Full Length Research Paper

Shifting conceptualization of accountability in light of shifting governance patterns

Abbas Nargesian* and Saeed Aibaghi Esfahani
Public Administration, University of Tehran, Iran.

Accepted 9 February, 2011

Public accountability is a sign of modern and democratic administration. Accountability has become a topic of concern in governance literature. The question of holding politicians and administration accountable in new governance environment, where many traditional means for controlling government no longer fully apply, has gained wide recognition. As a consequence, new types of accountability have been sought and identified. The article discusses the shifting conceptualization of accountability on the basis of Erkkila typology in light of changes in the patterns of administration (governance) in the literature of public administration. It argues that this shift can be related to the structural changes that have taken place in politics and public administrations from the late 1980’s to the present. Also, the argument is made that instead of trying to identify new mechanisms of accountability more attention should be paid to the transformations taking place among traditional mechanisms of accountability and their potential in the new institutional design.

Key words: Public accountability, governance, patterns of administration, performance, deliberation.

INTRODUCTION

Accountability is increasingly becoming a topic of concern in governance literature. The growing interest in the issue of accountability is largely explained by the rise of new governance models which are seen to challenge the traditional mechanisms of accountability. In fact, the subject of accountability in the private sector is always under consideration and it was tried to provide development and achievement in this aspect by creating suitable structures and methods, but in the public sector the subject of accountability is of multi importance, because public interest is concerned in this respect changes in administration paradigm and origin of modern methods of governance like new public management and new public services is discussed severely to the issue of accountability. The problem of holding politicians and administration accountable for their actions in the new governance environment has been widely acknowledged. As the interest in ‘accountability’ has increased, the definition of the term itself seems to have become more ambiguous. Scholars have argued that the concept is all but well defined and that the definition of the term has moved and expanded (Mulg, 2000; Sinclair 1995: 221; Dubnick, 2005: 2 to 3).

In this article, the shifting in the conceptualization of accountability in the governance literature is discussed on the basis of shifting in the administration patterns (Old public administration, New public management and New public services) based on Erkkila typology. The term ‘governance’ has been criticized for its inconsistent use and catch-all nature (Stoker, 1998: 17 to 18; Smouts, 1998: 81). It has had a dual use as a phenomenon and as an analytical framework (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 24). Governance literature describes the changes in politics and administration that have been taking place throughout the Western world from the late 1980’s to the present: changes in conditions, patterns and structures of governing, along with changes in nature, number and relations of actors involved (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 14 to 23). In this respect ‘governance’ has been used as a referent for emerging structures and dynamics in governing that go beyond the scope of traditional ‘government’.

‘Governance’ is also a topic for a framework which organizes different research approaches in trying to

*Corresponding author. E-mail: anargesian@ut.ac.ir.
analyze these changes (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 14, 24 to 25; Stoker, 1998: 18). In this sense governance has been used in reference to research as diverse as studies on New public management (Lane, 2000; Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004), policy networks (Kickert et al., 1997; Rhodes, 1996), new mechanisms of steering and coordination (Kooiman, 1993), internationalization of government and public policies (Rosenau, 2000) and the changing role of the public sector and state (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Governance research is also spread over several levels of analysis, which adds up to its heterogenic nature (Pierre, 2000). The governance framework might not provide one with many definitive answers, but it contributes to the discussion by pointing out relevant trends, issues and topics of concern regarding the current developments in politics and administration (Stoker 1998: 18). It also provides us with new ways of thinking and conceptualizing these processes of change. This “article” is discussed in “structuralism paradigm”.

Erkkila will argue that there is no static way of organizing accountability and that accountability systems are dependent on the institutional design of their administrative context. Therefore, structural changes are likely to influence the organization of accountability and also the conceptualization of the term. As examples of this, two new alternative types of accountability, often cited in governance literature, will be discussed – namely ‘performance’ and ‘deliberation’. Both these can be linked to new governance (NPM and NPS) structures.

CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

From accounting to accountability

The English word of accountability is from the same origin of accounting and goes to the victory of Normans in England in the years after 1066. In 1085 William I the King of England asked all the land owners throughout his domain to present a list of their lands and properties. After this the land owners were asked to take an oath before the King. It means that this census in addition to goals of taxation auditing also flows the political goal. After that gradually an accountability system was centralized to the royal government and every six months the accounts were checked in form of centralized inspections. In the current political dialogue, the public accountability no more gives the boring concepts of accounting, financial administration and giving accounts to the governors, but the accountability relation is completely changed. Accountability to the act of kings forcing the citizens to give account is not used but in contrary to that the authorities and public servants have to respond towards their citizens (Bowens, 2005: 4).

In the end of 20th Century, the world of Anglo-Saxons (U.S., U.K, Australia et.) witnessed changes of traditional bookkeeping and accounting in form of public administration together with vast accountability. This change took place by introducing a new public management in the government of Thatcher in U.K and also public sector reforms and towards managerialism in the government of Regan in U.S. In both these reforms, types of methods and tools of private sector entered into the public sector (Pollitte and Bouchart, 2005: 98 to 99) contract management and turning over the duties of public sector to private sector, using indexes of benchmarking for comparing and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations, mostly these means needs wide supervision and accountability for the useful result.

