THE AMBIGUITY OF RESULTS: ASSESSEMENTS OF THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT[1]

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Abstract

This article embraces Guy Peters' suggestion that those assessing organizational reform must distinguish between the theories of reform used by organizational members and the theories of reform used by social scientists in their efforts to understand reform phenomena. An examination of the findings of recent assessments of the New Public Management is guided by Peters' categories of reform models. This study concludes that the institutional perspective may offer the most promise in understanding the ambiguous results of these appraisals. This ambiguity, however, should be neither surprising nor dismaying, for reforms are likely to have cumulative effects that make managerial and institutional differences over time.

Introduction

The public sectors of the developed world have undergone a remarkable two decades of public management reform(2) variously labeled "the New Public Management," "managerialism," and "reinventing government." This reform movement has been most extensive in the Anglo-American democracies, but significant efforts to change public management practice on the European continent and in the most developed states of Asia have also been undertaken *(Peters and Savoie, 1998; Kettl, 2000; Politt and Bouckaert, 2000)*. The current new public management (NPM) movement is wedded to substituting business management and market mechanisms, "good things," for "evil and failing" government bureaucracy. Reform prescriptions are by their nature normative, even when they rely on empirically established principles of structure or behavior. Such reforms may be guided by good science, ideological

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commitment, or both. To better understand reform as an organizational phenomenon, researchers need theoretical tools that distance them from prescriptions and aid in explaining the kind of phenomena that public management reform may represent.

Similarly, the literature assessing reform efforts such as the NPM needs to be read from such a perspective. As Peters *(1994)* observes, in order to understand reform as an organizational phenomenon "we will need to be extremely careful to distinguish the theories (implicit or explicit) that have guided practitioners who constructed the reorganizations from those theories which political scientists and other organizational analysts have utilized in their attempts to understand, ex post facto, the changes imposed" *(Peters, 1994, p. 166)*. Barzelay *(2001)* draws a similar distinction between the study of the "political and organizational processes" of making "public management policy" and the "substantive analysis of public management policy" *(pp. 157-158)*.

This paper examines the perspectives and findings of three recent examples of an emerging literature that appraises the effects of the global NPM movement. This critique uses categories of reform models, proposed by Peters *(1994)*, to inspect the tools of assessment used by their authors and to draw conclusions about the ambiguity of results found in the assessment literature under review. Peters' approach is used here because it takes a comprehensive view of reform theories while categorizing and evaluating these as political and organizational processes rather than opportunities for prescription. The paper also reflects on Peters' categories as a basis for furthering study of reform and the significance of the ambiguity of these results.

Reform Models

Reviewing the literature on reform theories, Peters (*1994*) identified three useful categories of reform models that can assist in the interpretation of recent reforms installed in the developed world (see Exhibit 1 below). The first set of models he dubs "purposive." Essentially these reform theories are endogenous to the organization in objective and guidance. Leaders may perceive a "need" for change and seek pragmatically to adjust structures and procedures to satisfy this need. Theory here may be implicit in leadership's choice of a solution, as it is, for example, in the effort to "straighten out" the public sector by having it imitate aspects of the private sector. In its more extreme form such managerialism assumes that the problems of bureaucracy arise largely from bad management, not bad constitutions, policy or programs. Another purposive slant is the economic view that the utilities of bureaucratic officials motivate bureaucratic behavior, and these must be manipulated by incentives to effect desired change. Change decisions associated with the purposive models stem from rationalistic analyses of problems that lead to optimized solutions. Peters concludes that remedies "may be related to common ideological and/or professional beliefs about good government and good administration, but there will be a basic belief that the actors in government themselves are central to identification, selection, and implementation of administrative changes" *(p. 170)*.

