A Decade of Managing for Results in American Public Administration: An Assessment of Accomplishments and Perspectives on Future Developments

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From its inception as an academic discipline during the latter part of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century, one theme in particular has dominated the field of public administration. For scholars and practitioners alike, this theme is the relentless search for new ways to improve the performance of administrative agencies in order to enhance policy implementation and service delivery within the framework of democratic governance. As pointed out by Kettl (2000) "Wilson believed that the effectiveness of government hinged on the effectiveness of its administrative apparatus. That, in turn, helped build a strong case for a professional administration and a strong management capacity" (pp. 14-15). Other early leaders of the new field of public administration, including Goodnow and Taylor, also recognized the need to improve the performance of public agencies and, therefore, government (Kettl, 2000). The performance of public agencies became an even more critical issue in recent decades as the scope and complexity of public policy making and implementation increased and citizen satisfaction with service delivery decreased. These developments, coupled with the establishment of new public policy programs in the American academic setting (Kettl, 2000), lay the groundwork for the emergence of a powerful and highly visible public management reform movement with Managing for Results (MFR) at its center.

As part of the global public management reform movement called the New Public Management, MFR continues the reform tradition first established by the founding fathers of public administration and reinforced by later efforts such as the Hoover Commissions and, most recently, the Clinton Administration's National Performance Review. Although deeply rooted in the reform tradition of public administration, MFR constitutes a radical departure in the field's theory and practice. Given its scope, intensity, methodology, and popularity, many academicians and

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practitioners feel that MFR may constitute a paradigm shift within the discipline. In their opinion, the time has come to replace the existing bureaucratic paradigm with an entrepreneurial management paradigm (Norris, 2000). Behn (1999) has aptly described the nature of the paradigm shift that appears to be occurring:

The champions of the new public management have challenged the traditional public-administration paradigm that has ruled our thinking and deliberations (if not our practice) for over a century. Their argument is quite simple: The traditional method for organizing the executive branch of government is too cumbersome, too bureaucratic, too inefficient, too unresponsive, too unproductive. It does not give us the results we want from government. And today, citizens expect government to produce results. They are no longer tolerant of inefficiency or ineffectiveness. Thus, we need a new way of doing business, a new paradigm for the management of government (p. 131).

Managing for Results was formally introduced in the United States with the passage of the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act. Similar developments occurred in several state governments as they followed the federal government's lead and passed their own performance and results acts (Miller and Kress, 1996). At about the same time, at the local level, numerous examples of reform aimed at instituting MFR in cities and counties took place as well. Therefore, it is fair to say that MFR in its current form is about 10 years old in the United States, although elements of it were practiced during the 1980s and 1990s as part of the reinventing government movement, especially in American local government (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Thus, a sufficient amount of time has passed to warrant an assessment of the accomplishments of MFR, including the challenges remaining as well as the emerging threats that may endanger the sustainability and durability of this reform effort.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a report card of MFR as this government-wide reform movement approaches its 10th anniversary and to examine barriers that may have prevented MFR from reaching its full potential. Additionally, the paper seeks to identify and examine emerging threats that may help derail MFR and new opportunities that may boost its accomplishments. To accomplish this purpose, the paper begins with a brief review of the elements of MFR in the American setting. Second, it delineates MFR's accomplishments at the federal, state, and local levels in the United States. Third, it summarizes the specific barriers that have impeded the application and practice of MFR. Emerging threats and opportunities for MFR will be discussed in the fourth section. The conclusion will provide several perspectives on the future of MFR in the United States, and on the discipline of public administration generally.

The Essence of Managing for Results

Managing for results, as currently practiced at all levels of government in the
United States, is a comprehensive, systematic, integrated, and dynamic framework
for action designed to transform public agencies into high-performance
organizations. The true essence of MFR, however, is its strategic orientation. That
is to say that MFR transcends the narrow confines of internal agency management
to operate at a much higher level of organizational existence that includes relevant
stakeholders such as legislative bodies, citizens and interest groups, and related
agencies (Miller and Kress, 1996). Having a strategic orientation also means that
public agencies practicing MFR stay focused on a few critical issues and on the
development of powerful strategies to achieve significantly higher levels of
performance.

