

**MANAGERS' ROLE IN THE CULTURAL CHANGE TO HAVE OCCURRED WITHIN  
PORTUGUESE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE CASE OF MERITOCRACY**

**PAPÉL DOS GESTORES NA MUDANÇA CULTURAL DA ADMINISTRAÇÃO CENTRAL  
DO ESTADO: O CASO DA MERITOCRACIA**

**PAPÉL DE LOS GESTORES EN EL CAMBIO CULTURAL DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN  
CENTRAL DEL ESTADO: EL CASO DE LA MERITOCRACIA**

**LE ROLE DES GESTIONNAIRES DANS LE CHANGEMENT CULTUREL DE  
L'ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE AU PORTUGAL : LE CAS DE LA MERITOCRATIE**

**管理者在国家中央行政文化的变化中的作用: 能人统治研究**

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**ABSTRACT**

The influence of New Public Management (NPM) on administrative reform in Portugal, and specifically on matters related to the introduction of greater technical rationality in public management processes, has been widely acknowledged (Mozicafredo, 2000); (Bilhim, 2008); (Rocha, 2011). Many governments of OECD member countries have undertaken identical initiatives. However, literature on administrative reform suggests institutional bureaucracies' resilience to managers' control and to change (Burns e Stalker, 1961); (Bjur e Caiden, 1978); (Bilhim 1995, 2010). The sociology of management has also helped to identify and understand the platonic image of the manager – a rational enforcer of a system for planning and controlling an organizational structure, quickly adaptable to the surroundings – transmitted by the rhetoric of technocratic ideology. This article aims to contribute to the debate on the role played by the public manager in the change in organizational culture, based on meritocracy.

**Key words:** Organizational Culture, Public Management, Organizational Change.

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## RESUMO

A influência da *New Public Management* (NPM) na reforma administrativa em Portugal e, em particular, no que toca à introdução de maior racionalidade técnica nos processos de gestão pública é amplamente reconhecida (Mozicafredo, 2000); (Bilhim, 2008); (Rocha, 2011). Foram muitos os governos que, nos países da OCDE, tomaram iniciativas idênticas. Todavia, a literatura sobre a reforma administrativa apresenta bastante evidência da resiliência das burocracias institucionais ao controlo dos gestores e à mudança (Burns e Stalker, 1961); (Bjur e Caiden, 1978); (Bilhim 1995, 2010). Por outro lado, a sociologia da gestão tem ajudado a identificar e compreender a imagem platónica do gestor - executor racional do sistema de planificação e controlo de uma estrutura organizacional, adaptável rapidamente à envolvente – transmitida pela retórica da ideologia tecnocrata (Reed, 1989). Este artigo quer contribuir para o debate sobre o papel do gestor público na mudança da cultura organizacional, a partir do caso da meritocracia.

**Palavras-chave:** Cultura Organizacional, Gestão Pública, Mudança Organizacional.

## RESUMEN

La influencia de la *New Public Management* (NPM) en la reforma administrativa en Portugal y, en particular, en lo que se refiere a la introducción de una mayor racionalidad técnica en los procesos de gestión pública está ampliamente reconocida (Mozicafredo, 2000); (Bilhim, 2008); (Rocha, 2011). Muchos fueron los gobiernos que, en los países de la OCDE, tomaron medidas idénticas. Todavía hoy, la literatura sobre la reforma administrativa muestra muchas evidencias de la resiliencia propia de las burocracias institucionales al control de los gestores y a los cambios (Burns e Stalker, 1961; Bjur e Caiden, 1978; Bilhim 1995, 2010). Por otra parte, la sociología de la gestión ha contribuido a identificar y comprender la imagen platónica del gestor – executor racional del sistema de planificación y control de una estructura organizativa, adaptable rápidamente al entorno – transmitida por la retórica de la ideología tecnócrata. Este artículo pretende contribuir al debate sobre el papel del gestor público en el cambio de la cultura organizacional a partir del caso de la meritocracia.

**Palabras clave:** Cultura Organizacional, Gestión Pública, Cambio Organizacional.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'influence du *New Public Management* (NPM) sur la réforme administrative au Portugal, notamment en ce qui concerne l'introduction d'une plus grande rationalité technique dans

les processus de gestion publique, est amplement reconnue (Mozicafredo, 2000 ; Bilhim, 2008 ; Rocha, 2011). De nombreux gouvernements des pays de l'OCDE ont pris des initiatives identiques. Toutefois, la littérature sur la réforme administrative montre une certaine résistance des bureaucraties institutionnelles au contrôle des gestionnaires et au changement (Burns et Stalker, 1961 ; Bjur et Caiden, 1978 ; Bilhim 1995, 2010). Par ailleurs, la sociologie de la gestion a aidé à identifier et à comprendre l'image platonique du gestionnaire – exécutant rationnel du système de planification et de contrôle d'une structure organisationnelle, rapidement adaptable à son environnement – transmise par la rhétorique de l'idéologie technocrate. Cet article veut contribuer au débat sur le rôle du gestionnaire public dans le changement organisationnel à partir du cas de la méritocratie.

