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# **Traditional Bureaucratic Culture as an Impeding Factor in Implementing New Public Management in Bangladesh**

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### **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the independence in 1971, Bangladesh has made a commendable progress in all sector of the state in its 47 years of journey. Over this period it has come across to a long way in administrative reforms under different political regimes. Most of the reforms in the administrative section could not achieve the desired results due to different reasons. This paper particularly tries to find out how traditional bureaucratic culture has been an impeding force on the way of implementing New Public Management in Bangladesh. Public servants have been a strong body in Bangladesh due to different political incidents. Basically military backed governments at different times were highly dependent on bureaucratic administration. Such political practice has grown a peculiar culture of reform resistant behavior among administrative members. As a result, they are not enough open to new changes in the administrative system and thus impeding the implementation of new administrative reforms frequently as there remain uncertainties of power distribution.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public administration is experiencing a series of phenomenal reforms in the recent decades, particularly in the developing countries. Paradigms of administration have been shifted as states' focus has been shifted to service provision [1]. Global development organizations are the dominant factors behind this paradigm shift. New Public Management is one of the reform strategies of administrative management developed in the 1980s. The spread of new public management in public administration extends to a new movement of adhering to the main ideas of management reforms in the public sector all over the world [2]. There are numerous reasons behind the failure of administrative reforms in Bangladesh. This paper particularly attempts to see how traditional administrative settings of Bangladesh impede the implementation of New Public Management reforms in Bangladesh.

1980s a new model of administration was developed named as New Public Management (NPM) to get rid of age-old bureaucratic practices replacing business like management principles focusing on structure, process and functions [4].

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country in 1971 inheriting the colonial administrative system. From the beginning of its administrative journey, it has formed a number of commissions and committee for reforms [5]. Reform programs undertaken so far have looked for creating an administrative system that would ensure efficiency, professionalism, accountability, responsiveness and democratic control of administration by elected officials [6]. Like other developing countries, different governments in Bangladesh attempted to reorganize the administrative system. Over the years different types of regimes have ruled the country in the last 45 years. The 1<sup>st</sup> political government stayed in power only for three and half years after emerging as a sovereign country. Military regimes in different shapes ruled the country from mid-1975 to 1991. Since 1991 democratic governments are ruling the country so far. All of these attempts have been made to reform the administrative systems. So it can be mentioned that Bangladesh has experienced a good number of reform attempts over the years. Evaluation of these attempts does not show enough encouragement for the change believers in public administration. The below-illustrated table shows the major reforms attempts in Bangladesh and their main focus and recommendations.

## 2. HISTORY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN BANGLADESH

Administrative reform is not a newly born phenomenon in the arena of the public administration. After the Second World War, decolonization made the administrative reform a necessity. The primary motive behind reform process was modernization [3]. Subsequently in 1970s significant changes occurred in the sphere of public administration all the world. Thus, in the

## 3. MAJOR COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES FORMED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

Committees/Study Groups/Commissions	Year	Focus	Recommendations
Administrative Reorganization Committee	1971	Civil Service	Organizational Set-up for the Government after the emergence of Bangladesh
Administrative and Services Structure Reorganization Committee	1972	Service Structure	Unified civil service structure with a continuous grading system from top to bottom
Pay and Services Commission	1977	Services Structure and Pay Issues	28 services under 14 cadres created within the civil service; establishment of senior services pool (SSP)
Martial Law Committee for examining Organizational set-up of Ministries/ Divisions/ Directorates and other Organizations	1982	Organization and Rationalization of Manpower in the Public Sector Organizations	Reduction of the size of the government; reduction of layers for decision making; delegation of administrative and financial powers down the hierarchy

<b>Committees/Study Groups/Commissions</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization	1982	Reorganization of District (Upazila) and Field Level Administration	Upgrading of the thanas into Upazila Parishad as the focal point of the administration; empowerment of the local authority.
Special Committee to Review the Structure of Senior Services Pool	1985	Structure of Senior Services Pool	Continuation of SSP as a cadre; promotion within SSP to be strictly on the basis of merit; fixed tenure of secretaries
Cabinet subcommittee	1987	Review of SSP and Promotion Aspects	Endorsement of the recommendations of the special committee.
Public Administration Reform Commission	2000	The effectiveness of Public Administration and Procedural improvement of Service Delivery at all levels of Administration in the light of NPM	Improving the delivery of services; restructuring field administration; establishment of an independent commission against corruption.
National Pay Commission	2009	Pay Issues	Doubling the basic salary of the civil servants.