Managing for Results involves five critical steps: (1) define desired performance
in terms of outcomes rather than inputs and outputs; (2) identify critical issues and
develop strategies to address these issues; (3) measure performance; (4) report
performance; and (5) use performance information to improve agency performance
(Abramson and Kamensky, 2002; Kress, Miller and Grier, 1997; Miller and Kress,
1996). Steps 1 and 2 are typically predicated on the development of a strategic plan
that links an agency's vision, mission, and goals to desired performance outcomes.
Outcomes may relate to changes in service quality, community conditions, customer
value, or efficiency and cost-effectiveness ratings. A strategic plan also strives to
identify a manageable number of critical issues that must be addressed before
performance can be increased. Critical issue areas may include an agency's
leadership - especially the philosophy, functions, and forms of leadership,
organizational culture, or specific management systems such as human resources,
information technology, and budgeting (Pickering and Matson, 1992). Another
critical issue area is the agency's organizational structure, which should be framed
around desired outcomes and not around organizational processes and functions
(Abramson and Kamensky, 2002).

Furthermore, the effective application of MFR depends to a large degree on the
selection of appropriate change strategies, which are also delineated in the strategic
plan. Here public managers are called upon to select innovative and powerful
strategies such as the ones recommended by Osborne and Plastrik (1997). Their
strategies are aimed at altering an agency's "DNA" in order to achieve a clarity of
purpose, introduce consequences for performance, put the customer in the driver's
seat, change control mechanisms, and create an organizational culture conducive to
high performance (Norris, 2000). Other appropriate strategies include
reengineering, TQM, and organizational learning, to mention a few. Clearly, MFR
requires selecting the most appropriate and effective strategies to effectively address
the critical issues confronting public agencies.

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Steps 1 and 2 define the strategic dimensions of MFR. The remaining steps, however, are just as critical to success. Step 3, performance measurement, involves numerous methodological challenges such as finding appropriate indicators for the measurement of outcomes, collecting meaningful measurement data, and measuring outcomes generated by several agencies (Kettl, 1995). The last two steps involve the generation of performance information (such as Service Efforts and Accomplishment Reports, Balanced Scorecards, and Periodic Report Cards) and the use of such information to improve agency and program performance, to build capacity, and to make resource allocation decisions.

In sum, MFR constitutes a strategic framework for action to transform public agencies into high-performance organizations. According to Kress (2002), a high-performance organization in the public sector is expected to:

- Focus on outcomes related to service quality, customer value, and financial performance;
- Achieve desired outcomes and specific outcome targets;
- Be efficient and effective in all of its operations;
- Meet the highest standards of quality in all internal systems and processes;
- Disperse effective leadership throughout the organization (e.g., Likert's S3/S4 type leadership);
- Promote and achieve an entrepreneurial culture conducive to high performance;
- Properly train all employees in accordance with the highest professional standards of their respective "businesses;"
- Be totally aligned in terms of its mission and operations; and
- Maximize accountability for results.

To transform public agencies into high-performance organizations is indeed an arduous task, as later sections of this paper clearly show. However, public managers need not feel overwhelmed by the challenges associated with MFR. Instead, MFR should be viewed more like a toolbox one can use to achieve results over a period of time. Therefore, all critical issues do not have to be addressed at the same time. Similarly, change strategies need not be applied simultaneously. One should not attempt to address different issues such as leadership or organizational culture all at once. Given the strategic management emphasis of MFR, critical issues should be dealt with within a given timeframe, say within three to five years. Addressing the totality of critical issues would certainly lead to an agenda overload and prevent MFR from reaching its full potential. On the other hand, one should not lose sight of these issues: this, too, would lead to failure. Once specific critical issues are identified, public managers must pick the strategies most appropriate to address

specific issues, apply them, and then measure results. Ultimately, however, all strategic applications have to be aligned within the overall organizational setting to achieve maximum results.

Managing for Results should not be seen as a magic bullet that will transform public agencies into high-performance organizations overnight. We have to realize, as one observer has so aptly put it, that "the road to improving government performance is not a sprint, but a never-ending marathon over many different types of terrain that will require a multitude of tools to achieve" (Yi, 2002. p. 58). Patience, persistence, creativity, and a strategic stance are the hallmarks of MFR that will ensure its success.

