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**Connecting the Dots:
Are the new public management and policy capacity related?**

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Abstract

The New Public Management (NPM) and Policy Capacity (PC) have garnered significant attention in the field of public administration. NPM is frequently associated with market-based reforms and the privatization of public services, whereas PC pertains to a government's ability to design, implement, and evaluate policies effectively. Despite the vast literature on these concepts, there remains a dearth of studies examining their connection. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the linkages between NPM and PC. Drawing from a comprehensive review of articles and journals, most studies revealed that the two concepts are indeed related in some way.

Keywords: New Public Management; Policy Capacity; Public Policy; Public Administration

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1.0 Introduction

Policy capacity generally refers to the ability of governments to develop, implement, and evaluate effective public policies. It is also a critical measure of effective policy performance within the public sector (Peters, 2018; Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018). However, recent findings from policy capacity studies reveal a consistent pattern of deficiencies persisting over the decades (Brenton, Baekkeskov, & Hannah, 2022). Prior studies have consistently attributed this deficiency to the impact of New Public Management (NPM) (Brenton, Baekkeskov, & Hannah, 2022; Mukherjee, Coban, & Bali, 2021; Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018; Bettini & Head, 2018; Peters, 2018; Faulkner, 2022). NPM is a public management reform aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services through the adoption of private-sector management techniques. Unfortunately, besides eroding policy capacity, studies have reported that NPM has fallen short of its intended outcomes as public service delivery has remained unsatisfactory and inefficient, failing to meet public expectations (Mahmoud & Othman, 2021).

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Interestingly, despite extensive policy capacity literature reporting how NPM has diminished policy capacity, there is a lack of literature that specifically discusses these two theories together. As such, this study aims to address this gap by bridging both theories to explore the potential connections between them. The assumption is that there may be unexplored linkages between policy capacity and NPM beyond their traditionally understood negative relationship. Specifically, this study seeks to identify and analyze how the NPM relates to and affects policy capacity. In doing so, it offers valuable insights to policymakers and scholars alike in planning the future of policymaking, especially when delivering effective public services and achieving policy objectives have remained a constant challenge.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 New public management

Since the 1980s, many governments have grappled with issues of inefficiency and ineffectiveness, leading to significant expenditures on various programs. Economic downturns resulting from the collapse of major world commodities like petroleum in the late 1970s further exacerbated the challenges faced by most countries (Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018). Consequently, governments faced pressure to enhance responsiveness and performance across all sectors. This led to the rise in popularity of public management reforms such as NPM, which is based on the application of private-sector management practices in the public sector (Popa, 2021). The primary goal of NPM is to restructure the systems and methods of the public sector to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness.

According to Young, Wiley, and Searing (2020), the prominence of NPM became increasingly apparent, especially in the early 1980s. This trend was particularly notable in Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly the United Kingdom and New Zealand, before spreading globally, especially in advanced OECD democracies (Lapiente & Walle, 2020). For instance, the election of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and Ronald Reagan in the United States, marked the start of significant NPM reforms. Thatcher's reforms aimed to reduce the size and role of government, and shift service provision responsibility to the private sector and local authorities. Among her key reforms were competitive tendering, which required public bodies to put services out to bid to private contractors; and decentralization of power from central government to local authorities, by abolishing several regional bodies, such as the Greater London Council, and transferring their responsibilities to local authorities. Similarly, Reagan also focused on reducing the size and role of the government, as well as government expenditure. Among his key reforms were deregulating industries such as transportation and telecommunications; and devolving power to state and local governments, through initiatives such as the Block Grants program, which allocated federal funds to states for various services, granting them more flexibility in expenditure.

In its effort to reform the public sector, the NPM adheres to the principle known as the "three Es": economy, effectiveness, and efficiency. The three Es are motivated by the perception of the public sector as being costly, excessively bureaucratic, and hierarchical (Popa, 2021). Therefore, by prioritizing economy (cost-effectiveness), effectiveness (achievement of desired outcomes), and efficiency (optimal resource utilization), NPM aims to address these perceived shortcomings and enhance the overall performance of public sector organizations. This pursuit of the "three Es" entails several key changes, namely: 1) hands-on professional management; 2) explicit standards and measures of performance; 3) greater emphasis on output controls, focusing on results and output over procedures; 4) disaggregation of the public sector into distinct units or agencies to decentralize decision-making and enhance their autonomy; 5) greater competition within the public sector to mitigate inefficiencies among service providers; 6) implementation of private sector management styles in the public sector; and 7) greater discipline in resource utilization to achieve "more with less."

Based on these seven doctrines of NPM, Funck and Karlsson (2019) clustered them into two types of reform aspects: (a) management-based and (b) market-based reforms. The management-based reform is prevalent in doctrines one through four, and seven. It focuses on utilizing discretionary power to control and organize resources such as people and technology to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Whereas, market-based reform is prevalent in doctrines four through seven. It focuses on creating pressure to increase the efficiency of service delivery through the introduction of competition. In conclusion, the NPM has undeniably reshaped public administration worldwide, advocating for the adoption of private-sector managerial techniques to enhance efficiency and service delivery. Moving forward, it is essential to understand the complexities and nuances of NPM, especially to move forward in the 21st century of public administration.

2.2 Policy capacity

Policy capacity is a fundamental concept within the realm of public policy. Policy capacity has appeared to mean different things in different studies. However, in recent times, policy capacity is understood by Wu, Howlett, and Ramesh's (2018) definition, i.e., "the set of skills and resources—or competencies and capabilities necessary to perform policy functions". Wu, Howlett, and Ramesh (2018) are among the prominent scholars of policy capacity and have made a significant contribution to the development of the policy capacity concept.

