

The New Public Management in Morocco: A Theoretical Approach to the Dynamics of Public Administration Modernization.

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Abstract

This article presents an in-depth theoretical reflection on the deployment of New Public Management (NPM) in Morocco, situated within the broader context of public administration reforms initiated since the early 1990s. Through a critical review of academic and institutional literature, it explores the ideological, conceptual, and practical foundations of NPM while analyzing the dynamics of its implementation within the Moroccan administrative system. The central objective is to assess to what extent this managerial model originally rooted in Anglo-Saxon administrative reforms has been adapted to, or has conflicted with, Morocco's sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural specificities.

Emerging from administrative reforms undertaken in Anglo-Saxon countries during the 1980s, NPM gradually established itself as a dominant global paradigm emphasizing performance, accountability, and efficiency in public sector management. It is based on the introduction of private-sector principles and techniques, such as results-based management, contractualization, decentralization of decision-making, and performance evaluation. In Morocco, NPM has inspired several modernization initiatives, including the digitization of public services, the rationalization of bureaucratic processes, and the promotion of managerial responsibility within public institutions.

However, the article argues that the Moroccan experience with NPM remains partial, fragmented, and often technocratic, marked by a formal adoption of managerial tools without a genuine transformation of administrative culture or governance logic. The predominance of legalistic traditions, hierarchical bureaucratic structures, and political centralization often limits the effective translation of NPM principles into practice. As a result, managerial reforms tend to coexist with persistent structural rigidities, thereby generating tensions between the pursuit of efficiency and the need to preserve public value, social equity, and democratic accountability. The article concludes that beyond the simple importation of managerial instruments, the modernization of Morocco's public administration requires the development of a contextualized model of public governance. Such a model should reconcile managerial performance with the ethical and democratic imperatives of the public sector, fostering an administrative culture grounded in transparency, participation, and sustainable public value creation.

Keywords: New Public Management, performance, administrative reform, public governance, Morocco, state modernization, rationalization, evaluation.

Introduction

The public administrations worldwide are being faced with the need to improve management, efficiency, transparency and control over running public services. As we enter the twenty-first century, one paradigm that rose to prominence over the last few decades for reforming public sectors, is New Public Management (NPM). NPM -based on neoliberal ideology-encourages the use of managerial devices taken from the private sector, such as performance indicators, competition and customer focus within public sector organizations (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This is a significant departure from traditional bureaucratic models to results-based government and managerial responsibility. Within this larger global context, the article considers NPM's trajectory and appropriation in the Moroccan administrative system presented not as a set of technical tools but as a conceptual and ideological framework to reconfigure public action.

In Morocco, for example, the impact of NPM ideas started to be visible in the first half of the 1990s characterized by the adoption of structural adjustment policies, fiscal discipline and increasing international promotion of good governance. Since then, the Moroccan state has launched some waves of administrative modernization which pursued to improve public service quality, develop performance measures and reinforce financial transparency and accountability (OECD, 2021). Examples of such initiatives are the budget management reform, introduction of results-based management (RBM) and ongoing digitalization of administrative procedures. Yet, the transplantation of NPM-inspired reforms into the Moroccan administrative apparatus has highlighted a number of institutional, cultural, and structural constraints. Anthony Giddens would say: "The French style of bureaucratic perception, the individualism is categorical to historical individual. It could not itself self-evidently be translated from a previous tradition into an Arabic one." These characteristics have presented obstacles for transforming a culture of compliance to a culture of performance and accountability. Long-standing problems such as weak managerial autonomy, underdeveloped performance measurement mechanisms, and continued bureaucratic inertia remain impediments to the achievement of NPM's aims (Bouckaert & Pollitt, 2011).

