

# choices

Vol. 9, no. 6 August 2003 ISSN 0711-0677 [www.irpp.org](http://www.irpp.org)

Governance

## From Skepticism to Cynicism

Paradoxes of  
Administrative Reform

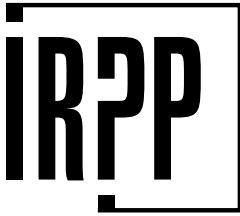
Isabelle Fortier

## From Cynicism to Organizational Disillusion

New Public Management  
as Confusion Factor

Christian Rouillard

IRPP



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This publication was produced under the direction of Geneviève Bouchard, Research Director, IRPP. Art direction was by Schumacher Design, and printing was by AGL Graphiques.

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# Governance

Project Director  
Geneviève Bouchard

**A**n important area of our research is to examine the challenges of domestic and international governance.

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## Foreword

In Canada and elsewhere in the world civil services have been the object of much criticism over the past few years, often the manifestation of an increasingly widespread cynicism on the part of the population. This growing problem, which affects the federal and provincial civil services, seems to be exacerbated by the perception (by no means always justified) that the civil service is inefficient and does not respond to people's needs. Moreover, some civil servants themselves, disillusioned in their jobs, share this feeling.

To examine this phenomenon, the IRPP organized working lunches in Quebec City and Ottawa at which Isabelle Fortier and Christian Rouillard, professors at the École nationale d'administration publique and specialists in this area, were the featured speakers. The overwhelming success of these events was a clear indication that this issue was of interest to a large number of people, both within and outside the public service. This *Choices* paper, part of the IRPP's Governance research program, presents essays written by Fortier and Rouillard on the basis of these working lunches.

The IRPP asked the authors to examine the notion of cynicism (within and toward the civil service) and to respond to the following three questions: How do you define cynicism? In what forms does it manifest itself? What are its causes? In her paper, entitled "From Skepticism to Cynicism: Paradoxes of Administrative Reform," Isabelle Fortier shows that cynicism among civil servants, like that in the general public, is caused by ambivalence and paradoxes in the discourse of reform. She argues that this discourse, which is supposed to be restoring the public's confidence and mobilizing civil servants, is in reality having the opposite effect.

Christian Rouillard, in his paper "From Cynicism to Organizational Disillusion: New Public Management as Confusion Factor," distinguishes cynicism from organizational disillusion. He maintains that this disillusion is a cultural and organizational phenomenon that is much more profound and more difficult to deal with than cynicism. In his view, the increasing organizational disillusion in the federal civil service can be explained by contradictions in the reform discourses and in managerial practices.

In addition to shedding light on the issue of cynicism in and toward the civil service, the authors examine the major ideas that have influenced administrative reforms over the past 10 years. They also caution against the adoption of private sector principles that might not only be unsuitable for the reality of the public service, but also call into question the fundamental role of the State.

Canada's public service, at all levels, contributes to the high rating Canada and the provinces receive from international organizations that assess honesty and the absence of corruption. While as a society we tend to focus on things that need improving, many of our public sector systems actually work quite well. These two essays explore the kinds of internal attitudinal and confidence issues that those who care about the quality of our public services and the excellent people in its ranks need to consider.

Hugh Segal  
President, IRPP

# From Skepticism to Cynicism: Paradoxes of Administrative Reform

Isabelle Fortier

**B**ecause of the crisis of confidence that is shaking political institutions and public organizations, there is an increasing amount of discussion of public cynicism<sup>1</sup> toward the State. This cynicism is said to be undermining citizen participation, the foundation of a democratic ideal which, it is feared, will be weakened by deepening contradictions.<sup>2</sup> The term “cynicism” is often used to describe popular reaction to the deterioration of political and public institutions and their representatives, or to denote voter apathy and explain low voter turnout.

The reverberations of this cynicism toward the public service are being felt at all levels. It resonates and burgeons in the context of repeated reforms aimed at overcoming the top-heaviness and inefficiency of the bureaucratic system, along with the latter’s stereotypical symbol, the caricature of the jaded public servant. Blamed, even despised, civil servants are increasingly compared with their private sector colleagues, who are assumed to be super dynamic and efficient – and sit by as portions of their work are given over to outsourcing and subcontracting. This crisis of public confidence not only is affecting institutions and their representatives, it is also reflected in political leaders’ loss of confidence in their own public organizations. Moreover, as the activities that are contracted out are frequently the most interesting and challenging ones, the civil servants’ role is reduced to administering contracts, which emphasizes the bureaucratic aspects of their functions and robs them of their professional role.<sup>3</sup>

In this article we do not propose to treat this very complex phenomenon exhaustively, but rather to interpret the pervasive cynicism within and toward the public service by examining the political and managerial discourses dealing with the administrative reforms. We will attempt to show how public servants’ cynicism, like that of citizens, is a considerable phenomenon that is symptomatic of the paradoxical and ambivalent aspects of the reform discourses. While

not denying that there is room for improvement in public organizations or that bureaucratic management can produce pernicious effects, we believe that the efforts to improve public administration may be compromised by the very discourses that are supposed to bring about the desired changes.

After outlining the definition of cynicism used here, we will present other authors' explanations of the crisis of confidence, and we will link these explanations to the phenomenon of cynicism. We will then develop our arguments about cynicism in the context of public service reforms on three analytical levels. Beginning at the most general level, we will look at the impact of discourses that deal with the "marketization" of services the State provides and the relationship between it and citizens, who now become "clients." Then we will consider the interaction between the State's political and administrative spheres in order to show that the linkages between them are not neutral and that they are also affected by the discourses on administrative reform. Finally, we will examine the dynamic in the administrative sphere, questioning the neutrality of public policy implementation, a fundamental objective of the administrative reforms.

## What Is Cynicism?

In order to define cynicism, we will first contrast it with skepticism, a seemingly related concept. Skepticism stems from an intellectual doubt about knowledge. Because we cannot know anything with certainty, says the skeptic, who has, in a way, lost his "faith,"<sup>4</sup> we must suspend judgment and adopt an attitude of permanent doubt.<sup>5</sup> Questioning, debating and revealing one's premises – in other words, healthy skepticism – are the essence of true democracy and individual freedom of thought.

Like skepticism, cynicism is anchored in doubt. However, the cynic's doubt is deeper and more serious than that of the skeptic, because it relates to a person's intentions, sincerity or integrity. This doubt, or suspicion, implies that there are hidden motives behind an idea, an action or even an institution. Cynics do more than question the premises underlying social reality, they reject them outright as being corrupt, just as they reject anything that might be constructed based on them. The cynic's doubt thus leads to the outright discrediting of both the medium

and the message, and translates into an attitude of generalized distrust of society and its conventions, values, symbols and institutions.

The concept of cynicism originates in antiquity, and first referred to a school of thought founded on resisting and rejecting social conventions, power and its symbols in favour of a simple life, removed from material goods and rooted in nature. In this sense, cynicism is more a way of life, and the virtues associated with it are given concrete expression and learned through example, not through discourse.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, then, cynicism and politics do not mix: the former is a way of life centred on detachment and nature, while the latter is a collective human exercise that transcends nature and is based on the challenges of collective social interests. Thus, when faced with a regime that purports to be democratic or a management whose legitimacy is based on its rational-legal character,<sup>7</sup> the cynic strives to reveal the imperfection of reality in relation to the ideal advocated by the democratic and rational-legal models of these institutions. Political activity, in its broadest sense, appears problematic because of the opportunism it produces on the part of those who aspire to power and crave its prestige and privileges.

This mocking intolerance exploits the essence of a situation to the full, instantly laying bare the derision and conventional nature of the criteria on which value judgments are based, thus revealing them to be unsupported opinions, prejudices, conformity inspired by fear and corrupt interests.<sup>8</sup> [translation]

Nowadays, the term "cynicism" is generally used pejoratively to describe the jaded attitude of someone who not only no longer believes in anything, but also regards all forms of discourse with suspicion. Faced with the deceptive appearances and social values of civic life, the cynic prefers to return to a natural state. At first glance, this might appear to be a kind of regression to a prediscursive, precultural stage that is justified by the belief that one cannot trust the world in which one lives. The only way to protect oneself from this hostile world is to withdraw, disinvest, disengage from it,<sup>9</sup> and ultimately to reject thinking and speech as the product of social systems. However, perhaps deep down this apparent indifference conceals an unavowed optimism, even the secret hope that one will find in the other a response that one has given up expecting.

From a psychodynamic perspective,<sup>10</sup> cynicism as a state or attitude may be a defence mechanism against

disappointment, disillusion, even against the feeling of having been betrayed by discourses, practices and those seen as their representatives. It might well develop as people become worn down by the constant feeling of being duped by unkept promises and false claims. Perhaps the cynics in question are people whose democratic ideals are higher than the average, and the public servants who are most devoted to public service.<sup>11</sup> In fact the people who are most emotionally involved in the role they play are the most frustrated by their inability to satisfactorily play that role; i.e., according to their values and ideals.

It is possible to conceptualize the stages by which a cynical attitude develops. It begins with disappointment – not yet resignation – as the cynic starts out by criticizing the worthlessness of appearances and the illegitimacy of social values and conventions. Meeting resistance from the system further justifies and consolidates the cynical attitude until the only possible reaction is complete and total withdrawal. That is why cynicism ultimately leads to a refusal to participate in social life: the cynic stays aloof since this is the only refuge from the aberrations of a system that crushes with its conventions, the only refuge from the attitudes of those who are content at worst to acquiesce to it and at best to contest it.

## Paradoxes of Reform: Confidence and “Satisfaction” in the Relationship between the General Public and the State

The first level of our analysis of the impact of discourses of reform is the erosion of confidence that characterizes the current relationship between the general public and the State. We will see that although the objective of these discourses is to reassure citizens and increase their confidence in the State, they might be creating exactly the opposite effect. They might in fact be increasing citizens’ expectations of public services, and, in changing the very nature of these expectations, creating confusion over the true intention of public services. Paradoxically, by creating conditions that exacerbate dissatisfaction, the discourses ultimately contribute to the cynicism they were supposed to attenuate.

## Declining Confidence Despite a High Level of Well-Being

The public’s confidence in the State is a diffuse reality that is hard to define and even harder to explain. This relationship is built through a large variety of experiences, whether direct (through the delivery of certain services, for example) or indirect (through an image of the State presented by the media, and through the perceptions people develop on the basis of their experiences and personal biases, for example). Nevertheless, this confidence is vital in a democracy, since it guarantees the institutions’ legitimacy, which is essential to their survival.

In his meta-analysis of political and cultural changes, Inglehart<sup>12</sup> interprets the current crisis of confidence by analyzing its links with the changes in attitudes brought about by socio-economic progress in advanced industrial societies. He suggests that it is because of the relatively high level of material security that a large portion of the population in developed countries is able to take it for granted that their essential needs will be met, and to base their ambitions on values that are different from those held by previous generations. In the past, the imperatives of survival that underlie modern values meant that individuals were motivated mainly by economic and material achievement. Today, concerns about survival have subsided, and modern values have thus given way to “postmodern” values, which are centred more on personal well-being. Without referring specifically to cynicism, Inglehart adds that in the postmodern context there has been a change in perspective, which he describes as follows:

The shift from traditional society to industrial society brought a shift from traditional authority to rational bureaucratic authority. But in Postmodern society, authority, centralization, and bigness are all under growing suspicion. They have reached a point of diminishing effectiveness; and they have reached a point of diminishing acceptability. Every stable culture is linked with a congruent authority system. But the Postmodern shift is a move away from *both* traditional authority and state authority. It reflects a declining emphasis on authority in general — regardless of whether it is legitimate by societal or state formulae. This leads to declining confidence in hierarchical institutions. Today, political leaders throughout the industrialized world are experiencing some of the lowest levels of support ever recorded.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, he maintains, a high level of subjective well-being, that is, overall life satisfaction, is an integral part of the postmodern cultural syndrome, and this is producing a transformation from materialist to postmaterialist values. Although on the whole, and as a cul-

tural syndrome, postmodern societies provide a high collective level of personal well-being, there has nevertheless been a reversal in terms of personal satisfaction, which has, on the contrary, increased expectations with respect to personal well-being:

At the individual level, however, Postmaterialists do *not* report relatively high levels of subjective well-being. Far from being a paradox, this is central to their nature: Postmaterialists have experienced relatively high levels of economic security throughout their formative years. They develop Postmaterialist priorities precisely because further economic gains do *not* produce additional subjective well-being: they take economic security for granted and go on to emphasize other (nonmaterial) goals. Moreover, they have relatively demanding standards for these other aspects of life — to such an extent that they often manifest *lower* levels of overall life satisfaction than do Materialists in the same society.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, while in most societies rich people would usually feel a higher level of well-being than poor people, in postmaterialist societies this is not the case. Inglehart concludes that progress ultimately leads industrial societies to a point where the marginal return of economic gain for the individual, or that of economic growth for society, does not produce an improvement in subjective well-being.

The value attributed to work, the pursuit of wealth, the legitimacy of authority that induces obedience in exchange for security and remuneration and faith in the ability of science and progress to advance humanity no longer has the influence it once had. Individual motivation is no longer focused on material success as it was once defined, socially, in the context of economic development. The postmaterialist reaction to the values of the economic growth era is creating conditions conducive to the development of cynicism toward the reform discourses. This is especially true when they are based on arguments that invoke economic rationality, technological progress and the quantitative logic of efficiency and performance. “Happiness” is voluntary simplicity,<sup>15</sup> whose hedonistic nature is entirely postmodern but is nevertheless similar to the cynic’s way of life in Antiquity, also ultimately a form of hedonism.

This has been borne out by demographic studies: cohorts of individuals share certain characteristics whose origins can be traced to the context in which they have lived. For example, in his analysis of the four generations currently living in the United States, demographer Ron Zemke reveals the cynical nature of the 1960s to 1980s generation. These individuals, who grew up in the shadow of the baby-boom generation, learned at an early age that they had to be self-reliant.

Having witnessed the decline of mythical patriarchal figures and the weakening of the aura of all-powerful America, they are simply no longer impressed by authority and treat “the company president as they would the receptionist,” without deference.