**Mots-clés:** Culture organisationnelle, Gestion publique, Changement organisationnel.

## 提要

葡萄牙实施了新的公共行政改革 *New Public Management* (NPM), 引进专业技术人才到公共行政管理机构对葡国公共管理产生了很大影响 (Bilhim,1998) ; (Rocha, 2001) ; (Mozicafredo, 2000)。经合发展组织 (OECD) 的其他成员国政府也采取了类似的改革。然而, 在关于行政改革的文献中人们发现官僚机构对改革是有抵触的 (Burns e Stalker, 1961) ; (Bjur e Caiden, 1978) ; (Bilhim 1989)。但是, 在技术精英治国的主导意识形态下, 管理社会学帮助制造了一个这样的柏拉图式的管理者形象— 理性执行计划, 控制机构, 使之能最快适应政改需要 (Reed, 1989)。本论文试图探讨在能人治国的理念指导下, 组织文化的转变和管理者在此过程中所起的作用。

**关键词:** 组织文化, 公共管理, 组织机构变化。

## Introduction

It is not difficult to accept the study of management as one of the most strategic processes and social institutions in today's society. Understanding how managers successfully organize and control productive work within such a great variety of conditions and situations provides an academic challenge. It is undoubtedly the responsibility of the sociology of management, organizations and work to shed light on management processes, conceived as a set of poorly articulated mechanisms, processes and strategies guided by the conjugation of other practices related to the production of goods and services and representations which transform the environment in which we live.

Literature on the topic features authors who treat managers paternalistically, as though they are unfeeling professionals, mini Machiavellis or prisoners of a structural logic which they are incapable of understanding. This work, in contrast, suggests that management practices point to the existence of complex networks of relations established between the technical, political and ethical dimensions characteristic of the performance of management functions. Seen according to this perspective, managers are professionals whose activities require the possession and application of knowledge allowing them to deal with the contradictory demands and pressures imposed by resource mobilization, as well as with the pressure of efforts to maintain their behavior within the limits prescribed<sup>2</sup>.

In a tense game of balance, managers negotiate the pressures derived from the logic of bureaucratic control and those from operational demands. Public or private managers attempt to balance the integrity and survival of the organizational structure with the pragmatism of short-term pressures designed to smooth daily crises and find achievable solutions.

Managers may encounter great difficulties when seeking to resolve the conflict between instrumental rationality, key to survival, and ontological rationality which demands loyalty to the ethical purposes which should guide management activities.

The rhetoric of technocratic ideology transmits a platonic image of the manager, which does not extend beyond a mere rational executor of the system for planning and controlling an organizational structure, quickly adaptable to the surroundings. However, when we analyze managers from the inside, we see a very different image. We see someone fighting to reconcile themselves with the reality they face which refuses to adjust or conform to the universal categories and principles they have learnt.

The equation for the problem we have brought to this work requires us to go beyond the duality of the public, platonic image and the internal one, focusing the discussion on the inevitable dilemmas in which managers are submerged and their struggle to construct a viable compromise between structural constraints and human stubbornness. The question central to this work consists in knowing if managers control organizational culture, or if, on the contrary, they are controlled by it. We must improve our understanding of organizational control throughout history, requiring the examination of the impact that these forms of control exert on management functions.

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<sup>2</sup> Reed, Michael (1989). *The Sociology of Management*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Supervision and control appear as questions fundamental to the history of sociology in organizations. However, recent works on the field encourage a wider-reaching and more sophisticated vision of control in the most complex of organizations. There is a greater sensitivity to the historical context in which the different forms of control have been developed and to their implications in the construction and maintenance of organizational identities. These developments have cultivated an investigational “order of works” and theoretical approaches focused on the strategic role of administrative power, the connection between central authorities, in bureaucracies and in target populations, at the heart of modern societies. These subjects tend to be analyzed from the standpoint of “*theories of modernity*”<sup>3</sup>.

In these works, management control involves a deliberate attempt to monitor and/or supervise objects and people, and is exercised in formal organizations with well-defined objectives, associated with a formal administrative structure which includes agreements for the maintaining of boundaries and exchanges between the organization and outside personnel. Modernity also constitutes an age of bureaucratic organizations, fruit of a process rationalising social action, as Weber has observed<sup>4</sup>.

