15. Governance Processes and the New Public Service:  
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Janet V. Denhardt and Robert B. Denhardt  
Arizona State University

One of the most important developments in public service today is a dramatic change in the way that public policies are being developed, processes are being created, and programs are being implemented to serve the needs of society. In the past, government played a predominant role in providing these functions in order to fulfill its responsibility for the steering of society. That is not to say that other interests were not represented, but government played the decisive role.

But time and circumstances have changed. Public policy formulation and implementation is no longer the sole responsibility of government. Today, the public policy process is becoming increasingly more open and participative, involving many individuals, groups and institutions both inside and outside government. Put more formally, there has been a reformulation of the steering mechanisms of society. Under these circumstances, the role of government is changing. As we witness a fragmentation of policy responsibility in society, we must also recognize that the traditional mechanisms of governmental control are no longer workable—or even appropriate. Traditional hierarchical government is giving way to a growing decentralization of policy interests, in which government, non-profit organizations, and many others will play new and decisive roles. Control is giving way to interaction and involvement.

Today, national, state, and local governments are involved in policy development and implementation along with thousands of citizens, other public institutions, private companies, and non-profit organizations. For this reason, it increasingly makes sense to talk not just about government, but also about the process of governance. We can define governance as the exercise of public authority. The word government is usually used to refer to the structures and institutions of government and those public organizations formally charged with setting policy and delivering services. Governance, on the other hand, is a much broader concept. Governance encompasses the traditions, institutions, and processes that determine how public authority is exercised, how citizens are given voice, and how decisions are made on issues of public concern. Governance speaks to how society actually makes choices, allocates resources and creates shared values; it addresses societal decision making and the creation of meaning and place in the public sphere.

What then is the new role of government in the governance process? First, government will continue to play a central role in establishing the overall legal and political rules through which various networks will operate. We might say that government will operate at the meta-level, that is, government will play a role in ratifying, codifying and legitimizing decisions that arise from within the various policy networks. Moreover, government will continue to play a significant role in establishing broad principles of governance that apply to all, for example, setting the overarching rules of the game. Second, government will likely play a role in resolving resource distribution and dependency issues within various networks, but especially between and
among those networks. Government will aid in protecting economic interests that are played out in the relationships between different sectors or policy networks; it will play a role of balancing, negotiating, and facilitating relationships across network boundaries (often through the use of incentives rather than directives), and assuring that one sector doesn't come to dominate others. Third, government will be required to monitor the interplay of networks to assure that principles of democracy and social equity are maintained within specific networks and in the relationships between and among the different networks. Government must assure that democratic processes are maintained and that ultimately the public interest is served.

Just as the steering of society is changing, so are the roles and responsibilities of elected and appointed public officials changing—and changing in exactly parallel ways. Not surprisingly, each of the three roles we have just described—those associated with legal or political standards, those associated with economic or market considerations, and those associated with democratic or social criteria—are reflected in popular approaches to understanding the role of government and especially public administration today.

The first of these approaches can be called Traditional Public Administration. It is probably the most familiar and most easily characterized school of thought, and certainly the legal and political standards it emphasizes will continue to be important. According to this traditional view, public officials are involved in designing and implementing policies focused on limited, politically defined objectives. They are bound by the law and by political realities. They are concerned with developing programs and providing services through the traditional agencies of government. The question of accountability in the public service is answered by limiting administrative discretion and relying on neutral expertise to implement the decisions and policies established by democratically elected political leaders.

The next two approaches have emerged much more recently. The second, which has to do with economic and market considerations, is based in a view of political life which sees the role of government as continuing to steer, at least in the sense of acting as a catalyst to unleash the forces of the market and in creating mechanisms and incentive structures to achieve policy objectives through private and non-profit agencies. The approach to accountability reflected in this viewpoint is that government is responsible for offering choices to their "customers" and to respond to their individual preferences in terms of the services and functions provided. The school of public administration theory and practice associated with this approach goes by many names—among them managerialism, neo-managerialism, economic rationalism, reinventing government, the reinvention movement, and, most recently, the New Public Management.

The third emerging (or perhaps re-emerging) role of government focuses on democratic and social criteria. This view suggests that the public interest is paramount and that the public interest in the result of a dialogue about mutual or overlapping interests. It sees the role of government as brokering interests among citizens and other groups so as to create shared values. This might mean, for example, building coalitions of public, private, and nonprofit agencies to meet mutually agreed upon needs. The approach to accountability reflected in this approach suggests that public servants must attend to law, community values, political norms, professional standards and citizen interests. The school of public administration theory and practice that we associate with this approach we have called the New Public Service.
Employing a governance perspective and a new focus on public service allows us to explore the full range of policy choices, management strategies, ethical responsibilities, and civic commitments that are necessary to effective and responsible public administration. It also highlights the complexities of democratic governance and civic engagement. In turn, we are reminded that, by definition, democracy involves a diverse collection of people, beliefs, traditions, processes, and structures that come into play when public decisions are made. In such a milieu, public administrators are required not only to address the traditional concerns of organizational management, policy development, and service delivery. Increasingly, the job of public administrators will be that of fostering citizenship and identifying, creating, and managing public values.