

TED1: SYNTHESIS COMMENTS ON PROPOSITIONS

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Christopher Pollitt

Institutional details

Christopher Pollitt
BOF/ZAP Research Professor of Public Management
Public Management Institute
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Parkstraat 45
BUS 3609
B-3000 Leuven
Belgium

Tel. 00-32-16-32-32-70

Christopher.Pollitt@soc.kuleuven.be

For CV, see www.publicmanagement.be (go to ‘staff’)

The ‘propositions’ concerning the Neo-Weberian State that have been circulated by participants in TED have gone far beyond anything that Geert and I had anticipated when we originally coined the label ‘NWS’. Our original focus was on the empirics – on what we thought we saw was going on. NWS was a descriptive concept. Interestingly, only a minority of the propositions and comments we received focused on the empirics. Far more popular was the theoretical side: where different ‘proposers’ linked or compared NWS to a wide range of other theories, including multi-level governance, network theory, regulatory theory, deliberative democracy, Luhmanesque systems theory, Public Service Motivation and the Napoleonic model – to mention but a few! ‘Paradigm’ was probably the most frequently occurring word in the comments we received, and yet in our book we never in fact called the NWS a paradigm, and, indeed, I don’t think it is one. It is just what we called it: a ‘model’ of public management reform.

One initial and sobering thought is that perhaps this distribution of propositions reflects the state of the academic field of public administration and public policy in continental Europe? Could it be that we are an academic community whose theoretical work runs far ahead of our empirical work? [That may be why virtually no-body made any comment at all about research methods and what might be needed to test the accuracy and extent of the NWS description, or to assess its consequences?] We love inventing new theories and models and terms but we are rather slow to design and conduct the large-scale empirical research that might help us to test some of these abstract constructions? Our

typical comparative text is still a collection of country chapters written by individual country experts, within only a loose overall theoretical or conceptual framework. Perhaps one thing that might come out of TED would be a more ambitious empirical agenda, with genuinely strategic and comparative projects, run from several centres as disciplined teams?

However, let me return to the propositions. They were very various and, in the time available, I cannot comment on them all. Since NWS was originally intended as a descriptive concept, I will say only a little at the end about its connections with other *theories*, although that is potentially a very productive discussion. Here, however, I will deal mainly deal with those propositions that cast doubt on the accuracy of NWS as a description or characterization of what has been going on. Among comments of this type there seem to be four main substantive points:

1. Each country has its own variations – Norway, for example, is different from, say, the Netherlands or Denmark, and Finland has several contradictory tendencies within its reform trajectory – and therefore the NWS concept misses a lot of important local detail.
2. The Weberian model does not apply to the Napoleonic states, which have a separate model. Therefore France, Spain etc. cannot be ‘post-Weberian’.
3. In eastern Europe it remains true even now that the most important influence is not the Weberian model but the Russian/Soviet model. Again, therefore, NWS does not really make sense in those territories.
4. NWS ignores the influence of the EU, and needs to be adapted so as to take account of the reality of multi-level governance

I will try to address each of these in turn.

Individual country variation

It is not surprising that not everything in every country fits the NWS. It was always a very high-level model, intended to capture the broadest features not the detail. [The same could be said of the NPM and, indeed, Weber’s original ideal type.] The high level of generality of NWS should be clear from its substantive content (see annex to this note).

Therefore, for there to be particular reforms in a given country which do not have NWS characteristics is not surprising. Only if the main lines of reform in a country contradict or bear little relation to this set of precepts can we say that the NWS is ‘falsified’ for that country. If we take two states that are represented here today and whose representatives have stressed their distinctiveness and variety – Norway and Finland – I would say that, in so far as I understand what has been going on in those two states over the past couple of decades, in broad terms it fits the NWS model quite well. However, I am quite happy to be contradicted by those from those countries, who undoubtedly know their developments far better than I ever could! And I am equally happy to confirm that researchers who focus on issues or events which are do not fit with the NWS model are doing work as important and legitimate as those who use the concept.

The post-Napoleonic states

One comment was that some southern European countries could not be post-Weberian because they were post-Napoleonic. This was an interesting line of argument – I think I know what the proposer was getting at, but I don't quite agree with his way of putting it. Of course Spain, Portugal and Italy have strong trace elements from the Napoleonic system. But I don't think it is that which makes them unlike the Weberian model. Clearly, France and Germany (or at least Prussia) also bear/bore the marks of Napoleon, and they are often considered to be cases of the Weberian model, at least as far as bureaucracy is concerned (Lynn, 2006). [Again, of course, there are major differences between France and Germany, but for certain purposes it is nevertheless useful to see them as both belonging to a particular continental 'type' (Proeller and Schedler, 2007)].

