

## The Impact of the New Public Management: Challenges for Coordination and Cohesion in European Public Sectors

*Steven Van de Walle*

*Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands*

*Gerhard Hammerschmid*

*Hertie School of Governance, Germany*

### ABSTRACT

New Public Management has been around for a quarter of a century in European public sectors, yet despite the movement's emphasis on indicators and evidence, there have been surprisingly few encompassing evaluations. In this paper, we provide an overview of academic evaluation and impact studies of entire NPM-style reform programmes. We distinguish between two sets of NPM-style changes and reforms. One is that of specific managerial innovations within public organisations. The other consists of changes to the role of government and citizens as a result of NPM ideas. We conclude that a majority of academic research has focused on the first set of changes, while approaches to the second set has been mainly of a critical nature with relatively limited attention for empirical studies.

**Keywords:** New Public Management; fragmentation; cohesion; coordination

### Analysing the impact of an ill-defined concept

Despite 30 years of New Public Management-style reforms in European public sectors, there have been surprisingly few empirical encompassing evaluations of their effects. In this review paper, we provide an overview of available studies and of the increasing number of empirical approaches to the subject. We argue that such evaluations ought not just to look at specific managerial and operational innovations, but also at the wider effect of NPM-style reforms on the role of the state and on the position of the citizen-client.

Analysing the impact of the New Public Management on aspects such as efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, social cohesion etc. is not straightforward, because NPM is not a well-defined or coherent set of ideas (Wegrich 2009). It merely reflects a number of changes in public-sector management that started to develop in the 1980s, and many of its associated reforms were not planned strategically and implemented at a precise point in time. New Public Management has a hybrid character (Christensen and Lægheid 2002) and is generally used as an

umbrella term for a collection of trends; this is also reflected in the alternative wordings used to describe the changes that have occurred in public sectors in Europe and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s: managerialism (Pollitt 1990), market-based public administration, post-bureaucratic organisation (Barzelay 1992), entrepreneurial government (Hughes 1998) etc. This means that in order to analyse impact, we have to drill down the analyses to a number of key trends. Just like McLaughlin et al. (2002, 1), we are interested not just in the concept of NPM, but in the empirical reality of it.

There is considerable discussion about the nature of NPM (Barzelay 2002). For Lane, NPM is mainly a contractualist model (Lane 2000). Other authors have downplayed the contractualist approach and have equated NPM with a much wider range of business-like managerial reforms or with any type of reform or efficiency-saving during the last decades of the previous century. König dubbed NPM a “mixture of management theories, business motivation psychology and neo-liberal economy” (König 1997, 219). Barzelay distinguished between four widely different models of NPM: a contractualist model, a managerialist model, a consumerist model and a reformist model. Each of these is based on different assumptions and principles (Barzelay 2002).

All this makes NPM “more a recognizable term than a fully established concept.” (Barzelay 2002, 15), which makes analysing its impact difficult. Because of its ill-defined nature, NPM has at times been described as a fad (Lynn Jr 1998, Pollitt 1995), a mythical recipe (Christensen et al. 2008) or a shopping basket of management ideas and techniques (Painter 2003). There is considerable scepticism about the consistency of NPM: “NPM is, in other words, not a consistent and integrated theory for modernizing the public sector, but is better characterized as a wave of reforms composed of some principal reform ideas together with a loose cluster of reform initiatives pointing in various directions.” (Christensen et al. 2008, 128). In analysing the impact of NPM, it is crucial to distinguish between talk and reality. Just studying canonical texts (for example, Barzelay 1992, Osborne and Gaebler 1992) teaches us very little about actual implementation. In addition, there is much talk about reform, without action, but with hypocrisy and double-talk (Brunsson 1989). Furthermore, public sectors have often introduced specific innovations traditionally associated with NPM, but without also embracing the NPM public-choice philosophy.

In this paper, we distinguish between two levels of NPM. On a first level, NPM can be seen as a set of managerial innovations, each of which can be subject to evaluation of their impact. At a higher level, NPM stands for a change of the role of government in society. Evaluating the impact of this feature of NPM requires a focus on the macro level.

