



3rd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on BUSINESS, ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT and TOURISM,  
26-28 November 2015, Rome, Italy

## Innovation and public reform

Ani Matei<sup>a\*</sup>, Razvan Bujac<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration Bucharest, Romania*

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### Abstract

Innovation involves taking a risk and accepting a potential of failure. Thus, reporting to our public administrative system, the process of innovation is not normally associated with thinking and acting within the public sector. This is a real challenge, and if this challenge is overcome, innovation has the proper internal channels to take effect. Innovation is a dynamic process that changes the overall architecture of government, identify issues, challenges, develop new processes, creative, and selection and implementation of new solutions. Thus, in general the features of innovation coincides largely with the reform process. Important factor on promoting innovation is promoting a creative mindset. The innovation process is essential to increase public sector efficiency and for delivering quality and competitive public services. The purpose of this paper is to present and analyze innovation as a social phenomenon and how it is tangential to the public administration reform and identify the defining characteristics that classify the reform process as one innovative. Based on a review and analysis of the literature, acceptions of the reform process and innovation in the public sector, its objectives, motivational factors, barriers, and indissoluble link between reform and innovation will be presented in this paper.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of BEMTUR- 2015

*Keywords:* Innovation, administrative innovation, novelty, public reform, modernization of public sector, public services.

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### 1. Introduction

For more than half a century, scientists from around the world have conducted academic research and analyzed the innovation process. While a big part of this research has focused on various aspects of innovation, (Osborne,

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\* Ani Matei.Tel:+412-321-23

E-mail address: [amatei@snsa.ro](mailto:amatei@snsa.ro)

2013; Henderson and Clark, 1990; Utterback, 1994) the tendency has turned to exploring other forms of innovation such as the innovation of processes, the innovation in services and the strategic innovation, in order to understand the way in which they are managed and how they are contributing to successful outcomes in the long term. In this paper the focus is on the accumulation of the research not on only one form of innovation and in particular on the processes by which they are achieved. We will present a definition and a theorization of the main types of innovation, of the connection between invention and innovation, innovation and reform, management practices, the process, structure or technique, which will be incorporated into a new model for an organization's objectives.

The aim of this research study is a contribution to developing our theoretical appreciation of the existing literature theories which are focused on analyzing innovation. This paper attempts to address the lack of a satisfactory theoretical understanding of change as exposed by (Caldwell, 2006). It is a study that focuses on developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon to be able to relate this concept of innovation with the changes and the reform processes from the public administration.

This first part of the research study identifies the debates and the specific concepts related to innovation in the literature. Thus, this study in its first phase, presents a paradigm for understanding the phenomenon of innovation. Our interest in this paper is the revealing of recent studies of innovations, primarily because this is the area where existing knowledge is limited.

It is the conceptual and theoretical contribution that has derived from a quantitative, qualitative and competitive analysis of the main theories of innovation in order to compare it to the reform process, serving to highlight the main characteristics of innovation in its general classification and specific theories.

It must be emphasized also that this is not a paper that reveals an empirical study. It is important here to clarify some of the limitations of this paper, it identifies the traits and critics addressed to the theories of innovation, taking into account the available literature in the field, taking into account both the visions criticized, as well the favorable visions of each theory; a qualitative method - highlighting specific studies of innovation and the main concepts issued by industry representatives to identify similarities and differences between the theories and concepts exposed, as well as the proclivity through which the innovation is analyzed; the comparative method - creating a parallel of the main theories in order to identify similarities and differences between them, not only in terms of characteristics, but also the critics brought by of relevant specialty literature.

## **2. Innovation a comprehensive concept**

The administrative reformers who wrote in the first half of the twentieth century discredited the proliferation of administrative values. They said they were about to discover the universal principles of a good administration, an anticipation that emerged from their belief that testing or efficiency would provide a single standard by which administrative practices might be judged for all time. "In the science of administration, be it public or private, the basic good is efficiency" (Gulick, 1937). Other values might influence the degree of efficiency. Gulick condemned the suggestion that alternative preferences may be allowed to influence the public administration. "The continuing penetration of different value scales served to the hindering of the development of all social sciences," he wrote. He suggested that these values be treated as a "phenomenon", meaning that they occur in special circumstances. The need for efficiency, on the other hand, was contextualized to be treated as universal. The Initiates in administrative studies could "explore the relationship from the efficiency point of view in a given frame." (He doubted that the system of promoting the values only in small circles was effective for highlighting of strong political parties.) More importantly, the scientists who had Works about administrative system would consider "the effect of this framework on the effectiveness itself."