Peters' second set of models embraces those approaches to reform that depend on environmental change. Although the type of environment may be conceptualized in different ways, all rest on the belief that "over time structures adapt, or perhaps whole groups of structures adapt, to the environment and construct patterns of organizations that are functional for the fulfillment of their collective goals" *(P. 171)*. This interpretation suggests that organizational history is necessarily efficient. Environmental approaches may take several forms: (1) government creates new organizations to exploit economic or technological innovations in its environment; (2) over time the structures of organizations come to reflect the tasks posed by their environments; and (3) the nature of a type of organization is best discovered by looking at a "population of similar organizations." Organizations seek their niches, Peters says, and the effect of the environment on their behavior can be seen as learning. Where "populations" are concerned, it is collective learning *(p. 175)*.

The third category of models identified by Peters is institutional in nature. Institutional models take a collective perspective rather than an individual one. The institutional approach explains behavior in terms of organizational history, members' shared values, as well as rules and practices. "Rather than requiring only the wishes of an organizational leader, or significant changes in the environment, to occur reform in this mode of analysis requires to some extent altering the internal values of the organization. It therefore requires modifying the operative values of organizational members as well" *(p. 176).* Although this point of view is similar to that of organizational culture, the mutability of an institution is constrained by the inertia of the constitutive beliefs, relationships, and processes of its members. “Once a successful pattern of functioning is established, it becomes difficult for an organization (institution) to reform itself” *(p. 177)*. Not only may reformers of organizations be faced with intransigence, but the outcome of change may prove unpredictable, dispelling any idea of “the efficiency of history” or “positive developmental aspects of organizational responses” *(p.177)*. Reform action is expected to have unanticipated consequences. Institutionalism, moreover, accommodates the notion that reform may be largely a political event, not a managerial one.

Exhibit 1 summarizes Peters’ categories and the characteristics of the theories they classify. These categories should not be taken uncritically. Undoubtedly they reflect Peters’ own concern with issues of structure, process and their relevance for governance *(see Peters, 2001)* as well as his

Exhibit 1
Peters' Categories of Reform Models

Purposive Models	1. Leaders identify need for change, type of reform, direct implementation. 2. Reforms are endogenous in objective and guidance. 3. Reforms are guided by either implicit or explicit theory, commonly managerialism and/or economic theory of individual incentives. 4. Reforms reflect rational analyses with optimized solutions.
Environmental Dependency Models	1. Organizational change or reform constitutes adaptation to environmental factors by a. exploiting economic or technological innovations in the environment; b. structures coming to reflect environmentally imposed tasks; c. finding niches where they can survive. 2. Historical efficiency is at work in the adaptive process.
Institutional Models	1. Organizations are collectives that reflect history, shared values, norms and rules. 2. Change requires altering internal organizational values and, therefore, members' operative values. 3. Organizational mutability is constrained by constitutive beliefs, relationships, and process. 4. Outcomes of reform are unpredictable. 5. Reform leads to unintended consequences.

(Adapted from Peters, 1994)

interest in institutional theory as an approach for examining the behavior of governmental organizations *(see Peters, 1999)*. Exhibit 1 reflects his considerable compression of a range of theoretical ideas into the purposive category. The other categories contain more distinct, more narrowly drawn theories although they have their own variants. Peters' approach gives emphasis to "new" institutional theory and offers up environmental dependency somewhat as a straw man. That said, the institutional view bridges the gap of explanation between internal causes and external causes.

On the one hand, organizations do attempt to adapt, as suggested by the environmental dependency perspective, but members come to hold views of their work and the environment that are conditioned by the way the organization has done business in the past. Organizational leaders and members respond to new and unexpected demands and threats from established assumptions reinforced by existing structure, processes, and experiences. Peters favors the institutional interpretation largely because it fits government organizations and the complexity of reform events in them so well. While the institutional perspective suffers limitations regarding what is cause and what is effect in organizations, it accommodates complexity and particularly provides an understanding of ambiguity in outcomes, which is useful to this analysis.