### **A first set of changes – NPM as managerial innovation**

New ways of thinking about the role and nature of government and public administration, partly inspired by public-choice theory, and a series of gradual and less gradual reforms in Western public sectors gave rise to what would later be known as the New Public Management. Many attempts at defining the New Public Management have been made. Definitions of New Public Management abound, as do

variations. They have in common “the attempt to implement management ideas from business and private sector into the public services” (Haynes 2003). Donald Kettl identified productivity, marketisation, service orientation, decentralisation, policy and accountability for results as the key ingredients of the global public-management revolution (Kettl 2000, 1-2). Likewise, Ferlie et al. developed a typology of four NPM models: the efficiency drive, downsizing and decentralisation, in search of excellence and public-service orientation (Ferlie et al. 1996, 10-15). A review of the literature turns up many different lists of NPM characteristics, which have a common core (Kettl 2000, Borins 1995, Hood 1991).

Christopher Hood’s 1991 article “A Public Management for all Seasons” is widely regarded as the key source on New Public Management. It distinguishes between seven doctrines of NPM (Hood 1991): hands-on and entrepreneurial management; explicit standards and measures of performance; output controls; desegregation and decentralisation; competition in the provision of public services; stress on private-sector styles of management; and discipline and parsimony in resource allocation. Other characteristics, such as separating political decision-making from direct management and community governance, are often added to this list (McLaughlin et al. 2002, 9). Such a wide set of characteristics opens up several ways to study the impact of NPM. Some changes have been more fundamental than others though and have profoundly changed the nature of the public sector. Other changes have seen more marginal implementation or were renewed attempts at introducing older ideas.

A key characteristic of the New Public Management was the desire to do away with hierarchist public sector monoliths, which were, both presumed and in many cases actually, inefficient. Solutions were searched for to break up these monoliths, introducing competition between these new units and imposing tighter controls over those units that did not operate in markets or quasi-markets. Such processes of devolution, disaggregation and decentralisation (Gray and Jenkins 1995) were believed to lead to greater clarity and simplicity in the public sector. Inside organisations, the new thinking led to a differentiation of tasks such as regulation, policy advice, ownership functions, control etc. that had traditionally been organised together into separate units (Christensen and Lægheid 2003a). This practice of disaggregating the public sector into autonomous agencies, business units and competing public, market and non-profit bodies has, in turn, also come under pressure. Rhodes warned very early of a replacement of line bureaucracies “delivering any service all over the country” by a “patchwork quilt of organizations” (Rhodes 1994, 142). Also, NPM-style reforms have not always proved to be sustainable (Meyer-Sahling 2009).

### **A second set of changes – NPM ideas about the role of government**

New Public Management is not just a set of managerial and service delivery innovations. It is also based on a set of ideas about the nature of man and the role of the state in society. With its roots in public-choice thinking and the Chicago School economists’ ideas of deregulation, privatisation and also later marketisation (Lane 1997a), the NPM philosophy has been largely based on a new right agenda of privatisation, deregulation, marketisation and a small state (Lane 2000). While those ideas are not visible in all

NPM-style reforms, NPM has been blamed for its focus on individual rights rather than collective rights, its belief in individual self-interest as a key guiding principle and its strong reliance on markets as a core steering mechanism.

Often, these criticisms have also been inspired by the real or perceived disappearance of neighbourhood services or by the public-sector workforce's fears about job security. Protests against NPM-style reforms have indeed been channelled by public-sector unions, and some countries have been more critical about the reforms than others (Héritier 2001, Van de Walle 2008). The start of reforms and the search for improved public performance was seen by some as a questioning of the welfare state (Lane 1997a, 2), and reforms of services of general interest and former state monopolies have been criticised for their potential negative effects on social cohesion and equity. At the same time, there has been no correlation between NPM emphasis and political incumbency (Hood 1995).

The emergence of NPM meant a shift in the values of the public sector. New values such as efficiency and individualism presumably replaced traditional values such as universalism, equity etc. (du Gay 2000). Central to this shift was a belief that managing public-sector organisations is not different from running private-sector organisations – a controversial claim (Allison 1983, Boyne 2002a). This managerialism should therefore not just be seen as the introduction of new management methods, but also as a new ideology about the role of the state and the public manager (Clarke and Newman 1997). Research has focused on changes in public servants' values, shifts of citizens to customers (Clarke and Newman 2007, Fountain 2001) or changes in administrative law and good governance principles. Likewise, changes to the role of government in providing services through privatisation, deregulation etc. have also received considerable attention (Clifton et al. 2003, Prosser 2000, Prosser 2005).