This article aims to establish a theoretical and critical tool of analysis regarding the adoption of NPM in Morocco, by examining the way it was conceived, perceived and implemented at Moroccan level and its implications in transforming governance, performance and legitimacy of public sector reform. While being in dialogue with international but also domestic literature, our study aims to offer a more complex description of the Moroccan NPM experience: it seeks

not simply to describe reforms but rather questions their underlying rationale and proposed value as well as their modes of translation into administrative practice and their contradictions. In order to meet this purpose, the research is developed around five dimensions of analysis. First, it scrutinizes the conceptual and ideological underpinnings of NPM, discussing its theoretical assumptions and normative presuppositions. Second, it brings out the historical evolution of administrative reforms in Morocco and highlights some milestones and breakthroughs in its process of modernization. Third, it discusses the dynamics and paradoxes of NPM implementation, by examining the conflicting requirements between rational management and local administration. Fourth, it examines the constraints of Morocco's public sector, such as issues related to efficiency and governance (i.e. coordination between agencies, responsibility, institutional consistency). To do so, it suggests an endogenous framework of NPM borrowing adjusted to the Moroccan context and other developing countries so that managerial efficiency coexists with public value, equity and democratic legitimacy. The paper concludes by summarizing the key findings and considering the implications of a contextual, adaptive form of NPM for the future prospects of public sector reform in Morocco.

Possible backdrop the Moroccan NPM's inappropriate aping? By focusing on this study, however, we want to illustrate that a more contextually grounded borrowing of NPM matters for Morocco's public sector transformation: one that learns from global management innovations, but also nurtures its own institutional culture and administrative assets, governance traditions.

1. Theoretical Foundations of New Public Management (NPM)

1.1. Origins and Core Principles of NPM

Emerging in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and the United States during the 1980s, the New Public Management (NPM) movement arose as a critical response to the inefficiency and rigidity of traditional bureaucratic systems and the fiscal constraints faced by welfare states. Grounded in neoliberal economic philosophy, NPM drew inspiration from private-sector management practices and promoted the application of market-oriented mechanisms within public administration (Hood, 1991). It was driven by the belief that the public sector could achieve higher levels of efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability by emulating corporate management models.

The fundamental doctrines of NPM can be summarized as follows:

- **Decentralization of decision-making authority**, granting greater autonomy to managers and local administrative units;

- **Accountability and performance measurement**, emphasizing the use of quantifiable indicators to assess results;
- **Customer orientation**, conceptualizing citizens as clients or consumers of public services;
- **Efficiency and cost-effectiveness**, positioning value for money as a key performance criterion;
- **Contractual management and competition**, encouraging internal markets and performance-based contracts within and between public agencies.

These principles constituted a radical departure from Max Weber's bureaucratic model, which prioritized procedural compliance, hierarchy, and uniformity. NPM, by contrast, shifted the focus toward results-oriented management, organizational flexibility, and performance evaluation (Ferlie et al., 1996). This transition marked the rise of a new managerial culture in the public sector, wherein efficiency and accountability became synonymous with modernization and reform.

1.2. NPM as a Paradigm of Public Sector Modernization

Beyond a mere set of managerial techniques, NPM represents a comprehensive paradigm of public sector modernization. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) emphasize, NPM encapsulates a global vision of administrative transformation that redefines the relationship between the state, the market, and the citizen. Its underlying managerial logic prioritizes performance, measurement, and control, reshaping public administration into a results-driven enterprise. Within this framework, the state evolves from being a direct provider of services to acting as a strategic regulator, overseeing service delivery through contractual arrangements and performance incentives.

According to Dunleavy and Hood (1994), NPM signals the emergence of a "post-bureaucratic" state, where traditional hierarchical coordination is progressively replaced by performance contracts, competitive tendering, and network-based service delivery mechanisms. This transformation is associated with a broader trend toward governance through management, in which public organizations adopt entrepreneurial strategies and seek to optimize outputs under conditions of fiscal constraint and public scrutiny.

However, as Christensen and Lægreid (2011) caution, the success and applicability of NPM remain highly context-dependent. While the model has yielded notable improvements in efficiency and accountability within Anglo-Saxon administrative systems, its transposition to developing or transitional contexts often encounters significant challenges. Issues such

as institutional inertia, limited administrative capacity, and weak political commitment may hinder the full realization of NPM objectives. Consequently, the diffusion of NPM across different governance environments necessitates a context-sensitive adaptation, balancing managerial efficiency with the preservation of public values, equity, and legitimacy.