Once they have established a common and standard value for measuring the administration, the early reformers announced that they were the first that had to do with administrative practice in a systematic way. In 1887, Woodrow Wilson suggested that people who have written about the government until then haven't really dealt with the real problems of administration.

The desire to reduce the size of the administration has been the subject of considerable debate. Supporters of the delegation of power concerns Thoreau's dictum that says that government is best which governs the least. Here we can refer to another idea, in the decision-making process within public administration, the administration or those who lead it should not compete with its citizens. The competitive market system, characterized by individual liberty

and by initiative, is the main domestic source of economic strength. In recognition of this principle has been and continues to be the general policy of the administration to rely on commercial sources to provide products and services that government needs.

Many supporters of the evolutionary theory of the administrative system believe that the administrative apparatus could "do more with less" by setting clear priorities, reducing layers of bureaucracy, and eliminate inefficiencies. In the process, many have thought that administrative efficiency could be maintained through the application of techniques borrowed from the private sector (such as strategic planning, cost accounting based on activities, as well as the quality management) and treating of administrative organizations, as they should be an enterprise (identifying the main business activities, encouragement of a sense of "ownership" and the results management).

#### *a. Associated concepts*

Public policy seeks innovation as a solution to society's big problems, Innovation is an imperative of public policy: In a time of resource constraint governments, innovation of public services has become a sine qua non of keeping up with society's needs. (Osborne 2015). Innovation is a concept widely used, but elusive. Definitions of this term are often circular or ad hoc and rarely reach beyond the common sense understanding of using something new, as (Gann 2001) theorized in his book. In the specific literature that questions the sustainability issues, "innovation" can take moral nuances, often submitted in terms of what "they" need to do in order to become more cautious and aware, and / or to be more focused towards the client.

All the acceptations identified in order to make this research are not suggesting that innovation must be radical or that it appears exclusively for products. Nothing suggests that innovation is exclusive to large organizations or singular entrepreneurs. In the context of organizational innovation it can occur in the case of products, processes or services. This can be incremental or radical, and it can occur at different levels in an organization, from management groups and departments to design teams and even individuals. Over these aspects we will focus in the next part of our study and we will detail them, in part for a better understanding.

One of the oldest and most important commitments regarding the concept of innovation were those of (Schumpeter 1934), whom placed the phenomenon in the centre of his economy's model. Schumpeter theorized that innovation is what incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, destroying the old one constantly, always creating a new structure. This process of creative destruction is the essential fact of capitalism. For Schumpeter, innovation is a creative implementation of the new which takes place amid the resistive background of the addictive activity of day to day; the circular flow.

Associated concepts include invention, growth, creativity, design, reform, change, failure, entrepreneurship, customer, knowledge, and society. Thus Invention is often measured as the ability to patent an idea. If this can be achieved, then it is an invention. The success or failure of an invention depends not only on the ideas chosen by the organization but also on the how their implementation is managed. The invention is often the creation of something that has not yet been desired by a customer. Numerous inventions do not lead to innovation because they are not brought to market.

If an invention can be exploited and transformed into a change that adds value to a client, then it becomes an innovation. On the other hand, there are many innovations that do not require invention in terms of originality. Process and service innovations often involve well-established techniques and the application of technology. Although it can be argued that this fact doesn't include invention, as there it already exist, it is a legitimate form of innovation but because it is new in the organization that applies it.

Creativity is regarded as a main foundation for innovation and it is a capacity inherent to all human beings. Creativity is a mental process that leads to the production of ideas and concepts that are appropriate and useful. The creative process it is said to be composed of four distinct phases: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification (Wallas 1926). Future revisions of this process added a final stage, elaboration (Kao 1989), in which the idea is structured and completed into a form that can be easily communicated to others. Creativity requires a level of originality and novelty that is essential for innovation. Although creativity is a fundamental part of innovation, it is wrong to swap terms. Innovation encourages the further processing of the production process of creation (idea), so as to allow the exploitation of its potential value by exploiting development.