While private-sector ideas have dominated public-sector-reform thinking in the 1990s, we have recently seen the emergence of new models for thinking about the role of the public sector, such as Public Value or Neo-Weberianism. While many public sectors went ever further in embracing NPM ideas, even in countries or sectors where the diagnosis was different from that in e.g. the UK or New Zealand, doubts about whether the core assumptions on which NPM is based are actually correct started to grow in the 1990s. Since the heyday of NPM, we have witnessed a growing belief that many NPM ideas, grounded in new institutional economics, may actually be based on untested assumptions including the idea that monopolies and hierarchies cannot work, that the state is too big, that the public sector hinders economic development etc. (Flynn 2002).

### **Intended and unintended effects of NPM-style reforms**

These two sets of changes, managerial innovations and new ideas about the role of government, have both resulted in a number of intended and unintended effects. Managerial innovations did not only have a positive impact on short-term economy and efficiency, but also created new problems of fragmentation and coordination. The new thinking about the role of government did not only instil a more entrepreneurial spirit into the public sector, but may also have had negative effects on equity and social cohesion.

### **Fragmentation vs. coordination in the public sector**

One of the key recommendations of the NPM-movement was to disaggregate large, multifunctional public bodies and replace them with a series of single-purpose bodies. This disaggregation extended to hiving off public tasks to the private and not-for-profit sector. The philosophy was that a deliberate fragmentation and distribution of functions would result in clear lines of control and boundaries and possibly to competition between these new entities. Furthermore, performance was to be monitored using specific and detailed sets of performance indicators and targets (van Thiel and Leeuw 2002).

Disaggregation and a related increase in accountability and control systems focusing on relatively narrow objectives have, for public services and public managers, “narrowed the nature of the work, creating focus at the expense of coordination” (Norman 2003, 200). Disaggregation became fragmentation at the detriment of institutional development, development of strategic capability and expertise, and institutional memory (Norman 2003, Pollitt 2000, Pollitt 2008). Early on, fragmentation was identified as an unintended effect of NPM-style reforms. Coordination rapidly came to be seen as the key problem in making NPM work (Webb 1991), and the structural disaggregation of the public sector was seen to lead to deficient coordination, duplication and even waste (Rhodes 1994). With Schick’s 1996 report “The Spirit of Reform” on public sector reforms in New Zealand, fragmentation of the public sector became to be seen as a major unintended effect of NPM reforms. It identified a tendency to focus on the short-term production of outputs and annual actions, rather than the development of long-term strategic planning (Schick 1996, 8).

New systems of control, evaluation and incentives tended to discourage actors from collaborating with other departments or services, despite the big idea of more collaboration in public services (Norman 2003). Disaggregation may have led to a replacement of traditional ministry- or department-based silos by new types of silos. The reforms led to the fragmentation of a previously monolithic public sector and a related loss of strategic capacity at the centre of government (Painter 2003). Rather than becoming efficient, effective and entrepreneurial, public sectors influenced by NPM risked becoming hollow states (Greve 2008) or fragmented states (Christensen and Lægheid 2004), and the strategic alignment of government has become one of the key challenges for the future of the public sector. Furthermore, the reforms were seen as undermining political control through the strict separation of political and administrative functions and a wide-ranging contractualisation and devolution (Christensen and Lægheid 2003a). By letting the managers manage, overall political control became difficult. This problem is further complicated by the low steering capacity in departments (principals) to control the agencies (agents) because of a supposed hollowing out of policy functions through extensive differentiation and short-term employment contracts.

The advantages and disadvantages of disaggregation strategies have been studied from various perspectives (Talbot and Johnson 2007), but there is relatively little overall assessment of the total impact of NPM-style reforms on fragmentation and coordination in the public sector. An analysis by Boyne on the effect of NPM-inspired institutional disaggregation on institutional performance in British local

authorities revealed that one of the key assumptions of NPM, that disaggregation leads to better performance and that large organisations are poor performers, does not hold (Boyne 1996). Indeed, subsequent research suggested that large consolidated organisational units are likely to benefit from lower administrative overheads (Andrews and Boyne 2009). Painter, in a study on housing policy in Australia, found mixed effects of disaggregation and NPM-style reforms on policy capacity (Painter 2003).