They have learned not to place their faith in others, to be very careful with their loyalty and commitments, for fear of getting burned. One Nike ad says it this way, “Don’t insult our intelligence. Tell us what it is. Tell us what it does. And don’t play the national anthem while you do it.” While the Boomers were told, “You can be anything you want — even President of the United States,” Generation X was told, “Be careful out there. It’s a dangerous world”...There is no evidence that Xers expect work to be totally engaging and completely meaningful. They are not naïve kids; they learned self-sufficiency early and never expected the world to be a bowl of cherries. As long as you don’t pretend that some meaningless task is really important, they will respect you for your frankness and honesty...They require real human judgment.<sup>16</sup>

This rather sombre portrait nevertheless contains a glimmer of hope that, despite the loss of deference<sup>17</sup> toward institutions, the postmaterialist movement can find political expression in a blueprint for a fairer and more equitable democratic society. In fact, according to Inglehart, postmaterialist values are *more* democratic and participatory. For example, he views the currently low voter turnout as a reflection not of political apathy on the part of citizens (as is frequently claimed in the media), but of a shift in political participation from the simple vote toward collective, *ad hoc*, targeted and more radical actions, such as boycotts and demonstrations.<sup>18</sup>

### Fidelity or Capacity of the State?

Although the crisis of public confidence in the State and public service appears to be confirmed by public opinion surveys, there are few empirical studies determining whether this loss of confidence is justified. This raises the question of whether, at the political level, the orientation of the reforms is based on a thorough examination of the reasons behind this decline in confidence. Putnam *et al.*<sup>19</sup> define two dimensions that enable us to analyze the current crisis of public confidence and help us answer these questions. The first is the crisis of confidence regarding the fidelity of the State, which relates to a disconnect between the State’s ultimate purpose and the values of the collectivity; and the second is the crisis of confidence in the State’s capacity, which is linked to organizational inefficiency in public service delivery. This is an important distinction, because the current reforms too often focus, *a priori*, on the State’s



capacity rather than its fidelity. Consequently, the responses are structural and managerial, while the problems are perhaps of a completely different nature – the questioning of certain values and choices that are based on these values, for example. As Gow and Guertin clearly state:

Government policy has become a risky operation. The strategy of rejecting any increase in “visible” taxes and successively targeting relatively isolated categories of taxpayers for cuts will perhaps result in the creation of protest movements like the ones faced by reformers in other provinces. This is why reforms will henceforth be aimed even more directly at the structures of the Quebec government, thus focusing less on the political choices made than on the operative, technical “rationalization” for them. The review of administrative processes is the route chosen in the search for new reference points with respect to public policies. The object of the political game is more and more often the definition of the “problem” and the “logic” of the approach taken to solve it.<sup>20</sup> [translation]

We emphasize this distinction because, depending on whether the phenomenon of declining confidence is of the first or second type, very different considerations will be taken into account. Thus, a crisis of confidence related to the fidelity of public action to citizens’ values and social issues should stimulate and contribute to the debate over public policy making. However, a loss of confidence in the State’s capacity to offer high-quality public services is more a reflection of the loss of confidence in the competence of public servants or a criticism of the public service and its management.

A crisis of confidence related to fidelity is perhaps more difficult to understand and confront because it places a government under scrutiny vis-à-vis the legitimacy of its actions. Besides, the ability of the average citizen to evaluate public policies is relatively limited, as they have neither all the information nor the means necessary to do so. More often than not they base their judgment on specific experiences of public service use. In these circumstances, opinions are volatile, fluctuating according to the events reported, particularly in the media. Evaluation like this of the State’s legitimacy, created by people on the basis of specific experiences, can be contradictory. For example, Dwivedi and Gow show that despite people’s quite high satisfaction with federal government services they have received, they have a negative overall impression of the State and the public service.<sup>21</sup> As Inglehart suggests, this probably explains why people’s perception of a government’s legitimacy is predicted by

their overall satisfaction with their lives, rather than their more or less favourable opinion of political institutions.<sup>22</sup>

### Reforms Focusing on the State’s Capacity

The current reforms, which almost exclusively centre around the State’s administrative and managerial aspect – supposedly unrelated to the issue of the State’s fidelity – appear to be based on the interpretation of a loss of confidence linked to its capacity. They overwhelmingly place the burden of this incapacity on the shoulders of public servants and the bureaucracy, without taking into account the devastating effects that prolonged downsizing might have had on the organizational capacity of the public sector. This is to a certain extent reflected in the following observation by a senior Quebec public servant:

There is no doubt that right now public service employees feel completely unmotivated. No new public servants have been recruited in the past ten years. Public servants haven’t had a wage increase in the past ten years. For years, the politicians have been saying over and over that there is no more money and that we have to restore our financial health and they’ve practically implied that if public servants had performed better, we would not be in the dire straits that we are in today.<sup>23</sup> [translation]

The budgetary restrictions, which seem excessive when viewed from this perspective, must have satisfied those who believed that the State apparatus had grown so large that the budget deficit was spiralling out of control. However, these restrictions concretely diminished the State’s capacity to offer the quality and number of services that the public still expected to receive. It was therefore necessary to turn to the private sector to compensate for the public sector’s incapacity. During this time, this judgment of the public sector’s incapacity was never questioned. It is a vicious cycle made worse by the fact, welcome in the context of deficit aversion, that this use of private sector resources does not appear in the State’s “official” workforce figures and that costs associated with transactions with the private sector are not included in the operating costs of the bureaucratic machine. Moreover, this workforce can be increased or decreased without infringing on existing agreements, especially with respect to human resources management.

The crisis of public confidence is clearly a complex phenomenon that is not necessarily rational. Nor is it the result of a realistic assessment of organizations’ performance or the quality of services offered despite serious constraints. Thus, in the current context, it is relatively easy for supporters of a minimalist state to advocate resorting to the private sector as an indispensable solu-

tion to offering better services at lower costs. This competition between the public and private sectors as suppliers of certain public services is sustained by numerous debates. The controversy raging in Quebec over the “two-tier” health care system is a good example. Nevertheless — and this is not pointed out frequently enough — sometimes public opinion is manipulated during these discussions, because it is assumed that the private sector is necessarily more efficient than the public sector. However, a number of well documented studies that use more than the narrow criteria of efficiency have shown that the private sector’s “competitive advantage” is far from being a given.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at the very stage of defining the “problem” of the State’s capacity, a bias is introduced into the reasoning: to state that recourse to the private sector is obviously “the solution” only masks the detachment of politics and the disengagement of the State.

### Citizen or Client?

It is also important to recall that citizens’ level of “satisfaction” with public services is related to the nature of the services they are promised. Thus, the logic of the market, part of the discourse of public administration reform,<sup>25</sup> turns citizens into consumers, who then react like clients to the “merchandise” delivered to them. We are all accustomed to hearing the discourses of marketing specialists singing the praises of customer service and preaching that “the customer is king and always right.” It shouldn’t be surprising that citizens now expect “satisfaction guaranteed or money back,” reducing the idea of taxation to a form of purchasing power that they acquire for services they personally receive.

We thus consider the relationship between the State and its citizens, whose premises pervade the whole of civil society, to be the crux of our analysis. We will return to it below when we analyze the impact of the reform discourses at other levels. For the moment, what matters is that the phenomenon has an impact on the dynamic of the expectations and actors involved. We can see this influence on the development of government policies in the United States, where the logic of private interests predominates.

Many designs reinforce the self-interest motivation in US politics and signal that people are expected to look after their own interests (with little regard for the elusive “public interest”), and everyone is expected to cut the best deal they can for themselves. Policy so designed creates a particular culture that permeates democratic institutions and has far-reaching negative consequences for justice. A more just society

depends on citizens not only expressing their own interests but empathizing with other citizens different from themselves and accepting compromise...Citizenship also has an impact on whether policies will solve the problems toward which they are directed...Because citizens are often an integral part of making policy work, attitudes toward policies become self-fulfilling prophecies.<sup>26</sup>

Aucoin recognizes that this “client focus” is at the heart of federal government reforms: the Treasury Board Secretariat, for example, has promised that Public Service 2000 “will make affordable, ‘client-focused quality service delivery’ its top priority.”<sup>27</sup>

At least two factors are crucial to the success of improved public services in the above respect. One is the need to foster a culture that gives high priority to a focus on clients; the other is the need to establish criteria for assessing performance in responding to clients’ expressed demands. The record of achievements within the federal public service suggests that leadership can be found in several departments and agencies, and that this leadership has contributed to the adoption — formally or informally — of total quality management principles.<sup>28</sup>

Because citizen-clients are being encouraged to express their expectations in individual terms, it is easy to conclude that the State’s actions amount to satisfying the sum of these private interests, without real concern for the public interest or common good. The democratic system is thus jeopardized by the weight of the majority or the ability of certain groups to make their interests prevail. Symons and Deschênes show that this approach reduces the identities, roles and relations between citizens and the State, since it limits citizen participation to expressing satisfaction/dissatisfaction with services received. By concealing social inequalities and undermining collective solidarity, this approach also affects interactions between citizens: “[C]onsumers of public services such as the poor on welfare, the student in the school, the sick patient in the hospital, or the elderly in a retirement home are hardly customers in the same sense as shoppers at the local department store.”<sup>29</sup>

Assigning the status of consumer isolates and differentiates people as individuals, since it is in an isolated fashion that decisions and actions of consumption are taken. Inequalities become private troubles rather than public issues.<sup>30</sup>

### When the End Justifies the Means

In the discourses of advocates of the “marketization” of public services, there is no room to question the relationship between political choices and the administrative procedures employed to implement them. This is a good reflection of the gap that is created between

the ends and the means, whereby the means are seen as “neutral” ways to achieve the ends. In the name of an “authentic” pragmatism centred on efficiency, the proponents simply claim to be choosing the best means to achieve the end. In this way the means end up making efficiency an end in itself and leaving far behind the ultimate purpose connected to the State’s role. The following are examples of this concept as it is presented in the federal and Quebec public sectors:

The advantage of the Canadian approach in these regards lies in the fact that it has not been excessively preoccupied with external or internal debates and conflict over schemes to privatize, market-test, or contract-out government operations. Rather, the full range of “alternative service delivery” options has been pragmatically deployed in the service of meeting the objectives of affordability, better service and improved policy outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, within the administrative units of departments and agencies [of the Quebec government] for which services produced or delivered to the public can be measured quantitatively, performance and accountability contracts will be signed between unit managers and ministers. These performance contracts will allow administrative units to apply real management by results, with the precise targets to be achieved. Above all they will have greater latitude with regard to the means used to achieve the objectives.<sup>32</sup> [translation]

Finally, the separation between ends and means, which is the logic underlying the establishment of an endless number of autonomous administrative units and independent agencies, is problematic in terms of the common interest. Ultimately it is impossible to serve the common interest, which requires a degree of renunciation and sacrifice, as well as a societal perspective, and treat citizens as clients whose sole preoccupation is to satisfy their own interests in their dealings with service units, whose sole objective is to optimize their performance.

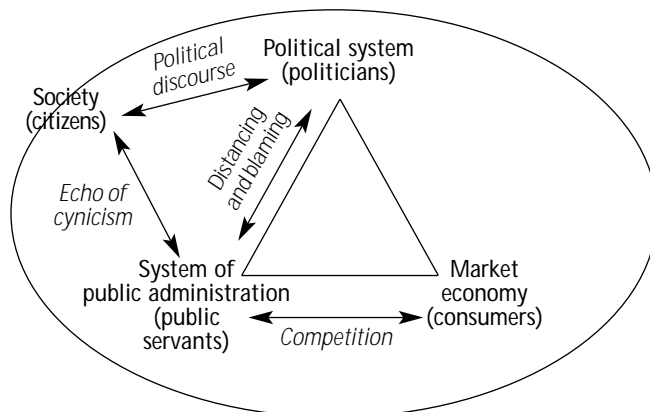
### Three Interacting Systems

Having set out the underlying features of the discourses of reform in terms of their impact on the relationship between the citizen and the State, we will now analyze how these discourses characterize the relationships between the political and administrative spheres. Pollitt and Bouckaert<sup>33</sup> present a three-level analysis of civil society. Although this triangular representation of reality is an oversimplification, it allows us to illustrate the broad lines of our argument. The three corners of the

triangle (see figure 1) represent the political system (politicians and their allies), the administrative system (public servants) and the market (businesses and consumers). The whole triangle represents civil society in which citizens are the actors. Note that the boundaries between the groups are not watertight, and individuals can be members of the different systems simultaneously. Each system has its own peculiarities and its distinct role in society. Recalling what was presented in the first part of this article, we can see how, if we look at the interactions between the three systems, the reforms centred on the “marketization” of services tend to standardize citizens’ identities and the relationships between the systems in the direction of the third corner, thus reducing the specificity of characteristics and relationships with the State.

Let us examine the interaction between the political and administrative systems in this context. First, note that in the cases of both federal government reforms (since the 1990s) and Quebec government reforms (since 2000), the bureaucracy is presented as the principal cause of public organizations’ poor performance in the past. Public servants’ bureaucratic behaviour, focused on following predetermined rules and procedures, is thus presented as a factor in the bureaucratic red tape and rigidity of the system. By thus blaming the public service and making people’s dissatisfaction a problem of bad management, the actors in the political system and their allies distance themselves from the administrative system and find a target toward which to divert citizens’ dissatisfaction far from themselves. Moreover, the discourse of empowerment and public servants’ accountability supports this trend by diluting or creating a screen for ministerial responsibility, which still prevails in our parliamentary system. Since minis-

Figure 1  
Three Interacting Systems



Source: Adapted from C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

ters have the power to reprimand and even replace managers,<sup>34</sup> they can, paradoxically, avoid responsibility for certain actions and at the same time claim to have things in hand by showing that they are in complete control of the administrative machine.

[O]n the one hand we see policy-makers using administrative reform to displace accountability for public policy; on the other hand we see the very same policy-makers trying to increase their control over bureaucracy. Whilst this appears to be two inconsistent developments, they may in fact reflect a general desire among elected politicians to increase their influence over bureaucracy while at the same time avoiding responsibility for the bureaucracy's actions.<sup>35</sup>

As we are no longer in the era of big social programs (projects that contributed to politicians' popularity), it is becoming more difficult for elected politicians to dazzle. Citizens expect more from their public services and are skeptical (even cynical) when it comes to assessing their representatives' credibility and actions, especially when these actions reduce social programs and increase taxes. Even if they do not want to participate more in decision-making processes, which demands time and energy, citizens still demand the right of critical review, that is, the right to comment on decisions and resist public authority. In this context, politicians tend to curry favour with the electorate by responding to their dissatisfaction with promises to make changes in the areas where people's sensitivities are most visible, such as the current electoral-style debate on the functioning of the health care system.<sup>36</sup>

The administrative reforms put services to citizens and budgetary issues at the forefront and relegate their underlying political concepts to the background. This allows politicians to claim that the reforms of "doing more with less," based on "purely administrative" changes, are ideologically neutral<sup>37</sup> and thus have no political consequences.