In summary, NPM stands as both a theoretical and practical framework for rethinking public administration. It offers tools for enhancing performance and accountability but also raises critical questions regarding its compatibility with diverse political, institutional, and cultural settings questions particularly salient in the case of countries like Morocco.

2. Administrative Reforms in Morocco: Genesis and Trajectories

2.1. The 1990s: The Emergence of Managerial Discourse

The 1990s marked a decisive turning point in the evolution of Morocco's public administration, as the country began its gradual shift from a bureaucratic logic of control toward a managerialist and performance-oriented discourse. This transformation was largely driven by both internal and external factors most notably the structural adjustment programs promoted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These programs sought to rationalize public expenditure, enhance fiscal discipline, and improve the overall efficiency of the state apparatus (World Bank, 1995).

During this period, Morocco launched a series of reforms that laid the groundwork for what would later be recognized as the New Public Management (NPM) agenda. Key initiatives included:

- Public service reform, introducing elements of mobility, merit-based promotion, and a gradual decentralization of administrative functions;
- The adoption of Results-Based Management (RBM) principles in public budgeting, linking financial resources to measurable outputs and outcomes;
- The introduction of performance indicators and contractual management mechanisms within public enterprises and agencies, intended to foster accountability and efficiency;
- The implementation of national modernization programs promoting transparency, simplified administrative procedures, and improved service delivery to citizens.

These reforms collectively represented the first attempts to institutionalize a performance culture within Morocco's public administration. However, as Bencheikh (2018) observes, these early initiatives often remained symbolic, fragmented, and predominantly formalistic. They lacked the necessary institutional anchoring, managerial capacity, and political commitment to

translate reform rhetoric into sustained administrative transformation. Consequently, the 1990s can be viewed as a formative yet incomplete phase in Morocco's trajectory toward managerial modernization a period during which the discourse of performance began to take shape without yet achieving systemic depth.

2.2. Twenty-First Century Reforms: Digitalization and Governance

Entering the twenty-first century, Morocco renewed and expanded its reform agenda, seeking to move beyond technocratic rationalization toward a more integrated and governance-oriented approach. A series of landmark legislative and institutional reforms signaled this new orientation:

- The Organic Law on Finance (LOF 130-13), adopted in 2015, institutionalized performance-based budgeting, requiring ministries and public entities to define strategic objectives, performance indicators, and outcome evaluations;
- The National Strategy for Public Deconcentration Reform (2018–2021) articulated a comprehensive vision of administrative modernization centered on efficiency, transparency, digital transformation, and human resource development;
- The Decree on Administrative Deconcentration (2018) reinforced regional autonomy and territorial governance, aiming to align administrative structures with the goals of decentralization and regional development.

In parallel, Morocco has embraced digital transformation as a cornerstone of its modernization efforts. The “Digital Morocco 2025” strategy seeks to simplify administrative processes, improve inter-agency coordination, and enhance citizen access to public services through e-governance platforms. Initiatives such as online service portals, electronic document management, and open data frameworks exemplify this transition toward a more responsive and technology-enabled public sector.

Nevertheless, the implementation of these reforms continues to face significant challenges. Persistent weaknesses in evaluation capacity, inter-institutional coordination, and public accountability limit the effectiveness and sustainability of reform outcomes (OECD, 2021; Cour des Comptes, 2020). Moreover, entrenched bureaucratic practices, limited managerial autonomy, and resistance to change often hinder the full operationalization of NPM principles. In sum, Morocco's administrative reform trajectory reflects a progressive yet uneven process of adaptation to NPM paradigms. While notable advances have been made particularly in digitalization, fiscal transparency, and performance-oriented budgeting the enduring challenge

lies in consolidating these technical reforms into a coherent governance model that balances managerial efficiency with institutional legitimacy and public trust.

I. 3. The Deployment of NPM in Morocco: Dynamics and Paradoxes

II. 3.1. Managerial Diffusion and Institutional Innovation

The deployment of New Public Management (NPM) principles in Morocco has been characterized by gradual and selective diffusion, primarily concentrated within public enterprises and semi-autonomous agencies such as the National Office of Electricity and Water (ONEE), the National Social Security Fund (CNSS), and the National Railways Office (ONCF). These entities, positioned at the intersection of public service delivery and economic performance, have served as laboratories for managerial experimentation and institutional innovation.