Three Assessments of NPM Reforms

Three assessments of the public management reform movement in developed nations have recently appeared *(Kettl, 2000; Peters and Savoie, 1998; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000)*. Whereas one of these works, Kettl's reduces NPM to two models and evaluates them in a mere eighty-six pages, another, Peters and Savoie's edited volume, requires 417 pages to address a broader range of issues. Pollitt and Boukaert's study offers a comparative analysis of reform in ten countries. Despite their diversity in size, style, and analytical approach, remarkable similarities are found among the conclusions of these studies: (1) the NPM ideology has taken hold, to varying degrees, in most developed countries prompting efforts at reform; (2) the efforts at reform, in some cases have been comprehensive and in others selective; (3) some of these reforms have been successful in their own terms; (4) nonetheless, it is often difficult for reform results to equal unambiguously their promise; and (5) in any case, overall results are indeterminable.

Kettl's *(2000)* spare volume claims a global perspective, but largely pits the Westminster model of reform, exemplified by the New Zealand experience, against the National Performance Review (later National Partnership for Reinventing Government) model in the United States. While pointing to some "hard" measures such as changes in government employee pay and citizens' opinions of government performance, Kettl must admit that "any assessment of the global reform movement is ultimately unsatisfying" *(p. 57)*. As we might expect, he observes that administrative form and action is wrapped up in political decision-making. Similarly, Savoie *(1998)* asserts that there are valuable lessons learned from the reform experience, "but beyond that, it is difficult to be certain about anything" *(p. 394)*. Pollitt and Bouckaert *(2000, Chapter 5)* provide considerable comparative measurement among ten countries that have embraced, to some degree, the ideology of management reform to. They conclude, however, that the applications of various models of reform are "only occasionally backed up by results data, and, when they are, the attribution of effects is usually disputable" *(p. 133)*. These analysts, too, recognize the "contentious" relationship between politics and administration which contributes to the paradox of "freeing managers to manage," on the one hand, and controlling them through "accountability by results" and "citizen ownership," on the other *(Chapter 6)*. What are we to make of the uncertainty of such assessments and the political nature of reform? Is there a theoretical framework of reform that can accommodate—even explain—the ambiguity of such evidence and the political nature of reform?

Kettl's *(2000)* assessment attributes the impetus for the Westminster-style reforms in New Zealand to environmental causes. Largely there are economic in nature. The extensive and expanding New Zealand welfare state appears to have reached its limits in the 1980s when competition from Pacific Rim economies and declining agricultural exports to the United Kingdom caused economic stagnation and inflation *(p. 8)*. The cost of welfare state appeared to be too much, and dependency on the world economy forced a rethinking of policies and the mechanism for delivering them. To this end change can be seen as adaptation to environmental factors. To discover the efficiency of this adaptation, however, more time may be required to ascertain to what degree environmental forces have been at play. Government surely did act, if Kettl is correct, to exploit economic innovations (e.g., accrual accounting). Thus there is considerable evidence that "environmental dependency" may explain the impetus for reform, but does it explain the shape and nature of reform itself?

Be that as it may, Kettl's assessment clearly reflects the purposive model in his account of New Zealand's reforms: "They resulted from a carefully thought-out plan of what the reformers wanted to do and how they could accomplish it. The New Zealand reforms began with a top-down approach . . . .” *(p. 8).* The object of the reform wasn’t the environment that had made the economy go sour; rather, it arose endogenously as a need for changes in policy regarding what government should do and how it should go about doing it. Leadership’s reform decisions were distinctly neoliberal with “a commitment to competition, a belief in using market processes to shape the incentives of government employees, and an approach to reform heavily shaped by new institutional economic theories” *(p. 8)*. This belief in the efficacy of the market mechanism was coupled with “management reform ideas borrowed from the private sector” *(p. 9).* The use of planning and results-based control mechanisms reflect both the managerial and rationalistic aspects of the New Zealand approach.