When you aspire to be the most effective, the most competitive, you have to realize that you cannot be the best in everything. It is impossible. You have to define your main activities and entrust the management of other activities to partners in the private, even in the parapublic sectors who have more expertise than you do in some areas. [It is not the role of the State that is being challenged here], but rather the way it plays its role and the way it delivers the services to the population.<sup>38</sup> [translation]

However, placing so much emphasis on efficiency is far from neutral: the obsession with control, and thus with the evaluation of results, distorts the very nature of public services, which are based on quite a different logic.<sup>39</sup>

Paradoxically, the discourses of reform nevertheless claim to simultaneously reinforce the power of the system's three poles: those of "consumers," administrators (through decentralization and delegation of authority), and politicians (as a result of the control of politics over administration through accountability).<sup>40</sup> There are great tensions between these three groups of actors, and the pressure is greater on those who are responsible for the daily, on-the-ground successes and failures in government services. This is the very ground from which ministers seem to want to distance themselves by placing themselves above the technocratic and bureaucratic reality.<sup>41</sup>

If it is the managers' duty to achieve results, ministers reserve the right and power to intervene, which they use when things go wrong, particularly in the eyes of the public. They can then claim to be the saviours of the situation they had distanced themselves from by giving the managers involved a greater margin for manoeuvre. In the next section we will look at this ambivalence between control and autonomy, which colours the relationships between politicians and managers and tends to have repercussions in the entire hierarchical structure of the administrative machine.

## Reform Strategies

We have established that the sources of citizens' cynicism toward the public service are, among other things, the distortion of their expectations and participation as a result of their transformation into "clients," and the discrediting of the public service for its alleged inability to deliver quality services. We will now analyze the reforms more closely in order to interpret their effects within the public service, while attempting to understand the cynicism of public servants themselves. In using the term "administrative reforms," it is important to make some distinctions among the great variety of measures included in this seemingly monolithic term, and to take into consideration the historical and cultural differences in the societies involved as well as the public sectors in question.

In their comparative study of administrative reforms in 10 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Pollitt and Bouckaert<sup>42</sup> examine the different systems involved and categorize the various strategies used in this wave of reform that has swept over the public sector since the 1980s. As it is impossible to present the details of this analysis here, and in order to better

contextualize the federal and Quebec government reforms being analyzed, we present a summary of the four types of reform strategies identified by these authors in table 1 below.

On the basis of this classification, Pollitt and Bouckaert define four reform strategies, compare them with the traditional State administrative systems, and then analyze their impact on the legitimacy of the governments that implemented them. The modernization strategy,<sup>43</sup> one of the tenets of the federal and Quebec government reforms, has allowed costs to be restrained to a certain extent, but has only moderately increased governments' legitimacy, according to Pollitt and Bouckaert. The marketization strategy is more drastic in terms of its potential to redress public finances. However, when citizens get the impression that fiscal concerns are being given priority over the service ethic, or that public organizations are more concerned with their image and competition than with the reliability of services and their accessibility for the "client," this strategy loses credibility and undermines the legitimacy of those implementing it. We should point out that the marketization and minimization strategies both tend to reduce the distinctiveness of the *public* sector.

With respect to the "mind-set" of these reform strategies in terms of rupture with the past, Pollitt

and Bouckaert make significant distinctions regarding the maintenance or modification of traditional public service values.

Within a modernization strategy, leaders can still appeal to traditional public service values, such as career service, probity, equity, equality and so on. In value terms the basic thrust of this approach is that something valuable and worthwhile is being updated and improved — whereas MARKETIZE and, even more MINIMIZE entail the substitution of a substantially different set of values and, by implication, a blaming and discarding of the older set.<sup>44</sup>

Dwivedi and Gow<sup>45</sup> analyzed the new public management movement in Canada, officially launched with the publication of the White Paper in 1990 and culminating in Public Service 2000. Their first observation was that those implementing this reform claimed to want to innovate without abandoning traditional public service values. According to the typology set out above, this would therefore be a modernizing strategy. However, Dwivedi and Gow found that, despite a modernizing discourse, several of the new values presented conflict with traditional values. Nevertheless, citing Hall and Plumptre, the authors<sup>46</sup> acknowledge the humanist aspect of the reform, which is expressed in the value accorded to human resources, and note the extreme optimism that emerges from the unifying potential of the alignment of values with the goals of the organization.

Once alignment (of values) is achieved, managers are freed from command-and-control type respon-

Reform strategies	Characteristics	Examples
Maintain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status quo</li> <li>• Tighten up traditional controls</li> </ul>	Restrict expenditures, freeze new hirings, run campaigns against waste and corruption, compress the system of administration and law
Modernize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New ways of doing things</li> <li>• Flexibility and rapidity of the administration and of service delivery</li> </ul>	Using private sector practices: Public Service 2000 and La Relève (federal government) and Working to Improve Services for Citizens (Government of Quebec)
Marketize (application of market-type mechanisms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instituting as many market-type mechanisms as possible within the administrative and legal systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition between agencies and public organizations</li> <li>• Search for efficiency and "user responsiveness"</li> <li>• Marketing approach based on public schools</li> <li>• Creation of independent agencies</li> </ul>
Minimize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handing over as many activities as possible to the community or private sector through contracting out or privatization</li> <li>• Increased contacts between the market economy and the political system, unmediated by bureaucratic structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government abandoning certain social services</li> <li>• Contracting out operational activities or handing them over to other levels of government</li> <li>• Using consultants and external firms for program management contracts</li> <li>• Privatization of health care (or "two-tier system")</li> </ul>

sibilities. Employees know precisely what they are working toward...and understand generally what will help the organization achieve its goals and what is tangential and counterproductive.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the values are supposed to have a mobilizing potential, but serve above all to guide and direct action, taking the place of traditional bureaucratic controls. However, it is clear that the confusion between the explicit values underlying the management methods prescribed by the reform and the reaffirmation of traditional public service values instead creates problematic, indeed paradoxical, conditions for public servants. This ambiguity between continuity and rupture is evident in *La Relève*, a more recent federal human resources management reform, as can be seen in a speech made by the Treasury Board president. Having asserted that it is not due to a deficiency in the public service that reform is necessary, in the same breath Minister Robillard went on to describe the public sector's lag behind the private sector in terms of "modern" management theories.

So when we talk about changing the rules governing how we manage our human resources, it is important to stress that we are not doing so because we think the Public Service is deficient. We are making these changes to ensure that our managers have the tools to keep and develop the people who are already in place, and attract the talent we need to meet the demands of an ever-changing world. We are making these changes to ensure that our employees look upon the work they do with a source of pride and accomplishment, and are happy to come to work every day. We are making these changes to ensure that our Public Service continues to provide the best quality programs and services to Canadians.

None of this can occur under the current human resources management framework. It is, quite simply put, outdated, archaic and completely out of step with modern management theories. It is unfortunate that we did not focus earlier on what, in my view, is the number one resource of any government: its human resources. No service industry in the private sector could survive with a human resources system like ours.<sup>48</sup>

In Quebec, the enthusiasm of the instigators of the *Improving Services for Citizens* reform, launched in 2000, is such that some commentators have drawn a parallel between the extent of the proposed changes and those of the Quiet Revolution; as if the proposed rupture with the past were almost worthy of a second "exit from the Great Darkness." The following comments by André Dicaire clearly point to the reform's orientation toward market mechanisms, that is, clear objectives, results-oriented in terms of "goods," and planning worthy of a private sector business plan.

This is a remarkable policy statement. It now remains to deliver the goods. The government must adopt a business plan, that is, determine

the precise goals of the reform, establish clear schedules, and appoint the people in charge who will report on the smooth running of operations.<sup>49</sup> [translation]

Whether the outcome of this reform will be continuity or rupture remains to be seen, considering that the current discourses are united in calling for the state to play a lesser role and to give more prominence to market mechanisms. It is reasonable to question the foundations of this neoliberal shift, which threatens the legacy of Quebec statism that emerged out of the Quiet Revolution. It is criticized by Montpetit and Rouillard, among others:

Far from concluding that the institutional legacy of the Quiet Revolution could not be improved in any way whatsoever...[we emphasize] the necessity to subscribe to a logic that refuses to give priority to the individual over the community, to private savings over public expenditure, and refuses to pit the State against civil society.<sup>50</sup> [translation]

The dominant neoliberal discourse, which openly attacks the bureaucratic dimension — in the Weberian sense of the word — of public policy implementation and State administration, nevertheless encourages us to consider the necessity for this bureaucracy, with respect to the collective values that fostered its development.

Since we refuse to reduce bureaucracy to its dysfunctions and perverse effects, which are, incidentally, real, should we not acknowledge that the legal constraints on which it is based are the best guarantees of equity and equal treatment for all citizens?<sup>51</sup> [translation]

This brings us to the last level of analysis, where we will examine the transformation proposed by the reforms: the reduction of the bureaucratic dimension of the public service.

## A Discourse of Radical Change?

Let us first summarize what we have said so far about the trend in reform discourses, particularly in Anglo-American systems. We said that politicians and their allies in the upper levels of the public service are distancing themselves from their administrations, which they publicly blame for a "poor" past performance. They are attempting to reassure citizens by showing that the situation is "under control." They promise, and have begun, "in-depth" reforms that they claim will lead to a more efficient public service, since they are based on private sector practices.

The bureaucratic and technocratic stereotypes that ridicule the work civil servants do by reducing it to

the dumb application of rules or mind-numbing processes consisting of not much more than form-filling, are hurtful to those for whom dedication to public service was the motivation for their choice of career. This is the viewpoint presented by Leduc when he says

It has never been the practice of the public service to question its efficiency, its capacity to provide quality services to the population and to do so at a lower cost. The current management framework, developed in the 1970s, is based on respect for internal procedures and reinforcement of controls from the Conseil du trésor and the ministère des Finances. What matters is not the service that one provides to citizens, but compliance with rules and standards.<sup>52</sup> [translation]

This opposition between complying with “the rules” and concern about “service” ultimately leads to a separation between the ultimate purpose of State action and the bureaucratic means employed to achieve it. But why should bureaucratic practices be opposed to the traditional values that underlie public administration? On the contrary, integrity, equity, competence, professionalism, impartiality, respect, prudence and continuity are the very values that give meaning to bureaucratic practices and that constitute the *best* means to accomplish them, as Montpetit and Rouillard<sup>53</sup> remind us above. Is it because we cannot accept the necessary “heaviness” involved and the inevitable pernicious effects that we prefer “lighter,” private sector inspired values such as efficiency and effectiveness, flexibility and innovation, risk and change – values that nevertheless generate their fair share of perverse effects? Perhaps we prefer to ignore these effects for the moment, for fear that the very source of the inspiration for the reforms will vanish.

To present the concept of “services for citizens,” and even make it the title of the provincial reform, as a new type of mission, is insulting to long-time public servants who must surely be wondering what values they have been serving up to now!<sup>54</sup> Within the Quebec and federal public services there is a noticeable decline in troop morale,<sup>55</sup> after years of staff cuts and scornful comments about public servants’ alleged inefficiency. It is not surprising, but it should be a cause for concern. On this point, the emphasis in the reform discourse on the necessity to draw on the services of all human resources (for example, see Minister Robillard’s comments on page 12) is somewhat paradoxical. While full of scorn for the past practices of public servants, the discourses are meant at the same time to motivate these individuals, who will once again be expected to put their shoulders to the wheel of change.

Moreover, there is talk of a mandate to be entrusted to the “next generation” because the young people who are going to enter the public service in massive numbers will supposedly bring dynamism of youth to foster change.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence we are witnessing, in organizations and in society in general, the intensification of an intergenerational conflict that is being abusively exploited without regard for the human effects that it may be having, or taking into account the loss of experience and even wisdom (which fortunately often comes with age). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the historical dimension of this generational situation is being denied, and it is being presented, rather, in an ahistorical dynamic of changes in values through rhetoric that is shrouded in vague and ambiguous concepts such as “the new knowledge society,” “globalization” and “the new millennium.” Evidently, the myth of progress dies hard, particularly when times are politically tough. Rather than questioning ourselves seriously, we often prefer to give the impression of advancement or progress.<sup>57</sup>

There is another major ambivalence in the symbolic discourses of reform. While attempting to rekindle public servants’ enthusiasm about the distinctive and noble nature of public service so as to compete with the private sector and attract the next generation of public servants, the discourses also maintain that private sector management methods will mobilize public servants.

Performance bonuses,<sup>58</sup> for example, are a practice borrowed from the private sector to encourage staff commitment to results.<sup>59</sup> Associated with more freedom in the ways of achieving results, this practice is a disturbing potential source of blunders, where the ends can justify the means while the means lose their specific meaning. Yet this risk is never mentioned when the practice is vaunted as an essential incentive to increase performance in the context of the reform of the Quebec administration.

Isn’t there is a contradiction in wanting to revive values that are specific to the public service vocation by emphasizing competition and the lure of a reward instead of co-operation and the spirit of service? What we are seeing in the public service is a phenomenon we described earlier in society in general: the encouragement of individual interests to the detriment of collective interests. The paradox of borrowing approaches from the private sector to revive the distinctiveness of the public service would raise eyebrows among the most confident of optimists. Public servants have always been subject to multiple reforms, changes in discourse and visions in the wake of elections or cabi-

net reshuffles, as well as a high turnover among senior management. This has long justified the necessity – probably beneficial, whatever may be said of its effects – to resist change in favour of continuity. In this sense, it can probably be said that the public administration is made up of people who tend to be skeptical about any process of change. For the same reasons, public servants are probably used to reading between the lines of the political statements and grand pronouncements that are meant to mobilize and unify. Conditions are thus quite ripe for a shift from skepticism to cynicism. By dint of regularly finding themselves in the same situations and facing the same discourses, civil servants end up having to decide for themselves: are the reform discourses the fruit of hypocrisy or innocence? And, whatever the answer, this can lead to cynicism. According to Arpin,

[p]ublic servants have become “cynical” about government initiatives. For years they have been hearing about the improvement of services to citizens and modernization of the management framework, and they don’t really believe in them. They are convinced that they will not happen...They can only happen through mobilization of teams and ministries; not through mobilization around a management philosophy, but rather through projects. It’s not easy to get people who have 20 years of experience to believe in a new management philosophy. You get them to support the projects. And I’ll say it until the day I die: public service employees’ capacity for creation, innovation and production is impressive.<sup>60</sup> [translation]

This comment by a senior public servant helps explain how the hope that young people will facilitate the achievement of the reforms<sup>61</sup> denies the value of the experience and skills of those already there. Considering the synchronization of the reform and the expected “exodus” from the Quebec public service,<sup>62</sup> the reform discourses to a degree exploit and exacerbate an intergenerational conflict in which existing public servants will be made to bear the costs; those who helped build and run the State in the past are presented as a source of resistance to change. This comment also underlines the need to understand human reality and change on the basis of local contexts rather than on the level of management philosophies (very often disguised as political discourse).