In these organizations, NPM-inspired reforms have materialized through the introduction of contractual management frameworks, whereby public funding is explicitly tied to performance indicators, service delivery targets, and results-based accountability mechanisms. The contractualization process has encouraged a redefinition of managerial responsibilities, emphasizing output measurement, performance evaluation, and responsiveness to users.

Furthermore, the diffusion of NPM has stimulated a managerial culture of innovation within the Moroccan public sector. Institutions have progressively adopted strategic planning tools, financial control mechanisms, and customer satisfaction metrics as integral components of governance. These developments have not only contributed to improved efficiency in certain public enterprises but also fostered the professionalization of administrative elites, who increasingly view management as a means to enhance accountability, transparency, and performance.

However, while these managerial innovations signify progress toward modernization, they remain unevenly institutionalized across the Moroccan public administration. Their sustainability often depends on political will, leadership continuity, and the adaptability of organizational structures, which vary significantly among sectors and agencies.

3.2. Tensions and Institutional Resistance

Despite these advancements, the Moroccan experience with NPM reveals a series of structural tensions and enduring paradoxes. The discourse of managerial performance often collides with the realities of bureaucratic culture, generating a persistent gap between reform rhetoric and administrative practice.

Several systemic obstacles illustrate this contradiction:

- **Persistent centralization of decision-making**, which limits the scope of managerial autonomy and inhibits innovation at lower administrative levels;
- **Restricted managerial discretion**, as formal decentralization has not been matched by genuine empowerment or resource flexibility;
- **A weak evaluation culture**, characterized by the absence of systematic feedback loops, performance audits, and evidence-based decision-making;
- **A mismatch between political objectives and managerial tools**, whereby performance indicators are often disconnected from policy goals or lack relevance to service outcomes.

These challenges underscore the hybrid nature of Morocco's governance system, which blends traditional bureaucratic logics with modern managerial aspirations. As Bouckaert and Halligan (2008) observe, such hybridization is common in developing and transitional contexts, where reform processes produce coexistence rather than substitution introducing new tools without transforming underlying mentalities.

In Morocco, this dynamic has led to what can be described as "partial modernization": while NPM instruments such as performance contracts, results-based budgeting, and digital management systems have been formally adopted, the cultural and institutional prerequisites for their full effectiveness remain insufficiently developed. Bureaucratic inertia, risk aversion, and hierarchical control continue to prevail, preventing the emergence of a truly performance-oriented administration.

Ultimately, the Moroccan experience with NPM illustrates the complexity of transferring global managerial paradigms into national contexts shaped by distinct institutional traditions and political economies. It suggests that genuine modernization requires not only technical reforms but also deep cultural and cognitive transformations a shift from procedural compliance toward a shared ethos of public responsibility and performance-driven governance.

4. Rationalization, Performance, and Governance: Between Ambition and Adaptation

4.1. The Challenges of Managerial Rationalization

At the core of New Public Management (NPM) lies the principle of managerial rationalization a process aimed at simplifying administrative procedures, eliminating inefficiencies, and aligning organizational operations with quantifiable performance objectives. In the Moroccan context, rationalization has been pursued through a variety of mechanisms, including process

reengineering, performance auditing, and the use of strategic contracting between the state and its agencies. These initiatives are designed to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of public administration, ensuring that public resources are utilized effectively and outcomes are measurable.

However, as Hammerschmid et al. (2019) emphasize, genuine performance improvement cannot be achieved through managerial instruments alone. It requires an integrated framework that combines institutional coherence, strong leadership, and a learning-oriented organizational culture. In Morocco, the fragmentation of public institutions, overlapping mandates, and rigid administrative hierarchies have often hindered such coherence. The persistence of siloed decision-making and the dominance of procedural compliance continue to constrain the transformative potential of managerial rationalization.