What is the meaning of the word “public” in the public accountability? The public word can have various meanings. In the first stage must give the meaning of openness and transparency. It means that information for all citizens. Accountability to account should not be on the back side of closed doors, but should be free for all. Information provided about the function and actions of actors should be accessible easily. Discussion and negotiation about this should be free for the general public and the association should also provide its judgments through various means especially press and mass media (Bowens, 2005: 10). In the subsequent stage generalization of accountability is discussed which the subject topic should be within the public sphere for example issues including costing of public budget, actions of public agencies and foundations. Of course this subject is not limited to public sector, but can be increased to the groups of private sector to execute the powers of public sector or receives public budget. In general, public accountability is about giving answer about internal issues and about public sphere.

Accountability – Attempts at a definition

The concept of accountability has been applied in many different ways. The usage of the term is argued to have both expanded and gained distance from its original meaning. According to Mulgan, the concept of accountability has gained ground on the term responsibility (Mulgan, 2000: 557 to 558; Dwivedi and Jabbra, 1988: 3 to 5). In Mulgan’s view, accountability was first conceptually included in the idea of responsibility, but later gained ground as an individual concept, even to the extent of over weighting responsibility in both importance and scope (Mulgan, 2000: 558; Sinclair, 1995: 221). Also, Dubnick tends to see responsibility as an integral part of accountability rather than vice-versa (Dubnick, 2005: 6). Mulgan draws attention to what he calls the “core sense” accountability, derived from previous research on the topic. In this sense accountability is defined as a ‘process of being called to account to some authority for one’s actions’, or a process of ‘giving an account’ (Mulgan, 2000: 555; Dubnick, 2005: 6). According to Mulgan this
core definition of accountability is characterised by ‘externality, social interaction and exchange and rights of authority’ (Mulgan, 2000: 555).

Externality refers to an external ‘account-holder’ to whom an account is given by an ‘accountor’ (Mulgan, 2000: 555; Mulgan, 2003: 10). In this sense accountability also involves social interaction and exchange in terms of rectification and sanctions (Mulgan, 2000: 555). The account-holder also has rights of authority over the accountor implying rights to demand answers and impose sanctions (Mulgan, 2000: 555). In this sense accountability can also be seen as answerability (Dubnick, 2005: 410 to 411; Bovens, 2005). Dubnick agrees with Mulgan's definition of core accountability but finds it somewhat limited, since it stresses the external authority, disregarding personal ethics as a mechanism of accountability (Dubnick, 2005: 6; Dubnick, 2003). Mark Bovens also notes that the accountholder or the ‘accountee’ can be a person or an agency, but it can also be seen as an ‘accountability forum’ such as the general public. According to Bovens the accountability forum can also be of a more ‘virtual’ nature like personal conscience or faith (Bovens, 2005). Similar to Mulgan, Bovens defines the social process of ‘account giving’ in terms of three elements:

The accountor’s obligation to give account to the accountability forum, the forums ability to interrogate the accountor, and the forums ability to pass a judgement and impose sanctions (Bovens, 2005).

The different definitions of accountability all entail an element of control, which in fact was the term commonly used in the literature before the term accountability took over. Some scholars have also used a similar term ‘comptrol’ especially when referring to hierarchical means of control (Hood, 1986). Carol Harlow has argued that the notion of control differs slightly from accountability since the process of calling someone to account is retrospective by nature whereas control can be proactive (Harlow, 2002: 10). Yet both of these terms refer to the same phenomena: authority over those who govern. In Erkkila's view the different definitions, or types, of accountability are highly dependent on the structure or administrative context in which they appear. Scholars have argued that different types of accountability apply in different administrative contexts and that there are no universal solutions for organizing accountability systems (Dubnick, 2005: 37; Sinclair, 1995; Romzek, 2000: 34 to 35).

One of the famous classifications about types of accountability relates to Erkkila. He has used previous classifications of accountability as a starting point, especially a classification by Richard Mulgan and a typology by Barbara Romzek and Melvin Dubnick (Mulgan, 2000; Romzek and Dubnick, 1987). In this classification, "he" wishes to emphasize the importance of administrative context and structure to the applicability of different systems of accountability. In this classification, "he" will concentrate on the following types of accountability:

- Political accountability, bureaucratic accountability, personal accountability, professional accountability, performance and deliberation.

These are presented in Table 1.

Erkkila has regarded political accountability, bureaucratic accountability, personal accountability and professional accountability as "traditional" types of accountability since they have a long history within the context of the democratic state and public administration. They are described briefly in the following along with some assessments of their recent developments. Governance literature often sees performance and deliberation as "new" or "alternative" types of accountability. These two are discussed separately (Erkkila, 2007: 8).

**Traditional types of accountability**

As Erkkila states: The traditional idea of democratic accountability is based on the institutional environment of a nation state. However, public administrations throughout Europe have been subjects of a structural change from the late 1980's to the present day. This development has been characterized by redefining the role and scope of public sector and state (Pierre, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000). From the point of view of the state, this can be seen to consist of three kinds of outbound shifts in power:

- An upward shift emphasizing the role of international organizations, a downward shift of decentralization granting local government more autonomy and a shift towards private and non-governmental organizations in terms of externalization of government activities (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 77 to 91).

