

Plus ca Reform: Rapid change and rapid decay in Public Sector Management?

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Abstract

This paper is about the role of organisational change in public sector management. The paper draws upon the new public management (NPM) and new public governance (NPG) and examines debates around organisational change and partnership governance and examines the ways in which actors and institutions are affected by change, particularly rapid change at the national level. Public sector organisations adversely affected by huge funding cuts is a well documented, and vital, shift in public service delivery. However, in addition to this, we see constant and rapid 'reform' of the management and delivery of core public services. This quest by national governments to continually 'reform' public services, this paper argues, does not produce reform at all, but rather a confused delivery structure. For example, the NPM role of targets, measurement and league tables is as central a focus to reform as ever, but also has a focus on NPG partnership delivery. This emphasis on continual reform produces, as Finer (1967) suggested, not rapid progress, but rapid decay. Public services find themselves, the paper argues, unable to plan and produce strategies effectively in the face of continual reforms, frustrating both management and frontline delivery services engaged with their local community or area which target youth, health or social engagement.

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