Moreover, the introduction of performance tools such as audits and contractual targets has frequently been technocratic rather than strategic, focusing on formal compliance rather than genuine outcome assessment. This overemphasis on process metrics risks turning NPM instruments into bureaucratic rituals rather than levers of transformation. As a result, managerial rationalization in Morocco remains an ambitious yet incomplete endeavor, constrained by structural rigidity and limited institutional capacity to internalize the logic of continuous improvement.

4.2. Cultural and Organizational Transformation

Perhaps the most critical obstacle to the successful deployment of NPM in Morocco lies in the cultural and organizational fabric of its public administration. Rooted in the French Napoleonic tradition, Morocco's administrative culture is characterized by hierarchical obedience, legal formalism, and procedural conservatism features that stand in stark contrast to the entrepreneurial, adaptive, and results-oriented ethos promoted by NPM (Bencheikh, 2018). This deep-seated bureaucratic culture tends to prioritize conformity and control over innovation and initiative, limiting the emergence of a genuine performance culture. Transforming this cultural paradigm thus constitutes a central challenge for reform. It requires moving beyond structural adjustments toward the empowerment and professionalization of managerial actors at all levels of the administration. Specifically, three interrelated priorities can be identified:

- **Empowering middle managers** through greater autonomy, targeted training, and the delegation of decision-making authority, enabling them to act as agents of innovation rather than mere executors of hierarchical directives;

- **Institutionalizing performance evaluation** not as a punitive or control mechanism, but as a **learning and improvement tool** fostering reflection, feedback, and adaptation;
- **Encouraging participatory governance**, by creating spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and accountability that bridge the gap between administrative actors, citizens, and other stakeholders.

Such transformations require sustained political support, coherent policy alignment, and a deliberate effort to cultivate an administrative ethos that integrates both managerial efficiency and public value orientation. The Moroccan case demonstrates that managerial modernization cannot succeed in isolation from broader cultural change one that redefines public service not merely as rule compliance, but as a mission of delivering effective, equitable, and transparent outcomes for society.

Ultimately, Morocco's path forward depends on its capacity to adapt NPM principles to its own institutional and societal realities. By reconciling efficiency and ethics, performance and legitimacy, the Moroccan public administration can move toward a hybrid governance model one that draws on global managerial innovations while remaining anchored in local values, traditions, and expectations of democratic accountability.

5. Toward a Conceptual Model of NPM Appropriation in Morocco

5.1. Synthesis of the Observed Dynamics

The synthesis of the preceding analyses and the review of the relevant literature indicate that the appropriation of New Public Management (NPM) in Morocco has evolved through three interrelated and complementary dynamics. Together, these trends reflect both the global diffusion of managerial ideas and their local adaptation within the Moroccan administrative system:

1. **International Influence:** Morocco's reform trajectory has been profoundly shaped by the global governance agenda advanced by international organizations such as the World Bank, the OECD, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These institutions have encouraged reforms centered on fiscal discipline, performance evaluation, and public accountability. Their influence has contributed to the diffusion of NPM principles through policy conditionalities, technical assistance, and the promotion of best practices in public management.
2. **Progressive Institutionalization of Performance Management:** Over time, Morocco has witnessed a gradual embedding of performance-oriented management within public organizations. This process has been facilitated by successive legal and institutional

reforms including the Organic Law on Finance (LOF 130-13) and the National Strategy for Public Administration Reform (2018–2021) which institutionalized tools such as results-based budgeting, performance indicators, and service evaluation mechanisms. Despite the persistence of bureaucratic inertia, these instruments have begun to reshape administrative routines, encouraging greater managerial accountability and efficiency.

3. **Hybridization of Bureaucratic and Managerial Practices:** The Moroccan experience is best understood through the lens of hybrid governance, where traditional bureaucratic norms coexist with imported managerial logics. Rather than replacing the Weberian model, NPM principles have been selectively assimilated and reinterpreted according to Morocco's political, institutional, and cultural specificities. This hybridization process has produced a governance model that combines formal modernization with informal continuities, generating both innovation and contradiction within public management practices.