These shifts have significantly changed the role of state, as it no longer can be seen as single locus of power. Instead, a network of other actors has surfaced alongside the traditional state apparatus (Rhodes, 1996; Kickert et al., 1997; Kooiman, 1993). Also, the nature of public administration as an actor has changed. The insertion of market type mechanisms into the public sector has blurred the traditional border between the public and private sector (Lane, 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The internationalization of public administration and public policy agendas has also come to challenge the state as a single source of authority and new forms of global and multi-level governance are said to have emerged (Rosenau, 2000).

The governance literature emphasizes that this shift in
Table 1. Different Types of Accountability (Erkkila, 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of accountability</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Mechanisms of accountability</th>
<th>Context (structure)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political accountability</td>
<td>Democratic, external</td>
<td>Democratic elections, chain of accountability</td>
<td>Democratic state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic accountability</td>
<td>Hierarchic, legal</td>
<td>Rules, regulations, supervision</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accountability</td>
<td>Internal, normative, moral</td>
<td>Culture, values, ethics</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional accountability</td>
<td>Complex, ‘deferent to expertise’, peer-oriented</td>
<td>Expert scrutiny, peer review, professional role</td>
<td>Expert organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Output or client-oriented</td>
<td>Competition, self-regulation</td>
<td>Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Interactive, deliberative, open, public</td>
<td>Public debate, deliberation, transparency, access to information</td>
<td>Public sphere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

locus of power has made the traditional means of accountability ineffective (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 67; Hirst, 2000; Rosenau, 2000: 193 to 195). How is this then apparent among the traditional types of accountability? I will next briefly present the traditional types of accountability and point out some changes in institutional design that can be seen to have eroded them. My argument is that traditional state centric types, or mechanisms, of accountability such as political, bureaucratic and personal accountability have lost some of their capacity to control the administration, whereas the mechanisms of professional accountability have become more central due to the increasing complexity of government tasks. This development has in my view diminished the openness of decision-making, both in bureaucratic and political spheres and increased expert authority (Erkkila, 2007: 9 to 10).

Political accountability

The concept of accountability is closely tied to concepts of democracy and legitimacy (Mulgan, 2003: 6 to 7). Those who govern have to answer for their actions to a wider public either directly, when politically elected or appointed, or indirectly as subordinates of politically elected bodies. If they fail to do so they can be substituted in democratic elections. This constant threat forces the ruling government to respond to the demands of a constituency, who can thus hold their government to account (Dwivedi and Jabbar, 1988: 3, 6; Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 229). Many scholars have referred to this kind accountability as ‘political accountability’ (Sinclair, 1995: 225; Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 229; Behn, 2001: 41) or ‘political responsibility’ (Dwivedi and Jabbar, 1988: 3; Harlow, 2002: 8). The political accountability is external in nature, since the body in control, a constituency, resides outside the body that is being called to account (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 228; Harlow, 2002: 10).

Political accountability reaches even non-elected bodies of government through a ‘chain of accountability’ that makes them accountable as subordinates of democratically elected representatives (Sinclair, 1995: 225). This kind of accountability system is typical in the context of a democratic state. However, the decision-making in the open parliamentary process has declined due to the internationalization of policy-making, and decisions previously made on a national level are now increasingly being made in various international organizations (Erkkila, 2007: 11).

Bureaucratic accountability

Separating administration from politics weakens the link of accountability between elected and non-elected...
bodies, which inevitably creates pressures for inventing other mechanisms of administrative accountability (Peters 1989: 253 to 254). Perhaps the strongest degree of control can be achieved through hierarchy based ‘bureaucratic accountability’ (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 228). There seems to be a wide consensus that bureaucratic accountability is based on a hierarchical relationship between superiors and subordinates, rules and regulations and supervision (Mulgan, 2000; Goodin, 2003: 368 to 369; Harlow, 2002: 10). These kind of hierarchic relationships and traditional mechanisms of accountability tend to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy (Goodin, 2003; Mulgan, 2003). However, whether the source of control is internal or external to the administrative body that is being held to account seems to divide authors.

Romzek and Dubnick have stressed the internal nature of bureaucratic accountability, dividing it from legal accountability, which in their view is clearly external and thus divides the “lawmaker” from the “executor” (public administration) (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 228 to 229; Harlow, 2002: 16). Richard Mulgan also notes that from the point of view of the bureaucracy the internal control of superiors and the external control of other institutions tend to appear as a single mechanism of control (Mulgan, 2000: 564). Accordingly, Erkkila has treated these internal and external means of control as a single type of bureaucratic accountability (Table 1) (Erkkila, 2007: 12).

**Personal accountability**

The idea of internal control as means of accountability is perhaps best captured in so called ‘personal accountability’ (Sinclair, 1995: 230), which refers to personal values and ethics as guidelines for acting in the public interest (Mulgan, 2000: 562). The personal integrity of an individual is largely shaped by shared values, ethics and beliefs communicated within the organization or within a certain collective (Sinclair, 1995: 230). In public administration the mechanisms of personal accountability are closely tied to the prevailing administrative culture and its values and ethics (Sinclair, 1995: 230). These normative constraints can, to a certain extent, be seen as complementary to the institutional arrangements enhancing administrative control.