As a result of this real or perceived fragmentation, recent trends can be seen towards strengthening the overall steering capacity of government through a new agenda of coordination (cf. *infra*) (Verhoest et al. 2007). New agendas focusing on strengthening the policy cohesion of the public sector have emerged, and governments have further attempted to regain a certain degree of control over hived-off tasks through a new regulation agenda. The tendency towards departmentalisation and towards the development of whole-of-government approaches is a good illustration of this trend. Norman and Gregory talk about pendulum swings in administrative doctrine, with ideas moving back and forth. The NPM-style move towards smaller organisations in reaction to large bureaucracies is now being challenged by a move towards amalgamations of organisations and networks of organisations in reaction to fragmentation (Norman and Gregory 2003). The partial rolling back of agencification and installation of coordinating structures in the UK is a good example (Talbot and Johnson 2007, James 2003, James 2004).

### **NPM-style reforms and the effect on equity and social cohesion**

NPM-style reforms have been widely associated with neo-liberal thinking and blamed for their effect on the public service ethos, the (un)equal treatment of citizens and a corresponding decline in the cohesion of local communities. The suitability of NPM ideas for a public-sector context has been questioned, especially as they are sometimes seen as undermining shared public values and the pursuit of social equality. Whereas in its early days, NPM was heralded as the – politically neutral – solution to the public sector's problems, it has since become subject to increasing criticism because of its association with neo-liberal tendencies towards capital accumulation. Some of these criticisms are of an ideological nature, yet many result from first-hand experience of the unintended effects of innovations such as pay-for-performance schemes, utility liberalisation and deregulation, and marketisation. Job insecurity, rising utility prices and weakened democratic accountability have served to undermine the post-war welfarist consensus upon which social solidarity was founded.

NPM rhetoric in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised the need to restore citizens' trust in a public sector that routinely failed to meet their needs (Van de Walle et al. 2008). By offering citizens more choice and inserting market discipline into the public sector (OECD 1987), it was thought possible to overcome the dysfunctions of bureaucracy. According to this model, citizens should be viewed as customers with all the rights and entitlements to consideration and service that this entailed (Clarke and Newman 2007, Aberbach and Christensen 2005, Clarke 2004). However, the resistance of public officials in many sectors and countries to attempts to redefine

clients as customers, coupled with the reduction of communities to a mere aggregation of customers, has been subject to severe criticism. Indeed, the effects of such a shift on political agency and social cohesion has been a recurring theme in the academic literature (Clarke and Newman 1997).

Many authors have discussed the anti-democratic implications of NPM (Behn 1998, Borins 2000, Box et al. 2001, Gottfried 2001), especially its propensity to establish a "supermarket state" model, where the wealthiest, best-informed and most assertive customers get the best quality service (Olsen 1988). Whereas conventional Weberian models emphasised the public sector's responsibility to offer equal treatment to clients, NPM models are largely driven by notions of customer satisfaction (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002). At the same time, numerous contradictory impulses are at work within NPM doctrines. For example, calls for greater stakeholder involvement in decision-making sit very uneasily alongside planning, performance management and greater central-government control (Coupland et al. 2008). Similarly, it is very difficult to reconcile NPM's consumerist conception of democracy with the group rights that participative democracy demands (Andrews and Turner 2006).

The nature and implications of the shift from collective (though producer-led) citizen-orientated models to individualised customer-based models have been studied from a variety of academic disciplines and often highlight the managerialist imperatives at the heart of NPM (Clarke and Newman 2007, Learmonth and Harding 2006). More recently, we have also seen increasing attention to studying public attitudes towards public services and towards the effects of liberalisation in certain sectors (Bacchiocchi et al. 2008, Brau et al. 2007, Fiorio and Florio 2008). Examples include studies looking at cohort changes in satisfaction with health care (Adang and Borm 2007), related to reforms within this sector, or studies looking at public preferences for or against public and private provision of public services (Wendt et al. 2010). Special concern in such studies goes to elements of unequal treatment and of access of disadvantaged groups to public services and associated non-take-up or non-recours. The ideas underlying NPM-style reforms have also been blamed for dysfunctional effects on the democratic polity and on responsiveness to citizens. One key cause for this change is the changing role of professionals in the public sector. Professionals have come under increasing pressure through the use of protocols and targets (Ferlie et al. 1996, 165-194, Broadbent and Laughlin 2002), even in those public services where individual discretion rather than standardisation is essential (Savoie 1995).