Some support the former argument that modern organizations are strategic mechanisms or devices to ensure the reproduction and/or the transformation of the central institutional structures – companies, the bureaucratic state, the professionalized/expert division of work and industrialized military power – constituting modernity<sup>5</sup>.

Professional groups also perform a central role in the design of institutional forms and organizational configurations developed in modern industrialized societies. In this sense, professionalization is understood as a part of the wider process of bureaucratization. The latter must be understood as a sustained movement, in terms of its impersonal means of administration based on the diffusion of more elaborate systems of controlling information, and its presentation through the application of knowledge and technical expertise associated with professionalization<sup>6</sup>.

The question of current control in public administration should be considered based on two perspectives: intra-organizational control, by means of the law, administrative and technical regulations and procedures, exercised by senior public administration and middle

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<sup>3</sup> Touraine, Alain (1998). *Crítica da Modernidade*, Lisboa: Instituto Piaget.

<sup>4</sup> Giddens, Anthony (2004). *Sociologia*, 4. ed., Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

<sup>5</sup> Dandeker, C. (1990). *Surveillance, Power and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Bilhim, João (2009). *Ciência da Administração*, 2. ed., Lisboa: Universidade Aberta

managers; and intra-organizational control exercised by the juxtaposition between the various entities which compete among themselves.

The externalization of services, by means of the total or partial privatization of the social capital of the state's corporate entities or by means of other forms which prioritize competition between suppliers and public services constitutes a form of changing the type of control in which competition takes place of internal control, and whose limit is the failure of the weakest entities<sup>7</sup>. The most appropriate organizational field for this externalization and change in the type of control is that executed by public policies linked to state functions which are not financed by taxes, but by rates, or in other words, by the so-called "welfare state".

The question to be dealt with in this work requires a clarification of the relations between public administration's managers in their role of controlling efficiency – maximum output through minimum input – and organizational culture as a system of norms, values and beliefs identifying a determined public body. Some cultures maximize and others minimize efficiency. Therefore, in terms of this symbolic cultural reality, it is paramount to determine managers' roles as well as to what extent they control or are controlled by the organizational culture in which they are inserted<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, since the mid-nineteenth century - whether due to public or private administration – meritocracy has been seen as a mark of modernity and consequently as a guarantee of organizational efficiency. However, if managers are controlled by organizational culture, in public bodies in which meritocracy does not constitute one of the marks of its culture, such as in Portugal, is it theoretically possible to introduce it or consider it in terms of myth?

## **1. Managers and Control over Organizational Culture**

Culture is intangible, implicit, given as a certainty, and each organization develops assumptions, understandings and rules which guide daily behavior at the workplace. Until they learn these rules, new employees are not accepted as full members of the

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<sup>7</sup> Bilhim, João (2000). "Gerir a Administração Pública como uma Empresa". In *Reforma do Estado e Administração Pública Gestonária*, Lisboa: ISCSP.

<sup>8</sup> Shein, Edgar (1985). *Corporate Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

organization. Transgressions therefore result in disapproval, and penalizations and conformity with the rules becomes a primary basis for compensation and upward mobility<sup>9</sup>.

Thus when taking culture as a variable and norms, values and beliefs as underlying organizational life and resulting in socialization processes, or taking culture as a system of ideas and divided meanings, expressive forms and manifestations of human conscience, we are always confronted with this dilemma of whether the manager or the culture is in control. To resolve this issue, it is necessary to ask another question first: do organizations only have one culture or various? And if they only have one culture, what is the role played by the subcultures?

The dominant culture expresses the norms, values and beliefs essential across all of the organization and which are divided by a greater or lesser number of members. When we speak of culture, this refers to the dominant culture, to the macro vision which lends the organization its identity. It must be highlighted that, in complex organizations with marked social stratifications, the groups present report to different cultures and it is based on them that they construe their games and strategies concerning power and influence, as seems to be the case with public bodies.

In a pluralist model whose endeavors are based on the recognition of internal dichotomies and which values political questions, culture may act as a support for intergroup strategies. Analyzing social relations in the organizational context requires a reflection on the processing of power relations in the same space. For Teixeira Fernandes<sup>10</sup>, the entire structure of collective action is organized as a system of power. Power is present in all of daily life and affects every type of social interaction, from the most simple to the most complex. Power relations sit on the instrumental asymmetry of professional competences and on the intellectual capital present across the various socio-professional groups.

Today it has been recognized that organizations are intrinsically political social phenomena, both responsible for the creation of order and the authority designed to guide people, with often opposing and conflicting interests.

It is formally assumed that an organization is managed by the rationality of the relationship between means and ends, resources used and results achieved. For this

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<sup>9</sup> Bilhim, João (1988). *Cultura Organizacional do INESC*. Master's degree dissertation at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the Technical University of Lisbon.