Administrative culture may provide moral guidelines for acting, sense of involvement, commitment and boundaries for identification, and it can foster self-regulation by deeming certain behavior undesirable (Sinclair, 1995: 230; Goodin, 2003). One may therefore conclude, besides the legal and bureaucratic framework defining duties and responsibilities of public service, that the continuity of public administration is largely based on administrative culture. Thus, shared norms, values and ethics effectively act as a mechanism of accountability (Erkkila, 2007: 15).

**Professional accountability**

Due to the increasing complexity of the tasks of public administration, public bureaus are more and more becoming expert organizations specialized in executing certain specific tasks (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 229; Mulgan, 2000: 558; Sinclair, 1995: 229). Controlling and supervising this kind of expert activity requires ‘professional accountability’, which according to Romzek and Dubnick is largely based on ‘deference to expertise within the organisation’ (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 229). This definition stresses expert scrutiny since the technical knowledge inherent in the routines of an expert organization makes other forms of external control difficult and ineffective (Mulgan, 2000: 559). Therefore, the key mechanisms of a professional accountability system are peer-review and expert scrutiny.

Professional accountability can be seen to have become a more common mechanism of accountability in policy fields involving complex tasks such as financial management, biotechnology, food safety, and energy and transport policy (Erkkila, 2007: 16).

**SHIFTING CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY: SEARCH FOR NEW ALTERNATIVES**

Changes in government due to the fragmentation of power and the decline in role and scope of a state have been seen to create situations where the traditional means of accountability no longer fully apply. As a consequence new means of accountability are sought and identified (Mulgan, 2003; Behn, 2001). Erkkila will next concentrate on two “new” alternative types of accountability often cited in governance literature, namely ‘performance’ and ‘deliberation’. ‘Performance’ regards policy outcome and results as a means of holding administration accountable whereas ‘deliberation’ emphasizes the importance of public debate, openness and transparency. The debate around both of these new alternatives can be linked to the changing conditions for holding politicians and administration accountable.

The debate around ‘performance’ as a type of control can be traced to the late 1980’s when the NPM reforms where first introduced to the public sector. The idea of ‘deliberation’ as means of accountability is more recent and can, to a certain extent, be seen as a critique of performance discourse, since they are usually seen as counterparts or alternatives to each other (Erkkila, 2007: 18).

**Performance**

Since the late 1980’s there have been references to output-oriented ‘responsiveness’ or ‘performance’ as a
new means of accountability (Mulgan, 2000: 568 to 569; Behn, 2001; Romzek, 2000). Even though traditional political accountability bears some similar features, this new type of accountability is distinctly different from the traditional types due to its market and client-oriented nature and market type mechanisms (Mulgan, 2000: 568 to 569). According to Robert Goodin, market environment emphasizes results as subject of accountability and competition as a mechanism of accountability (Goodin, 2003: 366 to 367). This result-orientation is also evident in the public sector, where the NPM reforms have blurred the traditional border between the public and private sectors (Lane, 2000). Many traditional public sector tasks are now being executed according to market based principles shifting the subject of accountability from policy process to policy outcomes (Goodin, 2003: 367).

Public bureaus are increasingly being controlled by results instead of rules and regulations. This kind of ‘market-based authority’ has also introduced the mechanisms of self-regulation to the sphere of public policy. There has also been a shift in the citizens’ role, as they are now increasingly seen as clients or customers instead of active participants in a policy process (Mulgan, 2000: 568). Introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector has lead to the new result and client-oriented thinking apparent in the discourse of ‘performance’ (Mulgan, 2000: 568; Dubnick, 2005: 2 to 3). Even the shift in the terminology from ‘control’ to ‘accountability’, stemming from the sphere of accounting, can be traced to the rise of the ‘new public management’ doctrines (Erkkila, 2007: 18 to 22).

**Deliberation**

There has been a more recent surge of scholars stressing the importance of deliberation as a mechanism of accountability (Mulgan, 2003: 10 to 11; Hirst, 2000). This line of thinking owes a debt to the idea of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996), which Paul Hirst has defined as two-way communication between the governors and governed based on an exchange of information and consent (Hirst, 2000: 27). According to Hirst, this dialogue conducted in the public sphere enables the citizens to hold the administration accountable for its actions and keeps up the legitimacy of government (Hirst, 2000: 27). The relationship between the administration and the civil society is thus largely built on an openness of decision-making, transparency of administration and public access to information.

When discussing the dislocation of traditional mechanisms of accountability or democratization of emerging processes of governing, the idea of holding policy-networks accountable through public scrutiny, dialogue and public debate is increasingly seen to have potential to enhance accountability (Bovens, 2005; Habermas, 1996). The ideas of public debate, transparency and access to public information as mechanisms of accountability are by no means new and they have been an integral part of both traditional bureaucratic and political accountability (Sinclair, 1995: 225 to 226; Romzek and Dubnick, 1987: 229 to 230). In this sense deliberation is rooted in the traditions of controlling government (Erkkila, 2007: 23).

**Shifting conceptualization of accountability in light of shifting governance patterns**

This history of science evidenced various revolutions through which modern method has substituted the pervious method which is named shifting paradigm, therefore, in the shifting paradigm it is clear that when the paradigm changes, the ducks of the world before the revolution of scholars will change to rabbits of the world after the revolution but can say that not reached to perfection, because there is no theory or theories which can arrange or unify the study of public organization effectively and even it is not possible in the long term, because the public administration is possibly supposed as a type of professional field but not a series with an unique paradigm, therefore in this article instead of paradigm, the concept of administration (governance) pattern is used. The definition of governance is not in itself of critical importance, particularly because many practitioners are widely familiar with governance in practice but find it difficult to recognize in the forms discussed by academics, many of which are highlighted by Guy Peters in this volume.

