

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

FROM TRADITIONAL BUREAUCRACY TO NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT DURING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

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Abstract

This article examines the organizational transformation of the Greek Ministry of Development during the period of the economic crisis (2010-2018), focusing on the transition from the traditional Weberian bureaucratic model to the principles of New Public Management (NPM). Through the analysis of structural changes, such as administrative mergers and the decentralization of competencies to autonomous bodies, the study explores how fiscal pressure acted as a catalyst for reform. Special emphasis is placed on the role of digital governance (e-government) as a tool for accountability and transparency, as well as the challenges of managing human resources in an environment of severe austerity. The article concludes that while significant steps have been taken toward a "leaner" and more efficient organization, the transition remains a hybrid process, balancing between legislative compliance and the pursuit of measurable results.

Keywords: *New Public Management, organizational change, bureaucracy, digital governance, accountability.*

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the organizational process of the public sector in Greece remained trapped in a strictly hierarchical, Weberian model, characterized by formalism, centralization, and a lack of adaptability. The 2010 economic crisis acted as the turning point that imposed a transition toward a new organizational paradigm. The Ministry of Development served as the primary field for implementing New Public Management (NPM) principles, as the survival of the Greek economy depended directly on this organization's ability to produce with minimal resources (Munzhedzi, 2021).

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According to Hyndman and Lapsley (2016), NPM is not a single theory, but a set of administrative practices borrowed from the private sector, aiming for economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. In the Ministry of Development, applying these principles meant deconstructing the traditional "provider-state" and creating a "regulatory-state," which focuses on setting rules and monitoring compliance rather than direct involvement in economic activity.

Lambropoulos (2017) underscores that the organizational transformation of the Ministry during the crisis was not an internal choice for self-improvement, but a structural necessity dictated by the need for fiscal consolidation and the pressure to absorb NSRF (ESPA) funds. Spanou (2019) adds that this transition was characterized by "double pressure": the need for a drastic reduction in personnel and expenditures on one hand, and the demand for higher quality services for investors and citizens on the other. This article examines the organizational changes at the Ministry of Development, analyzing the transition from bureaucratic structures to performance-based systems. It explores the impact of mergers, the introduction of accountability systems, and the significance of digital governance as the organization's "new operating system".

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT (NPM)

To understand the extent of the transformation at the Ministry of Development, we must analyze the theoretical framework of NPM and how it conflicts with traditional bureaucracy.

Critique of the Weberian Model

The traditional organizational model is based on adherence to rules and a hierarchical pyramid. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017), this model is extremely stable during periods of calm but fails miserably during crises due to its lack of flexibility. At the Ministry of Development, the crisis highlighted that an obsession with process hindered results. The sought-after change aimed to transform the civil servant from a "rule-executor" into a "manager" who handles resources and objectives.

The Pillars of NPM in the Ministry of Development

NPM introduces three key changes implemented at the Ministry:

- Decentralization and autonomy: The creation of independent units (e.g., General Secretariat for Strategic Investments) operating with greater flexibility.
- Performance measurement: The introduction of indicators to monitor project progress. Nikitas and Vasilopoulou (2022) state that goal-setting became the central management tool, replacing vague policy directions.
- Competition and market: The use of private-sector practices, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) under Ministry supervision.

"Lean" Management in an Environment of Austerity

A subcategory of NPM that emerged during the crisis is Lean Government. According to Lambropoulos (2017), austerity did not just mean cuts, but the requirement for "more with less".

The organizational restructuring aimed to eliminate "waste" in administrative processes. This was expressed by reducing the signatures required for an administrative act -a change known in organizational design theory as "flattening of the hierarchy". However, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) warn that over-focusing on efficiency can undermine institutional capacity if it leads to a dramatic reduction in specialized personnel- a phenomenon acutely observed in the Ministry as experienced staff departed due to salary reductions.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES, MERGERS, AND THE NEW MINISTRY ARCHITECTURE

The restructuring of the Ministry of Development during the period 2010-2018 was not a mere administrative adjustment; it was a violent reconfiguration of the state's operational logic. Under the strict supervision of the Economic Adjustment Programs, the reform effort aimed to impose a new functional model capable of meeting harsh fiscal adjustment requirements while simultaneously boosting economic growth.