## **The impact and effect of NPM: Collating the empirical evidence**

### **Why so few evaluations of NPM?**

Despite the omnipresence of NPM rhetoric and practice, both in the public sector and in academia, evaluations of whether NPM has worked are relatively scarce. NPM reforms have been described and compared, but seldom evaluated (Norman 2003, Peters and Savoie 1998). Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) point to the paradox that result-driven NPM reforms have not themselves resulted in an evaluation of the results of NPM reforms. The need to evaluate reforms has not been taken seriously

(Boyne et al. 2003, 2), and the NPM reform rhetoric has often been taken for real (Pollitt 1995). There is, then, a need to examine *whether* a transformation has really taken place at all (Pollitt 2002).

There is quite a lot of talk about the presumed positive effects of NPM and a strong political rhetoric about the benefits of reform, yet very little analysis. Many NPM evaluations have been heavily ideological or rhetorical (see Gregory 2003 for a critique). This absence of proper evaluation is not surprising, as many reforms have not been clear-cut. Furthermore, there exists very extensive variation across countries, both in state models and in reforms, making comparative analysis difficult. In the overall public-administration literature, there appears to be a relative consensus that NPM may have suffered from overselling, with dramatic underestimates of transaction costs and new administrative costs. Yet, overall, NPM appears to have resulted in more efficiency, but it depends on the tasks we are looking at (Christensen et al. 2008, 159).

Quite a few studies have focused on changes in public-sector-reform rhetoric and have used changes in the language used to talk about the public sector as the basis for evaluations. For instance, Gualmini (2008) analysed policy statements and government documents on reform in six countries (UK, US, IT, ES, FR, DE). This is relevant because talk often becomes reality. Several other studies have looked at formal and structural changes in public sectors. The NPM-movement has also created a large number of more generalist writings, considerations and observations, yet proper empirical evaluations are far and few between. Where studies exist, they are generally quite limited and tend to provide frameworks for evaluation, rather than doing the actual evaluation, and they tend to be non-quantified (Wollmann 2003). While there are not many empirical evaluations, the stream of conceptual works, works tracing the origins of NPM, or studies describing national realities, does not stop (McLaughlin et al. 2002, Borins 1995, Christensen and Læg Reid 2010). The public-administration literature does list a number of broad-sweeping national studies of NPM implementation, with a focus on the description of NPM impacts in e.g. Spain, Switzerland, Austria, France, Denmark, Central and Eastern Europe etc. (Bouckaert et al. 2008, Cole and Jones 2005, Greve 2006, Hammerschmid and Meyer 2005, Ongaro 2010, Schedler 2003, Torres and Pina 2004), or generic cross-country descriptions and summaries of reform trends (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). There are several detailed overviews of trends in individual countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, Schedler and Proeller 2002) or broad-sweeping macro-evaluations (Kettl 2000). Where studies exist, these focus on one specific sector or case, or on a single country or group of countries (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003b). There are few empirical studies that allow the evaluation of NPM effects across a range of sectors and countries.

In part, this lack of evaluations or impact studies has to do with the ill-defined nature of NPM, the variety of NPM models often with only a token recognition of NPM and the incompleteness of many NPM-style reforms. Measuring "results" of public-management reform is therefore slippery (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). The absence of clear evaluations follows from the difficulties in defining NPM, from the difficulties to discover the objectives of reform programmes and from conceptual differences in defining results such as savings, effectiveness, efficiency etc. (Pollitt 2002).



## Evaluating aspects of NPM

Overall evaluations of NPM-style reforms in certain sectors or national administrations are relatively scarce. However, specific NPM-style managerial innovations, as opposed to overall reforms, have been evaluated. These include reforms such as the introduction of agencies, performance pay, privatisation etc. We limit this overview to just some examples. Coupland et al. asked school principals in the UK to describe their new role following NPM reforms (Coupland et al. 2008). Also in the education sector, Andersen looked at the effect of NPM reforms in Danish schools on student performance (Andersen 2008). There have been evaluations of specific innovations and their various effects, including PPPs (Coulson 2008), the use of performance indicators (Bevan and Hood 2006, Pidd 2005, Smith 1995), performance pay (Randma-Liiv 2005), contracting (Hodge 2000) etc. Public-sector agencies have received considerable attention (Yamamoto 2006, Verschuere and Barbieri 2009, Pollitt et al. 2001, Pollitt and Talbot 2004, Pollitt et al. 2004). A substantial number of studies have looked at the impact of liberalisation, privatisation and other NPM-style reforms in utility sectors and former state monopolies, such as electricity, gas, and telecoms (Bacchiocchi et al. 2008, Brau et al. 2007, Fiorio and Florio 2008). Still other studies have focused on changes in HR systems and employment and the associated effects on civil servants' work, job security, morale etc. (Worrall et al. 2000, Emery and Giaque 2003, Nelissen et al. 1996, van Thiel et al. 2007, Hammerschmid et al. 2007).