Accomplishments of Managing for Results

A review of the literature reveals that awareness of Managing for Results is broad, and implementation is visible at all levels of government in the United States. The major questions, however, are:

1.   How successful has its application been?

2.   To what extent has MFR contributed to the reform of public management?

3.   What are the substantive outcomes associated with this reform effort?

This section of the paper is intended to shed some light on these three questions.

An assessment of MFR is indeed a daunting task, given the size of government in the United Stated and the diffusion of applications at the federal, state, and local levels. Clearly, making a comprehensive and accurate assessment of MFR outcomes would require substantial resources. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, a review of existing surveys and studies must suffice to provide a scorecard of MFR to date. Fortunately, several governmental and non-governmental entities, as well as individual scholars, have undertaken the task of evaluating public management reform, including MFR. For example, the Federal Performance Project (FPP), devoted to the evaluation of federal government agencies, is a collaboration of Government Executive, a monthly business magazine, and the George Washington University Department of Public Administration. Acting on the premise that accountability and informed decision making depend on credible and useful information, the Mercatus Center's Government Accountability Project (GAP) at George Mason University issues an annual scorecard on the quality of performance reporting by federal agencies. Additional assessment efforts at the federal level include studies by the General Accounting Office and surveys by the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Performance Consortium. The Government Performance Project (GPP) is a partnership of Governing magazine and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University that assesses the performance of states, counties, and cities.

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Also of significant interest here is the American State Administrators Project (ASAP), a survey conducted by mail and follow-up telephone calls of heads of state government agencies in all 50 states. The survey has been administered twice each decade since 1964 in a systematic effort to analyze state government performance and to trace implementation of new public management applications. This survey was last conducted in 1998. As far as studies by individual scholars are concerned, a compilation of case materials by the PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for the Business of Government provides excellent perspectives on the accomplishments of MFR at all levels of government. Papers and presentations at numerous annual conferences, foremost among them the Performance Conference on Managing for Results, organized by the National Academy of Public Administration and several affiliated conference partners, provide valuable insights into current developments in public sector performance management and outcomes associated with them.

A word of caution is in order, however, as far as the use of these information sources for an assessment of MFR is concerned. Several of the sources cited above address public management reform through the lens of reinvention or the National Performance Review (NPR). Only a relatively few focus directly on MFR, such as the Government Performance Project and a PricewaterhouseCoopers study. It would not be appropriate to use evaluations of reinvention and the NPR to measure the performance of MFR without qualification, given the significant differences between them. Especially the NPR, but also to some extent the reinvention movement, have addressed primarily micro issues of administrative management (Thompson, 2000) while MFR, as defined in this paper, constitutes a more comprehensive strategic management framework for action to elevate public organizations to significantly higher levels of performance. Miller and Kress (1996) note that MFR deals with the macro-level of public agency settings, striving "to link management with policy, analysis and measurement with action, and public administration with politics. To do all this, managing for results systematically uses several innovative management tools to translate its theoretical underpinnings into action" (p. 5).

On the other hand, MFR has numerous elements in common with other public management reform efforts. This should not come as a surprise, given the fact that MFR has its roots in the reinvention movement. For example, both MFR and reinvention stress the application of innovative strategies such as culture change and employee empowerment to achieve desired outcomes. Therefore, a careful and qualified use of the published materials for the purpose of addressing the accomplishments of MFR may be appropriate. With these methodological limitations in mind, let us examine how MFR has fared at the different levels of government in the United States.

Accomplishments at the Federal Level

David Walker (2001), the Comptroller General of the United States and head of the General Accounting Office, in a presentation at the 2001 Performance Conference, summarized MFR accomplishments at the federal level as follows:

If you look back to as recently as 1993, terms like results-oriented strategic plans, annual performance plans, and performance reports were largely unfamiliar terms in the federal government... But we have come a long way in a fairly short time...The fact is we have made some real progress, but as many GAO reports point out, much remains to be done (p. 20).

Several other observers echo Walker's assessment of MFR in the federal government. For example, Caudle (2001) also paints a mixed picture of accomplishments. At one extreme, she sees agencies that formally comply with the requirements of the 1993 GPRA, which mandated federal agencies to practice MFR, but do not take the Act seriously; they only pay lip service to it. At the other extreme are numerous agencies that manage for results and are committed to the development of a performance-oriented culture. In between are all types of management reform iterations with various degrees of success.