The central strategic idea was the transition from an "executive state" (a state that does everything itself) to a "steering" ministry. In this new architecture, the Ministry's core services would focus solely on strategic design, policy formulation, and legislation, divesting themselves of micromanagement and executive details. This separation of "steering" from "rowing" is a hallmark of New Public Management (NPM), yet its implementation in the rigid Greek context proved arduous (Kivotidis, 2024).

The Merger Strategy and the Reduction of Administrative Costs

The first phase of the restructuring involved drastic consolidation. Lambropoulos (2017) notes that the crisis forced the merger of large organic units -most notably the fusion of the General Secretariats of Commerce, Industry, and Consumer Protection- primarily to save resources. This strategy was driven by the "One Entity" principle, aiming to unify the fragmented identity of the Ministry.

Rationalization and Economies of Scale The primary goal was "downsizing" to eliminate overlapping responsibilities and reduce overhead. In the pre-crisis era, each General Secretariat maintained its own Financial and Administrative Support departments, leading to a massive duplication of effort. The new Organic Laws (Organization Charts) centralized these support functions into a single General Directorate. This theoretically allowed for "economies of scale," reducing the number of director positions and freeing up staff for frontline duties (Wiesendahl, 2024).

The "Organic Shock" of Mergers. However, the human aspect of these mergers was traumatic. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) point out that mergers during austerity often create "organic shock" as different organizational cultures are forced to coexist under the same roof.

- **Cultural Clash:** The Ministry faced a clash between the "engineering culture" of the Industry Secretariat (focused on technical standards and investments) and the

"legalistic/inspection culture" of the Commerce Secretariat (focused on price controls and market policing).

- Internal Friction: Forcing these distinct groups to collaborate without adequate preparation led to friction. Questions of hierarchy—such as which Director would lead the merged unit—created internal rivalries that often-paralyzed decision-making for months.

The Lack of Digital Integration

Furthermore, the structural merger was not immediately followed by operational integration. Spanou (2019) argues that the effort was hindered initially by the lack of a unified management information system. For years, the merged units used incompatible databases and file protocols. This meant that while they were legally one entity, operationally they remained "silos," unable to share data on businesses or inspections efficiently.

Horizontal Management To counter this, the new organizational chart attempted to introduce "horizontal management" for specific projects. Instead of the vertical command chain, cross-functional "Task Forces" were created to handle complex issues like the implementation of the NSRF (ESPA) or the simplification of licensing, forcing employees from different sectors to work together.

Creation of Autonomous Units and Decentralization (Agencification)

Beyond internal merging, the most significant architectural change was the delegation of authority. A core NPM principle is "decoupling," or separating strategic functions (which remain with the Ministry) from operational functions (which are transferred to specialized agencies).

The Rise of Executive Agencies This trend, known in the literature as "agencification," was seen in the strengthening or creation of autonomous bodies like "Enterprise Greece" (the investment promotion agency) and the "Hellenic Development Bank". Nikitas and Vasilopoulou (2022) mention that transferring critical competencies to bodies operating with private-sector criteria allowed for significantly faster decision-making.

- Flexibility: Unlike the central Ministry, these bodies could hire specialized staff (marketing experts, investment bankers) outside the restrictive public sector salary grid and operate under private law contracts.
- Speed: Free from the heavy administrative code that governs the Ministry, they could approve investment plans or issue export guidelines in a fraction of the time.

From Direct Control to Indirect Governance However, this "externalization" created a new challenge: the "Principal-Agent problem." It challenged the Ministry to move from direct control to "indirect governance". The political leadership found itself in a position where it could no longer order these bodies to act but had to steer them. The Ministry had to learn to oversee these bodies via performance contracts and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) rather than traditional administrative orders (Dipura, Soediantono, 2022). This transition was difficult, as the Ministry often lacked the expertise to effectively monitor the complex financial or promotional activities

of these autonomous entities, leading to occasional disconnects between government policy and agency action.