Kettl’s assessment recognizes that the thrust of the New Zealand reforms were to reduce government and change the way it does business. As these changes affect values, norms, and rules in governmental structures, they have an institutional impact. Yet, Kettl seems to suggest that the effect has been more “instrumental” than “constitutive,” to use Cook’s *(1996)* terminology. As yet it may be too soon to assess the instrumental impact of these reforms.

The American NPR, Kettl’s contrast to the New Zealand model, can be seen as having strong purposive characteristics. Leaders Clinton and Gore embraced the need for “reinvention” articulated by Osborne and Gaebler *(1992)* and attempt to implement some of the reforms indicated by them. These reforms employ managerialism and market mechanisms. From the perspective of Osborne and Gaebler, the reform received its stimulus from organizational disfunction within government, which fits the purposive scheme. At the same time, environmental dependency, in its most general sense, comes to bear: the large debt generated by the Republicans along with a declining dollar abroad, complicated by the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, make government appear more expensive than ever and reinforce the popular American belief that government is too big.

In many ways, though, Kettl’s (2000) appraisal suggests institutional change. There were relevant and influential environmental, political and economic factors that created circumstances for reform. In addition, Kettl observes,”[A]merica’s sweeping reforms touched more parts of government more quickly than the reforms elsewhere. On the other hand because of the political conflict it engendered, the reforms focused on changing bureaucrats' behavior rather than transforming the fundamental fiber of government's structure and process"*(p. 5*). Structure and processes weren't attacked, but attitudes about how to manage were. Kettl concludes, "Six years of reinvention left the federal government about the same size in scope and scale" *(p. 32).* But it devolved some responsibilities to state and local government, while making the federal government function better. "American reforms are perhaps most distinctive for their integration of governance deeply into the very fabric of civil society" *(P. 65).* From Kettl's perspective American reforms have had a constitutive, institutional effect on U.S. governments, more so perhaps, than in New Zealand.

Peters and Savoie's *(1998) Taking Stock* brings together the work of a number of analysts whose assessments of various aspects of NPM reforms fall into several of the model categories. Some aspect of almost all these appraisals reflect the three theory categories, but the purpose here is to find which they satisfy most. Of the chapters in this volume Peters' *(1998)* is largely philosophical regarding the nature of reform and managerialism specifically. The other articles assay reform and reform processes. Several, Ingraham's *(1998)*, Rainey's *(1998)* and Caiden's *(1998)*, reflect the purposive approach, focusing on reform practices and policies affecting budgeting and human resource management. Ingraham addresses managerialist issues concerning the higher civil service and identifies three models of the higher civil service that states may employ in the future. Using an organizational change model for personnel systems, Rainey compares the NPR personnel reforms to this model to discover their likely success. Caiden finds reform governments trying to contain expenditures, largely brought on, she believes, by expansive policies and process flaws, through new management processes.

The notion of environmental dependency matches the thrusts of other assessments in this collection. Pierre *(1998)*, looking at citizen participation in the policy process, asserts that "trends and developments beyond national political control have seriously challenged these [existing representative] systems" *(p. 137).* For Pierre these challenges consist of increasing political, institutional, and policy-oriented (technical) complexities *(p. 143).* NPM is a response to these challenges, and it "has prompted—or at least encouraged—experimentation with new models of citizen participation *(p. 158)*. Paquin's *(1998)* study of innovation is a less obvious fit into the environmental-dependent category. Because Paquin discusses reforms drawn from the private sector or the practices of other states and promulgated as "solutions" in the public sector, they appear to fit Peters' second category. "Thus waves of reform appear," says Paquin, "and reach administrations at every level: local, state or provincial, and national. Managers therefore have *no choice* to change the way they operate" *(emphasis added; pp. 221-222)*. Compelled by environmental forces, innovations, tested elsewhere, are adopted.