### Continuity or Rupture?

Between continuity and rupture confusion reigns, and it is affecting public servants’ work. For example, the much anticipated flexibility, touted as the outcome of

the administrative reforms, is based on public servants taking initiative in the course of their duties. Is it not problematic, then, that this initiative has to be commanded from above, by decree<sup>63</sup>? Surely there is a paradox in being “ordered” to take initiative, to participate, part of the discourse under the omnipresent theme of “empowerment.” In such a context, the only way to truly exercise one’s power to take initiative is to do nothing with it! That is the thrust of the following comment by an observer after the tabling of the Quebec government’s detailed draft bill and before the consultations to examine the legislation on the public service reforms:

The government’s approach is relatively authoritarian...The *Conseil du trésor*’s decision to produce a draft bill before holding consultations with public service managers and employees is indicative of the “authoritarian” approach adopted by political leaders in this process of modernizing the administrative apparatus of the government. Confronted with an act of authority, especially in a general context that is not favourable to great upheaval, people submit, remain indifferent and do not necessarily get on board.<sup>64</sup> [translation]

In this respect, studies of public service reforms oriented toward private sector methods have shown that public servants are very likely to resist initiatives for change when the compatibility gap between the situation to be changed and the proposal for change is too great.<sup>65</sup>

### From Control to Empowerment

Talking about cynicism in the public service inevitably leads down the slippery slope of examining intentions. We should state clearly that our study focuses primarily on the ambivalence in the discourse of reform. It is not our goal to accuse managers or politicians of bad faith or lying. For example, despite the underlying good intentions, the *leitmotiv* of “empowerment” was recognized as one of the most critical elements of the reform.

Edwards succinctly summarizes the basic PS 2000 thesis: the public service would perform better if it were “liberated from excessive constraints and served by streamlined administrative systems.” PS 2000 explicitly contained a strong element of changing the way public servants conceived their roles. Consistent with admonitions from best-selling management gurus of the day, public servants were encouraged to be less driven by rules and more concerned with results. They were to be more innovative, more service-oriented and more people-oriented in managing the workplace. PS 2000 was fueled by the promise of empowerment.<sup>66</sup>

Managers, it must be recognized, are sometimes unaware of their ambivalence with respect to control.



For example, seen from this perspective, employees will perceive discourses on participatory management as empty words if they see, in their day-to-day activities, that the principles being put forward have not in any way changed the prevailing command-and-control, hierarchical culture. It seems that in reaction to the authoritarianism that has long prevailed in management, the managerial process has become suspect and participation has been incorporated into managerial ideology as a gauge of good conscience.<sup>67</sup> Considering this ambivalence between control, born of the traditional values of bureaucracy, and the forms of participatory management that mark the new discourses – empowerment, initiative, risk – one can see cynical detachment as a psychological defence.<sup>68</sup>

The strategic role accorded information technologies in the implementation of the reforms should also be underlined. Their transformation of control processes and the transfer of power are highly incompatible with the desire for flexibility and “debureaucratization.” Under the legitimate cover of progress and the quest for efficiency, the information and communication systems present a potential for control that was until now impossible. It is increasingly obvious that we are seeing a resurgence of Taylorism which, under a new guise, is hitting the public services sector full-tilt, driven by the reforms.<sup>69</sup> The introduction of new information systems based on work flows and the fragmentation of tasks to increase efficiency frequently leads to deskilling of work, because now the system “possesses” the expertise, despite the omnipresent discourse that stresses the importance of human resources.

Furthermore, even when employees comply with the new discourses and the new service management and delivery methods, this does not prevent the emergence of cynicism. On the contrary, say Murphy and Mackenzie Davey,

employees may submit to managers’ assaults of cultural control, but may also resist them by developing subcultures and counter-cultures, expressing cynicism and detachment at managerial attempts to whip up commitment and enthusiasm.<sup>70</sup>

In this sense, even if it means going against the current, we believe that as a management approach, the explicit obligation to respect a number of bureaucratic rules – especially if they can be made more meaningful – is more honest and less harmful to public servants than ordering them to participate or take initiative. This is especially true when it is known that, regardless of whether or not employees

take “initiative,” they will be blamed in one way or another. This is what Minister Robillard was hinting at when she said:

Our current system has little faith in managers and is stifling them with processes and outdated rules. We must encourage them and give them the proper tools to make their own decisions about their employees.

She went on, reacting to the anticipated fears of favouritism elicited by a relaxation of the rules:

Let me state for the record that this will not be tolerated. In other words, it will be zero tolerance! While we firmly believe it is important to put more responsibility in the hands of managers and trust them to do a good job, we are also putting in place accountability frameworks and safeguards to make sure that hiring a new person is first and foremost based on that person’s qualifications.<sup>71</sup> [translation]

Discretionary areas already exist in the work of public servants. Why not identify them and give them their proper place in modes of operation, instead of dreaming up new ones that in reality simply are not discretionary areas? This in itself would be a laudable reform of administrative practices, and a sign of recognition for employees who use their judgment to increase their contribution to the public service. Let us not be naïve: rules and procedures do produce unfortunate abuses. But, to paraphrase Churchill, we should ask whether bureaucracy is not the worst form of organization for the management and delivery of public services...with the exception of all the others!

## Conclusion

In this article we first looked at the ways in which cynicism toward the public service is symptomatic of a contradiction in the role that politics plays.

While policy makers are supposed to define societal projects, the current reform discourse – whose objective is to restore the electors’ confidence in public institutions – is wrongly targeting the public service in the name of a pragmatism that does not acknowledge, and even denies, its ideological allegiances.

We then attempted to show that within the public service, the implementation of these reforms is creating ambivalence in the exercise of power and hierarchical authority. Those who are being called upon to “empower themselves” realize this, and their reaction is the opposite of what is intended. What we are seeing is the “demobilization” of human resources and their withdrawal into a degree of cynicism in a last-ditch attempt to foil this type of “forced mobilization.”

The trends examined here – “the cult of efficiency” that is dominant in reform discourses, to the detriment of the State’s values and purpose<sup>72</sup>; open competition between the public and private sectors over service delivery and management (including human resources management and recruitment and retention of new public servants); the growing predominance of a logic of consumption and personal interest over public service, citizenship and the common interest – undermine the State’s symbolic dimension and identity as well as its social role. The current cynicism as defined in this article is, we believe, indicative of citizens’ and public servants’ awareness of the inconsistencies between the discourses and individual and collective desires, inconsistencies that are difficult for them to accept.

Whether politician, senior public servant, manager or management professor, cynicism concerns everyone. It indicates that we cannot deny the eminently political dimension of these roles without insulting people’s intelligence, especially when, paradoxically, we are calling on that intelligence to take up the new challenges of public service management. For instance, the questions raised in this article echo the current debate about the need to supervise public servants’ behaviour in order to counterbalance the ongoing “debureaucratization.” In current management models we see the transition from the open exercise of bureaucratic authority (rational-legal) to more subtle (but no less instrumental) management methods; in other words, a movement from controlling organizational culture to controlling individual ethics. This attempt to standardize not only people’s behaviour but also their thinking, feelings and their very souls, is liable to provoke cynical resistance.

Questioning the legitimacy of power, regardless of the form it takes, is an act of both intelligence and awareness. Questioning and being skeptical, even resentful, of authority because one is loathe to submit to it is, however, easier than calling virtues and values into question. After all, who can be against virtue, even if it has been used time and again to legitimize the worst practices? The passage from skepticism to cynicism is a passage from legitimate questioning, which is healthy in a democratic regime and in management, to a justifiable feeling of betrayal. Cynicism is disturbing because it strips us of our pretenses, but, however distressing it may be, it also keeps us alert.

## Notes

I would like thank Éric Montpetit, Geneviève Bouchard, Gladys Symons and Daniel Lozeau. I would also like to thank the reviewers, whose pertinent comments helped to improve the article.

- 1 A general survey of articles published in *The Economist* over the past few years reveals that this phenomenon is quite widespread, for example, in Great Britain, where Prime Minister Tony Blair himself has openly denounced the cynicism and apathy of citizens and is making them the target of political action. See, for example, the following article in the September 30, 2000, issue: "Confidence or cynicism? That is Tony Blair's choice for Britain, but it is also Britain's choice about Tony Blair."
- 2 Based on the evolution of the phenomenon during the last 25 years, and despite the widespread – and serious – erosion of public confidence that they have observed in several trilateral democracies (including Canada), Putnam *et al.* (2000) do not, nevertheless, conclude that democracy is threatened in the sense that Crozier *et al.* (1975) had suggested in *The Crisis of Democracy*. On the whole, they note an increase in support for democratic values and are optimistic about the possibility that these values will become deeply rooted on the basis of the stability of the last 50 years.
- 3 Dwivedi and Gow (1999, pp. 149-150) note that the Canadian Union of Public Employees have expressed fears that jobs are being deskilled as a result of increasing use of contract employees. See also Garvey (1993) on the relations and interface between public agencies and contractual employees, though in the American context.
- 4 In this sense, skepticism marks the entry into modernity, through the separation between the Church and science, the former being under the yoke of faith and the latter praising doubt. At the same time, with the separation between Church and state came the passage from an authority based on tradition to a rational-legal authority on which bureaucracy rests.
- 5 Durozoi and Roussel (1990, p. 299).
- 6 Mourral and Millet (1995, under "cynisme").
- 7 By legal-rational character, we mean the "Rational-Legal Bureaucratic Authority" identified by Max Weber, which rests on the following elements:
  - authority vested in the offices of the State, rather than the individual
  - impersonal and formal rules, regulations that have been legally established
  - written documents, files to record decisions and actions
  - specialized training; appointment criteria
  - fixed salary determined according to the position in the hierarchy
  - career (one's position within an office is a full-time vocation)
  - vocation (each office is designated a specialized area of competence)
- free contact (based on technical expertise and qualifications)  
See Dickerson, Flanagan and Nevitte (1995).
- 8 Encyclopaedia universalis, corpus 6, under "cynisme."
- 9 Obviously, cynicism may also serve as an excuse for refusing to become involved; it is then, contrary to what we are proposing here, secondary to this refusal and constitutes an a posteriori rationalization that serves more to conceal its intentions than to defend or protect itself.
- 10 The psychodynamic perspective is a psychoanalytic approach which, unlike the Freudian approach, is not based on the psychic structure and developmental stages that one goes through, but rather on the fundamental psychic mechanisms that remain present throughout life and can be (re)activated through events and experiences. The Kleinian Object-Relations school is part of this approach.
- 11 A number of studies support the idea that, in occupational fields such as education and health, professionals who are enthusiastic and have a high service ideal are likely to experience significant disappointments. Therefore, to protect themselves, they have to reduce their aspirations and commitment so that they can carry out their work in conditions in which they have the impression that they cannot have the impact on service quality that they would like to have. See Miech and Elder Jr. (1996) as well as Cherniss (1991).
- 12 Inglehart (1997).
- 13 Inglehart (1997, pp. 78-79).
- 14 Inglehart (1997, p. 87).
- 15 For example, Mongeau's (1998) invitation to adopt a lifestyle that is strikingly different from that encouraged by the consumer society.
- 16 Zemke (2000, pp. 101-102; 107-108).
- 17 For a more in-depth analysis of the changes in values observed in the 1980s in Canada, see Nevitte (1996).
- 18 On this issue, see O'Neil (2001).
- 19 Putnam *et al.* (2000).
- 20 Gow and Guertin (1996-1997).
- 21 Dwivedi and Gow (1999, p. 146).
- 22 Inglehart (1997, pp. 178-179).
- 23 Comments by Roland Arpin, Director of the Musée de la civilisation, reported by Leduc (1999, p. Z5). Arpin was a key figure in Quebec's administrative reforms. He was assistant deputy minister of education and of cultural affairs, and he was also secretary of the Treasury Board.
- 24 Stein (2001).
- 25 Regarding the different relations between the citizen and the State, the text of the federal reform states as one of its goals: "providing effective and responsive service to clients – those who benefit from a Government of Canada initiative, whatever it may be" (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2000, p. 12).
- 26 Schneider and Ingram (1997, p. 81).
- 27 Aucoin (1995, p. 202).
- 28 Aucoin (1995, p. 199)
- 29 Symons and Deschênes (2000, p. 8).