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND E-GOVERNMENT: THE DIGITAL PANOPTICON

The transition from the traditional Weberian administration to the New Public Management model fundamentally redefined the concept of accountability within the Ministry of Development. In the pre-crisis era, accountability was strictly "hierarchical" and "procedural": the civil servant answered only to their superior regarding whether a process followed the letter of the law, regardless of the outcome (Janssen, Van der Voort, 2020).

NPM introduced a paradigm shift towards "managerial accountability," which is oriented toward results, cost-efficiency, and transparency for the citizen-customer. To achieve this in a resistance-prone environment, the Ministry relied heavily on digital governance. Technology was not merely a tool for modernization; it served as a mechanism of surveillance and control -a "digital panopticon"- that forced transparency upon a reluctant bureaucracy (Monteiro, Alder, 2022).

"Diavgeia" and the Institutionalization of Transparency

The most groundbreaking intervention was the introduction of the "Diavgeia" (Transparency) program. This system radically altered the administrative flow by introducing a simple but powerful rule: no administrative act is valid unless it is published online and receives a unique Internet Upload Number (ADA) (Loukis, Chryso, 2024).

For the Ministry of Development, which manages investment laws and public spending, this was revolutionary.

- **Real-time Visibility:** Every decision regarding subsidies, staff transfers, or expenditures became visible to citizens and journalists in real-time. This acted as a powerful preventive mechanism against arbitrariness.
- **Dissolution of Information Monopoly:** Previously, only the bureaucrat and the minister knew the status of a decision. Digitization democratized this information, stripping the hierarchy of its power to hide or delay files.

Electronic Procurement as an Anti-Corruption Shield

Public procurement has historically been a high-risk area for corruption. The implementation of the National Electronic Public Procurement System at the Ministry of Development aimed to depersonalize this process (Demin et al. 2020).

- **The End of "Paper Envelopes":** The transition to fully digital bidding meant that sealed paper offers -which could be tampered with or "lost"- were replaced by encrypted digital files.
- **Standardization:** The system forced the use of standardized templates, preventing the practice of "tailor-made" tenders designed to favor specific suppliers.

- **Audit Trail:** Every click and document submission is logged, creating an immutable digital audit trail. Nikitas and Vasilopoulou (2022) argue that in this context, e-government acted as a potent "antidote" to clientelism, as the system creates a barrier between the political patron and the administrative outcome.

The "NotifyBusiness" Paradigm: Depersonalization of Service

A critical aspect of the reform was minimizing the physical contact between the regulator and the regulated. The "NotifyBusiness" system for business licensing represents the pinnacle of this strategy.

- **Removing the "Facilitator":** By allowing entrepreneurs to submit notifications remotely, the system eliminated the need for face-to-face interaction with civil servants. Systems like "NotifyBusiness" reduced employee-client contact, thereby lowering corruption opportunities and "petty bribery".
- **Automated Rules:** The system applies rules automatically. If a business meets the criteria, the system acknowledges it. There is no room for an official to exercise discretion -or to demand favors in exchange for "interpreting" the law favorably.

Goal-setting, Performance Measurement, and its Pitfalls

While digitization provided the *tools* for accountability, NPM also requires *metrics*. Introducing performance evaluation was one of the most contentious aspects of the reform. Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) note that in organizations without such traditions, performance indicators are met with deep suspicion and high stress.

The Pressure of Absorption The primary Key Performance Indicator (KPI) during the crisis was the absorption rate of EU Structural Funds (NSRF). The Ministry was under immense pressure to execute the budget to inject liquidity into the starving economy. Monitoring NSRF absorption mandated strict timelines and quantitative targets.

"Gaming the System". However, the obsession with quantitative targets led to unintended consequences. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) warn of the phenomenon of "gaming the system," where employees or departments focus entirely on hitting the specific metric while ignoring the broader service quality or impact.

