
A Review on Nicholas Henry's "Good Government: An Unstylish Idea that Warrants a Worldwide Welcome"

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Abstract. The article, "Good government: an unstylish idea that warrants a worldwide welcome," was written by Nicholas Henry, a Professor Emeritus of Public Administration and President Emeritus at Georgia Southern University, USA. The article draws attention to the fast spreading influence of the citizen-friendly approach that seeks to build an administration from a rigid, hierarchical, and disciplined bureaucracy to one that is more "businesslike" using private sector management models, specifically the New Public Management (NPM). In the face of the success of the NPM, the author pointed out some ceaseless problems the government is facing, namely authoritarianism, corruption, and ineptitude. Nicholas Henry believes that it is time to resuscitate the good government approach that will help curtail the government's ceaseless problems. However, the author's proposal to resuscitate the "good government" approach is easier said than done.

Keywords: Resuscitate, Good Government, Nicholas Henry, The New Public Management

Synopsis

In the article, Nicholas Henry argued that in 21st century, New Public Management continues its fame in the field of public administration in most developed and developing countries. While it continues to dominate the field, the Good Government, which is a reformist phrase in the past years, fell out of favour in the field of public administration. Some 1400 years ago, the Good Government was unequalled in the field of public administration. Its roots, according to the author, are surprisingly global, cultural and deep.

The author tells of the fall of the Good Government that began in mid-20th century and ended in 1980s. It was when the NCSL, a leading organization associated with good-government reform movement forsook its Good Government tradition by its issuance of Public Personnel Administration Law in 1970 that contains values that we now associate with the new public administration.

At present, as argued to the author, the Good Government is dead. The author calls for the revival of the Good Government because it asserts that government must be good in every public sense – politically, ethically, and professionally. According to him, Good Government embodies three core values, viz. democracy, honesty, and competency. He argued that these three core values are more important to human happiness than ever before. Despite the global corruption cost, the globe's officialdom was stubbornly refusing the outsizing significance of the Good Government in bettering people's lives.

In conclusion, the author pointed out that he values the concept of the New Public Administration. According to him, NPM is progress. However, administrators should not forget the notions of progressive public administration. These notions, as maintained by the author, are the pillars of the Good Government – democracy, honesty, and competency.

Review

Nicholas Henry's article directs attention initially to the rise of NPM and its cascading effects to the Good Government traditions in Public Administration. He claims that in the opening decade of the twenty-first century, New Public Administration is in and the Good government is out. His claim about the fall of the Good Government is strongly supported by a group of professors in Public Administration at a Prestigious Universities. Richard C. Box and the accompanying authors in the article titled, "New Public Management and Substantive Democracy." They claim that the American democracy – one of the core elements of good government - is confined to a shrunken procedural remnant of its earlier substantive form due to the abandoning of the public sector in favour of the market model of management:

The classical republican model of citizen involvement faded with the rise of liberal capitalist society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Capitalism and democracy coexist in a society emphasizing procedural protection of individual liberties rather than substantive questions of individual development. Today's market model of government in the form of New Public Management goes beyond earlier "reforms," threatening to eliminate democracy as a guiding principle in public-sector management." (Box et al., 2001)

In addition, Henry also speaks of one of the core elements of good government, i.e., honesty. According to him, honesty is deteriorating in some developed nations, notably the United States. The deterioration of the core values, as maintained by the author, associates with the perspective of the "least government". This notion is also raised by Jan-Erik Lane (2000), a Professor of Political Science at the University of Geneva and adjunct professor at the Norwegian School of Management. According to him, deterioration is a new right agenda of the New Public Management's philosophy.

Furthermore, The degradation of honesty in Public administration brought by the omnipresence of New Public Administration's "rhetoric and practice" was noticed and observed by Frederickson (1996), a former President Emeritus of Eastern Washington University and an outspoken opponent of the NPM Movement. He argued that officials in bureaucratic hierarchies are more ethical than those who practice new managerialism that move democratic government further away.

However, the paper presented by Kolthoff and Huberts (2003) titled, "The Ethics of New Public Management: Is Integrity at Stake?" shows that scholars do neither agree about the intensity nor the direction of the relationship between ethics and New Public Management. In other words, the changes of the values of public service to business-like values has no hard evidence that it will lead to more integrity violations. His study concluded that the effects are more on the establishment of principles than the business-like methods introduced by NPM. They also argued that corruption is not new. Like crime, corruption is age-old. Sykes (1971) aided the idea by describing that corruption in American cities has nothing to do with NPM or Reinventing Government. The corruption in American cities, according to him, is partly because a malfunction of the bureaucratic system.

In the middle part of Nicholas Henry's article, the resuscitation of the reformist phrase of yesteryear, "Good Government" was advocated. According to him, the revival is a must because "Good Government" asserts itself to be good government. The government must be good in every public sense of that word – politically, ethically, and professionally. In whatever way, his statement is puzzling. The word good is highly subjective because it is defined and rated differently by different people. What one considers as good might not be the same to others. For this reason, it is more convincing to define the word good clearly and separately like politically good, ethically good, and professionally good. In doing so, it will help the readers gain clear understanding.

The notion of Nicholas Henry to resuscitate what he previously calls dead can be harmful and might be an impediment for the administration of some developing countries. Holding on to what is dead is pointless and futile. Democracy which is central to Good Government, comes in all shapes and sizes. In other words, democracy can be unpredictable. Democratic institutions can be easily manipulated and perverted. As Caiden (2006) argue, democratization is a process of trial and error. It is experimental. He claims that no one can exactly predict if an instrumentality can work out as anticipated because what might work in this place might not work in that place, and what satisfies one group of individuals might not satiate another.

There is more, Caiden (2006) also pointed out that if liberal democracy is to be globalized, the administrative state is facing an onerous task that might impede its way to development. According to him, democracy cannot be imposed from the outside. The educative role of the administrative state must be properly performed. People must be made aware of not only their rights but also their responsibilities. Elected officials need to understand what their positions require, the standards of conduct that are expected of them, the potential personal sacrifices they may have to make, and the skills and knowledge they will need to acquire. This educational function requires extensive formal training because it is an ongoing socializing function rather than a one-time occurrence that may be assumed once it has been carried out.

Nicholas Henry continues his argumentation by stating that Good Government encompasses more than just democratic values and governmental honesty. Good Government, according to him, includes professional competence – the third of its component. He cited the incident of typhoon Katrina as a price of a weak, brittle, and clumsy government. In other words, the weak and slow response of the government after the typhoon Katrina slammed the country is a result of an incompetent government. On the contrary, competency is part of the emphasis of the New Public Administration. Alertness, agility, and adaptability are three of the five ideas of NPM which are significant component of competency. It would be erroneous to say that competency is not present in NPM.

Nonetheless, Nicholas' article has a few merits but mostly a gaff that proposes a future in the Public Administration that is unlikely to happen. The topic discussed in the article is arguable. Definitely, the work of Nicholas Henry can definitely change or challenge the reader's perspective on Public Administration.

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