- 30 Symons and Deschênes (2000, p. 11).
- 31 Aucoin (2001).
- 32 Leduc (1999, p. Z2).
- 33 Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000).
- 34 Leduc (1999, p. Z2).
- 35 Pierre (1995, p. 3), quoted in Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, p. 134).
- 36 On this point of the political advantage derived from reforms, Aucoin (2001) emphasizes the distinction of the Canadian reform which, with the political leadership seeing little advantage in it, was the result of “an initiative conceived and entirely driven by the Public Service” with the aim of “letting the managers manage.” In the other Westminster systems, accountability was central and was aimed at forcing managers to better manage their resources and solve the “bureaucratic problem” which was an obstacle to the full exercise of political leadership.
- 37 Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, p. 136).
- 38 Comments made by André Dicaire, reported in Leduc (1999, p. Z3). Dicaire has worked in the Quebec public service for 30 years. He has occupied key functions such as deputy minister of health and social services and secretary of the Treasury Board. He is now secretary general of the Executive Council. The comments in square brackets were added by Leduc.
- 39 On this point, Symons and Deschênes (2000) point out the contrast between economic rationality and Weberian-style substantive rationality.
- 40 In Quebec, the *Loi sur l'imputabilité des sous-ministres et des dirigeants des organismes publics* (Act respecting the accountability of deputy ministers and chief executive officers of public bodies) was adopted in 1993 and amended in 1995. At the federal level, accountability has been implemented since 1986.
- 41 Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, p. 137).
- 42 Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, p. 136).
- 43 It should be noted that as a reform strategy, the concept of modernization is used by these authors in the usual sense that is similar to the idea of “improvement” and does not refer to the concept of modernization used to characterize the Quiet Revolution. This latter concept involved moving the State into the era of modernity, in particular through the separation of politics from the Church and the transition to rational-legal authority.
- 44 Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, p. 180).
- 45 Dwivedi and Gow (1999).
- 46 See their detailed analysis of the values expressed in the reports of the Public Service 2000 working groups. Dwivedi and Gow (1999, p. 142).
- 47 Hall and Plumptre (1991) cited in Dwivedi and Gow (1999, p. 144).
- 48 Robillard (2002).
- 49 Comments made by André Dicaire, reported in Leduc (1999, p. Z3).
- 50 Montpetit and Rouillard (2001, p. 139).
- 51 Montpetit and Rouillard (2001, p. 137).
- 52 Leduc (1999, p. Z2).
- 53 Montpetit and Rouillard (2001).
- 54 Murphy and MacKenzie Davey (2002) showed that reforms, which are based on the affirmation of trivial values, are, contrary to their anticipated mobilizing potential, demoralizing for the staff.
- 55 For example, see Government of Canada (1999).
- 56 Leduc (1999, p. Z5).
- 57 Murphy and MacKenzie Davey (2002).
- 58 For an overview of federal practices of variable compensation based on performance, see “Performance Management Program Guidelines for Chief Executive Officers of Crown Corporations” at [http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=PCOsSecretariats&Sub=mpsp&doc=pmp\\_hcc\\_guidelines\\_e.htm](http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=PCOsSecretariats&Sub=mpsp&doc=pmp_hcc_guidelines_e.htm)
- 59 It is also revealing that human resources counsellors ask private companies that seek to retain their staff to release their best employees so that they can contribute voluntarily to a cause that is dear to them, since they can hardly be content with working for money only! See Whitters (2001).
- 60 Comments made by Roland Arpin, director of the Musée de la civilisation, reported in Leduc (1999, p. Z5).
- 61 Leduc (1999, p. Z5).
- 62 Comité de travail sur l'intégration des jeunes à la fonction publique québécoise (2001) (Task force on the integration of the young into the Quebec public service).
- 63 The instigators of reforms emphasize the importance of human resources and appeal to employees to undertake to guarantee success. However, at both the federal and provincial levels, the reforms were initiated by a legislative process in which these very same “resources” were not invited to take part. Dwivedi and Gow (1999), in the federal case; in the provincial case, see Arpin, quoted in Leduc (1999, p. 25).
- 64 Comments made by Roland Arpin, director of the Musée de la civilisation, reported in Leduc (1999, p. Z5).
- 65 Lozeau *et al.* (2002).
- 66 Clark (2001). John Edwards was the director of PS 2000.
- 67 Lapierre (1998).
- 68 Murphy and MacKenzie Davey (2002).
- 69 Duval (1996).
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# From Cynicism to Organizational Disillusion: New Public Management as Confusion Factor

Christian Rouillard

Legislative change alone will not allow us to attain our objectives. Cultural change is needed too — change that begins with leadership and is reinforced by action.

Mel Cappe<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Some believe that since its inception in the early 1980s new public management (NPM) has effected a renewal in managerial philosophy that has given rise to new ways of thinking and new practices within Canada's federal public service. NPM certainly appears stronger than ever nowadays, and it has a profound and abiding effect on major identity-building, symbolic, direction-setting management texts from which are derived planned changes<sup>2</sup> aimed at renewing and modernizing the public service. Though its relevance is now largely recognized by the academic community and civil servants alike, NPM is nonetheless at times called into question and has even been met with opposition which, in its most extreme expression, could lead to its rejection and outright dismissal.

The discussion developed in the following pages follows this line of thought. It suggests that, over the past decade, managerial theory and practice in the public service of Canada have been profoundly affected by NPM and are fraught with basic inherent contradictions that have been given expression in the gradual emergence of an organizational culture of disillusion. Indeed, since the publication of *Public Service 2000*, whose recommendations largely fell on deaf ears, major management policies upon which the intended changes are based have not led to the creation of new spaces for empowerment; on the contrary, they have further subjugated those who participate in the asymmetrical exercise of authority and further ossified the principle of hierarchy already present in the bureaucratic environment.

In the following pages we shall deal with the issues of organizational leadership, the transition from the old to the new psychological contract, as well as organizational cultures, ever numerous and distinctive, to explain the emergence and subsequent development of an organizational culture of disillusion. We shall also observe that this disillusion is not to be confused with the cynicism to which is commonly ascribed the lack of enthusiasm or commitment and even haphazard participation in the federal public service. Finally, we shall extend our critical discussion beyond the federal public service to the larger discipline of public management and argue, from both theoretical and normative perspectives, that there is a need for a renewal of management philosophy.

## NPM and the Search for Equilibrium between Managerial and Legal Rationalities

**N**PM is a managerial and political movement aimed at reforming public administration practices by replacing the bureaucratic organizational principles of the Weberian model with dominant management tenets and teachings of the private sector. The federal public service of Canada is

markedly influenced by NPM at present. Though there is a lack of agreement on the overall characteristics of NPM in the extensive literature devoted to the field,<sup>3</sup> it can be distinguished from traditional public administration by its focus, primary mode of operation, socio-professional characteristics, organizational cultures and politico-administrative structures (see table 1). That said, this way of distinguishing NPM from traditional public administration tends to caricature the features of the latter and unduly play up the claims of uniqueness and enrichment as well as the tangible empirical accomplishments of the former.<sup>4</sup> In other words, NPM appears all the more innovative and modern the more obsolete and passé traditional public administration is perceived to be.<sup>5</sup> NPM emphasizes intrapreneurship, creativity, flexibility, risk-taking, managerial freedom and a client-focus as means of achieving organizational effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately improving the quality of government services.

The dynamic relationship developing between the teachings and precepts of NPM on the one hand and the constraints and requirements of traditional public administration on the other may be seen as a search for equilibrium between managerial and legal rationalities. Such rationalities differ in the following respects: the legitimacy of legal rationality refers to compliance and conformity with procedures, whereas that of managerial rationality is related to their effectiveness/efficiency; the former emphasizes means and stability,

Table 1  
Components of New Public Management and Traditional Public Administration

	New public management (managerial rationality)	"Traditional" public administration (legal rationality)
Focus	Clients (individuals and groups) Micro-relationships	Citizens and communities Collective relationships
Preferred means of development	Program management and evaluation Quality Privatization Employability Accountability for results	Public policy and design Social equity Procedural compliance Career orientation Procedural accountability
Socio-professional characteristics	Intrapreneur (action) Creativity	Analyst (reflection) Probity
Organizational cultures	Managerial freedom Flexibility Risk-taking Customer service Political/administrative dichotomy	Administrative prudence Bureaucracy (hierarchy) Transparency Public interest Political/administrative continuum
Politico-administrative structures	Public service as organizational units Simple and pared-down units Decentralization and autonomy	Public service as a large institution Large, complex department Centralization and co-ordination

Source: Based on Mohamed Charih and Lucie Rouillard, "The New Public Management." In *New Public Management and Public Administration in Canada/Nouveau management public et administration publique au Canada*, eds. Mohamed Charih and Arthur Daniels. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1997, p. 31.

while the latter considers goals and change to be paramount; legal rationality is based on analytical, linear and deductive reasoning, while managerial rationality is synthetic, systemic and teleological; the former considers the administrative apparatus as a closed system, while the latter views it as an open one; the former relates authority to a unilateral hierarchical order, while that of the latter is linked to delegation, incentives and negotiation; finally, legal rationality exerts control over rules, while managerial rationality exerts control over results.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the distinctions mentioned above, it is important to note that each rationality can only truly be understood in relation to the other and that they both characterize all politico-administrative activity to varying degrees according to the space and time. Thus, the significant advancement of the managerial rationality within the Canadian federal public sector, whose pace was stepped up in the 1990s, should not be perceived as the substitution of rigid and backward-looking reasoning and practices, those of traditional public administration, for more flexible and innovative ones, those of NPM. It should rather be interpreted as a dynamic manifestation of tensions between these two rationalities. In other words, the rise of managerial rationality and the decline of legal rationality are indicative of a shift away from the emphasis on the administrative principles of compliance and efficiency.

It should also be observed that tensions between legal and managerial rationalities are accompanied by various conflicting interpretations of the State/civil-society dynamic and different conceptions of the space that public and private spheres should and must occupy, as witnessed by academic treatises on the similarities and differences between public and private management.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the search for equilibrium among differing – sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting – managerial values, among various sectoral interests in civil society, as well as between respect for individual rights and freedoms and concern for social cohesion and solidarity is the very purpose of government activity. The gradual rise of NPM and the decline of traditional public administration heralds the achievement not of a new equilibrium, but rather of a relative and temporary triumph of managerial rationality over legal rationality (as can be seen in table 1).

## The Primacy of Seminal Managerial Texts on Identity-Building and Symbolic Direction-Setting: The Search for Organizational Leadership

We have chosen to review seminal, identity-building and symbolic direction-setting managerial texts<sup>8</sup> as they include components of the ongoing exercise to redefine and modernize the federal public service of Canada. While the dissemination of these managerial texts is not in itself problematic in complex bureaucratic organizations such as those in the federal public service (central agencies, departments, service organizations, Crown corporations, etc.), their common interpretation and acceptance remains uncertain. Multiple actors and organizational environments give rise to multiple interpretations. The complexity of this discourse precludes any claim that ours is a definitive interpretation. Rather, we propose here to present a critical review of major managerial policy documents. We do not claim that the case we make in the following pages is empirical in nature; our aim is to enrich, from both theoretical and normative perspectives, the debate among academics and practitioners on the relevance of NPM in the context of the renewal of the federal public service of Canada.

When we refer to seminal, symbolic, direction-setting and identity-building managerial texts, we mean management frameworks, including *La Relève* and *Results for Canadians*, as well as the prime minister's annual reports on Canada's civil service, produced by the Office of the Privy Council pursuant to the Civil Service Employment Act. In addition to clearly stating major theoretical, conceptual and ideological parameters, these texts collectively serve as a frame of reference for other pronouncements made by various organizations within the public service.

In all seminal managerial texts, leadership is considered one of the paramount tools for redefining organizational culture, viewed as homogeneous and consensual, and for encouraging "the development of a management culture that supports initiative and builds an exemplary workplace."<sup>9</sup> In keeping with NPM values of intrapreneurship, managerial freedom, flexibility and risk-taking (see table 1), such organizational leadership in some ways buttresses the work of modernizing the federal public service<sup>10</sup> insofar as it addresses managers and nonmanagers alike,



regardless of hierarchical level. Thus, a Privy Council report to the prime minister states:

A leader is the person who guides the efforts of a group toward a result beyond its current reach. Leaders are not necessarily managers — they can come from anywhere in the organization. And no leaders lead all the time. They know how to follow the lead of others and rely on the strength of others. Human qualities — not position or title — make a leader. The signs of outstanding leadership are found among the followers, for without them there would be no leaders.<sup>11</sup>

Considered in these texts to be “the foundation of a strong public service,”<sup>12</sup> the exercise of leadership within the federal public service of Canada is understood to be a set of individual skills and competencies which, if well suited to a particular environment, increase group performance by, for example, building a climate of confidence.<sup>13</sup>

While organizational leadership is inextricably linked to public management of which it is sometimes the complement or the substitute (although this last term is sometimes tautological), the prevailing interpretation of the concept refers primarily to particular socio-psychological characteristics and individual traits that enable those who possess them to play a central and distinctive role, especially in an environment of ongoing redefinition and planned change. Although this dominant interpretation of leadership implies that it is an activity or process that, as such, anyone can perform, the present conceptual clarification is indicative of persistent semantic confusion. Indeed, while works by the Leadership Network and the Canadian Centre for Management Development<sup>14</sup> emphasize that leadership is “an activity or process and not a personality trait,” they also explain that it is a set of “attributes, skills, attitudes and characteristics”<sup>15</sup> while at the same time espousing the views of the Canadian Public Service Commission, according to which leadership is a set of 14 cognitive, managerial, relational and personal competencies.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of the commonly held view that leadership should not be confused with management, the former being to change what the latter is to stability,<sup>17</sup> the two are often embedded in dynamics that reduce leadership to a mere component of management. In simple terms, a manager, whether in the public or private sector, must be a leader. What, therefore, are these personal, static attributes that, some claim, are inseparable from their possessor, that transform him or her into a leader and on which leadership is grounded?

While it remains more often than not undefined<sup>18</sup> — which is somewhat surprising for a subject of such strategic importance — leadership can essentially be understood in terms of what makes a leader, namely, an individual capable of grasping and communicating the meaning of events as well as the increasing complexity of the organization’s environment. Leaders must also have the ability to build and consolidate the confidence of their followers by appealing not only to their intellects, but, even more importantly, to their hearts and even their consciences.<sup>19</sup> More precisely, a leader must possess the following attributes:

- 1) Helicopterability — the ability to see the whole picture in both time and space.
- 2) Good judgment — the ability to make sound decisions based on facts, experience and intelligence.
- 3) Imagination — the ability to be creative and see opportunities beyond the obvious ones.
- 4) Analytical ability — the deductive intelligence to draw conclusions in a logical sequence from available facts.
- 5) Efficiency — the ability to make decisions of crucial importance to the enterprise with high productivity.
- 6) Ability to win trust and inspire respect.<sup>20</sup>

Presented as socio-psychological skills, these subjective attributes are supposed to illustrate that “each individual leader acts in a certain way and displays a distinct set of character traits and behaviour patterns,”<sup>21</sup> whence the highly general nature of this definition. Though it is extremely rhetorical, the main problem with this definition is on another level. In addition to referring to an indeterminate set of static, personal attributes, it groups together characteristics selected on the basis of the personality of a manager in charge of a project or organizational unit that is considered to be productive or innovative. In other words, despite the claims of a high value added and the apparent sophistication of certain discourses, the logic on which they are based is at best doubtful and at worst circuitous, in that it is based on the rule that “one observes leaders’ behaviour, and then tries to draw empirical conclusions from their actions.”<sup>22</sup> This would presuppose that one must recognize organizational leaders from the get-go, that one can identify them from among the ever disparate group of human beings that make up the organization, and one can then determine the nature of leadership from their behaviour and acts. If claims of universality and timelessness are somewhat relativized, that of transferability is fully maintained.