Regarding the change, although we see innovation as resulting from change, it is incorrect to equate innovation with all forms of change. In order for the change to qualify as innovation, it must have a certain degree of desirability and intentionality (West and Farr 1990). When we examine the output of innovation and change, another difference becomes evident. This refers to the fact that change can have a positive or negative impact on the organization, whereas innovation by definition must be positive because it should add value to the customer. Therefore it can be concluded that, although all innovations can be seen as a change, any change cannot be seen as an innovation.

Innovation is an attribute that is beneficial to a large society, such as a nation or a region. Not only the innovation can introduce new products and services that improve the lives of individuals both nationally and internationally; it can also contribute to economic growth. The innovation of processes also increases the level of economic growth by ensuring cost competitiveness within the nation and attracting investment by organizations that establish their bases there. National economies grow through innovation and the manufacturing capabilities of the organizations.

### *b. Innovations classification*

The current edition of the Oslo Manual identifies four types of innovation:

- *Product innovation*: the introduction of a good or a service that is new or significantly improved in terms of its features and how to use. This includes significant improvements in technical specifications, components and materials, incorporated software, user-friendliness or other functional characteristics.
- *Process innovation*: implementation of a significantly improved production or delivery mode. This includes significant changes in techniques, equipment and / or software.
- *Marketing Innovation*: implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing.
- *Organizational innovation*: implementation of a new organizational method in the firm's business practices, workplace organization or external relations.

Innovation (and innovation in services) traditionally was considered as a means of stimulating growth due to a cumulative and future-oriented process dealing with the organizational innovation as well as with the market or the presentation of the innovation, Van Geyes & Vandenbrande (2005). When looking for sources of growth, the economists have focused their effort on technological and scientific innovation, especially starting with the 1980s. In accordance with this, the criteria for the definition of innovation were mainly related to marketing or to the integration of new developments (a component or a method) in production as well as that of technological products and processes in the business / companies (for example Frascati Manual developed by the OCDE and the Oslo Manual developed by Eurostat). While modern economies have become increasingly more service-oriented, as Gadrey reiterated, the issue of innovation and the role of technology in terms of economic growth, were put in a different light ever since 1990 both by economists and sociologists (Gadrey, 2003).

Despite a gradual process of harmonization based on the Oslo Manual, innovation national surveys still have some significant differences in methodology and design. Regarding the evaluation forms, these include the sequence and formulation of the questions, types of variables (for example, categorical vs. numeric) filtering of the companies based on a questionnaire, etc. As regards to the survey design and methodology, it includes the choice of target population during the reference period, the methods of collection and processing of data, etc.

### **3. Administrative reform and the link to innovate**

The important link between reform and innovation in the public sector is weakly conceptualized: Much of the focus on innovation through the lens of New Public Management has been on individual studies of public reform or innovation. Starting from this idea we still need to make some clarifications, in which we can consider the public administration reform as processes of changing an ensemble of policies, rules, procedures, systems, organizational structures and staff specific to each state. In the early 80s in Anglo-Saxon countries, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, USA and Canada, they've promoted public sector reforms that have greatly changed the organization of the governance. The public sector reforms, sector that has been placed in its cultural and political environment,

made in the OCDE countries had the objective of redefining the structure of state organizations, of the role of the state in the economy and relations between civil servants, politicians and citizens. The bureaucratic model of the public administration was criticized for being rigid, based on hierarchical systems and decision process making "top-down" that leads to distancing the administration from its citizens.

Today, unlike the role and the structure it had in the past, the public sector is an extraordinarily complex system through the fact that it must adapt to the current requests which reflects the society in which we all live. Implicitly the way that the system can cope with the "new present" is to increase the flexibility and response time to new requirements and needs in this sector that wants to be in continuous development.