Source: Ferdous, J., 2014, Sarkar, A. E., 2014

#### 4. REPORTS EQUIPPED WITH THE HELP OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

<b>Committees/Study Groups/Commissions</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Towards Better Government in Bangladesh (Four Secretaries Report)	1993	Civil Service	Merit-based recruitment and promotion; incentives for better performance; improvement of accountability and transparency; improvement of training programs.
Government That Works: Reforming the Public Sector	1996	Comprehensive Administrative Reform, Privatization, Reduced Levels of Government	Enhancing nature of accountability and responsiveness of public organizations to different stakeholders; maintaining efficient, committed and professional public service.
Local Government in Bangladesh- An Agenda for Governance	1996	Local Government Issues	Decentralizing the power, Strengthening the local government structure.
Public Administration Reform in Bangladesh	2004	Civil service	Building strong civil service for better services.
Building a 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Public Administration In Bangladesh	2007	Civil Service	Restructuring and Reorganization of The civil service

Source: Ferdous, J., 2014, Sarkar, A. E., 2014

#### 5. NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AS REFORM STRATEGY IN BANGLADESH

The New Public Management (NPM) can be addressed as a management philosophy

used by governments since the 1980s to modernize the public sector, especially in the developing countries. It is assumed in the NPM that more market orientation in the public sector will lead to greater cost efficiency for governments [7]. By the early 1980s, the

world was conscious of the necessity of modernizing public sectors. Bangladesh with no exception had adopted the new reform in its public service sector. International donor agencies, which were financing different projects under structural adjustment plans were also highly encouraged to begin the changes in the public domain. Privatization of Public enterprises, contracting out of public services, reduction of manpower in the public sector, professionalism, performance standards, citizen's charter, market-based salary structure, devolution of authority to local elected bodies, e-governance, and combating corruption are some of the recommendations adopted by government of Bangladesh that reflects the spirit of NPM [8]. So from the existing literature, it is obvious that New Public Management mostly emphasizes on the service delivery of the government. To ensure this service delivery it also covers the institutional reforms such as establishment of criminal justice commission, the establishment of ombudsman and corruption commission. Furthermore, decentralization of the administrative system is one of the key features of the New Public Management. New Public Management began its journey in the 1980s with the help of multinational donor agencies like World Bank, IMF etc. Though there were some success stories after adopting new public management strategies in Bangladesh. Like merit-based recruitment system was introduced at the beginning of the 1980s. Moreover, collaboration with the non-governmental organizations was started with from the beginning of the 1980s for better service delivery and information collection [9]. It is often said this new reform strategy promised a lot of freshness in the administrative system and implementation of this could bring a revolutionary change in the administration of Bangladesh

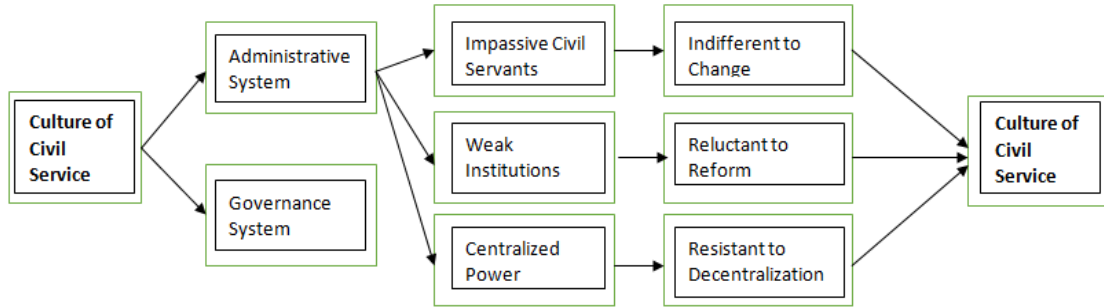
## **6. BUREAUCRATIC CULTURE AND FAILURE OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH**