As far as the assessment of specific agency accomplishments in MFR are concerned, Abramson and Kamensky (2001) recently presented four case studies that provide insight into the degree of progress made with regard to the development of what they call the MFR infrastructure, the use of performance information, and the challenges remaining. In another study, Abramson and Lawrence (2001) document progress made in transforming three federal agencies into high-performance organizations, focusing on lessons learned about revitalizing public organizations. These studies clearly reinforce the findings that MFR is a powerful and continuing force in the federal government.

For the past four years, the Federal Performance Project (FPP) has graded 27 federal agencies on management abilities, managing for results, human resources, information technology, physical assets, and finances. Managing for results counts for 50 percent of the grade and the other categories account for the remaining 50 percent. The FPP reports that agencies are making progress in managing their finances and are using performance measures in human resource management. According to the 2002 Report Card, the Social Security Agency (SSA) received the highest score of B. The Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) was second with a B-. In 2001 the highest rating went to the National Weather Service, which earned an A; in 2000 the Coast Guard received an A, and in 1999 the SSA was given an A. In the managing for results category, the SSA and the FAA both received Bs. The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) received the worst grades; a D overall as well as in the MFR category. The INS had mediocre to poor performance ratings in every management area except for services, where fees support

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improvements. Reasons cited for its poor performance include several factors: the INS has no dependable information management program; communication within the agency has broken down; and it has failed to use information-gathering technologies to track immigration cases (Federal Performance Project, 2002).

The Mercatus Center of George Mason University provides useful perspectives on performance measurement and reporting elements of MFR by federal agencies. For the past three years the Center has conducted an annual evaluation of agency performance reports required by the GPRA. Through the use of a "scorecard," these reports gauge the accuracy, reliability, and accessibility of agency statements of public costs and benefits, not the quality of the results actually produced by agencies. The scorecard rates agency reports in three areas - whether reports are transparent, focus on documenting tangible public benefits, and whether an agency evinces "leadership that takes advantage of performance information" (Cochran, McTigue, and Richardson, 2002, p. 18) to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of services. For 2001, the Department of Transportation (DOT) scored highest. (Note that DOT has also recently succeeded in transforming its organizational culture into a high-performance oriented culture). Other high performers included NASA and the Department of the Treasury. Nevertheless, Cochran, McTigue, and Richardson (2002) conclude that performance information has "little or no effect on high level strategies in any of the agencies" (p. 18).

Thompson's study of the NPR (2000) concludes that many of what he calls second-and third-order reinvention objectives, which tend to be similar to MFR objectives, such as culture change, employee empowerment, quality of service improvements, and efficiency and effectiveness improvements, have not been achieved. Similarly, the GAO (2001) found that fewer than 50 percent of federal managers use results information "to a great or very great extent" in allocating resources or setting program priorities. However, the GAO also found that in 2002 more than 75 percent of agencies were able to show a direct link between performance and budgeting (Weinstock, 2002).

In sum, the information reviewed here tends to support Walker's contention that federal agencies have made significant progress in MFR. Still, not everybody is on-board and the MFR reform agenda continues to have many gaps. There is clear evidence, however, that MFR is now well entrenched in the federal sector and that it is reasonable to expect further progress in MFR reform efforts in the future.

Accomplishments in State and Local Government

The experience and outcomes of American states, counties, and cities with MFR mirror those of federal agencies, as several assessments show. The most comprehensive assessment information is available from the Government Performance Project (GPP), which has graded the performance of all states and

numerous counties and cities in five management areas, including MFR (Barrett, Greene and Mariani, 2001). According to the GPP researchers, states have made significant progress, especially in MFR and related management areas such as human resource management and information technology management, since the first state grades were issued in 1999. Also, states that score high in MFR usually do well in financial management and workforce planning. Five states received a grade of A- or higher in MFR in 2001: Iowa, Missouri, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Most states were in the B to C range and none received a D or an F grade.