<sup>10</sup> Fernandes, A. Teixeira (1998). *Os Fenómenos Políticos: Sociologia do Poder*, Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

reason, this political activity and the conflict of interests are hidden or ignored, as though they do not exist. This leads to the belief that the term “political” or “conflict of interests” should be avoided.

It is thus that organizations, just like governments, use systems of “rules” as a means of creating and maintaining order among their members. A political analysis, whether of private management or public management and public administration in particular, provides a sound basis for an inside analysis of these organizations.

Bourdieu<sup>11</sup> claims that *habitus* varies according to the position that the individual or group of individuals occupy in the field. The domination of specific resources, powers or capitals is at the heart of the position that the individual or group of individuals occupies in the social field.

It is therefore natural to consider public organizations as home to various cultures, or namely, the specifics of socio-professional categories such as special-regime and general-regime careers, in which there are accentuated differences between the organizational cultures of the technical assistants, administrators, senior technicians and the senior and middle managers. These socio-professional groups possess different worldviews and assume them as different means of thinking, feeling and acting, functioning as sectorial groups of interest competing for scarce resources.

However, if a complex public organization is peopled by a plurality of professional, departmental and regional cultures (among others), what prevents it from coming apart? How is it that the principle of cohesion imposes itself on that of specialization and diversification? Any organization without a culture which allows its members to form a common interpretation of which actions are appropriate and which actions are not will not survive and will fall apart. It is this very character of shared understanding which confers the culture with the capacity to guide and direct behaviors.

To promote cohesion between the organizational cultures within a public body and the groups of interest present, organizations employ a global resource and a formal system of authority structuring behaviors and work relations: hierarchy. In the struggle for scarce resources, the sectorial strategies of each culture are suspended when a certain point of tension is reached. If any of the actors present proceed, they jeopardize the survival of all and the respective parts of the organization. At this maximum peak of

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<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1997). *Razões Práticas sobre a Teoria da Ação*, Oeiras: Celta Editora.



tension in the organizational dynamic, there is recourse to the hierarchy and to the managers.

Among the cultural traits which identify each culture within public bodies is one which serves as a kind of cement binding the entire organization together. It is the product of action and intervention by formal and informal leaders who permanently define not so much a unitary and consensual reality, but a concrete system of action, with conflicts of interest and power games. It is this cultural trait which permits the existence of the organizational cohesion indispensable to survival and to the condition of efficiency.

There seems to be a considerably generalized awareness that for certain peaks of tension in the organizational dynamic, negotiation and the resource of hierarchy are resorted to by means of recourse to formal leaders. When problems and difficulties arise, they are responsible for them, whether or not they are the cause. However, it must be noted that the role of the dominant coalitions is neither passive nor relative in terms of those involved, as organizations also exert an influence through their transformation and constitution.

When conflicts arise and complete rationality is not available to help resolve them, resorting to power is inevitable. In other words, as there is no process of rationalizing the dissent, it is the political force within coalitions which determines the criteria and the preferences which should prevail. This cultural trait is present to different extents in every organizational culture which integrates a public body and plays a crucial role in the maintenance of ties within the organic structure at the base of cohesion, and consequently, the survival of the organization.

From the analysis developed, it may be concluded that the manager of a public body controls and is at once controlled by the culture(s). Managers control their own culture, which, just like any other, is part of the public body in question and is among the traits of the managers' culture found in the processes justifying their profession, namely, the domination of the instruments of organizational efficiency. In the organizational political arena, however, they must negotiate with the other cultures and resolve disagreements. In this case, they are partly controlled by this network of social relations and web of power in which they are inserted and which constitutes the organizational dynamic.

## **2. Merit Management in Public Administration**

Modern public administration theory presumes the existence of two distinct orientations: the first tends to consider public administration as part of the process of governing, and therefore representative of a section of political theory; the second highlights the features common to public and private organizations, with public administration, according to this perspective, part of the wider organizational theory.

The first perspective seeks to distinguish public managers from private managers by means of their participation in the process of governing, and consequently, in public policies and the allocation of values in society. This is the older of the two theories. According to this vision, public managers are assessed by the same standard as the rest of the actors in the political process. It must be highlighted that the actions of administrative bodies and agents, according to that which is set out by Article 266 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, are marked by the prosecution of public interest in terms of the principles of equality, proportionality, justice, impartiality and good faith.

In contrast with this approach, other actors claim that individuals' behavior within public organizations or the behavior of organizations is itself not significantly different from that of private organizations. This generic approach toward organizational analysis has paved the way for the development of many interdisciplinary studies, derived from public and private administration and the sociology and psychology of organizations, among other fields of social and behavioral sciences. According to this perspective, the basic concerns with management are identical, whether regarding private companies or public organizations and agencies.