Bureaucratic culture of Bangladesh is developed with politicization, centralization etc. It tends to avoid uncertainty at the most of the times. Besides, there is lack of strategic vision for making change within the bureaucratic domains. The uncertainty generated by NPM is very much high in the NPM. Moreover, bureaucratic culture is inhibitive overly centralized policy-making. NPM primarily emphasizes decentralization. Performance measurement is another issue in the bureaucratic arena. Bureaucratic officials

consciously want to avoid this procedure. On the other hand, bureaucratic elitism is another culture within administrative system of Bangladesh. They deliberately and purposively oppose the implementation of major administrative reforms as they do not want to give up their comfort zones. For them, it seems change is a frightening prospect. They are used to working with a system that they have inherited. Their unwillingness to experiment with new ideas, new methods and the new structure created a stagnated culture in civil service which has resulted in bad impacts on NPM as well [10]. Moreover, power control is another important factor which impedes the implementation of NPM. Bangladesh administrative culture is very much centralized. The central body does not want to disseminate power among the local officials as they are main contenders of the power [11]. Such practice has been carrying out from the birth of the Bangladesh. To illustrate these phenomena more specifically such as how bureaucratic culture impedes to implement New Public Management in Bangladesh, we have developed an analytical framework.

Below mentioned framework shows the overall picture of the bureaucratic culture and its relation with the failure of New Public Management in Bangladesh. Basically, the culture of the civil service of Bangladesh is developed with two basic systems. First one is administrative system and the second one is governance system. This paper merely covers the administrative one and shows how the different institutional settings affect administrative system on which culture of civil service proceeds with impassive civil servants, weak institutions, and a tendency of centralized power influencing the whole administrative system. All these things are subject to some bad habits such as reluctance to reforms, unwelcome situation of change etc.

Impassive civil service denotes the lack of enthusiasm among the bureaucratic members to bring new changes among them. They are used to the traditional settings. Even they do not want to use new technologies and it is also true most of them do not have enough knowledge about the modern technologies and how to use them in service delivery, communication etc. Another problem lies with the existence of strong institutions. Most of the times constitutional institutions have been made politicized for the favor of respective governments at different times. Thus they cannot play the check and balance role. Centralizing the power is another



**Fig. 1. An analytical framework on bureaucratic culture in Bangladesh**

faulty practice which made the bureaucracy of Bangladesh very much powerful. Some attempts were taken at different times to decentralize the power but they did not see the desired level of success. Thus the nature of impassiveness spreads a vibe of not accepting any reforms within its body. Weak institutional settings of the state could not coerce it to implement any reforms. Most importantly due to having a strong power in the central body, civil servants always were resistant to reforms as it threatens their power holding. There may have lots of uncertainties in new administrative reform that is why they hold negative impression to it. New Public Management probably could not give proper incentives for changing their behaviors. Moreover, there were questions of adjustments to New Public Management principles where they could not cope with the pace. Most importantly political-bureaucratic relations have been the most dominant factor behind the failure of the NPM. Inherently bureaucrats make the core policies of Bangladesh and politicians only pass the law from the parliament. Often politicians cannot put enough pressure on bureaucrats due to having a huge reliance on them [12,13]. Coalitions among the parties like civil society, academicians, member of parliaments, civil servants are dominated by the civil servants. Besides, due to lack of technical incapacity among the civil servants is also an important factor to resist reforms. They all together have built a culture in civil service in Bangladesh which is core restricting factor on the way of implementing New Public Management in Bangladesh.

## 7. CONCLUSION

From the study, it is evident that traditional bureaucratic culture is one of the constraints against implementing administrative reforms in Bangladesh. Bureaucracy is inherited by a huge

power due to vulnerable democratic practice in Bangladesh. They do not want to embrace with new change which may challenge their power and positions. It is said from the academics of the public administration that civil servants of Bangladesh are busy with maintaining only status quo [14,15,16]. This tendency has created a long binding culture in administrative system in Bangladesh. So it imperative to break this bad culture in the administrative system for better service provision and all desired good governance. Breaking these stereotypes may be difficult, but not impossible for the policymakers at the end. So, a strong commitment to the good governance and application of professionalism can bring the positive in the administrative culture which will help to implement reforms ultimately.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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