Finally, the institutional perspective appears to guide the remaining studies in the book. As Peters *(1994)* observes, his institutional category overlaps the previous one in that the institution's relationship with the environment serves as a primary analytical tool. Institutionalism also accepts the notion that reform may be pragmatic and rational in form as well as endogenous in origin, but institutionalism is not so optimistic about the effects of change, which may be unpredictable and can create unintended consequences. This last group of assessments addresses values, roles, and structures. All recognize that significant environmental influences have impinged on the administrative systems of advanced countries, and that these institutions are under pressure from reasserted neoliberal values to shift roles and restructure themselves. These works find signs that this value shift is going on to some degree and that change is occurring even if its effects on service and citizens remain uncertain. The pieces by Aucoin *(1998)*, de Montricher *(1998)*, Pollitt *(1998)*, and Thomas *(1998)* speak directly to the ideological shift that has swept the developed world and points to evidence, such as devolution, decentralization, customer service practices, and privatization that have become accepted practice among national bureaucracies. Although all the writers question the coherence and assumptions of NPM, they admit that these ideas have penetrated public sectors rapidly and have become part of the parlance of everyday work. Thomas' *(1998)* discussion of accountability and the revision of accountability processes focuses on a central constitutive value of the public service as well.

Pollitt and Bouckaert's *(2000)* ambitious comparative assessment, appraising ten governments' reform activities, is avowedly institutional in its approach: "we find that institutionalist explanations carry considerable power. . . . We are probably closer to a mildly constructivist historical institutionalism . . ." *(p. 22).* This institutionalism evidences itself in the authors' model of public management reform where socio-economic and political events in the environment of the administrative system dictated and determined the nature of reform. A major feature of their analysis attempts to discover how the contextual characteristics of different "politico-administrative regime types" might account for the nature of reforms within them. They trace the "trajectories" (chain of implementing events) that connect the initial situation to be reformed with the anticipated future. They find a pattern suggesting "that there are some usually-continuing broad differences between different groups of countries" which can be related to politico-administrative regime types *(p. 96).* As for results, they find that "what you look for is what you see" *(p. 129).* This pattern-finding and regime-typing is typical of the institutional approach as is their identification of tensions in the reform ideology that result philosophically and practically in contradictions and paradoxes. Pollitt and Bouckaert see much of the reform effort as an exercise in rhetoric intended to reassure publics and inspire some changes: "The pressure, the rhetoric, the loosening of the old ways—all these have combined to give many public servants the opportunity to make changes which make local sense *to them*" *(p. 191; emphasis in the original).*

Usefulness of Peters' Categories

The application of Peters' *(1994)* typology helps make sense of reform assessments, but it also has its limitations. His models offer objective perspectives from which to examine such evaluations as well as the reforms themselves. The impetus for reform may be explained purposively in endogenous terms by leadership. The evaluator may accept these terms at face value or may look beyond the political-administrative system for the factors that trigger reform. As we have seen, few evaluators and few leaders are likely to simply dwell on internal weaknesses of structure and process, although these may be the objects of attack. Their inappropriateness is usually attributable to their inability to cope with change, which may be internal or external to the political-administrative one, and economic factors are particularly significant here. This is not to say that purposive leaders are likely to talk in terms of "adaptation," but some evaluators are inclined to use this interpretation. Knowing whether an adaptation is efficient, in the sense that it will sustain the political-administrative system over a considerable period of time, requires a longer time span, perhaps, than the fifteen or so years in which some systems have been implementing NPM reforms.

While the environmental dependency model can be used to "explain" reform, there are problems deciding which system or subsystem is dependent and adapting. Is it just a national bureaucracy that is adapting or is it the political institutions as well as the bureaucracy that are adapting? Are the environmental pressures coming from within the state or without the state or both? Where do we draw the line for causal assessment?