## Overall evaluations of the impact of NPM-style reforms

Despite a considerable number of studies looking at the effects of specific subsets of reform, few entire programmes of reform have been analysed. There are noteworthy exceptions though, such as Boyne et al.'s (2003) evaluation of NPM-style reforms in a number of sectors. In this evaluation, they focused on effects of NPM-style reforms on responsiveness, equity and efficiency in sectors such as housing, education and health. There appears to be some evidence that NPM has led to increased efficiency in the British health sector, but the situation is more ambiguous in other sectors, such as education. Furthermore, there appear to be some indications of reduced equality.

There are also exceptions at the local level. Both in Germany and the UK, NPM-style reforms in local government have been subject to evaluation. In Germany, a group of scholars did a large-scale evaluation of the *Neue Steuerungsmodell* – the New Steering Model in German local government (Kuhlmann et al. 2008), based on a survey of mayors and CEOs of German local authorities. In England, Walker and Boyne found NPM-style prescriptions such as planning, organisational flexibility and user choice to be positively associated with organisational performance in English local government (Walker and Boyne 2006). Likewise, innovative strategies have been found to have positive effects on organisational performance (Andrews et al. 2006) – though this is likely to work best in a decentralised organisation (Andrews and Boyne 2009). James (2003) noted that whilst individual agency performance often improved, systemic problems of performance emerged in sectors

where agencies were involved in extensive joint working with other public bodies, such as in the welfare-payments system where agency-specific targets and employment practices made working with local bodies and other central government agencies more difficult.

A final set of overall evaluations has looked at the effects of NPM-style reforms on the size and scope of the public sector. If the theory is right, two decades of reform should have resulted in smaller government outlays, lower deficits, savings and a smaller number of civil servants (Kettl 2000). These macro-level studies give us some information about macro-level changes in the public sector, but generally leave us guessing about the exact causal relationship between NPM reforms and broad outcomes. Furthermore, most of them have focused on a limited set of countries or have employed a limited time frame (Kettl 2000, Ferlie et al. 1996, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, Goldsmith and Page 1997, Lane 1997b), and a link between the extent of NPM reforms in a country, the timing of such reforms and the changes in government outlays is generally absent.

### **An empirical desert**

Despite the omnipresence of NPM as a topic in academic and policy debates, the dearth of empirical material is striking. Hood's decade-and-a-half-old damning evaluation is unfortunately still largely valid: "There are no systematic cross-national studies showing degrees of variation in public management reform in a robust and reliable way. The literature in the area is long in anecdote and general commentary but short on systematic comparison, and comes close to being a datafree environment." (Hood 1995, 99). Where such evaluations exist, they are often based on incomplete or unreliable empirics or are heavily tainted by ideological positions. Already in 1994, Dunleavy and Hood noted that, "most supposedly empirical discussions of the complex issues involved are dominated either by NPM evangelists exaggerating the efficiency impacts of changes on the basis of very preliminary or selective data; or by detractors basing their scepticism on dramatic anecdotes or sketchy arguments from past experience" (Dunleavy and Hood 1994, 13).

A lack of substantive, broad-ranging quantitative research makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions (Boyne 2002b). In recent years, we have observed a move towards more quantitative evaluations. Some inroads have been taken, for instance, through the ESRC Public Services Programme in the UK, where a series of research projects focusing on reforms in specific sectors or on specific innovations was commissioned in recent years. Also in some specific sectors and on some specific topics, we can find a more extensive use of quantitative data. Examples include utilities and network industries, research on privatisation or research on the performance and autonomy of public agencies.