Briefly stated, the dominant discourse suggests that leadership is simply what leaders demonstrate through their actions. But it is also the inevitable product of the ethical and political preferences – implicit and unavowed – of the author/researcher, who in this way constructs his or her own object of study. In this respect:

While large parts of leadership research are implicit in political bias – the strengthening of asymmetrical social relations and the construction of social relations alongside a leader/follower dichotomy – parts of it are close to [being] openly propagandistic. Sometimes the self-aggrandizing reports of managers – in (often transparent) tests, questionnaires or interviews – are uncritically reproduced as research results... Also a lot of research on charisma tends to uncritically reproduce strongly positive images of the heroes – partly recycled in popular media, including the heroes' book about themselves (Carlzon, Iacocca) – and sometimes comes close to providing propaganda for certain mass media figures and express a worshipping attitude to charismatic leadership.<sup>23</sup>

As suggested by the above, the presence of leaders involves that of disciples, assistants or subordinates and therefore encourages the maintenance and reinforcement of the asymmetry of intra- and interhierarchical power relationships rather than calling them into question. In *La Relève, Results for Canadians* and other seminal managerial texts produced by the federal public service, leadership is understood to be individual participation in the process of organizational change brought about, that is, designed and built, by managerial elites. Viewed in this light – through inter- and intrahierarchical responsibility/empowerment – the tangible exercise of leadership amounts to a collective acquiescence to the macro-managerial vision, the objectives and challenges, even the values and interests as defined by these managerial elites. Paradoxically, while the leader is antinomy to the disciple or the assistant, this leadership is clearly understood to be the preferential use of individual subservience or subjugation to the hierarchical power structure. This is all the more paradoxical as it occurs in an organizational environment that emphasizes increased involvement and empowerment. It may therefore be argued that:

[M]any of the changes involving empowerment may be seen as an attempt to shift blame and responsibility for organizational problems from the top management to other organizational members without a corresponding change in actual power relationships. Alternatively, implementing empowerment programs may also be viewed by other organization members as an attempt to co-opt them by creating the illusion that a decrease in top management control and

an increase in self-monitoring is equivalent to equal participation in decision-making processes (illusory power equalization).<sup>24</sup>

In other words, this paradox also entails an additional problem, even a threat: the individual empowerment and accountability on which this consensual leadership is based may constitute a roundabout, unavowed and even unwitting strategy to increase the accountability, and thus the potential blame, of participants without a commensurate increase in their formal authority or creating opportunities for the real exercise of critical leadership. Thus, the pre-eminent position of consensual leadership as a preferred source of individual empowerment might well result, not in more, but less involvement in the planned change. This enigmatic phenomenon of empowerment therefore marginalizes and excludes its beneficiaries from the strategic decision-making process, which remains the prerogative of the upper echelons of the civil service. The dynamic of marginalization and exclusion reached a pinnacle in the Canadian federal public service with the downsizing exercise of the second half of the 1990s, the effects of which included a definitive redefinition of the informal and tacit relationship between the individual and the organization in the form of the psychological contract.

## Breaking the Ethico-Political Contract between the Individual and the Organization, or Making the Transition from the Old to the New Psychological Contract

Those who have an interest in workforce reduction maintain that symptoms of the survivor syndrome<sup>25</sup> appear when the downsizing process breaches the ethico-political contract, commonly called the “psychological” contract, linking the individual to the organization, and substitutes a new one that is as different as it is unexpected.<sup>26</sup> Although this dynamic of rupture did not cause the survivor syndrome to appear and develop,<sup>27</sup> it may nonetheless be a perverse effect of workforce reduction. However, such a dynamic can only come into play logically if individuals view their relationship with the organization in a long-term perspective and, in this respect, enjoy guarantees of continuity and stability.

The psychological contract is commonly defined as a set of reciprocal, quite often informal, interpretative and tacit expectations, promises and obligations

between individuals and their organizations.<sup>28</sup> In the situation under review, the ethico-political or psychological contract may be summarized as follows. In exchange for his/her full and complete involvement in the organization's best operation, the organization offers the individual the opportunity to gradually build a career within its ranks, satisfactory and/or superior work leading to periodic promotions, and new challenges and responsibilities. However, breaching the ethico-political contract cannot be cited as the cause of the survivor syndrome where such a contract does not exist. The Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics highlights this point by suggesting that this perceived breach of the psychological contract between the individual and the organization is based on a misunderstanding of the contract's real meaning.<sup>29</sup> According to task force experts, workforce reduction is not a breach of contract for the simple reason that no clause

The traditional contract between federal public servants and the government has been based on a commitment to provide employment security within the Public Service. Changes in recent years have led the government to revisit certain elements of this employment contract, while maintaining a commitment to the historical underpinning of the contract. The changing nature and role of government will inevitably lead to other changes in working conditions in the public sector.<sup>31</sup>

The existence of a psychological contract based on such a shared belief (some have no qualms in referring to it as a "basic bargain,"<sup>32</sup> thus evoking its fundamental nature) is not only accurate from a legal standpoint, but was also recognized as such by the head of the public service in one of her most significant symbolic, direction-setting and identity-building documents and by those who are studying the issue of job security in the federal public sector.<sup>33</sup> This psychological contract, seen as a basic and formally sanctioned instrument, is

Table 2 Innovation Dynamic of Commonalities Between the New Psychological Contract and NPM	
Values	caution/stability → creativity/flexibility
Strategies	centralization/homogeneity → decentralization/heterogeneity
Organizational metaphor	mechanical → organic
Nature of management	paternalism → empowerment
Employee's attitude	dependency → autonomy/intrapreneurship
Individual/organization relational dynamic	career orientation → contractualization or long-term → short-term
Locus of control/evaluation	compliance with procedures → achievement of results

precluded such action. They believe that the size of the public service in a representative democracy is a corollary of the defined roles and functions of the State and, as such, it remains the prerogative of elected government. Simply put, that which never existed cannot be breached.

The above interpretation is as surprising as it is problematic, not only because it was not shared by the Supreme Court of Canada when it was asked to rule on the "Work Force Adjustment Directive" of 1991<sup>30</sup> but because it puts paid to the common understanding of job security in the federal public service, to which most civil servants gave credence. The clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the Cabinet explicitly recognized the existence of the psychological contract, going so far as to call it traditional, thus leaving no doubt as to its formality:

called into question not so much by workforce reductions per se as by a pre-existing, deep-rooted phenomenon that is part of a much more long-term dynamic than staff cutbacks. We refer, of course, to contracting out.<sup>34</sup>

As suggested by the innovation dynamic set out in table 2, the new psychological contract between the individual and the organization following workforce reduction is perfectly in tune with the spirit and the letter of NPM. Indeed, both claim to effect a substitution of creativity/flexibility for caution/stability and of the organic metaphor for the mechanical metaphor,<sup>35</sup> the achievement of results for compliance with processes and contractualization for career orientation, in other words, a move from a long-term to a short-term relational dynamic between the individual and the organization. Thus, intrapreneurship, autonomy, mana-

gerial freedom, flexibility and empowerment, among others, are so many shared component parts of the new psychological contract and NPM.

In this respect, table 2 clearly illustrates the common innovation dynamic underpinning the components and highlights the conversion of strategies, values, vision and interests linking the new psychological contract and new public management. These components are also related on a complementary level or may even be interchangeable, as the new contract is embedded in some respects in the larger whole that is NPM. The fundamental difference between them is therefore one of inclusion. The new psychological contract, like the related concept of job contractualization, must be viewed as an element of NPM. Given that the development and dissemination of NPM in the form of a strategic managerial project predates workforce reduction by several years,<sup>36</sup> the perceived breach of the ethico-political contract between the individual and the organization goes back to the former and not to workforce reduction as such.

Our intention here is certainly not to suggest that staff reduction is free from perverse effects or unwanted consequences, but rather to propose that it is all the more significant and problematic, for both management and individual members of the organization, because it is part of the same continuity dynamic as NPM. More specifically, workforce reduction is part of various organizational changes, including those that occur over a period of time, those that were thrown out or never realized, as well as those that were anticipated. In this respect, one of the perverse effects of downsizing is the attendant work restructuring that produces a considerable increase in civil servants' workloads, as shown in the 1999 *Survey of Public Service Employees*.<sup>37</sup> The report of the COSO Subcommittee on Workforce Well-Being, the body responsible for survey follow-up, could not have been clearer in this regard:

[T]he evidence we have reviewed leads us to believe that workload is the primordial issue affecting the quality of life in the Public Service of Canada. The survey results indicate that almost one-in-two respondents who said that the workload is not reasonable also tend to have substantially more negative views of their future career and their workplace.<sup>38</sup>

Such observations highlight individual perceptions and are of particular interest for the critical analysis set out above, inasmuch as they underscore the phenomenon of civil servants' pessimistic take on their future career, and thus demonstrate the importance of

grasping the complex issue of the perverse effects associated with NPM through a long-term temporal dynamic. This critical interpretation is also based on an understanding of organizational cultures that differs markedly from the one claimed explicitly or at times implicitly by NPM, which is perfectly in tune with the letter and the spirit of the third type of management described by Charih.<sup>39</sup> This type of management was introduced in the federal public service at the beginning of the 1990s. It emphasizes the importance of individuals and groups rather than structures and processes, as well as leadership and accountability.

The above reading of organizational cultures, dominant in managerial studies, values consensual participation while discouraging critical participation, itself considered an obstacle to co-operation and understanding, the foundation of planned change. This view emphasizes organizational culture as a managerial exercise for manipulating and controlling norms, values, beliefs, as well as attitudes and behaviours. Not only does this simplistic stance implicitly deny the indomitable social nature of any corporate process, it also displays shortsightedness, even ignorance regarding the temporal dimension from which planned change in complex organizations must be contemplated. Organizational cultures are long term in nature and are based on our interpretations of previous processes of change as well as assumptions about future ones. They can only be understood, ultimately, through a radical break with the instrumental, consensual and apolitical view propounded by the major managerial policy documents within Canada's federal public service.

## On the Nature of the Managerial Problem: Alienation, Cynicism or Organizational Disillusion?

**T**hough the concept of alienation derives from Hegel and is therefore removed from the prevailing doctrine of managerial studies, it is taken up by Feuerbach, who emphasizes its religious component, then by Marx, who makes use of it initially to explain the perverse effects of paid work in the industrial environment of late-nineteenth-century Western democracies. In simple terms, early Marxist literature postulates that workers, by selling their ability to work, are isolated from the work itself both as a process (means) and a product (result). From this per-

spective, alienation refers to both an economic and a psychological dispossession prior to giving way to the notion of exploitation to better convey the social relations of production and ideology. According to a contemporary interpretation, organizational alienation may essentially be perceived as a major loss of sense of purpose by an individual belonging to an organization, who henceforth only identifies tenuously, or not at all, with his or her duties or responsibilities, as well as with the organization's major objectives and challenges.<sup>40</sup> The notion may be described fundamentally as follows when considered as an individual socio-psychological state.

Work alienation reflects an attitude or a condition in which an employee cares little about work, approaches work with little energy, and works primarily for extrinsic rewards...Work alienation is defined as a generalized cognitive state of psychological identification with work insofar as work is perceived to have the potential to satisfy one's salient needs and expectations.<sup>41</sup>

Work alienation is reactive and therefore dynamic in nature, and while in its simplest expression it encompasses only the cognitive dimension of the individual, it must not be confused with a near immutable or static character or personality trait. It is therefore likely that the third type of management would seek to eliminate it through an organizational culture that is both instrumental and homogeneous and favours convergence through consensus.

Cynicism, a concept we owe to the ancient Greek philosopher Anisthenes, himself a disciple of Socrates, must be distinguished from socio-psychological alienation inasmuch as it is grounded in the relative demonization of human nature and individual acts as well as politico-administrative institutions in general. Within an organizational context, this notion of demonization also applies to managerial norms, rules, conventions, roles and functions, as well as to hierarchical authority and planned change initiatives.<sup>42</sup> When viewed accordingly, organizational cynicism may be considered an obstacle that is particularly difficult to overcome for the third type of management, ever desirous to increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency through individual responsibility and collective involvement. The notion has been defined as follows, with particular emphasis on organizational behaviourism:

Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to

disparaging and critical behaviours toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect.<sup>43</sup>

Organizational cynicism is therefore, like alienation, an individual attitude or socio-psychological state. Further, it refers to the shared perception of an abiding lack of integrity within the organization and hence among managerial elites and, at a higher level, is dependent on the demonization of these same elites. As is the case with alienation, cynicism is assumed to be dynamic, inasmuch as it may not be reduced to a personality trait, but rather, is linked to the tangible and ever personal experience of the individual belonging to the organization. When perceived in this light, and despite the challenge faced by the third type of management, the latter is capable of quashing and overcoming such organizational cynicism.

For its part, the organizational culture of disillusion rejects the exclusively reactive nature of alienation and the explicit demonization of organizational cynicism. It also denies their common dimension as a socio-psychological state or attitude as well as the possibility that it can be set right through a managerial exercise of control and manipulation. An organizational culture of disillusion is akin to an incremental and ongoing social process, which itself refers to an organizational construction in which management and individual members take part in a manner that is as skewed as it is indirect and involuntary. It leads, through a series of managerial projects and initiatives, to a growing gap between the individual and the organization, at the emotional, cognitive, political and symbolic levels.

In the particular case of the federal public service of Canada, the causes of the corporate culture of disillusion are twofold: firstly, the contradiction between inclusionary statements and exclusionary managerial practices and, secondly, the high level of confusion caused by the principal components of the seminal managerial texts. Those who claim they are striving to develop a new collective identity exclusive to the public service and distinct from those of the private sector and traditional public administration put as much effort, though implicitly and unavowedly, into promoting – at times to the point of sanctifying – managerial values hitherto restricted to private companies.<sup>44</sup> Whereas on the one hand they attest at times to the specificity of the public sector, on the other hand they advocate that it emulate the private sector, triggering confusion while claiming to seek a balance. With this in mind, it is at best saintly, at worst ill-advised, to suggest that:

From the point of view of these values, it is most important for the future that we learn to use and take advantage of private sector terms without being captured by them, or allowing them to supplant the key concepts or principles that underlie public service.<sup>45</sup>

Seminal managerial texts play up the collective intelligence of civil servants and its instrumental value for modernizing public administration. However, even though some claim the added value of the public service can only derive from this collective intelligence,<sup>46</sup> NPM links this intelligence, through the values to which it refers, to ongoing emulation of the practices of the private sector. One might ask whether it is at the very least contradictory to participate in the development and promotion of a collective identity specific to the public sector whose defining elements are akin to those of the private sector; whether promoting such public sector specificity ultimately promotes that of the private sector. Given that NPM implicitly makes less distinct or erases the boundary between the two sectors, the public sector's true specificity, namely, the defining elements it does not share with the private sector, is reduced to a negative collective identity from which it is necessary to free oneself to better participate in modernizing public administration.