How are we to know, moreover, that "authoritative decision-makers" are being pushed toward the best adaptation? When looking at leader's motives, how do we know whether they are prompted endogenously or by a greater environmental context or both? A significant problem with the dependency approaches is that all successful change over time may be attributed to niche finding and environmental pressures, and all unsuccessful change can be seen as a learning experience in the search for an optimum adaptation. Both perspectives assume that theories of reform have fairly predictable consequences, which is a questionable assumption.

The institutional explanation is useful to both reformers and appraisers. Institutional theories alert reformers to barriers thrown up against change and the prospects for easy success. Reformers must contend with institutional inertia that confronts them when they seek to change familiar patters of interaction, norms, written rules of work, symbols of organizational identity, and access for client and constituency groups. Intentional change commonly involves more than a change in behavior among a few members. By definition reform is sweeping in scope and likely to bring into question prized values and ways of getting things done associated with an organization. Surely this is true where NPM is concerned. It challenges the modus operandi of the welfare state built up over a century. It attempts to install in the place of welfare-state assumptions an eclectic set of reforms largely supported by neoliberal values.

Institutional theory also alerts reformers to the prospect that intentional change may generate unintended outcomes for the political-administrative system as well as the broader society. Reforms, like programs in general, are hypotheses to be tested. Experience with a set of techniques in the private sector, in the market, does not necessarily predict the effect of these reforms in the public sector context. The institutional point of view, moreover, should remind reformers of reform's political nature, and that politics directs reform actions toward more than avowed goals of efficiency and effectiveness. Rather, reforms are initiated to secure political power as well. It is this political nature of reform, as Brunsson *(1998)* has shown, that typically leads to disappointment in reform results. Reforms, while addressing the "action" mechanism of institutions in the name of efficiency and effectiveness, are largely intended for the consumption of the many contending forces in the environments of political-administrative systems. They may create a tone within organizations that encourage change, but change, if Brunsson is correct, is unlikely to be abrupt and successful.

The use of the institutional model may lead to more effective assessments of reform efforts by providing a comprehensive analytical framework that makes sense of the reforms and their effects both within and without the political-administrative system. Simply looking at individual initiatives and managerialist changes ignores the greater organizational context of change. Restricting an analysis to the purposive perspective limits the appraiser's ability to judge the intervening "institutional" variable at play in the reform situation and the full impact of an attempted reform. As we have seen the environmental dependency model expands the list of explanatory variables, but suggests an unwarranted determinism that belies the conclusion of reform success. There is considerable evidence that "historical efficiency" is a specious notion *(March, 1999)*. Pollitt and Bouckaert's *(2000)* institutional approach is particularly revealing because it begins from a rich theoretical perspective that identifies organizationally significant variables, guides the analysis, categorizes the findings, and makes meaningful the conclusions.

Interpreting the Ambiguity of Results

Peters and Savoie *(1998)*, Kettl *(2000)* as well as Pollitt and Bouckaert *(2000)* find that the NPM ideology has taken hold to varying degrees in most developed countries. Proponents of the new institutionalism would not find this interpretation surprising on two counts.

First, public organizations have their political sides. They must present themselves as addressing the concerns of their constituencies and clients. One way to address many concerns and maintain legitimacy with environmental actors is to appear to be progressive or modern *(Brunsson and Olsen, 1993a; Forssell, 1993).* One way to do this is to be "fashionable" *(Brunsson, 1993b; Czarniawska and Joerges, 1989).* The NPM can be seen as a modern idea, even though most of its content has been around for some time and are modulations on existing practices. The fact that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, dynamic and successful, became leader-symbols of the shift to neoliberaism made NPM highly attractive. Second, as observed in all three works under review here, Anglo-American countries were more open to acceptance of NPM and embraced it more fully than Continental and Asian regimes. Since the NPM fashion is founded in liberal assumptions, it is not surprising that institutions in the British liberal tradition should prove hospitable to its development and growth. Elements of organizational culture supportive of this view were already in place by virtue of this tradition. Thus the reforms have tended to be more comprehensive in these countries than in others.