- **Quantity over Quality:** In the Ministry's case, the pressure to show high absorption rates sometimes led to the approval of mature but low-value projects, rather than complex, high-impact investments that would take longer to mature.
- **Rushed Designs:** Spanou (2019) notes that the pressure for rapid absorption sometimes led to rushed project designs. To meet a deadline and avoid losing funds, officials might approve incomplete plans, leading to implementation problems and legal delays down the line. This highlights the limits of NPM: when indicators become the sole focus, the actual public value can be compromised.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW MANAGEMENT CULTURE

The transition to New Public Management (NPM) is not merely a technical exercise of changing laws and organizational charts; it requires a radical transformation of the human element. For the Ministry of Development, the period 2010-2018 was characterized by a profound paradox: the organization demanded more from its employees (higher productivity, digital skills, adaptability) while offering significantly less in return (drastic salary cuts, career stagnation, job insecurity). This section analyzes the turbulent emergence of a new management culture amidst an environment of austerity and "reform fatigue."

Leadership as a Catalyst for Organizational Change

In any change management initiative, leadership is the primary driver. However, the economic crisis in Greece precipitated a "crisis of trust" between the political leadership and the administrative hierarchy.

The Collapse of the Psychological Contract. Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) emphasize that organizational change is intrinsically linked to the "psychological contract" -the unwritten mutual expectations between employer and employee. In the pre-crisis Ministry, this contract offered job security and low stress in exchange for modest pay. The crisis shattered this agreement. The horizontal cuts to salaries and pensions made the exercise of "transformational leadership" extremely difficult. It is arduous for a leader to inspire a vision of "modernization" when the workforce views every reform as a prelude to further austerity.

From "Functionary" to "Manager" Despite these hurdles, a shift in leadership style began to emerge, particularly in the newly created autonomous units. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) describe this as the transition from the traditional "civil servant-functionary" (whose duty is to administer the law) to the "public manager" (whose duty is to achieve results). A new generation of managers -often younger and foreign-educated- attempted to adopt participatory models, moving away from the authoritarian "command and control" style. These managers focused on setting targets and problem-solving rather than mere protocol observance. However, this often created a "culture war" within the Ministry between the "old guard" of bureaucrats, who prioritized legality, and the "new technocrats," who prioritized efficiency.

Training, Reskilling, and the "Digital Divide"

The adoption of NPM tools (digital signatures, electronic procurement, cloud databases) exposed a severe skills gap within the Ministry's workforce. The average age of employees was high, and digital literacy varied significantly (Papada et al. 2023; Kivotidis, 2024).

The Challenge of Reskilling. To bridge this gap, the Ministry implemented retraining programs focusing on digital skills and modern project management methodologies, such as Lean Six Sigma (aimed at reducing process waste). The goal was to convert administrative staff into

"information workers." However, the lack of resources meant that training was often sporadic rather than systematic (Katsaros, Tsirikas, Kosta, 2020).

Ideological and Practical Resistance. Resistance to these training initiatives was significant. Spanou (2019) notes a strong "ideological resistance" where many employees equated NPM practices with the "privatization" of the state and the intrusion of neoliberal business logic into public service. Furthermore, there was practical resistance born of fear. Older employees, accustomed to paper-based workflows, feared that their inability to master complex systems like ESHDIS would lead to their marginalization or dismissal. This highlights that resistance was not always about "laziness," but often about anxiety regarding professional relevance in the new digital era.

Incentives and Disincentives in an Austerity Environment

Perhaps the most critical failure of the reform period was the inability to construct a viable incentive system. NPM theory relies heavily on performance-related pay (bonuses) to motivate staff. In Greece, however, the fiscal framework explicitly prohibited such financial rewards.

The Motivation Vacuum. With financial bonuses non-existent and promotions frozen, management had to rely almost exclusively on "moral incentives" and a sense of public duty. Leaders appealed to the employees' patriotism and the urgent need to save the national economy. While this worked initially for a core group of highly motivated staff ("Satisfaction from results"), it was not sustainable in the long term.