The relative scarcity of quantitative research is not entirely due to researchers. A lot of basic empirical material is simply absent. Many official cross-national public-sector statistics are notoriously unreliable and therefore not useful for research. Only recently, through efforts by EUROSTAT or through OECD's Government at a Glance project to improve data definitions has data become more reliable and valid. Most progress has been made in health-sector data, but to be ready for cross-national com-

parisons of public-sector productivity, quite a few issues of data definitions need to be solved first (O'Mahony and Stevens 2006, Mahoney 2001). Measuring productivity has become easier in some countries in recent years thanks to the work of budgeting or statistical offices in e.g. Sweden or in the UK, and especially the work of the UK Centre for the Measurement of Government Activity (UKCeMGA) within the Office for National Statistics. Overall, given the quality of existing data, it is still way too early to make solid data-based, cross-national comparisons of public-sector productivity and efficiency. Where we have seen such attempts, these were based on massive simplifications of the tasks and scope of the public sector, or they necessarily had to rely on second-rate data (Afonso et al. Tanzi 2003, Van de Walle 2009).

### **Surveys on the impact of NPM**

One type of data that is available, albeit fragmented, is survey data collected through interviewing public officials. Many recent studies on the impact of NPM-style reforms are based on surveys of public officials. Læg Reid et al. looked at how the Management-By-Objectives-And-Results (MBOR), the Norwegian system of performance management, was introduced and at how its effects are evaluated by Norwegian public officials (Læg Reid et al. 2006). They also evaluated factors that have led to a successful and complete implementation of the system (Læg Reid et al. 2006). Christensen and Læg Reid also surveyed 2397 Norwegian civil servants in 1996 and asked them about the significance of various NPM-type measures in their organisation (management, organisational and market reforms) (Christensen 1999). Perception appears to be quite different depending on where one sits within the organisation. They later conducted a study on changes in perceptions between 1996 and 2006 by comparing the data sources (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007). Meyer-Sahling, commissioned by SIGMA, organised a web survey of civil servants in ministries in Central and Eastern European countries on practices in civil-service management, attitudes towards these aspects and their evaluation of recent reforms in seven CEEC countries, with 2361 respondents (Meyer-Sahling 2009). Meyer and Hammerschmid surveyed 417 public executives in Austria to measure the extent of their identity shift from a Rechtsstaat to one of NPM (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006a, Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006b, Hammerschmid et al. 2007). Likewise, Skålén (2004) longitudinally studied the effect of the introduction of NPM initiatives in a Swedish local public-health-care authority on organisational identity. Other studies include those that investigate NPM effects on identities within the UK police service (Davies and Thomas 2003) or the effects of NPM reforms on Swedish nurses (Blomgren 2003). Demmke et al. (2008) further worked on a study commissioned and financed by the Portuguese EU Presidency in which they surveyed 135 public managers in the EU on the impact of individual assessments on organisational performance in the public services. The same researchers further surveyed 4500 managers and employees of the city of Vienna on their public-sector motivation and attitudes towards public-management reform (Hammerschmid and Meyer 2009), and in 2009, they coordinated an executive survey on public-sector leadership among 352 German top civil servants (Hammerschmid and Geissler 2010). Groot and Budding asked 105 practitioners in government and nonprofits in Bel-

gium and the Netherlands about their appreciation of NPM and future developments, more specifically in relation to planning and control systems and accrual accounting (Groot and Budding 2008).

## Conclusion

In this paper, we provided an overview of impact studies and evaluation of NPM reform programmes. It was found that while many studies have addressed specific aspects of NPM-style reforms, few entire reform programmes have been evaluated, and quantitative empirical approaches are in short supply. This is due to two factors: one is that many reforms are not clear-cut but rather emerge or remain undefined and combine many NPM- and non-NPM-style reform elements. The other is that New Public Management as a concept has different meanings and has therefore become a catch-all term, making it hard to evaluate its impact.

While a considerable number of studies has focused on specific managerial innovations, evaluations of entire programmes are harder to find. In addition, studies focusing on NPM and the new role it gives to the state and citizens tend to be of a critical rather than an empirical nature. Yet, despite the gradual replacement of NPM-style reforms by a new wave of reforms, we do see a growing body of empirical material.

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**STEVEN VAN DE WALLE**, Ph.D., is Professor of Public Administration at the Department of Public Administration, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. His research interests include public sector performance, citizen perceptions of public services and trust in government. **GERHARD HAMMERSCHMID**, Ph.D., is Professor of Public and Financial Management at the Hertie School of Governance, Germany. His main research interests include public management reform, performance management, public corporate governance and public service motivation. Correspondence: Steven Van de Walle, Department of Public Administration, Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands; E-mail: vandewalle@fsw.eur.nl; hammerschmid@hertie-school.org.