Several "best practices" in state government can be gleaned from the GPP. For example, Missouri has developed a list of 20 performance measures for agencies. Texas tracks 7900 performance measures. Missouri's efforts to inform citizens about performance measurement are notable, and Virginia and Utah also stand out for publishing results. Michigan posts comparisons of programs by county and uses results measures in contracting. In Iowa, department heads are basing decisions on results measurements. Iowa is also doing a particularly good job in MFR by enhancing collaboration among agencies, labor and management, and the public and private sectors. Washington is also improving cross-agency coordination, and the benefits of training are evident in its strategic plans. On the negative side, the GPP claims that legislatures and citizens are often at fault for poor management grades. For example, in Virginia public agencies are required to include performance measurement and strategic planning information with all budget requests, but legislators are not using the measurement process in budgeting. The GPP also points out that in the states of Washington, Iowa, Texas, and Virginia lower-level managers and employees need to improve their understanding and use of the MFR process.

The American State Administrators Project (ASAP) provides another excellent perspective on public management reform in general, and on MFR in particular at the state level. As pointed out by (Brudney and Wright (2002), the principals of ASAP conclude:

First, reinvention is no longer in the 'appearance' realm. It constitutes a continuing and confirmed presence across state agencies. Second, we move from the 'ripple' metaphor toward viewing reinvention as a rising tide among state agencies in the 1990s (p. 357).

ASAP reinvention features that are similar to key MFR elements include strategic planning, customer service improvement strategies, employee empowerment strategies, and outcomes measurement. Survey results reveal notable improvements in these areas from 1994 to 1998. In 1998, 50 percent of state administrative agencies had fully implemented strategic planning to produce clear mission statements (87 percent partially or fully implemented); benchmarking for

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measuring outcomes was fully implemented in 24 percent of the agencies (73 percent partially or fully implemented); and 19 percent had fully implemented systems for measuring customer satisfaction (64 percent partially or fully implemented) (Brudney and Wright, 2002, p. 357). It is clear from both the ASAP and GPP studies, that states have made progress in implementing MFR. Many gaps, however, remain to be filled.

At the local level, numerous counties and cities have demonstrated impressive accomplishments in MFR. The GPP gave the Counties of Fairfax, Virginia, Maricopa, Arizona, and San Diego, California A- grades in MFR. The Cities of Austin, Phoenix, Indianapolis, San Diego, and Milwaukee were also given high grades in MFR, with Austin, San Antonio, Indianapolis, and Virginia Beach noted for having fully developed MFR systems (Barrett, Greene and Mariani, 2001). Additional MFR accomplishments and best practices at the local level have been cited by Abramson and Kamensky (2001).

The GPP study also indicates that many counties and cities have not made much progress as far as MFR is concerned. Similarly, a study of city managers indicates theoretical support for public management reform but relatively little action to translate their espoused support into tangible outcomes (Kearney, Feldman and Scavo, 2000). A 1997 GASB survey of state and local government officials found that only 23-28 percent of the entities used output or outcome measures in strategic planning, budgeting, or program monitoring even though 53 percent had developed outcome measures (de Lancer Julnes and Holzer, 2002)

The review of assessments of MFR at all these levels of government in the United States reveals the following: (1) significant progress in MFR has been made; (2) troublesome gaps in its application remain; and (3) variations in the application of MFR are numerous. Factors that may have impeded the implementation of MFR will be discussed in the next section, along with some perspective on emerging developments that may threaten or provide opportunities for the durability and sustainability of MFR.

Challenges and Emerging Threats and Opportunities

Challenges

Putting Managing for Results to work is no easy task, particularly since public managers are called upon to combine "the craft of performance management with the art of democratic governance" (Gawthrop, 2001, p. 18). The challenges of MFR are many and substantial; they must be overcome to ensure the continued success of this public management reform effort. The following is a brief summary of the major challenges to MFR as identified by academic writers and practitioners.