What links all of these approaches is the concern with meritocracy, but this concern is as old as the Mandarins of ancient China. Mandarins were divided into two categories: civilians and soldiers. Each of these categories was divided into nine ranks, with each of these subdivided into two classes: that of great Mandarins and that of common Mandarins. Access to this privileged class was achieved by means of competition, after obtaining different degrees of knowledge which became progressively more demanding. Career promotions were obtained through merit.

In modern times, it is not to be unexpected that this kind of behavior by managers dates back to the early days of the administration science to have appeared in the United States and to have established relations between science and private management. Its

consequence was the emergence of the known “scientific principles” designed to increase corporate productivity<sup>12</sup>.

This concern with meritocracy also soon appears in the public sector; Woodrow Wilson<sup>13</sup> defends the separation between politicians and bureaucrats and consequently affirms that they should fill positions of power within the organizational structure according to their merit. In the twentieth century, Max Weber<sup>14</sup> attributed particular emphasis to meritocracy in referring to the characterization of formal bureaucracy, that the selection of workers is made based on technical qualifications and that these may be tested by means of examinations and diplomas certifying candidates’ technical qualifications.

Meritocracy has accompanied the history of public administration and recently its importance has been reinforced by the *New Public Management* (NPM) reform measures. The most interesting aspect is that in assuming the reforms promoted by the NPM to be anti-Weberian, it still shares with Weber the importance attributed to meritocracy.

Selection based on merit has been valued and accepted over time as a sign of modernity, an ethical guarantee, a bulwark against corruption and a guarantee of impartiality in people management in the public sector.

For contemporary sociology, meritocracy corresponds to a system in which social positions are filled based on individual merit and not through criteria such as wealth, gender, social background or politics<sup>15</sup>.

An analysis of the current literature on public administration by means of a general survey of the content shows that the terms meritocracy/merit appear in scientific literature, in professional reports on practices and in recommendations by various international bodies such as the OECD/PUMA and the World Bank.

Although this concern with meritocracy in the public sector has undergone ups and downs, it has never left the core of teaching, investigation and practices and processes in the public sector. This raises the question: why has this concern suddenly become so pressing?

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<sup>12</sup> Bilhim, (2009). Op. Cit.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, Woodrow, (1887). “The Study of Administration”. In *Political Science Quarterly*, n.2, v.2, p. 197-222.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, Max. (1978). *Economy and Society*, Berkley: University of California Press.

<sup>15</sup> Bilhim, João (2012). “O Mérito nos Processos de Seleção da Alta Direção da Administração Pública Portuguesa: mito ou realidade”. In *Sequência: Estudos Jurídicos e Políticos*, v. 33, n. 65, p. 57-78.

The answer is that the administrative paradigm in southern Europe places the focus on administrative action in the interpretation and application of the law and not in efficiency, as is the tradition in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European administrative culture.

The resistance felt in Portugal through the application of the Integrated System for Performance Appraisal in Public Administration (SIADAP) as an instrument of merit management effectively demonstrates which of these administrative cultures is found in the country. Of course there are pockets of excellence in the introduction of this new behavior, but, generally speaking, the resilient maintaining of career ascension based on seniority and not through merit demonstrated is expressed in this broth of organizational culture.

Criteria	Southern Europe	Northern Europe and Anglo-Saxon Countries
Objectives	General: the body's functional content	Precise, clear and measurable
Success criterion	To do what the law sets out, the way it sets it out	Meet quantified objectives
Use of resources	Abundant resources; efficiency is secondary	Scarce resources; efficiency is key
Type of structure	Mechanistic, rigid and a high and strong hierarchy	Flexible, flattened, more delegating
Manager's role	Passive. An interpreter and executor of regulations and procedures	Active. Protagonist; assumes controlled risks.

João Bilhim. Developed based on a comparative analyzes of literature and empirical knowledge of the situation in Portugal.

It is important to highlight a significant contradiction in the reform measures conceived by the NPM. The NPM claims to tackle Weberian bureaucracy, but still adopts

its concept of merit and imposes its practice on the various public administrations, regardless of the culture of the people at the heart of which such administrations exist<sup>16</sup>.

Public organizations are currently confronting the impact of two different waves. Current practices no longer correspond to any past model, but are still not integrated and unified in one theory. Much has happened in the thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989: a new economic paradigm, “new public choice”; geopolitical transformations; globalization; the emergence of China, India and Brazil; the impact of IT in general.

The importance of good governing to citizens’ quality of life has been discovered, as has that of the interdependent role played by the following sectors – private, public and civil society. There is awareness that good governing is impossible without a good government, efficient public services and public institutions which are as productive as private institutions.