It is useful, however, to give a definition in order to focus discussion. “Governance” will be interpreted in this chapter to mean the set of rules, structures and procedures which give stakeholders some power to influence the decisions which affect their welfare (Peters, 2002). As Caiden and Caiden put it in this volume:

“The intent is to restore to the public what is considered rightfully theirs, to reduce the unaccountable powers of elites and increase the power of the citizenry, to remind public officials, both political and administrative, both within and without government, that the public are the masters not the other way round, and to give the citizenry the feeling that they are in control and that they are the most important stakeholders in governance.” This use of the term public, however, needs to be interpreted in the sense of “other societal stakeholders” (Caiden and Caiden, 2002).

At present, most of the governments and societies are using various governance patterns and approaches of public administration for the administrating of their country affairs. In the path of administration pattern in the literature of public administration of various countries, traditional pattern of administration public (old public administration) with the reforms of 19th century in
England change to dominant approach of administration in the governance of various countries. Although, traditional pattern of public administration at present, due to bureaucratic status and insufficiency was attached severally, but to be noted that utilization of this pattern in comparison to the primary forms, was a progress. Nowadays, necessitation to encountering challenges includes globalization technology, international competition, has compelled the western states to create main changes in the public administration sector. Traditional pattern of public administration which was considered as dominant theory in the main section of 20th century, during the last years witnesses vast changes in this century, has given its position to more modern patterns, therefore, considering the occurrence of movement of “new public administration” against “old public administration” and criticizing. This pattern caused that after that the scholars in pubic administration considering the criticisms of old public administration, have proposed other patterns for public administration. In contrast to the old public administration and of new public administration, two patterns in this article as dominant patterns in the path of governance literature are “new public management” and “new public services”. The matter of accountability and responsibility in the public service is extremely complex.

Public administrators are and should be held accountable to a constellation of institutions and standards, including the public interest; statutory and constitutional law; other agencies; other levels of government; the media; professional standards; community values and standards; situational factors; democratic norms; and of course, citizens. Indeed, they are called upon to be responsive to all the competing norms, values, and preferences of our complex governance system. These variables represent overlapping, sometimes contradictory, and ever-evolving points of accountability. As a result, there are significant challenges involved in establishing expectations, verifying performance, maintaining accountability of agents, assessing blame, sorting out responsibilities, determining who the masters are, and managing under conditions of multiple accountability systems (Romzek and Ingraham, 2000: 241 to 42). In fact, one of the defining principles of governance models is the notion of controlled, accountable government. As Dwivedi states:

“Accountability is the foundation of any governing process. The effectiveness of that process depends upon how those in authority account for the manner in which they have fulfilled their responsibilities, both constitutional and legal. . . . Consequently, at the very root of democracy lies the requirement for public responsibility and accountability”.

Now, in this article we have tired to compare shifting conceptualization of accountability based on typology of Erkkila with shifting governance patterns in the literature of public administration.

Old public administration and public accountability: bureaucratic accountability

A formal, hierarchical, and legal view of accountability characterizes the “old public administration” and remains, in some ways, the most familiar model for viewing administrative responsibility and accountability today. This view of accountability relies on the assumption that administrators do not and should not exercise significant amounts of discretion. Rather, they simply implement the laws, rules, and standards set forth for them by hierarchical superiors, elected officials, and the courts. Accountability, according to adherents of the “old public administration”, focuses on ensuring that administrators adhere to standards and conform to rules and procedures established for them in carrying out their functions. It is not a matter of using discretion appropriately and responsibly, it is a matter of avoiding the use of discretion by closely adhering to the law, regulation, organizational procedures, and directives of the supervisor. In this view, direct responsiveness or accountability to the public was, implicitly at least, seen as unnecessary and inappropriate.

Elected officials were seen as solely responsible and accountable for translating the public will into policy. As Goodnow presented it:

“Politics has to do with the guiding or influencing of governmental policy, while administration has to do with the execution of that policy” (Goodnow, 1987: 28).

The public had little or no direct role in the administrative or policy execution process. Wilson, in fact, seemed to want to buffer the governing process from popular interests, thus preventing the people from becoming “meddlesome” by direct involvement. In the “old public administration”, responsible administrators were those who possessed and relied on their expertise and “neutral competence.” Accordingly, responsible administrative action was based on scientific, value-neutral principles. A quick review of the topics included in Rosen’s (1989) edition of “Holding Government Bureaucracies Accountable”, for example, presents a broad array of processes, institutions, and mechanisms for ensuring formal accountability. Within the executive branch, hierarchical supervision, the budget and audit process, performance evaluations systems, and oversight by staff agencies such as personnel and purchasing departments are used to hold the actions of administrators in check and to ensure compliance with laws, procedures, and regulations.