In essence, NPM in Morocco does not represent a rupture with the past but rather an incremental and adaptive transformation, shaped by the interplay of international norms, domestic reform capacity, and enduring bureaucratic traditions.

5.2. A Proposed Conceptual Model

To capture the complexity of NPM's adaptation in Morocco, this study proposes a conceptual model that integrates multiple analytical dimensions linking global managerial principles to local administrative realities. The framework is structured around three main variable categories:

- **Independent Variables (NPM Principles):**

These constitute the core managerial doctrines introduced through reform, including:

- **Autonomy**, emphasizing the decentralization of decision-making and the empowerment of managers;
- **Accountability**, ensuring that performance and results are measurable and transparent;
- **Results-Based Management (RBM)**, linking resources to outcomes and policy impacts;
- **Customer Orientation**, reframing citizens as active clients whose satisfaction measures service success.

- **Mediating Variables (Contextual Factors):**

The translation of NPM principles into effective outcomes depends on key mediating factors that determine the degree of institutional adaptation and internalization:

- **Institutional Capacity**, encompassing administrative professionalism, coordination mechanisms, and regulatory coherence;
- **Leadership Quality**, referring to the commitment and strategic vision of administrative elites in driving reform;
- **Digital Transformation**, which facilitates process rationalization, transparency, and data-driven decision-making;
- **Administrative Culture**, shaping values, norms, and attitudes toward innovation, performance, and accountability.

- **Dependent Variable (Performance Outcomes):**

The expected results of NPM implementation are measured through multidimensional performance indicators, including:

- **Organizational Efficiency**, reflecting the optimization of resources and processes;
- **Transparency**, ensuring openness, accessibility, and public trust;
- **Service Quality**, evaluating responsiveness and reliability in public service delivery;
- **Citizen Satisfaction**, representing the ultimate benchmark of administrative legitimacy and effectiveness.

This conceptual model posits that the effectiveness of NPM in Morocco is contingent upon the interaction between imported managerial principles and local mediating factors. In other words, contextual mediation the capacity of Moroccan institutions to adapt NPM tools to their own historical, cultural, and governance realities constitutes the decisive determinant of reform success.

Thus, the Moroccan experience underscores a fundamental insight of comparative public management: managerial reform is not a process of uniform convergence but one of contextual appropriation. The sustainability of NPM depends less on the mechanical application of international models than on their context-sensitive translation into governance systems capable of reconciling efficiency, equity, and legitimacy.

Conclusion

The Moroccan experience with New Public Management (NPM) exemplifies the inherent challenges of translating a global managerial paradigm into a distinct national governance context. While NPM has undeniably served as a catalyst for reform stimulating progress in transparency, accountability, and efficiency its overall impact remains partial and uneven, constrained by enduring institutional fragmentation, bureaucratic inertia, and cultural resistance to change.

This theoretical reflection has shown that NPM cannot be treated as a universal or standardized model applicable across all administrative systems. Rather, it should be understood as a flexible and context-sensitive framework that requires adaptation to each country's historical trajectory, political economy, and administrative traditions. In Morocco, the success of NPM depends fundamentally on achieving a delicate equilibrium between the imperatives of managerial rationality and the enduring principles of public service ethics between efficiency and equity, control and trust, modernization and legitimacy.

To consolidate and deepen its modernization trajectory, Morocco must move beyond the technical importation of managerial tools toward a more integrated governance model grounded in local realities. This involves cultivating a performance-oriented administrative culture, strengthening evaluation and feedback mechanisms, and empowering public managers through sustained investment in leadership development, institutional learning, and organizational innovation. Only through such endogenous capacity-building can the Moroccan administration internalize NPM's principles in a manner that is both effective and legitimate.

Ultimately, the Moroccan case underscores that the modernization of public administration is not merely a matter of procedural or technical reform. It represents a profound political and cultural transformation one that redefines the role of the state, the expectations of citizens, and the very meaning of public value. The enduring challenge lies in constructing a governance model that harmonizes managerial efficiency with democratic accountability, ensuring that modernization serves not only administrative performance but also the broader pursuit of social justice, institutional trust, and national development.

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