The twentieth century bequeathed us with a public administration theory and practices which are robust and resilient to change. However this resilience needs to adapt and to be prepared for new circumstances and the unexpected. These thirty years have been rich in new experiences, promoting a state which is more transparent and flexible, with recourse to privatizations, decentralization, deregulation and in particular, the promotion of efficient and meritocratic public organizations.

Portugal finds itself at a point in the process of change characterized by no longer being something, but not yet being something else. Meritocracy should perform a crucial role in the organizational culture of the managers in public bodies in this process of transitioning from the classic legal paradigm to the new management paradigm.

Among academics who teach and the practices they employ at public organizations, there seems to exist a certain generalized belief that somehow is passed down through the generations over time that ideal public administration is one in which corruption is wholly defeated and merit rules in the occupying of all roles and functions in the structure of the state. Furthermore, the rhetoric of political parties in a democracy significantly helps to feed this belief, whether at specific moments such as elections, or later in forming oppositions in parliament.

If it is certain that Max Weber, in the concept of a type of ideal bureaucracy, foretold meritocracy as a consequence of social evolution, it is no less certain that the

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<sup>16</sup> Pollit, C; Bouckaert, G. (2004). *Public management reform: a comparative analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

management model which has, since the 1980s, been fighting against the Weberian bureaucratic model of the state and public administration, would place urgency on the introduction of meritocratic systems as one of the key features of its measures.

It is for this reason that the following question must be asked: is it not a contradiction that Portuguese public organizations have adopted the Weberian model and do not show results in terms of meritocracy as defined by the NPM, despite an anti-Weberian theoretical positioning, and continue to insist that this characteristic of Max Weber's ideal must be met?

In fact, over the last four decades there has been generalized criticism of the performance of public organizations, accused of loyalty to the Weberian model and as a result, of being counter-cyclical to social evolution, thus requiring an administrative modernization whose central point would be the introduction of merit.

Many decried this state of things, pointing to aspects such as: the poor image of the services provided; low quality; excessive costs; bureaucracy and centralization; the lack of transparency in citizens' eyes; the perception that managers do not solve citizens' problems, only those of their own; corruption; low productivity; the lack of qualified resources; workers' lack of motivation; the absence of cost control; the absence of strategic thinking and vision; weak management; the absence of a meritocratic system.

All of the interested parties surrounding public administration from trade unions, businesspeople, social communication bodies, consultants, political parties and even the general public have pressed governments to reform public administration due to the fact that its construction is based on Max Weber's erroneous principles of bureaucracy, requiring a reinvention and renovation of its institutions.

The NPM measures adopted by Portugal and many other OECD countries includes reforms such as: budget cuts, privatization, the break between financing and payments, contracts, vouchers or checks sent directly to citizens, concern with the client/user rather than with the citizen, the feeding of competition between providers (private/public and public/public), flexible management, a re-editing of Wilson's dichotomy for relations between politicians and bureaucrats, the decentralization and de-concentration of services, intermediation, the feeding of the practices of electronic governing, greater regulation and less rendering of services by the state, performance assessment and recruitment based on merit.

It is important to recognize that this cast of new public management principles and processes still presents a loose and incoherent set of measures, wrapped up various times

by a vague strategy for improving the quality of services and “doing more with the same budget or doing the same with reduced costs”, making use of hidden installed capacities or the contribution of technological innovation.

As for meritocracy, which integrates Weber’s “ideal type” of bureaucracy and is recommended by the NPM’s reform measures, might it be absent from the culture of public institutions? Meritocracy does not appear to be present in the expression of daily practices in the social actions of these organizational cultures, even in those of managers, given the resistance encountered by governments in the introduction of meritocratic practices. Meritocracy does however seem to be very much present in the values of these cultures.

There seems to be a contradiction that to understand we may resort to Malinowski’s concept of real culture and ideal culture. All signs suggest that the value of meritocracy integrates, to different extents, the various cultures present with public organizations. Currently, not even trade unions assume that meritocracy is not a value, circumscribing themselves to concretely question meritocratic processes, or in other words, the practices.

For this absence of meritocracy in the practices of public organizations, there are many different arguments, such as: the difficulty of measuring non-repetitive (technical) work, the feeding of a certain social Darwinism which abandons the weakest to their fate, the lack of mechanisms ensuring relative equality between assessors and organizations, the arbitrariness of the decision maker and the subjectivity of the process, among others.

It must be highlighted that, as Bronisław Malinowski<sup>17</sup> observed among the Trobrianders, although outbreeding was presented as of great value, inbreeding was still greatly appreciated behind closed doors, or, in other words, meritocracy is assumed to be politically correct by organizational cultures but the practices express sympathy for the old style and for antiquity as a criterion for climbing the career ladder. The question of how to change work practices and processes must now be asked of managers.