The legislative branch also uses a range of accountability mechanisms, including the appropriations process, committee oversight, hearings and investigations,
reporting requirements, and legislative audit. The courts also employ a number of administrative controls, through judicial review and case law, as well as their oversight and interpretation of the Administrative Procedure Act of 1946 (which governs the procedures and process which executive agencies must use in establishing and applying governmental regulations). Most of these approaches rely, to a greater or lesser degree, on formal, external notions of accountability- that is, that administrators are responsible for adhering to objective external controls and answering for their actions in relation to established standards and the preferences of key stakeholders (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007: 129 to 130). Now, if we want to compare the type of accountability in this approach with the typology of Erkkila, is bureaucratic accountability.

Bureaucratic accountability is based on hierarchy relation among the superiors and inferiors, rules and arrangements and supervision. This type of hierarchy relation and traditional forms of accountability inclined towards superiority for public bureaucracy.

New public management and public accountability: performance-based accountability

Over the 1980s there was a move in a number of OECD countries towards the New Public Management (NPM). Central to this change in modes of public management was a shift towards “accountingization” (Power and Laughlin, 1992: 133). This development can be claimed to be part of a broader shift in received doctrines of public accountability and public administration at the same time, accounting changes formed an important part of the assault on the progressive-era models of public accountability. For progressive public administration, two democratic accountability depends on limiting corruption and the waste and incompetence that are held to go with it (Karl, 1963: 18). The assumption is that politicians are inherently venal, using their public office wherever possible to enrich themselves, their friends and relations, and that reliance on private-sector contracting for public services inevitably leads to high-cost low quality products, either because of corrupt influence on the contract-awarding process or because the public contract market will come to be controlled by organized crime, or both.

A market-based entrepreneurial model of public management, the new paradigm for public administration (Behn, 2001), may or may not have changed what government does, but few would argue it has not changed how government does. The new paradigm has caused a very important idea to take root- that accountability to citizens and customers is demonstrated by a commitment to measure and report performance. It defines accountability as what the public demands in exchange for the discretion they afford administrators to make decisions about service provision. The accountability of the new model is citizen based, market driven, and distinguished by the concept of a relationship between administrators and the citizens and customers they serve, unmediated by elected officials. It shares with traditional public administration a confidence that management science can achieve economy and effectiveness in public programs. It differs in that the rules designed to constrain choices and limit functions as a way to prevent the improper exercise of administrative discretion in traditional public administration are considered obstacles to a flexible, responsive, citizen centered administrative system. Administrators should be free to “steer, not row” in the direction of providing outcomes that matter to citizens.

Many advocates of traditional public administration and most dissenters to the new model point out that private sector values are not sufficient for civil society, and that the profession owes accountability to the collective interest of citizens, not the aggregation of their preferences. Loyalists to traditional public administration and proponents of the new model share the same concept of administrative accountability-accountability to citizens-but traditionalists insist on a more expansive definition of “citizen.” In the concept of accountability, there is a shift in accountability process based towards accountability output based and performance. But what is for status of accountability status in the pattern of NPM, it should be noted that public accountability in this pattern has been weakened.

In the opinion of Kettle, the restructuring of government is based on methods like business, boldly attacks against democratic accountability.

The primary challenge of public accountability turns to participative activities between private and public sectors which has been developed in the developed countries and also in developing countries under the banner of market reforms. These type of participative activities cause to doubt and uncertainty among the people about the accuracy of public-private exchanges and the question is raised that whether utilization from public sources is acceptable for the benefit of special private agencies and whether not decreasing the ratio of control of government on the private contractors whom should be accountable? For example, in U.S increase in the number of governmental contracts with the private sector caused anxiety among the people pertaining to substantial issues in the relation of government and the contractors, repeated use form illegal techniques and increase in corruption opportunities.

On the other hand, this type of participative activities may alter the real chain of accountability because ordinary citizens are not able to determine the offender in rendering public services easily and are not aware that whether the government is he main offender or the contractors. Therefore the close unity of public services with the private company causes to formation of new
challenge pertaining to public accountability and as a result decrease democracy. Another issue, accountability to changes in the functions of public services in form of reforms like market, from production and direct supply of goods and public services to the indirect functions like sovereignty, compiling regulations and assessments, and supervision on the activities of market like investment, conclusion of contract and liberation. Therefore the serious challenge of accountability in NPM is that the primary functions of public services is relativity, palpable, assessable and verifiable, whereas proving the new indirect function, like compiling regulations due to its non-palpable nature is comparatively different. In a sense, the views of accountability advocated by the adherents of the New Public Management echo those of the Old Public Administration in that there is a continued reliance on objective measurement and external controls.

There are important differences, however. First, in the New Public Management, the assumption is that traditional bureaucracy is ineffective because it measures and controls inputs rather than results. As Osborne and Gaebler state:

"Because they do not measure results, bureaucratic governments rarely achieve them" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992: 139).

Controlling inputs, such as money and personnel, rather than results, such as the cleanliness of streets or the knowledge gained by children, leads to government failure. Osborne and Gaebler argue that the answer is to look to the business model:

"Private organizations focus on results because they will go out of business if the key numbers go negative" (139).

