The target countries are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Bulgaria, Estonia and Slovenia. n addition to national governments, the ACN involves civil society, business, international organizations: the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Transparency International (TI), Open Society Institute (OSI), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Council of Europe (CoE), Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD (BIAC), American Bar Association (ABA) and others. The author was engaged in 2004 in a country review of Ukraine.

not directly but through the acceptance and application of these standards by third parties. For example, the OECD released the Best Practices for Budget Transparency in 2001, which was then incorporated by the IMF in its Manual on Fiscal Transparency (2001).[7] Together with the UN's statistical benchmarks in COFOG (Classifications of the Functions of Government) these become standards of compliance in governmental fiscal reports to the Fund. The standards in turn inform the reporting requirements of donor agencies around the world, as well as private lenders to governments. In a nominal sense these are still "soft" law and voluntary standards, since no government can be compelled to use them. But to the extent the governments seek donor funds, or accession to the EU, for example, they will have to comply with this set of OECD standards, and the larger family of standards of which they are a part.

Nonetheless, this still begs the question of why governments and their officials engage as energetically as they do with a body like the OECD, one that can exercise almost no leverage over them. This is a large topic that will have to be developed in future research, but at this stage we can discern at least four factors that create a receptive audience for OECD governance standards. First, we underestimate the pressure of "policy search" among modern governments. In most cases when government officials are asked to develop new policies, their first question is "what are other governments doing?" This is both to provide a backdrop for domestic policy, but also to search for new ideas, techniques, tools, best practices, stories of success and failure. Most officials would be considered irresponsible if they did not have some grasp on what other

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[7] www.imf.org/external/np/fad/trans/manual/index.htm

governments are doing with respect to a given policy field.[8] The OECD provides a one-stop shop for comparative policy data.

Second, participation in the OECD yields several practical as well as symbolic benefits for most states. In the complex world of international relations, the practical benefits extend from compliance with standards that are recognized by third parties, to the personal connections with counterpart officials in other countries. The symbolic benefits arise from membership (or participation) in an exclusive and prestigious club. For example, even if the OECD's CAN achieved absolutely nothing at all in practical terms, countries like Kazakhstan and Ukraine achieve a measure of global respectability simply by showing up.

Finally, the OECD has managed to capitalize on a complex global psychology of "modernization," a restless hunt to reach an always-receding horizon of improvement. What works now is never good enough. As Governance in Transition put it: "Unchanged governance structures and classic responses of "more of the same" are inappropriate to this intricate policy environment. …Governments must strive to do things better, with fewer resources, and, above all, differently." To be modern is to be *à la mode*. While the OECD is not as ruthless in defining *la mode* as New York or Parisian *fashionistas*, it has appropriated the discourse of modernity, and has a credible claim to defining what is *à la mode* through its membership and associational ties. Most governments, whatever their real inclinations, resist being labeled "conventional," "backward" or "traditional." Most prefer to be "modern" or to be "modernizing." But to be modern is also to be "of the moment," and as the moment is always changing, so the quest is never-ending.

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[8] This observation springs from personal experience. The author has served as a consultant on several federal government policy review projects, and each one without fail has demanded some sort of comparative analysis of other countries' policies.

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