### **3. Public Managers and Organizational Change**

The management culture in public organizations integrates two large groups – senior and middle managers, both first and second level. However, in public organizations with a mission, attributes and skills of a more operational nature, the head of the division, a second-level middle manager, performs the role of directly managing and supervising

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<sup>17</sup> Malinowski, B. (1975). *Uma Teoria Científica da Cultura*, Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

production once the department and section heads which traditionally integrated the nucleus of direct heads have been eradicated.

Managers' role consists of organizing and controlling work processes and those of producing goods and services, whether that means the group of managers at the top of the administration, the first-level middle managers, the services director who implements the body's policy or the direct head or division head.

As selection is based on merit and not according to the government's political choice, in the state's central administration, the director general or president of the public institute tends to be taken as representing the balance of interests between the government (elected politicians), the public administration staff, integrated in general-regime or special-regime careers and the citizens. Head managers, selected according to merit, come to perform a crucial role in the assessment of the balance between diverging interests involved in decision-making processes.

As decision-making processes gradually abandon the typical programmed character of the classic legal paradigm (only doing what the law calls for) and come to enter the management model marked by efficiency, effectiveness, equality and ethics, the factor dominating the role of managers is the interaction within struggles for power and cultural and ideological debates on the organization's future.

The processes of change may follow various guidelines with different theoretical assumptions and implied models. The following must be highlighted: change as a process of general evolution or adaptation; as a therapeutic or revolutionary process; to be managed. Various mechanisms for managing change have been defended.

Kurt Lewin<sup>18</sup> defined the mechanism for managing change based on the three following phases: unfreezing – the alteration of the present state of equilibrium, responsible for the sustaining of the present behaviors and attitudes. This process should consider the threats which change might resuscitate and the need for motivating those forming the new process; changing – the development of new responses, based on new information and refreezing – the establishment of the change by the introduction of new responses.

From Lewin's point of view, to achieve successful change it is necessary to adhere to the following steps: examine the forces which oppose or support the change; diagnose the specific weight of each one; strengthen the favorable forces and weaken those which

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<sup>18</sup> Lewin, Kurt (1951). *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York: Harper & Row.



are unfavorable. In this process, managers identify the problem which requires the change; set objectives; define the future state or the organizational conditions desired upon the change; generate the transition process. Managing the change is not a linear process. It is therefore necessary to pay constant attention to the entire organizational structure.

In the particular case of the introduction of the meritocracy to management practices and processes, it is indispensable that the absence of merit in the processes of work management generate dissatisfaction due to such awareness of both the need to change and the risk of not changing. Furthermore, in the process of change, small actions may exert a fundamental catalytic effect.

For Pettigrew<sup>19</sup>, understanding the problem of change in strategic terms requires an analysis of the context, content and the process of change, without allocating more importance to one component than the others.

A process of change at the top of the hierarchy may conform to the following steps: encourage employees and middle-level managers to accept the change by means of jointly analyzing the existing problems to affect the organization; develop a shared vision of the future; produce a consensus on the new vision, feed cohesion; spread the revitalization across all departments without pressurizing the top of the hierarchy; make the revitalization official by means of formal policies, systems and structures; control and adjust strategies in response to the problems of the revitalization process.

During an investigation into change management, Pettigrew and Whipp<sup>20</sup> concluded that the effectiveness of a strategic change requires: the construction of a climate receptive to change (which implies justifying the reason why it is necessary); the construction of the capacity to change (before introducing the change); the establishment of a change agenda, (establishing the business direction, the necessary vision and its implicit values). The authors also suggest the following secondary measures to support the strategic intervention: the transformation of the intentions into components of action; the use of these components to attribute responsibilities to change managers who act upon the structures of the various levels in the organization; the adjustment of the compensation function, the remuneration system, as well as the mechanisms of communicating the objectives of the change.

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<sup>19</sup> Pettigrew, A. (1985). *The Awakening Giant: Continuity and Change in ICI*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

<sup>20</sup> Pettigrew, A.; Whipp, R. (1991). *Managing Change for Competitive Success*, Oxford: Blackwell.

For Robert Quinn<sup>21</sup>, deep change requires a new means of thinking and behaving in the organization. Its purpose is more ambitious, discontinuous in terms of the past and is generally irreversible. Deep change breaks with the daily standards of action and entails assuming risks and a certain loss of control.