Our focus is a public sector context, for this purpose, we adopt Brown and Osborne's (2013) preferred definition of innovation as "the intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organization of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, the group organization or wider society" (West and Farr, 1990:3). As such, innovation is not synonymous with any change process. Rather, it is "a distinctive category of discontinuous change that offers special challenges to policymakers and service managers alike" (Brown and Osborne, 2013: 188).

Such innovation in public sector can furthermore be categorized into evolutionary innovation, expansionary innovation, and total innovation (Brown and Osborne, 2013: 198). Evolutionary innovation denotes new skills or capacities that are used to address an existing need; expansionary innovation describes new needs that are being addressed by existing policies, skills or capacities. Finally, total innovation stands for a new need being addressed by a new skills or capacities (Brown and Osborne, 2013: 199).

Often, the discussions about public administration reform are given birth to some confusion regarding the meaning of this phrase. Specifically, a reform means more than improving the talked about administrative capacity, and in regards to the process of innovation there is a report of inclusion. The short answer is that these are two different concepts about public sector organization. However, they are functionally connected, as I try to demonstrate in this article. Public administration reform is a broad concept that includes all aspects of public sector organization, including the general characteristic of ministries and agencies, organizations, systems, structures, processes, motivations, and how they are supervised and reformed on a periodically system, we can observe here that we made a distinction at formal level, a distinction similar to how innovation is classified. On the one side, the administration refers to way the coordination of activities in the public sector it is formally authorized, ordered and organized; on the other side, the administrative innovation it is not analyzed and reviewed at an general level, is a process that is being implemented at sector level, so that the characteristic of the specific sector also determines how innovation derives its shape. We can consider in this case, referring to the process of innovation, as being only one of the public administration reform. However, the administrative innovation is essential for the reform process and for the operation and development of the state, but, as we have seen, is only part of this vision, and by itself can not generate the results expected from a modern administration. In fact, simply increasing the rate of innovation at sector level can generate discrepancies in getting results, because it depends partially on how it is organized and conducted, and how it's incorporated it with all functional departments of the administration.

We have to return and seek a response to our initial question: What is the link between reform and administrative innovation in the context of public sector? First we have to clarify that modern society is in a continuous and perpetual change, and the public administration has to adopt the same pace, promoting communication, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness. Flexibility and adaptability as a response to the needs of society are values that promote and encourage innovation, and an important aspect of public administration reform is to ensure a proper management in the process of implementing it. All too frequently, conventional wisdom confuses the application of management of change with 'management innovation'. This is a conceptual error that can, and frequently does, lead to serious practical mistakes. Much the same argument can be put in relation to 'public administrative reform'. The conventional interpretation of both innovation and public administrative reform usually requires that they entail what at the time is considered to be 'international best practice'. This study deviates from conventional wisdom by interpreting innovation and public administrative reform in much more contextualized and relative terms. Innovation and administrative reform both involve novelty – doing the same things differently, or doing new things, in relation to the management of the behaviour of people and organisations (Blunt, 2002: 2). To reiterate, they are both relative phenomena because what constitutes novelty or the well-known in one cultural and organisational setting may not do so in another. What is mundane or outmoded to some can clearly be revolutionary

and appropriate to others. In this view, the technique becomes a universal imperative purely by virtue of its supposedly superior, or more advanced, national or cultural origins.

Many reforms are stimulated by technology developments which have changed the underlying cost and competitive structure in industries ranging from telecommunications to banking to biotechnology. At the same time, reform is a powerful stimulus to further innovation as emphasized by OECD's paper on Regulatory reform and innovation. OECD is a main source for this paper because it has done more research on the subject than any other intergovernmental organization (EU institutions included). OECD has noted: Government policies can support innovation by continually reforming and updating the regulatory and institutional framework within which innovative activity takes place. In this context, reforms are needed to make public policy and regulatory framework more conducive to innovation in a range of policy areas from the general business environment — especially in the services, particularly in the network industries — to international trade and international investment, financial markets, labour markets, and education. Governments can also play a more direct role in fostering innovation.

Scholars within the public administration discipline have long underlined the need for more rigorous research, going beyond single-country and single-organization approaches (see Derlien, 1992; Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Pollitt, 2011; Raadschelders and Lee, 2011). From a theoretical perspective we've identified three major reform paradigms (New Public Management, Public Governance and the Neo-Weberian State) as described by (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Focusing on top executives, it follows pioneering elite studies such as those of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (see Putnam, 1976; Aberbach et al., 1981; and Aberbach and Rockman, 2006).