Again, as with the New Public Management generally, the assumption is that business and the market model are superior and ought to be emulated in the public sector. Since government agencies cannot go out of business when they do not produce results, performance measurement must be used as a surrogate measure for what in business is the bottom line-profit. The focus of accountability is, then, on meeting performance standards to produce results. Secondly, the public is reconceptualized as a market made up of individual customers who each act in a manner to serve their self-interest. In this way, public agencies are not primarily accountable, either directly or indirectly, to citizens or to the public or common good. Rather, they are accountable to their “customers.” The responsibility of government then is to offer choices to their customers and to respond to their expressed individual preferences in terms of the services and functions provided. Accountability is a matter of satisfying the preferences of the direct customers of governmental services.

The third difference in the dominant view on administrative accountability suggested in the New Public Management perspective is the reliance on privatization. There is a strong emphasis in the New Public Management on privatizing previously public functions whenever possible. Again, this shifts accountability from a public to a private perspective, focusing again on the bottom line. As such, accountability systems in privatized government emphasize the provision of services and functions that produce desired results in the most cost-effective manner possible while satisfying their customers (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007: 130 to 131). It was wanted to conform the type of accountability in NPM to the typology of Erkila, is accountability based on performance (market based accountability).

Since the late 1980’s there have been references to output-oriented ‘responsiveness’ or ‘performance’ as a new means of accountability (Mulgan, 2000: 568 to 569; Behn, 2001; Romzek, 2000). Even though traditional political accountability bears some similar features, this new type of accountability is distinctively different from the traditional types due to its market and client-oriented nature and market type mechanisms (Mulgan, 2000: 568 to 569). According to Robert Goodin, market environment emphasizes results as subject of accountability and competition as a mechanism of accountability (Goodin, 2003: 366 to 367). A clear link can be seen between the New Public Management doctrine and the rise of performance as a perceived type of accountability. Introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector has lead to the new result and client-oriented thinking apparent in the discourse of ‘performance’ (Mulgan, 2000: 568; Dubnick, 2005: 2 to 3).

New public service and public accountability: deliberation-based accountability

Perspectives on accountability in the New Public Service stand in contrast to both the Old Public Administration and the New Public Management. Measures of efficiency and results are important, but they cannot address or encompass the other expectations we hold for public administrators to act responsibly, ethically, and in accordance with democratic principles and the public interest. In the New Public Service, the ideals of citizenship and the public interest are at center stage.

Accountability in the New Public Service is multifaceted and demanding in recognition of the complex roles played by public administrators in contemporary governance. The New Public Management artificially oversimplifies the issue of accountability in several ways. Kettl expresses it even more strongly that:

“The pursuit of businesslike practices and market-driven reforms constitutes an aggressive attack on the tradition of democratic accountability” (Kettl, 1998: 5).

First, privatization and attempts to mimic the private sector narrow the scope of accountability and place the
focus on meeting standards and satisfying customers. Such approaches do not reflect the multiple, overlapping channels of accountability in the public sector because the standards in the private sector are simply less stringent (Mulgan, 2000). A private company being responsible to its shareholders is not analogous to a government agency being responsive to its citizens. While private companies are invariably and primarily accountable for producing a profit, the public sector must pay more attention to process and policy. In government, “the emphasis is on the accountability of public power, on how to make governments, their agencies and officials, more accountable to their ultimate owners, the citizens” (Mulgan, 2000: 87).

Glen (1997) also makes important observations in this regard. She suggests that there are a number of reasons that responsiveness to citizens is different than responsiveness to customers. In order to be responsive to customers, private enterprise attempts to provide a product or service that is desirable and of acceptable quality, as inexpensively as possible. Customers don’t have to like the product or buy it unless they choose to do so. The serving of customers is driven by the profit motive: Enough customers have to be satisfied so they will buy the product or service at the designated price. Response to citizens, on the other hand, is distinctly different. Government should provide a service or product that the majority of citizens want. Since buying the product or service is not voluntary in that it is often paid for by tax revenues, “This creates a special responsibility for government not only to satisfy its immediate customers and operate in a cost-efficient manner, but also to deliver services that its citizens have requested” (1997: 464).

Secondly, the New Public Management does not place an appropriate degree of emphasis on public law and democratic norms. Public accountability is lessened when governmental services are performed by nonprofit or private organizations that are not bound by public law principles. Also, the New Public Management does not place an appropriate degree of emphasis on public law and democratic norms. Public accountability is lessened when governmental services are performed by nonprofit or private organizations that are not bound by public law principles (Leazes, 1997). In the New Public Service, if private administrators are to function as public ones, they should become subject to public standards of accountability. The focus on results or outcomes popularized by advocates of the New Public Management does not satisfy the need for accountability to democratic norms and values either. As Myers and Lacey state:

“The performance of civil servants should be judged . . . according to the extent to which they uphold such values, just as much, if not more than, on their success at meeting output targets” (1996: 343).

That is not to say that attention to results and output measures isn’t important. By focusing on results, public organizations can make important improvements to the benefit of the people they serve. But it does suggest that results-oriented performance measures ought to be developed based on an open public process; they should not be developed and imposed by those in government simply to mimic measures of profit.

Thirdly, in the New Public Management, the public administrator is conceived of as an entrepreneur, seeking opportunities to create private partnerships and serve customers. This perspective on the role of the public administrator is narrow, and is poorly suited to achieve democratic principles such as fairness, justice, participation, and the articulation of shared interests. The very qualities that make an administrator a good entrepreneur may in fact make him or her an ineffective public servant. Cooper states:

“The attributes associated with effective administration and management in the business world, such as competitiveness and profit orientation, may be unsuited to, or less appropriate to, the interests of democratic political society” (1998: 149).