According to Quinn, deep change occurs during the transformation process which has four distinct phases: initiation; uncertainty; transformation; routine. During the initiation phase, a vision is developed of what is desired long term, producing the risk of the initiative. During the uncertainty phase, the participants commit to intense action and intuitive experimentation. During the transformation phase, intuitive learning obtained through experimentation produces a new paradigm. In the phase of the new routine, new practices are implanted.

This rational and symbolic instrumental capacity is held by public managers to establish the future of public organizations by combining planning with improvisation and the negotiation of diverging interests. This future is not just established by the group of managers; other internal organizational cultures are partners within it, as are the various political parties and the citizens, organized in turn into diverse and conflicting groups of interest.

Managers at the top of a body in the public social security system, for example, in introducing the mechanisms of meritocracy called for by a law such as the SIADAP or the recruitment and selection system via the Public Administration Recruitment and Selection Commission (CReSAP) cannot ignore that among their citizens and workers, there are different visions on what the body should or should not be in the future.

Meritocracy seems to be generally assumed as a democratic value in open and global societies. Organizational practices seem to remain distanced from the application of this value however, and for change to have a place, the role of managers/directors seems indispensable. The secret remains in managers' capacity to adopt a winning strategy in the implementation of merit in public management practices.

Difficulties which currently persist are linked to the fact that the culture of the state's central administration managers is more marked by the legal paradigm than by the new management paradigm. In the legal paradigm, the content of the function of management is contained in the interpretation and application of the law. Meritocracy is thus imposed by

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<sup>21</sup> Quinn, Robert (1996). *Deep Change*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

means of the law and loses its momentum and dynamic force as an instrument of management in the private sector.

The implementation of a process of change designed to introduce to the state's central administration a meritocratic policy shall always be more contentious than the same process in the private sector. Primarily, because managers' culture in the state's central administration seems to value meritocracy less than the culture of managers in the private sector.

In the many interviews held with senior and middle managers in the administration, the most common expression is "this is very different in the private sector" and, when faced with meritocracy, the impression easily remains that this is accepted only because it is politically correct. It does not seem to constitute a value with the same force as that found in the private sector. So if it still does not constitute a value rooted in the value system of the culture of the managers' culture, the difficulty to be expressed in daily practices will be even greater.

Another difficulty revealed by the state's central administration in processes of change is the fact that its structure is intended to be resilient and to resist processes of change. Managers thus possess little experience, skills and training to manage such processes.

However, in the struggle against this rigidity, we find that the concept of governing has been assumed in literature as preferable to that of administration; the principles of administration having been mere hypotheses and not facts; the administration dealing with values and ethics throughout its intervention; managers playing an important role in affirming democracy; and the administration depending on the internal and external context. There seems to be a marked contradiction between what is done and what should be done which is provoking the urgent need for change.

To our understanding, the state's central administration is currently, according to Kurt Lewin's terms, de-freezing. It is no longer what it once was, but it is still not what it wishes to be, (in the future there may be opposing expectations). In other words, it is at a certain point of anomy, positioned like a hyphen. It still does not experience meritocracy as a management value and practice, but is embarrassed by selection based on political choices, connections and seniority.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The reforms to public administration expressed by the NPM measures have produced the fragmentation of services, while those expressed by the organizational structures of traditional administration and its application have led to emphasis placed on risk management rather than prudence and the law, on competition rather than cooperation and trust, on efficiency rather than equality, on the proliferation of bodies with various legal natures rather than the holism of public bodies, and on private law rather than administrative law.

Literature on administrative reform is also replete with references to institutions' resilience or resistance to change, especially when reforms call into question culturally instituted practices, processes and procedures. Organizational culture, seen as a set of norms, values and beliefs, in its deepest dimension conditions the most superficial cultural traits such as routines, processes, practices and management systems.

Managers' culture seems to bear this trait as meritocracy constitutes one of the processes for controlling the profession. However, in the culture of public managers, meritocracy seems to be assumed merely as what is politically correct.

It may be affirmed, however, that in all of the cultures present inside public organizations, there is a willingness to accept, at least ideally, the selection of professionals to occupy various positions in the structure based on merit as a value.

Field studies do not prove these practices as a measurable artifact, because, as this work has problematized, there is a marked difference between ideal culture and real culture. The value might be present in ideal culture, but absent in the practices and processes.

In light of this, it seems that the manager's sociological function assumes a critical role in this process of organizational change. Only managers can ensure that the reforms introduced in Portugal by means of altering the statute of the people directing the services and central, local and regional state administration bodies with Law no. 64/2011 of 22 December are expressed in daily life as a cultural artifact characteristic of the various cultures present in public organizations.

The value of merit, which seems to play a part in the ideal cultural traits of various organizational cultures, will only come to constitute a concrete manifestation by means of an effort to coordinate and negotiate what constitutes the daily functions of the public manager.

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