Norris (2000) has developed a useful typology for grouping the challenges for

and barriers to MFR. For him, barriers may be structural, bureaucratic, political, or internal in nature. Each of these barriers deserves a brief review. For Norris, structural barriers that may impede public management reforms such as MFR include primarily the separation of powers and federalism. With regard to the separation of powers issue, the built-in "distance" between the executive and legislative branches of the federal government has made it difficult to develop an effective congressional-executive cooperation strategy. Such cooperation was envisioned and mandated by GPRA and was seen as a foremost prerequisite for the success of MFR (GAO, 1994; Kress, Miller and Grier, 1997; Rosenbloom, 1995). Although both Congress and the executive branch appear to have been committed to cooperation, especially in the area of strategic planning, the road to effective consultation has been rather bumpy. According to Radin (2000), "Because GPRA has established a set of expectations for both the legislative and executive branches, this reform effort directly collides with the institutional design of separation of powers" (p. 121).

Federalism is seen as another major impediment to effective performance management. The devolution of powers from the federal government to states and local governments may be in conflict with federal granting agencies' demand to hold recipients of aid accountable for results (Caudle, 2001;Norris, 2000; Radin, 2000). According to Caudle (2001) the GAO has identified several intergovernmental issues affecting GPRA implementation such as "developing and cascading national goals and performance targets to individual states, designing measures and collecting performance information..." (p. 56). Most important of all, federal agencies appear to have relatively little control over what is being accomplished at the state and local levels.

As far as bureaucratic barriers are concerned, Norris (2000) notes that "Opposition from career bureaucrats, particularly those in middle-management positions, has been especially marked" (p. 84). Many of them have not been willing or able to embrace the idea of risk-taking or develop entrepreneurial behaviors. Also, in many instances performance management as envisioned by MFR has been impeded "as a result of the tension between standards of public accountability and demands for increased flexibility in agency operations" (Norris, 2000, p. 85). Other challenges that could be listed in the category of bureaucratic barriers include difficulties in dealing with the high degree of fragmentation, duplication and overlap in federal agency and program operations (Kress, Miller and Grier, 1997; Radin, 2000;Walker, 2001). These systemic constraints have made it difficult to produce and measure outcomes that cross program boundaries.

Political barriers include the confusion of reinvention and reorganization and the excessive emphasis on performance management (Norris, 2000). Clearly, reinvention and MFR go far beyond instructional reorganization (Osborne and

Plastrik, 1997). Differences in stakeholder's perceptions of appropriate performance indictors as well as difficulties associated with the measurement of outcomes are serious political concerns that need to be addressed.

Norris (2000) cites reinventors' emphasis on downsizing and cost-savings as major internal barriers. These barriers are less relevant in a discussion of factors that may constrain MFR, as the latter does not aspire to achieve such objectives. However, several other MFR-relevant internal barriers have been identified, foremost of all the need for effective leadership. According to Walker (2001) "leadership makes all the difference. If you do not have dedicated and sustained leadership from the very top on this issue, you are not going to get there" (p. 22). Effective leadership is an important prerequisite for initiating and perpetuating results-based management practices and the development of a performance-oriented organizational culture (Brudney and Wright, 2002; Thompson, 2000). Other internal issues affecting MFR include the need for capacity building. This demands that more emphasis be placed on the development of the human workforce to strengthen competencies in strategic planning, the selection of innovative management tools, and performance measurement and reporting (Miller and Kress, 1996). In general, agencies are called upon to build the infrastructure necessary for moving to higher levels of performance (Abramson and Kamensky, 2001).

This discussion of challenges associated with MFR has focused on experiences at the federal level. A major reason for this orientation is the fact that more has been written about barriers to performance management encountered by federal managers. It can be assumed, however, that state and local efforts to practice MFR are hampered by similar constraints.

Emerging Threats

In addition to the need to tackle the numerous challenges discussed above, the future of MFR is further clouded by several emerging threats. First, the scandals in the private sector, such as Enron and WorldCom, may make some of the management practices we typically associate with MFR suspect. MFR relies heavily on private sector management strategies aimed at the promotion of entrepreneurship and risk-taking, employee empowerment, competitive practices, as well as flattening of organizational structures and the development of cross-functional teams. In the aftermath of these private sector debacles, public managers may be a bit more reluctant to apply these tools in public agency settings to ensure the existence of effective control mechanisms and to avoid unethical behavior. Therefore, proclaiming the death of the bureaucratic paradigm may be premature.

Second, projections of significant budgetary deficits caused by a declining economy, may have a major negative impact on capacity building for MFR. As the previous discussion shows, capacity building in the form of personnel training and

the development of performance measurement technologies are essential for MFR. Emerging resource constraints may seriously reduce intended and necessary capacity building efforts.