The "Brain Drain" Phenomenon. The lack of incentives had a tangible negative impact: the "Brain Drain." Highly skilled employees, particularly those with degrees in finance, law, or engineering who were critical for the Ministry's development strategy, opted to leave the public sector or emigrate. They could not justify the high workload and responsibility for salaries that had been slashed by up to 40%. Consequently, the Ministry was often left with a "hollowed-out" workforce, struggling to retain the very talent needed to implement complex reforms. As Lambropoulos (2017) notes, reforms were constantly presented as "sacrifices," leading to a workforce that felt punished rather than empowered, creating a fertile ground for passive resistance and low morale.

CONCLUSIONS AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE TRANSFORMATION

The transformation of the Greek Ministry of Development during the crisis years (2010-2018) constitutes a definitive case study of administrative reform under extreme duress. The journey from a rigid, "Weberian" bureaucracy to a model influenced by New Public Management remains incomplete, yet the changes effected are decisive and largely irreversible. The crisis acted as a violent catalyst, forcing decades of delayed structural adjustments to occur within a few years. However, a critical assessment reveals a landscape of contrasts: impressive technological leaps coexisting with persistent cultural rigidities.

Despite the hardships, the Ministry that emerged from the crisis is fundamentally different from the chaotic organization of 2009. The adoption of NPM principles has yielded tangible benefits that constitute the organization's new "institutional capital."

A "Leaner" Organization: Through the painful but necessary process of mergers and the consolidation of silos, the Ministry achieved significant economies of scale. Nikitas and Vasilopoulou (2022) conclude that the Ministry is now a much "leaner" and more effective organization. The elimination of overlapping directorates reduced administrative operational costs and clarified the chain of command.

The Digital Acquis: The most profound achievement is the digitization of administrative processes. Tools like "Diavgeia," and NotifyBusiness created a "digital iron cage" that enforces transparency. These systems have successfully depersonalized the relationship between the state and the market, drastically reducing the opportunities for "petty corruption" and simplifying the daily life of investors. The shift from "ex-ante" licensing to "ex-post" control is a paradigm shift that has permanently altered the business environment (Maepa, 2022).

Extroversion: The Ministry successfully pivoted from a purely regulatory role to a developmental one. The creation of autonomous agencies like "Enterprise Greece" signaled a shift towards a citizen-oriented and market-friendly culture, prioritizing the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) over mere bureaucratic policing (Contractor et al. 2020).

However, the transformation was not without severe flaws. The critique of the 2010-2018 period highlights that the reforms were often unbalanced, prioritizing legal and fiscal compliance over human capital development.

"Law-centered" vs. "Human-centered": The reform strategy was heavily top-down and legalistic. Immense energy was spent on drafting new laws and organizational charts, but very little on change management and training. As a result, the reform was often "law-centered" rather than "human-centered". Employees felt alienated, viewing the changes as hostile acts imposed by foreign creditors rather than necessary modernization.

The Trap of Quantification: Lambropoulos (2017) emphasizes that the obsession with quantitative targets (such as the number of laws passed or the absorption rate of funds) sometimes downgraded administrative quality. In the rush to meet the "milestones" set by the Memoranda, complex problems were often treated superficially, leading to regulations that were technically compliant but operationally flawed.

Artificial Capacity: A critical weakness was the reliance on external aid. Spanou (2019) argues that the heavy use of the "Task Force for Greece" and external consultants created "artificial capacity". The Ministry appeared effective as long as consultants were driving the projects, but this capacity often collapsed upon their departure, as there was insufficient knowledge transfer to the permanent staff.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Development did not fully transform into a private-sector-style corporation, nor did it remain a traditional bureaucracy. Instead, it mutated into a "Hybrid

Model"—or what scholars call a "Neo-Weberian State." This model combines the strict adherence to legality (a remnant of the past) with the drive for efficiency and results (the influence of NPM). The challenge ahead is no longer about survival. The Ministry must transition from the era of "Crisis Management" – characterized by frantic cuts and emergency legislation – to the era of "Development Management" (Gogalniceanu et al. 2021). This requires a new strategy that focuses less on passing laws and more on building the internal capacity of the organization: investing in human resources, restoring the "psychological contract" with employees, and ensuring that the digital tools are used not just to monitor, but to innovate. Only then will the "creative destruction" of the crisis yield a truly sustainable administrative model.

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