Where I think the difference of the Mediterranean states lies is not so much with their bureaucracies as with their *democracies*. The Mediterranean states all have records of long periods of authoritarianism, and/or weak democratic institutions. They have deeply embedded habits of patronage, clientelism and/or corruption in the public service, to an extent which has disappeared from most north-western European countries (Kickert, 2008). Of course recently they have also seen many reforms, including important attempts to build proper social security systems and national health services, and to modernize systems of budgetary control. But the point is that these are building upon or seeking to change, an inherited situation which is significantly different from that found in the Nordic states, the Netherlands, Germany or even France. In path dependency terms, they have experienced a different sequence of major events (Pollitt, 2008). Thus the Mediterranean states are missing part of Weber's ideal type. They have the bureaucracies (albeit riddled with patronage) but until recently they have not possessed the strong democratic institutions that Weber regarded as essential for keeping bureaucracies under control and supervision. It has been the growth of democratic forms that has constituted the crucial change of the past three decades.

In sum, therefore, I would concede that the group of Mediterranean states are different in some very important respects (Kickert, 2008). This makes it more difficult to fit the NWS model to their recent histories. However, I am not convinced that NWS is entirely irrelevant either. I would cautiously argue that these countries are, in a sense, working towards something like a NWS, but that they are doing so from a different starting position – one where it is the democratic institutions that require as much or more change than the bureaucracy (although the latter is also being modernized, in a piecemeal and incremental way).

The post-Soviet states

None of the 12 states covered in the 2nd edition of Public management reform were post-Soviet, and Geert and I were not thinking of post-Soviet regimes when we discussed the NWS model. Thinking about it now I am inclined to concede that the NWS model does *not* fit such states very well. As a number of commentators have said, they have been trying to introduce modern management methods *at the same time* as installing some of

the basics of a Weberian system (e.g. Hajnal and Jenei, 2008). They are still getting to Weber rather than having the luxury of building beyond him. The Soviet regimes certainly had plenty of bureaucracy, but it was not of the Weberian type, and its relationships with political power were certainly fundamentally different from those in western liberal democracies. What is striking, however, is the number of expert commentators from central and eastern Europe who seem to want to adopt the NWS as a *normative* model – something to strive for, rather than a description of the status quo (e.g. Randma-Liiv, 2008).

The EU and multi-level governance

This is another good point, but I would argue that it is not a fatal one for the NWS idea, for at least two reasons. First, the NWS model was born within the study of public management reform. And public management reform is still an area marked by very strong national autonomy, and only a very limited competence on the part of EU institutions. This is not trade or agriculture. One can write a perfectly good history of public management reform in France or the UK whilst only making minor and occasional mention of the EU. It is true, however, that that autonomy may be less marked in the transitional states of central eastern Europe, where the Commission was able to insist on the installation of certain institutions and procedures as part of the price of membership, but in those cases much of what was imposed was far more Weberian than NPM-ish (Olsen, 2007). It is also true that the EU has had a major impact on the de-regulation and re-regulation of public utilities (energy, telecommunications, transport). However, its influence on reforms in the cores of central and local government has been much more modest – and that is the main focus of this paper, and of our original book.

Second, when we look at the EU Commission, we find a bureaucracy which is itself very much on the NWS path. Having been firmly moulded on the French model it finally, in the 1990s, began to reform, aiming to make itself more externally-oriented and consultative, more professional and more efficient (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). It is indeed a classic bureaucracy which is trying to modernize itself whilst retaining its distinctive public service qualities – very NWS-ish.

Afterthought: developing theory from the NWS model

As indicated at the outset, this short essay is mainly concerned with the adequacy or otherwise of the NWS as a descriptive concept or model. However, Lynn (2008) has provided the Trans-European Dialogue with a strong blueprint of what would be required if this model was to be developed further as a theory. It could feature, for example, as an independent variable (in so far as the NWS exists, it explains the further consequences a, b and c) or as a dependent variable (NWS comes into existence to the degree that the antecedent conditions p, q, and r are present).