Some reforms appear successful in their own terms to their evaluators. First, reforms often belong more to the world of ideas than to the world of action, and they are often successful in the world of ideas as opposed to the practical world *(Brunsson and Olsen, 1993b).* Second, reforms may change the perception of actors in an organization's environment to a more successful perception. Instead of organizations adapting to their environments, sometimes the environment—elements of it—adapts to the organization. As Brunsson and Olsen argue, "Reforms can even create the impression that improvements have already been made, since they are prone to generate talk of change among both reformers and reformees" *(p. 199).* Moreover, "reforms, by definition, are talk about desired states of affairs, and that such talk is adapted, for natural reasons, to the norms of how people should think and talk rather than to the world of practices *(Brunsson, 1993a, p. 87).* Some reforms may have succeeded as designed and intended, but this is thought hard to achieve. Brunsson *(1989)* believes that change is supported by an "objective ideology." To the degree that reforms are consonant with that ideology, they have a possibility of success. The degree to which NPM has integrated itself into existing objective ideologies should facilitate the success of the techniques associated with it.

All three assessments of NPM find that it is often difficult for reform results to equal unambiguously their promise and that overall reform results are indeterminable. Institutionalists don't find this surprising either. Typically success is expressed in terms of goals accomplished, objectives reached. The intentions of reformers are likely to be ambiguous *(March and Olsen, 1989).* It is common to keep or increase ambiguity to gain support from participants *(March, 1989).* The effectiveness of proposed reforms is exaggerated. "Inflated expectations about programs that are successful in gaining support for policy makers make subsequent disappointment likely" *(p. 158).* Not only may reforms begin ambiguously, but, like other decisions, their goals may change with the subsequent reaction, understanding, and behavior of organization members and environmental actors. "Thus, intentions are simultaneously persistent and shifting, simultaneously pervasive and idiosyncratic" *(March and Olsen, 1989, p. 66).* People in organizations evolve away from the original decision as the difficulties of implementation set in. "Policy ambiguity encourages administrative autonomy, which in turn encourage more policy ambiguity" *(March, 1989, p. 160).* If goals are subject to interpretation and shift in meaning, then the match between organizational outputs and outcomes are unlikely to match up with the originally stated goals.

The inconclusiveness of the NPM's results should not distract public managers. As Brunsson and Olsen *(1993a)* point out, in an institutional environment "attempted reforms can . . . be regarded as part of a cultural struggle for norms, world views, symbols and legitimacy" *(p. 11).* The outcome is highly unpredictable and the possibility of failure is high. Peters' institutional models are useful tools for conceptualizing and assessing reform; they provide rationales for the uncertainty of results. Different reforms applied for different reasons in differing contexts are not likely to produce consistent results in the institutional context; moreover, reforms are undertaken for political reasons more so than for organizational ones. Who evaluates the reform has much to do with the nature of the results. Nonetheless, the reforming activities of organizations satisfy many of their constituents' expectations while inspiring change. "[T]the achievement record of reorganization efforts seems more impressive in the long run than in the short run" (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 87). Reforms have cumulative effects that do make managerial and institutional differences over time.

Notes

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2. One of the challenges of addressing the subject of reform and theories of reform is a definitional one: What is reform? Does it refer to any and all attempts to reshape, re-form, organizational structures, processes, and/or relationships? Or does it refer to an exclusive class of organizational changes of a relatively major scale (i.e., comprehensive or intensive in nature)? Does the "reform" of organizational elements need to point toward efficiency or productivity? About these questions there is no clear consensus.

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Douglas Skelley directs the MPA program at James Madison University where he has taught organization theory and public management to graduate and undergraduate students for twenty-two years. His research has addressed institutional theory, management theory, industrial democracy, the neutrality principle in the civil service, and managerial capacity in rural governments. He received his doctorate in political science from the University of Georgia.