The juxtaposition of elements drawn from managerial and legal rationalities, to wit, the emphasis placed on the market values of the private sector on the one hand and the democratic values of the public sector on the other, does not help to reduce the confusion that mars the reasoning and structure of the federal public service. On the contrary, the relentless quest for a balance between the two rationalities is a way for management to avoid dealing with the issue more than a way to see clearly through the confusion. That said, it would not be enough to conclude, while recognizing the potential for conflict, that:

The true role of public servants is not just to serve "customers" but also to balance the interests and preserve the rights of "citizens"...In summary, renewal of the public service does not mean choosing between the "traditional" and "new" values. Rather, serving the public interest, in some instances, means finding the appropriate balance between them.<sup>47</sup>

Although initially it may seem reasonable and level-headed, this insistence on achieving a balance between public and private managerial spheres, this concern for combining their respective advantages to better renew and modernize the federal public service, is one of the ongoing sources of confusion that the approach is supposed to resolve. Surprisingly

enough, this culture of disillusion was acknowledged recently, in a limited though forthright way, by the clerk of the Privy Council, secretary to the Cabinet and head of the public service, who had this to say:

Leadership is never easy, but it is particularly difficult when expectations for results are high. The modernization of human resources management will provide tools for those willing to use them. But there is a great deal of skepticism and cynicism across the public service, a feeling that those tools will never be picked up and used. I understand the disillusionment that comes from hearing a lot of talk without seeing very much action. But today we have an opportunity for fundamental change...<sup>48</sup>

However, there remains an indomitable difference. This recognition of a phenomenon of collective skepticism and disillusion within the public service is due, according to the *Ninth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada*, to the gap between managerial discourse and practices or, in other words, to the fact that those responsible are not as swift to take action and such action that is taken is not as extensive as this same discourse would lead us to believe. The critical analysis set out in these pages suggests rather that the organizational culture of disillusion may be ascribed to the fact that managerial statements are, in and of themselves, fraught with contradictions and are thus vectors of organizational confusion.<sup>49</sup> More specifically, the notion of disillusion is utilized because it expresses more accurately than any other the gradual loss of illusion as the members of the organization increasingly realize that the inclusive dimension vaunted in seminal managerial texts is systematically missing from decisions or processes linked to significant organizational change. This ongoing absence becomes highly apparent in an organizational environment characterized by ongoing redefinition,<sup>50</sup> such as that of the federal public service, where organizational change or even an intention to proceed with such change could very well become an end in itself.

Furthermore, resistance to change may also be attributed to its expected effects on formal and informal power relationships among individuals within the organization. Any change, however small, causes a shift in these relationships and power struggles, which do not in all cases work to every individual's advantage. Some are winners, others are losers. For this reason, the problem is not solely related to the conceptual or symbolic dimension of the project or change, nor to its advantages or disadvantages. It is also, and perhaps primarily, related to individuals' understanding of its future effects on their ability to operate as independent actors within the organization. An actor is not only

egotistical and rational nor only altruistic and emotional: he or she possesses all of these traits at once within an uncertain dynamic relationship.

Such resistance is also due to the fact that any new project or change is partly assessed in light of previous initiatives, those that succeeded, those that failed as well as those that management was committed to deliver but for one reason or another never came about. Managerial statements and projects have a cumulative effect, each building on or multiplying the scope of all that came before. There is no clean slate or return to square one. All these precedents, regardless of their number, come into play in the discourse and organizational environment, from which one can never be emancipated. Thus, contrary to what normal dichotomic analysis suggests, all change involves both rupture and continuity: rupture because it is inherent in the nature of change, and continuity because one's understanding of change and, beyond this, its potential for success, is determined by prior changes as well as those that current changes may be seen to portend.

In addition, the difficulty of breaking with current mindsets, with associated material, emotional and political interests, as well as with power relationships that have emerged within the current institutional environment, is exacerbated by the difficulty of assessing proposals for change in any way other than within the framework of those same mindsets. True change is rarely achieved by means other than a crisis situation, due to the fact that the institutional environment affects not only the selection of means/strategies used to achieve particular objectives, but also the objectives/challenges themselves. In effect, a project for change always involves elements of both stability and crisis. There is no basis for seeking out a consensual, interactional dynamic presumed to be nonconflictual – a managerial panacea if there ever was one. Some crises are resolved through group learning, others are not. It is on this issue, that of group learning, that managerial thinking must concentrate, and definitely not on the necessarily vain search for a so-called consensual process.

For all of the above reasons, the case of Canada's federal public service, ever influenced by NPM, is certainly not unusual in the field of managerial studies, and the critical analysis developed to this point also addresses public management as an academic discipline. As suggested by this critical discussion of the prevailing interpretation of leadership and organizational cultures, as well as the transition from the old

to the new psychological contract, a renewal of public management philosophy requires an important break with, even a rejection of, all its component parts. To this end, though it may appear to be in its very early stages or even purely rhetorical, the recent anti-administration perspective is conducive to a fresh approach, distinct from what has been prevalent until now in the field of public management.

## Toward a Renewed Public Management Philosophy

Problems or lacunae in the area of managerial studies as a field of applied knowledge include claims of universality, timelessness and transferability, which are best illustrated by monographs, as numerous as they are superficial, on “winning” practices, upon which any managerial renewal or modernization exercise – whether in public administration or a private firm – should supposedly be based. We obviously wish to avoid this type of intellectual over-simplification and we do not claim therefore that the following is part of a manual for managerial action; our purpose, rather, is to support a critical renewal of public-management philosophy. While our recommendations may not be universally accepted, we hope they broaden and enhance theoretical and normative thinking in this field. Table 3 sets out elements for a renewal of managerial philosophy.

The biomedical drift in managerial studies can be described as a particularly heavy, perhaps undue, emphasis on the socio-cognitive dimension of an organizational phenomenon and a disregard for its political, identity, symbolic and collective dimensions. It is also expressed through the use of terms borrowed – fre-

Table 3  
Elements for a Renewal of Managerial Philosophy

- Moving beyond the biomedical drift and its apolitical and atomistic bias
- Transition from consensual to critical participation
- Rejection of competencies-based leadership in favour of social processes-based leadership
- Appropriation of a bureaucratic heritage
- Emphasis on the constructive dimension of power (shared exercise and collective action)
- Promotion of a multiplicity of identities (individual, team and organizational)
- Creation of spaces for meeting and discussion (softening of hierarchy)
- Recognition of managerial utopia as a vector for mobilization through collective emancipation
- Replacing intrapreneurial spirit with a sense of the State
- Awareness of the anti-administration perspective

quently without recognition of the source – from medicine, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, including such words as “diagnostic,” “syndrome,” “symptoms,” “needs” and “health.” The biomedical drift also overemphasizes the need for groups, projects and organizations to adapt to their environments, like a living organism does, eradicating in the process any influence they themselves may exert on their environments. Specialized literature on downsizing and the survivor syndrome as well as the organicistic current in organizational theory are so many examples of this biomedical drift, ever more prevalent in managerial studies.

Consensual participation is marred by a conservative bias insofar as it is based on current, recognized and ossified roles, functions, identities and expectations. Critical participation includes the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct identities and roles. As discussed earlier, contrary to what is suggested by the dominant discourse and popular belief, the consensual dynamic is one of marginalization and exclusion and must not be confused with unanimity. It is also liable to reproduce the asymmetry of existing power relationships through the unspoken, though implied, rejection of individual and collective dissidence.

Consensual leadership, as the adjective suggests, espouses the same enigmatic dynamic as consensual participation. It rests on the tacit and passive acceptance by managers and nonmanagers that they would be excluded from the design and development phases of projects aimed at implementing planned changes. As previously suggested, major modernization endeavours within the federal public service that emphasize consensual leadership do not create new spaces for empowerment; rather, they contribute to subjecting participants to the asymmetrical exercise of power and to crystallizing the hierarchy principle. In other words, such consensual leadership leads to a decrease in managerial control along with an increase in individual self-control; it is not synonymous with greater involvement in the decision-making process by any stretch of the imagination. Thus, traditional power relationships are maintained through this fictitious empowerment phenomenon, and the democratization of managerial practice does not occur.

Differing radically from leadership defined in terms of abilities and competencies, leadership as a social process affords an opportunity to recognize the political dimension of organizations as well as the primacy of communication, deliberation, negotiation and compromise in order to implement planned change.<sup>51</sup>

Power is neither dangerous nor problematic as such in an organizational environment, each collective action being itself the product of the exercise of power taken not as a personal possession but as a fluctuating and nontransitive capability. There is no doubt that power has a constructive side that must be reappropriated through this leadership as a social process resting on the contribution of those who are implicitly stigmatized as nonleaders, subordinates or assistants because they are not explicitly recognized as leaders. In this sense, this leadership spells the end of the spinning of an organizational mythology that explicitly legitimizes heroes, messiahs and other managerial demigods.

The appropriation of a bureaucratic heritage is obviously counter to the prevailing discourse in managerial studies that continues to distort bureaucracy and reduces it to its perverse effects.<sup>52</sup> Bureaucracy, as an organizational form, is far from limited to its perverse effects and unwanted consequences: the principles of standardization, specialization and hierarchy, to name only three, will persist and outlive any half-hearted desire to “debureaucratize” organizations.<sup>53</sup> The notion of heritage hinges on the idea that it is something to be accepted, appropriated and transformed in light of a given organizational environment that comprises particular challenges, objectives, constraints and resources. In this respect, and despite the well-known pronouncements on its rigid and backward-looking nature, bureaucracy is also a dynamic form that can range from its coercive variant to its facilitative one.<sup>54</sup>

The constructive dimension of power is simply that any collective action – including those that are part of public management practice – is an exercise in power, therefore a shared exercise. Power is not just domination, confrontation or conflict. Its tangible exercise is as much a good opportunity as it is a limitation on organizational creativity; the real management challenge in this regard is to transform limitation power into opportunity power.

Recognition and appreciation of the multiple identities of every individual are good ways to create spaces for meeting and discussion within the organization.<sup>55</sup> The idea is to authorize rather than force each individual to move beyond the restrictive state of organizational identity, which undoubtedly restricts his or her action. Such recognition is not, therefore, a negation of traditional identities based on managerial roles and functions, but rather a rejection of their hegemonic nature. It must be distinguished from the pluralistic project of representative bureau-



cracy,<sup>56</sup> which is just as constricted as the one whose shortcomings we have demonstrated (negation of multiple identities of each individual for the benefit of the multiple identities extant within the organization). The rather recent interest shown in diversity by the federal public service, as demonstrated by several major identity-building, symbolic, direction-setting managerial texts,<sup>57</sup> is in keeping with this pluralistic and conservative vision that seeks to maintain the oversimplification of identities rather than promote their complexity and number.

The managerial utopia we are discussing consists in creating symbolic direction-setting elements through management frameworks – the achievement of which is not valued as much as is their pursuit (de-emphasizing management by results) – and thus in ceasing to contribute to the development of collective expectations that are systematically left unfulfilled. This managerial utopia, which recognizes the importance of increased collective participation, also recognizes the role of ongoing negotiation and bargaining among participants and thus supports the transition from the consensual variant to the critical variant.

Simply stated, the intrapreneurial spirit (private company) is the antithesis of concern for the State and the spirit of public service (public organization); while the latter would never be valued in a private firm, why should the former be valued in a public organization? According to NPM's basic – implicit and unavowed – logic, public management itself will only be as efficient as its counterpart in the private sector to the extent that both are identical, a viewpoint that puts paid to the very notion that public management is not only innovative and forward-looking but also autonomous and differentiated.

The anti-administration perspective, still in its early stages, proposes rather a theoretical and normative reasoning that hinges exclusively on the specifics of public administration. Anti-administration aims at developing reflection on the theory and practice of public administration through the following components: an anti-administrative consciousness – open-mindedness and ambiguity: a source of anti-administrative attitudes – skepticism and hope (critical participation); and anti-administrative aims – rediscovery of the human element of the bureaucratic organization (noninstrumentality).<sup>58</sup>

This anti-administrative awareness banks on open-mindedness and ambiguity to throw off the weight of rules and norms that circumscribe individual and collective creativity, thereby increasing the space allotted

to dialogue and the number of participants in the discussion without perpetuating the efficiency requirement of new public management. Contrary to the traditional field of managerial studies, anti-administration emphasizes the need to recognize that whereas uncertainty is reduced or even eliminated by an increase in the quality or amount of information available, ambiguity is an inherent feature of managerial documents and remains linked to their interpretation by individual members of the organization. In other words, in an ambiguous rather than an uncertain situation, “the resulting call for more information (and perhaps more information processing equipment) may then only further obscure the political and social judgments that must inevitably be made.”<sup>59</sup>

Skepticism and hope are closely linked within anti-administration as safeguards against managerial dogmatism, meaning they allow us to keep in mind the fragile nature of our organizational knowledge without going so far as suspending judgment through absolute doubt. This philosophical concept is derived from the academic or mixed skepticism of David Hume (1711-1776), for whom “the most extensive share of our knowledge is composed of beliefs” and who emphasizes that “no rational principle legitimates political authority, only custom and social utility.”<sup>60</sup> [translation] Anti-administration is also illustrative of a mitigated postmodern sensibility to the extent that, as a school of thought, it rejects the notion of truth while espousing that of progress – though in a limited way and in a contextual perspective – and also authorizes a return to collective emancipation initiatives.

On a final note, the rediscovery of the human element within a complex organization seeks to overcome the significant perverse effects of bureaucracy, namely, its relative dehumanization that causes its individual members to perceive themselves only as functional pigeonholes and categories as they perform their duties. In this respect, the anti-administration perspective implicitly embraces the notion of multiple organizational identities as a vector of new spaces for gathering and dialogue.

This set of elements of theoretical and normative reflection, though it may seem rudimentary and abstract, informs the development of an alternative vision of public administration that does not perpetuate the claims, teachings or precepts of the new public management but strives rather to design a public management that is essentially autonomous and differentiated, forward-looking and innovative, and that firmly

challenges – from both an academic and a practical perspective – the influence of private enterprise and its attendant market. Far from being a guide for managerial action aimed at overcoming organizational disillusion, this stance nonetheless extends and enhances the debate on the perverse effects of planned changes carried out over the past decade within the federal public service of Canada.

## Conclusion

**S**eminal identity-building and symbolic direction-setting managerial texts in the federal public service of Canada, influenced by new public management, do not create new spaces for empowerment; on the contrary, they encourage subjecting participants to the asymmetrical exercise of power and crystallizing the hierarchy principle within the bureaucratic environment. Not only does the new public management movement not live up to its claim to bolster collective mobilization, it is also a source of confusion that, beyond its marginalizing and exclusionary effects, contributes to the creation and gradual but steady spread of an organizational culture of disillusion.