My first, rapid reflections on this lead me in the direction of seeing the NWS as possibly the outcome of a political strategy. It could be interpreted as a political response to globalization and political de-alignment in the rich, strong liberal democratic regimes of

western Europe. These are big states, in the sense that they employ or directly support a substantial share of the total workforce, and total government expenditure is a high percentage of GDP (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, pp204-205). This is mainly because they support large welfare states and derive a good share of their legitimacy from these programmes (social security, health care, education, social care). There are major differences between countries, of course, but both the corporatist models of Germany, France and the Netherlands and the social democratic model of Sweden share the characteristic of being bigger in terms of money and staff than the safety net model prevalent in the US (see, most famously, Esping Andersen, 1990). The pursuit of NWS-like solutions could be seen as an attempt to protect the 'European social model' from the deprivations of global markets and neo-liberal ideology. A modernized state may be able to retain the trust (or at least the acquiescence) of enough of its citizens to continue to play the central role in promoting social cohesion and a limited form of egalitarianism. But this would require modernization in at least two senses. First, there would be the elevation of the convenience, quality and efficiency of public services. But, second, there would also need to be an elaboration of mechanisms by which a far better educated, and less deferential, population could participate in decision-making and the expression of preferences.

This, is, however, no more than a first attempt to rise to the challenge thrown down by Lynn's paper (2008).

Summary: the essence of the NWS

The ideas of political power and modernization convey the two deepest dimensions of the original NWS concept. First, the state remains a strong steering and regulating presence within society. Thus the objective is *not* the minimal state praised by some Anglo-American politicians. The state is *not* seen principally as a burden on economy and society, or as a necessary evil. Rather it is the guarantor and partner of both a strong economy and a civilized, socially cohesive society. It is the initiator or facilitator of a whole range of additional democratic mechanisms, central and local, both representative and direct (see the second bullet point under "'Neo" elements' in the following annex). [Thus, incidentally, NWS is *not*, as some commentators have assumed, just the traditional Weberian bureaucracy plus some NPM efficiency tools.]

Second, the state is steadily modernizing, professionalizing and seeking improved efficiency. But there is no assumption that aping the private sector – or actually using the private sector – is the *only* way to achieve efficiency and professionalism. Private sector methods *may* be chosen on some occasions and for some policies, but they have no automatic priority or superiority. The public service remains distinct, ethically, motivationally and in terms of labour law, and it is regarded as fully capable of developing its own solutions to its own challenges. To be a public servant is not 'just a job'. Thus, from this perspective, the modern European state is seen as being capable of responding to the pressures of globalization without unduly fragmenting and/or marketizing itself. To put it another way, there is still a central role for representative politics, alongside international markets, in addressing the need for social and economic

change. Whether this can ultimately work is, of course, an empirical question, and it may be that the answer will not be the same in different parts of Europe.

ANNEX: SUMMARY OF THE POLLITT/BOUCKAERT NWS MODEL

'Weberian' elements

- Reaffirmation of the role of the state as the main facilitator of solutions to the new problems of globalization, technological change, shifting demographics and environmental threat
- Reaffirmation of the role of representative democracy (central, regional and local) as the legitimating element within the state apparatus
- Reaffirmation of the role of administrative law – suitably modernized – in preserving the basic principles pertaining to the citizen-state relationship, including equality before the law, legal security and the availability of specialized legal scrutiny of state actions
- Preservation of the idea of a public service with a distinctive status, culture and terms and conditions

'Neo' elements

- Shift from an internal orientation towards bureaucratic rules towards an external orientation towards meeting citizens' needs and wishes. The primary route to achieving this is not the employment of market mechanisms (although they may occasionally come in handy) but the creation of a professional culture of quality and service
- Supplementation (not replacement) of the role of representative democracy by a range of devices for consultation with and the direct representation of citizens' views (this aspect being more visible in the northern European states and Germany at the local level than in Belgium, France or Italy).
- In the management of resources within government, a modernization of the relevant laws to encourage a greater orientation on the achievement of results rather than merely the correct following of procedure. This is expressed partly in a shift in the balance from ex-ante to ex-post controls, but not a complete abandonment of the former
- A professionalization of the public service, so that the 'bureaucrat' becomes not simply an expert in the law relevant to his or her sphere of activity, but also a professional manager, oriented to meeting the needs of his/her citizen/users.

(Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, pp99-100)

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