

United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Fourth Session, New York, 4 - 8 April 2005

March 29, 2005

A Note on the UN Paper
“Search for a Bottom-Up Approach and Methodologies
for Developing Foundations and Principles
of Sound Public Administration.”

By

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1. Overall Assessment of the Paper

I found the report and the suggestion extremely interesting, and well-thought out. I am particularly impressed by the careful consideration given to the social and political environments of both developing and developed countries. In this respect, I found the paper was particularly sensitive to the issues and dilemmas that developing regions currently face. For these and other reasons, I strongly commend the paper for its content and argument. However, I found several minor problems.

2. Decline of Trust in Government and Public Administration

In my view, the paper tends to simplify this complex issue, and in trying to provide a straightforward solution to the problem, fails to get to the heart of the matter. Further, it does not address the most critical issue, and instead deals with a managerial theme which appears peripheral to the root of the problem.

The difficulty many countries now confront is not the lack of management capacity, nor are they specifically concerned with problems in public administration. Rather, the current problem in various countries is a sharp decline in public trust of government: simply put, the people in many countries no longer believe in their governments. This is a universal phenomenon, found in both developed and developing regions. According

to recent statistics, for instance, more than 60% of the population in Europe has little or no faith in government. Unfortunately, voters and taxpayers everywhere appear to have lost confidence.

It is critical to find a sound method of alleviating this declining public trust in government. In dealing with the issue, we need to come up with an effective measure to stop the erosion of trust in the electorate. I am sure the “Bottom-Up” approach is designed as one means to address this critical issue; however, in my opinion, the approach does not reach the heart of the problem. Instead, the paper tries to scale down the complexity and magnitude of the problem, and to replace it with a very simple managerial issue. I am not sure to what extent a concept such as the Government Performance Program (GPP) would contribute to the reduction of public mistrust in government. Those who initiate the GPP must remind themselves that the ultimate objective of this method is to regain public confidence.

3. Inconsistency of the Argument

Highly mindful of the problems that developing nations presently face, paper frequently refers to the limits and restrictions of its proposition. However, as the discussion moves to the Criteria-Based Organizational Assessment, the general tone subtly changes, and the change becomes more marked when the paper alludes to the Government Performance Project.

In my view, the major targets for this idea are not developing nations. Instead, the actual or potential aim of the GPP is toward a group of newly growing economies. China, India, and Thailand are the primary clients of the concept. In fact, the paper points out that the approach would soon be adopted by these expanding nations. However, if I may use academic jargon, these countries are on the “Dean’s List,” so to speak. In regard to degree of economic growth, these economies are ahead of many developing countries in Africa and other regions.

This suggests that the utility of the GPP is limited, since it presupposes the existence of marked development in social and economic infrastructures. As long as these basics are consolidated and entrenched, GPP would probably work. However, rather than enlarging management capacity, one of the acute problems among developing countries is to first develop the social and economic basics necessary to

their very survival. For these countries, the GPP concept would have to wait for several decades while social and economic fundamentals are being established.

4. The GPP and Good Governance

At the outset, the paper points out the importance of decentralization, participation through functioning organizations, and building partnerships between the public sector and civil society. In addition, the paper also contends that transparency, accountability, participation, and equity must become critical components of public management in the future. However, in the discussion of the GPP, there is little or no mention of these factors which are integral to good governance; the reference remains rather perfunctory.

I would like to know, for instance, how the GPP would promote good governance. Particularly, I would like to inquire how the GPP would improve transparency, accountability, and equity, and be able to guarantee such issues as decentralization, participation, and a host of other requisites intrinsic to a good governance agenda.

5. A Need to Classify Public Policies

Additionally, I believe that the paper treats various policies and programs as being equal and uniform in content. I strongly argue that classifying public policies into two different types – social and economic -- would enlarge and improve our perspective and understanding of public problems. Social issues include those concerned with justice, discrimination, equity, etc. Economic issues are those concerned with the growth and expansion of the country's economy.

In some countries, social issues would be better managed if the central government played a major role. In other words, a top-down approach would produce an effective solution. This is the case in America, where, for instance, the federal government was critical in resolving racial inequity and discrimination. Conversely, in

other countries, decentralization would facilitate the reduction of social injustice, discrimination, and inequity. Although not much documentation is available in English, Japan should be singled out as one of the good examples. Canada may also fall into this category. In terms of management of economic programs, the central authority may lead growth, as in China and Malaysia. In others, a cohort of local governments is involved in this economic issue.

6. Additional Suggestions

In the GPP concept, four components are regarded as independent variables: financial management, human resource management, capital management, and information technology management. According to the concept, they are the causal agents critical for the improvement of management capacity. I contend that, as long as these elements remain as independent variables, they show little or no connection to such important governance components as transparency, accountability, participation, and equity.

I would like to propose a change in the basic format. I suggest using transparency, accountability, participation, and equity as independent variables, with financial, human resource, capital, and information technology management as dependent variables. By changing the basic matrix, we can then test and examine methods for improving transparency, accountability, etc, and the outcome of this scrutiny could subsequently be checked against other managerial issues.

Finally, with regard to decentralization, I attach my article, "Is Decentralization Essential towards Democratization and Modernization: From a Comparative Perspective of Japan's Center-periphery Experience." This article appeared in *Decentralization towards Democratization and Development*, eds. Raul P. Guzman and Mila A. Reforma, The Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration, 1993. While this article specifically alludes to the Japanese experience, I argue that

decentralization is not necessarily conducive to democratization and modernization. I hope that my paper can serve as one of the minor references in the meeting.