Third, many public managers, as well as elected officials at all levels of government, have been forced to direct their attention to essential new tasks necessitated by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The continued need to strengthen emergency management systems, to overcome fragmentation in agency settings with disastrous consequences for public safety and national security, and the demand to protect important infrastructure installations such as water systems, ports, and nuclear facilities, may direct management attention away from MFR. Such a shift in management priorities and attention could seriously affect the progress that has been made in MFR and constrain future public management reform efforts.

It is too early to gauge the effects of these developments on MFR. However, a cautionary note is certainly in order here. As we know from previous experiences, it is easy to derail public management reform. Hopefully, the emerging threats will not contribute to such a development. To the contrary, MFR should receive even more support because the improved performance of public agencies would lead to a better management of the economy and the achievement of important public safety and national security goals.

New Opportunities

The previous discussion provides some cause for alarm as far as the future of MFR is concerned. However, there are also several new opportunities appearing on the radar screen of public management reformers. They can only be mentioned in passing here. First, the Bush Administration's commitment to reform, including MFR, appears to be strong and unconditional (Walker, 2001). President Bush, in a speech on June 9, 2000, stated his commitment to making government citizen-oriented, results-oriented, and market-oriented (Mini-Forum, 2001, p. 24). He subsequently laid out a comprehensive management agenda encompassing important strategies clearly in line with MFR. Specific initiatives address strategic human capital planning, competitive sourcing, improved financial management, expanded E-government, and budget and performance integration (Potok, 2002).

Second, efforts to redesign organizational arrangements, especially in the federal government, to more effectively combat terrorism and promote homeland security, bode well for the MFR movement. Such efforts are aimed at overcoming inter-agency rivalries and communication problems to enhance performance in these critical public policy areas. As mentioned earlier, administrational fragmentation constrains MFR. Current efforts to consolidate agencies working in related areas, such as the plan to establish a Department of Homeland Security (Wise, 2002), may give MFR a considerable boost.

Third, exciting new research on networks and collaborative arrangements may provide public managers involved in MFR with important theoretical perspectives to advance their cause. Networking is at the heart of MFR, namely to collaborate with other providers and across agency boundaries "to deliver better service, value, and outcomes for customers, stakeholders, and communities" (Linden, 2002, p. 4).

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Conclusion

There is ample evidence that MFR is alive and doing relatively well in American government today. Numerous federal, state, and local public organizations have made considerable progress toward transforming themselves into high-performance organizations by practicing MFR. The skeptics - academicians as well as practitioners - have been proven wrong. Their predictions that public management reform efforts, such as MFR, would not last, just like many previous reform fads, have not materialized.

Given the inroads MFR has been made in American public management, should MFR be seen as a new public administration paradigm? The answer is a firm no. Has MFR chipped away the traditional hierarchy - and control-oriented bureaucratic paradigm? The research reported in this paper supports a qualified yes as an answer. Any reform effort that stays alive for more than a decade stands a good chance of having a prolonged life expectancy.

Many systemic barriers and emerging threats need to be overcome to ensure the success of MFR over the long-term. In all likelihood, however, it will be the strategic dimension of MFR that will enhance its durability. A strategic framework for action, such as MFR, provides public managers with the flexibility to apply workable strategies that best address the critical issues. There is nothing dogmatic about MFR. Previous public management reform efforts typically lacked such a strategic dimension. Their rigid and dogmatic characteristics often led to their early demise. There are solid reasons to assume that MFR will have a different future.

Peter Drucker (1980) has warned against the dogmatic pursuit of managerial change strategies. For him, a dogmatic stance, in contrast to an experimental one, will most likely lead to nonperformance. In his opinion:

Even if the theories on which a program is based are themselves sound, successful application still demands adaptation, cutting, fitting, trying, balancing. It always demands testing against reality before there is a final commitment. Above all, any new program, no matter how well conceived, will run into the unexpected... (p. 104).

If public managers recognize the strategic dimensions of MFR, avoid dogmatic behaviors in its applications, and use the built-in flexibility and adaptability of this reform framework to their full advantage, MFR may succeed and receive recognition as a new paradigm in public administration.

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