In terms of change and innovation link, in contrast to earlier periods of public sector innovation concepts, and with the exception of Lynn (1997; see also Lynn 2013), the current period of scholarship pays much less attention to evolutionary character of changes described as innovations. This is not to say that there is not an acute awareness that one has to differentiate ordinary change from innovation. For instance, Osborne and Brown 2013 argue, “the management of innovation is an entirely different task from the management of developmental change” (2013, 3); Lynn similarly argues that all non-transformative change is “‘innovation lite’, which is indistinguishable from ordinary change.” (2013, 32) Yet, how this transformative change in fact works in the public sector – and differs from typical private sector dynamics – remains almost always unpacked. Even the most advanced concepts of public sector innovation do not address in detail how selection mechanisms and other processes take place that would enable us to distinguish innovations from ordinary changes. What makes one reform or new service an innovation, and the other not? Often there seems to be normative connotations involved in distinguishing innovation from reform: as innovation is good, a successful reform must be innovative (Kattel, Cepilovs, Drechsler, Kalvet, Lember and Tonurist 2013).

Innovation can be considered as a ‘magic concept’ (key terms which seem to be pervasive among both academics and practitioners, Pollitt & Hupe, 2011; p. 642) that is been used to frame the necessary transformation of the public sector in order to improve not only its effectiveness and efficiency but also its legitimacy (Bekkers, Edelenbos & Steijn, 2011). which during the last years has been embraced as a new modernization or reform strategy for the public sector. However, as Pollitt rightly points out, administrative innovations and reforms have in the past been known to have faded as fast as they first appeared (Pollitt, 2011). Many of those leading public management reforms identify innovation as a primary goal. For example, Mulgan and Albury (2003, 2), working in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the United Kingdom, argue that “innovation should be a core activity of the public sector: It helps to improve performance and increase public value.” For instance, David Cameron the British prime-minister put innovation on the forefront of his view on the ‘Big Society’ programme. The Australian Public Service reform program of the late 1990s also made much of the innovation objective, claiming its major achievements “entailed a focus on performance and on taking opportunities for continuous improvement through innovation and trying new ideas” (MAB 1995, 1). Canada made innovation a key objective in the reform process known as PS:2000 and “hoped to see innovation bring about enhanced efficiencies and improved productivity” (PPF 1998, 1). Also the European Commission has embraced innovation as a relevant topic on her reform agenda. On their website they state that innovation is “about new ideas that work to address unmet needs.” (European Commission, 2013).

In this decisive moment when the European Union's cohesion is tested intensively by the immigrant crisis, we need innovative ways to treat this social phenomenon. We can definitely say that it is a unique social problem that needs solving through reforms with a high degree of innovation from both the Member States and the European Union as a whole.

#### 4. Conclusions

Innovation is a universal phenomenon, driven by the principles of life. These relationships are in flux and change over time. To study innovation refers to explaining a process with dimensions that become determining factors and eclipse what is around them, depending on what is innovative; though certainly technical and economic innovation process is as social as it is political and obviously has a cultural impact.

Governments are increasingly making more of the innovation a key issue on the political agenda today, recognizing its potential to promote economic growth and how to address social and environmental challenges. However, many countries face significant "gaps" in regards to innovation resulted from a variety of binding constraints. Pursuing development pathways that help overcome these constraints is an important task of innovation policy.

Our vision in terms of innovation emphasizes the social construction of innovation and the processes and interrelationships that occurs between the two processes, the innovation and the reform at all levels. Our main intention was to emphasize an overall perspective that sees these two processes as interdependent elements that are under tension and have clear report of inclusion.

When we examine the effects of innovation and change on public reform, a difference becomes apparent. This refers to the fact that change can have a positive or negative impact on the organization, the individual and society, because innovation by definition must be positive, merely because it must add value to the recipient. As I stated earlier, often there seems to be normative connotations involved in distinguishing innovation from reform: as innovation is good, a successful reform must be innovative.

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