In fact, he points out, if concern for efficiency is given more than secondary importance, the openness to popular sovereignty may well be compromised. The New Public Service rejects all three of these assumptions about accountability advanced by the New Public Management. The complexity of public accountability faced by public servants is recognized as a challenge, an opportunity, and a calling. It requires expertise, a commitment to democratic ideals, a knowledge of public law, and judgment informed by experience, community norms, and ethical conduct. Accountability in the New Public Service suggests a reconceptualization of the role of the public servant as leader, steward, and emissary of the public interest, not as an entrepreneur. As Kevin Kearns states:

“Despite the fact that accountability is an untidy construct... debates on accountability should be informed by its poor structure, not deterred by it. To this end, any truly meaningful dialogue should be guided by an analytical framework that embraces the many dimensions of accountability and allows contextual factors and subjective judgments to surface for informed dialogue on assumptions” (1994: 187).

Legal, constitutional, and democratic principles are an incontrovertible centerpiece of responsible administrative action. The New Public Service differs from both the Old Public Administration and the New Public Management in its emphasis on elevating the importance and centrality of citizenship and the public as the basis for accountable and responsible public action. Put simply, the source of
Table 2. Shifting conceptualization of accountability in the light of shifting governance patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of accountability</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Mechanisms of accountability</th>
<th>Context (Structure)</th>
<th>Administration (Governance) Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic accountability</td>
<td>Hierarchic, legal</td>
<td>Rules, regulations, supervision</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
<td>Old Public Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Output or client-oriented</td>
<td>Competition, self-regulation</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Interactive, deliberative, open, public</td>
<td>Public debate, deliberation, transparency, access to information</td>
<td>Public sphere</td>
<td>New Public Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accountability requires that public servants interact with and listen to citizens in a manner that empowers and reinforces their role in democratic governance. As N. Joseph Cayer states:

“The purpose of citizen participation is generally to make administration more responsive to the public and to enhance the legitimacy of governmental programs and agencies” (1986: 171).

Responsible behavior requires that public administrators interact with their fellow citizens, not as customers but as members of a democratic community. In the New Public Service, accountability is broadly defined to encompass a range of professional, legal, political, and democratic responsibilities. But “the ultimate aim of accountability and responsibility mechanisms in democratic policies is to assure responsiveness by government to citizens' preferences and needs”. This accountability and responsibility is best achieved by a public service that acknowledges and responds to the multiple and conflicting norms and factors that can and should influence an administrator’s actions. The key to balancing these factors in a responsible and democratically accountable fashion rests with citizen engagement, empowerment, and dialogue.

Public administrators are neither neutral experts nor business entrepreneurs. They are called upon to be responsible actors in a complex governance system, in which they may play the roles of facilitators; reformers; interest brokers; public relations experts; crisis managers; brokers; analysts; advocates; and most importantly, moral leaders and stewards of the public interest (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007: 131 to 135). Now, if we want to conform the type of accountability in NPS to the typology of Erkkila, is accountability based on deliberation to arise can in my view be traced to the structural changes that have influenced these conditions. The NPM reforms have imposed result-oriented imperatives on public organizations, increased expert authority and blurred the lines between public and private organizations, all of which has diminished the open and deliberative aspects of policy-making. Also, the internationalization of governance is seen to have excluded the wider public from the decision-making. Therefore, to be noted that by shifting the pattern of administration in the governance literature, concept of accountability will also shift naturally and deliberation is also the result of shift in pattern of administration towards NPS.

Considering that basic differences are present among reforms in different countries, but all follows a general aspect in the suitable accountability programs. Table 2 shows the pure forms of accountability programs of OPA, NPM and NPS.

On the basis of typology of Erkkila, accountability in the NPM and NPS and its comparison with the OPA is that the effort for governance improvement, reforms of NPM and NPS, presents a pattern of accountability which is its meaning shifts the comparative importance of types of accountability. The main shift defined by taught NPM and NPS is a motive of bureaucratic accountability to accountability based on performance and deliberation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The question of accountability in the public service is a complex one, involving balancing competing norms and responsibilities within a complicated web of external controls; professional standards; citizen preferences; moral issues; public law; and ultimately, the public interest. This subject was involved during the course of time period in public administration with main shifts in conceptualization. Considering the governance literature, we can reach to a result that shifts in conceptualization of accountability relates to structural changes in political
science and public administration occurred from the year 1980 till now. Governance literature emphasizes that this shift in the focus of power causes to formation of traditional means of ineffective accountability. In fact, the discussion is that the traditional forms of accountability like political, bureaucratic and personal accountability have lost their ability to control the administration, whereas mechanisms of professional accountability due to complication of government functions has become more central.

On the other hand, performance and deliberation do have a role in the organization of accountability, but primarily as ideological elements of governing that influence the composition of accountability systems. In this sense performance and deliberation can be seen as reflections of a more historic debate on the trade-off between efficiency and democracy. The debates around performance and deliberation have undoubtedly altered the conceptualization of accountability which these shifts resulting from shifts in the administration structures and context and governance conditions. In fact, performance and deliberation as a result of these shifts, caused to new demands for “bringing back” the Public.

REFERENCES