Despite the appearance of openness and pragmatism, the relentless quest for equilibrium between the requirements of traditional public administration (transparency, probity and equity) and the precepts of new public management (efficiency, flexibility and a client focus) is more a managerial side-step than a meaningful way to stem the confusion in the discourse and structure of Canada's federal public service. Indeed, juxtaposing a discourse of inclusion with exclusionary actions, a discourse of consensus with conflictual practices, does nothing to increase managerial credibility. Rather, it demonstrates the existence of a vicious circle, in which these elements are made all the more suspect and incongruous by the fact that they are diametrically opposed. Thus organizational disillusion is due not only to the gap between managerial discourse and practices, but also to their intrinsically contradictory nature. A simple call to action through the wholesale implementation of organizational and consensual leadership therefore remains nothing more than vain rhetoric that has perhaps seen better days. The move from the old to the new psychological contract, related not so much to the downsizing that occurred in the mid-1990s as

to the earlier breakthrough of new public management, is in keeping with this exclusionary dynamic and, beyond this, nurtures the organizational culture of disillusion.

In the same vein, a clear distinction must be made between the notion of culture of disillusion and those of organizational alienation and cynicism. Conceptually, the culture of disillusion rejects both the reactive nature of alienation and the managerial demonization of cynicism. It is also not based primarily on the socio-psychological dimension. On the contrary, the culture of disillusion, taken as a separate organizational phenomenon, is a social process built by individual members of the organization over the years through their multiple interactions, in light of planned changes. In this sense, this notion of disillusion, viewed once again in opposition to alienation and cynicism, extends beyond the solely cognitive dimension to the political and emotional ones. Individuals' perceptions of a significant change are never limited to its potential costs and benefits; they are also shaped by their residual perceptions of both prior and anticipated significant changes. As such, these residual perceptions are indomitable institutional constraints that bear permanently on individuals and groups, influencing their current perceptions, which themselves are associated with a dynamic of anticipation of great changes on the horizon.

## Notes

- 1 Office of the Privy Council (2002, p. 2).
- 2 The expression *planned change* was selected to express both the formal and informal dimensions of public management modernization projects, as well as to highlight their strategic (therefore centrally controlled and predetermined) dimension, which thus must be distinguished from (unplanned) changes inherent in any organization in a given point in space and time. We also prefer the term to *administrative reforms*, which, in our opinion, implicitly emphasizes the technical and structural, frequently even legal, dimensions of public management modernization projects. Specialized literature on organizational change offers a plethora of terms and makes various claims concerning each, though they are all more or less interchangeable. The list includes strategic change, programmed change, far-reaching change, radical change, culture change, double- and triple-loop learning, etc.
- 3 Gow and Dufour (2000, pp. 679-707).
- 4 For a discussion of this matter, see Carroll and Garkut (1996, pp. 535-553).
- 5 Some even claim that this type of comparison is systematically biased in favour of new public management in that it is rooted invariably in a simplified and static vision of traditional public administration. For more information, see Denhardt and Denhardt (2000, pp. 549-559).
- 6 For a detailed discussion of managerial and legal rationalities within the French public administration, see Chevallier and Loschak (1982, pp. 53-94).
- 7 See, for example, Allison (1997, pp. 383-400); Parenteau (1992, pp. 49-74) and Plumptre (1988).
- 8 In simple terms, identity-building and symbolic direction-setting in seminal managerial documents are intended to provide answers to the following important questions: Who are we? Where are we going?
- 9 Treasury Board Secretariat (2000, p. 23).
- 10 In a recent speech, the clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the Cabinet could not have been clearer on this matter: "Success in this climate and for this agenda is not simply defined by what we do, but also by how we do it. It all comes down to leadership." See Cappe (1999, p. 4).
- 11 Office of the Privy Council (1998a, p. 24).
- 12 Office of the Privy Council (1998a, p. 14).
- 13 Treasury Board Secretariat (2000, p. 15).
- 14 *The Annual Reports to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada* may also be added to the list.
- 15 Along with public sector management, leadership is one of the two major themes dealt with in the learning activities of the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD). For more information, see the documents available on the CCMD Internet site at <http://www.ccmd-ccg.gc.ca/leadership/> as well as those posted on the Leadership Network site at <http://www.leadership.gc.ca/>
- 16 The Public Service Commission of Canada's overall views on these 14 leadership competencies is posted at [http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/aexdp/leaders\\_e.htm](http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/aexdp/leaders_e.htm)
- 17 Barker (1997, pp. 343-362).
- 18 Rost (1991). The author reviewed 587 documents whose titles include the word "leadership" and found that 366 do not define the term.
- 19 Hodgetts (1996, p. 72-78).
- 20 Karlöf (1996, p. 3).
- 21 Karlöf (1996, p. 3).
- 22 Karlöf (1996, p. 2).
- 23 Alvesson (1996, p. 474).
- 24 Gemmill and Oakley (1992, p. 123).
- 25 The "survivor syndrome" is the accepted expression used to describe the common experience of individuals who remain with their organizations following a downsizing exercise. It is a commonly held belief that, beyond the recurring themes of fear, insecurity, injustice, anger, incomprehension, frustration, mistrust, guilt, stress and depression, individuals develop pathological attitudes and behaviours that, for management, lead to so many problems to be solved or challenges to be met in order to avoid any loss of effectiveness or efficiency. See Rouillard (1999).
- 26 Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997, pp. 11-50); Kissler (1994, pp. 335-352) and Ettore (1996, pp. 16-23).
- 27 For a critical analysis of the survivor syndrome, see Rouillard and Lemire (2001, pp. 441-462).
- 28 Robinson and Rousseau (1994, pp. 245-259).
- 29 Deputy Minister's Task Force on Public Service Values and Ethics (1996, p. 24). This task force was one of nine groups set up by the clerk of the Privy Council in 1995 to reflect from a practitioner's perspective on a corresponding number of managerial themes. Each group was chaired by a senior official, with John C. Tait being responsible for the group on ethics and values in the public service. The task force's final report, known as the "Tait Report," was tabled in February 1997 and is still widely referenced in managerial documents and management frameworks within the federal public administration.
- 30 *Canada vs. Public Service Alliance*, 1993, 1 S.C.R. 941, 943. For more information on this matter, see Borgeat (1996, pp. 92-94).
- 31 Office of the Privy Council (1995, p. 34).
- 32 Mitchell (1997).
- 33 See Borgeat (1996, pp. 89-94) and Neilson (1991, pp. 1-17).
- 34 See Pollit (1998, pp. 45-77) and Gow (1997, pp. 235-261) on the concurrent rise of contractualization and new public management.
- 35 Prevalent in organizational theory, the metaphor is much more than a mere unavowed attempt at enticement or figure of speech aimed at embellishing the managerial discourse. In simple terms, the metaphor is a mental image primarily referring to a *way of thinking* and a *way of seeing* that, together, influence the ever subjective perception that individuals and groups form of their immediate and larger organizational environ-

- ments. More specifically, the mechanical metaphor elicits the image of a clockwork, or, as suggested by the adjective, an accurate and well adjusted mechanical system, whereas the organic metaphor, on the contrary, suggests a living system. While the first implicitly emphasizes formal elements, such as planning and control, the second underscores, rather, informal elements such as adaptability (both individual and organizational) to internal and external environments. Where the first would be concerned with stability and continuity, the second would favour change and severance.
- 36 Although it is impossible to determine the precise moment when new public management made its appearance, experts generally agree that it gained much ground as of the early 1980s. See Savoie (1994) in this regard.
- 37 A second survey was conducted with federal civil servants in May 2002, the results of which were not available when this paper was written. See Office of the Privy Council (2002, p. 8).
- 38 Government of Canada (2000, p. 13).
- 39 See Charih (1992, pp. 115-128) on this issue.
- 40 Agarwal (1993, pp. 715-739); Hobson (1996, pp. 719-738) and Kilduff *et al.* (1997, pp. 579-592).
- 41 Agarwal (1993, pp. 723-724).
- 42 Dean *et al.* (1998, pp. 341-352).
- 43 Dean *et al.* (1998, p. 345).
- 44 Rouillard (2001, pp. 215-238) sets out a detailed analysis of the perverse effects of the production by management of a new collective identity for Canadian federal civil servants.
- 45 Deputy Minister's Task Force (1996, p. 44).
- 46 Office of the Privy Council (1998*b*, p. 5).
- 47 Tait (1997, p. 12).
- 48 Office of the Privy Council (2002, p. 4).
- 49 In fact, the term *désabusement* itself, as it appears in the *Neuvième rapport annuel au Premier ministre sur la fonction publique*, is a French translation of the term "cynicism" used in the English version of the same document, which suggests that they share a common meaning, contrary to the analysis set out in the previous pages.
- 50 The term was used by the clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the Cabinet. See Office of the Privy Council (1995, p. 34).
- 51 For more information on the ever limited and conditional transferability of these elements to leadership as a social process, see Barker (1997, pp. 343-362).
- 52 Montpetit and Rouillard (2001, pp. 119-140).
- 53 Aucoin (1997, pp. 290-306).
- 54 Adler and Borys (1996, pp. 61-89).
- 55 Multiple identities, in addition to divergent and convergent ones, include proactive, reactive and latent identities. Whereas these identities arise and take shape through the political, cognitive and emotional interactions that are interpersonal communications and relations, as much as through decision-making per se, they are liable, according to circumstances, to move among categories, and, consequently, they possess a strategic dimension.
- 56 According to the American notion of representative bureaucracy, the public service should be representative of the various classes and groups of individuals in a proportion comparable, if not identical, to that part of society that they compose. It therefore involves a willingness to create within the public service a microcosm reflecting the (demographic, cultural, sexual, etc.) diversity of society at large of which it is a part and which it serves. However, promoting diversity (associated with an ongoing concern for efficiency) through representation threatens to reduce each individual to a quasi-caricature of the sociopolitical group he or she is meant to represent and to eradicate thereby the individual's identities other than the one related to the stereotype implicitly selected. It is ironic to note that such an approach denies the multiplicity of identities in the same manner as the prevalent approach based on organizational culture. It encourages the multiplicity of stereotyped identities within the organization while denying the multiplicity of each individual's identities. Therefore, despite claims of openness and generosity, it is marred as much by oversimplification and rigidity as was that which it is intended to replace. The approach propounded in this paper is radically different and recognizes rather that each organizational actor possesses multiple identities, including some that are reconcilable and complementary and others that are irreconcilable and contradictory. As such, it accepts that each individual is entitled to his or her own contradictions in terms of identities.
- 57 See, for example, Office the Privy Council (2002, pp. 6-12; 2001, pp. 7-9; 2000, pp. 5-6).
- 58 The following special issue offers various interpretations of the anti-administration viewpoint: "Symposium – Anti-Administration." Co-ordinated by Farmer (2001, p. 23).
- 59 Forester (1993, p. 9).
- 60 Clément *et al.* (2000, p. 205).

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# Summaries

Isabelle Fortier *(cont. from page 38)*

methods employed to implement the reforms. At the managerial level, the empowerment of public servants, which should have created a new dynamism in the public service and made it more efficient, is in reality a source of confusion. This new direction creates a double constraint, because control over the public service is changing and intensifying, albeit ambivalently. Given this context, the author questions the rejection of the traditional bureaucratic authority on which the reforms are based. In her view, this kind of authority remains the most honest and transparent form of supervision and control for government employees.

In criticizing the alleged ideological neutrality of the administrative reforms, this article sheds light on the underlying political dimension of these reforms. How can one be surprised that citizens and public servants — confronted with this paradoxical agenda of transformation that affirms continuity but in reality advocates rupture — go from skepticism to cynicism and react with indifference?

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suggests, the author views it as a factor of confusion rather than one of enrichment of managerial discourses and practices. Hence, a true renewal of the public service, as both a field of knowledge and a field of action, will only be possible after it has been entirely and definitively liberated from the yoke of new public management. In other words, rather than being part of the solution, the new public management movement is part of the problem.

# Summaries

## From Skepticism to Cynicism: Paradoxes of Administrative Reform

Isabelle Fortier

The crisis of confidence that is currently shaking political institutions and public organizations is generating an increasing amount of discussion of public cynicism toward government. In the context of the reforms aimed at overcoming government red tape and inefficiency, this cynicism reverberates at the very heart of public organizations and among public servants. What should one make of the crisis of confidence and the recent administrative reforms, which claim to be a response to this crisis? Is the cynicism of citizens and public servants justified? This article attempts to show how this cynicism within and toward the public service is linked to paradoxical and ambivalent aspects of the discourse about reform. Although its goal is to restore public confidence and mobilize public servants, the author maintains that in fact it produces the opposite effect.

After defining cynicism, the author presents a set of factors that contribute to its emergence. While the architects of the reforms undertaken within the governments of Canada and Quebec extol traditional values, in reality they are orienting the public service toward management practices drawn from the private sector. This only serves to exacerbate the perverse effects of the reforms.

The argument that the reforms have an impact on the cynicism of citizens and public servants is supported by three analytical levels. Beginning at the most comprehensive level, the impact of the discourse of “marketization” of government services on the relationship between the government and citizens – who have now become “clients” – is examined. The author then shows that the linkage between the political and administrative systems is not neutral and explains how the current reform discourses, by focusing on the issue of organizational efficiency, avoid that of the state’s true purpose. Lastly, she examines current dynamics in the administrative sphere by questioning the neutrality of the *(cont. on page 37)*

## From Cynicism to Organizational Disillusion:

New Public Management as Confusion Factor

Christian Rouillard

An increasing number of writings on governance, administrative reforms and managerial innovations stress the growing cynicism of individuals, as citizens and clients, toward their political and administrative institutions. Many authors see this cynicism as a major trend that is affecting all industrial democracies indiscriminately and reflecting the demands and high expectations of citizens and clients who are now more educated and better informed as a result of information and communications technologies.

This study examines the phenomenon within the more specific context of the public service of Canada. The author distinguishes between cynicism and organizational disillusion by highlighting the elements of rupture and continuity found in the managerial discourses and practices favoured in the federal public service. He suggests that it is the basic contradictions inherent in these discourses and practices that account for the organizational disillusion within the public service. Through a critical review of the key texts on identity construction and symbolic orientation, such as management frameworks disseminated by the central organizations, the author shows that the problem is much deeper than the phenomenon of cynicism. He traces its roots to the incremental rise of an organizational culture of disillusion, understood as a social process that is dynamic and iterative.

Among the topics discussed in this text are the search for a balance between managerial and legal rationalities; the endless search for organizational leadership; the ongoing transition from the old to the new psychological contract; the distinction between alienation, cynicism and organizational disillusion; and, lastly, the difficult and uncertain renewal of managerial thinking. This analysis of the Canadian case leads us to challenge, in a more general way, the precepts of the new public management that are being put forward to modernize public management. As the title *(cont. on page 37)*