Wu et al.'s (2018) operationalization of policy capacity is by far the most sufficiently broad to encompass all aspects of policy capacity, that have previously been possible. According to Wu et al. (2018), policy capacity encompasses three dimensions: analytical, operational, and political capacity, at three levels: individual, organization, and system. Wu et al. (2018) acknowledge that policy capacity is not limited to individual capacity but encompasses organizational as well as systemic capacity. The system includes a wide range of organizations, such as political parties, NGOs, private businesses, and international organizations, as well as multiple government agencies. This is because, all three—individual, organizational, and system—are involved in policy processes, and thus their capabilities would affect the government's capacity to perform.

In terms of the competency dimension, analytical capacity refers to the ability to ensure that policy is technically sound in the sense that it can contribute to the attainment of policy goals if carried out. Operational capacity refers to the ability to align resources with policy actions, to ensure effective policy implementation. Whereas political capacity refers to the ability to obtain and sustain political support for policy actions, as it would ease access to resources and persistent support from their governing bodies and constituents.

In essence, policy capacity is a crucial prerequisite for policy success (Wu et al., 2018). Recognizing policy capacity as multidimensional allows for a better understanding of the government's capacity to address public problems. Besides, it enables a more precise assessment of policy capacity, enabling sound policy choices to be made and implemented effectively. Accordingly, high levels of policy capacity across multiple dimensions are necessary for achieving superior policy outputs and outcomes. In contrast, deficits in capacity are seen as major contributors to policy failure and suboptimal results. Mukherjee, Coban, and Bali (2021) refer to this situation as an 'Achilles' heel,' where certain capacities are crucial for sustaining policy efforts, otherwise, it can significantly undermine policy efforts. However, while it may be challenging to attain high levels of capacity in all dimensions simultaneously, it is important to note that not all capacities are equally required for every action to succeed. Each capacity's contribution to the policy process is distinct and irreplaceable, allowing for some deficiencies in less critical capacities.

3.0 Methodology

In general, a conceptual paper is often perceived as an approach to bridge existing theories in interesting ways, to see newer insights into the theories (Rocco, Plakhotnik, & Silberman, 2022). This conceptual paper aims to bridge the theories of NPM and policy capacity, exploring their interconnectedness and implications. This study adopts a descriptive approach to address the "what" and "how" instead of the "why" of the research subject (N., 2019), specifically focusing on elucidating how NPM enhances policy capacity.

This study relies entirely on secondary data, particularly books and journal articles, to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. A literature search was primarily conducted in the Web of Science database, utilizing keywords such as ("NPM" OR "New Public Management") AND "Policy Capacity" to identify relevant scholarly papers elucidating the theory of NPM and policy capacity, as well as studies detailing the impact of NPM on policy capacity. Additionally, to ensure the study's findings reflect the latest discussions in the field, the literature search was restricted to articles published between 2018 and 2023. Only relevant papers that fit the criteria are included. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are as follows:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All the papers that are relevant to the topic, including the title, abstract, context, and findings.	All the papers that are not relevant to the topic, including the title, abstract, context, and findings.
All the papers are open-access.	All the papers are closed-access.
All the papers are in the English language.	All the papers are not in the English language.
All the papers discuss the interconnection between NPM and policy capacity.	All the papers did not discuss the interconnection between NPM and policy capacity.

(Source:) This Study's Research Methodology

As a result, a total of 15 studies were included, selected based on their relevance and alignment to the research objectives. The included studies were then analyzed using the content analysis technique to derive findings on the interconnection between both concepts. This study believes that identifying the interconnection is especially important for those interested in the idea of merging both concepts to better utilize existing concepts, rather than searching for a whole new concept or solution altogether.

4.0 The link between NPM and policy capacity: connecting the dots

In exploring the interconnection between NPM and policy capacity, conventional discourse often highlights NPM's perceived diminishment of policy capacity. However, beneath this narrative lies a nuanced relationship marked by significant overlaps and interdependencies. This study reviews three key aspects of this relationship: the convergence points where NPM and policy capacity intersect, and the discourse surrounding NPM's positive and negative effects on policy capacity.

4.1 Intersects between NPM and policy capacity

In examining the relationship between NPM and policy capacity, it becomes evident that the two concepts intersect at several notable points. Firstly, both NPM and policy capacity emphasize the importance of granting autonomy to policy managers. Both theories advocate for granting policy managers greater autonomy, emphasizing the need for them to make decisions independently, free from direct political intervention (Peters, 2018; Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018). This emphasis on autonomy stems from NPM's belief in striking a balance between political accountability and managerial autonomy. As such, NPM proponents argue for the reduction of internal deregulation within the public sector, aiming to mitigate political influence over administrative conduct and foster a conducive environment for policy entrepreneurship among managers (Peters, 2018). Policy entrepreneurship, in this context, refers to public managers being more innovative in carrying out policy tasks. The underlying belief behind all of this is that with adequate autonomy and resources, public managers can effectively execute their responsibilities and formulate superior policies, compared to situations where they are subject to micromanagement and political directives. However, policy capacity theory stresses that autonomy should be accompanied by control (e.g., standard operating procedures and rules) as a check and balance to maintain accountability and the

integrity of policy outcomes (Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018).

Furthermore, both NPM and policy capacity recognize the significant influence of politics on policy outcomes (Young, Wiley, & Searing, 2020; Mazepus, 2018; Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018). Political actors wield considerable power to determine the success or failure of public goals through their influence, derived from the trust of public support. This trust grants political actors legitimacy, an important quality of political authorities, which gives them the authority and credibility to make decisions accepted by the public and stakeholders (Mazepus, 2018; Young, Wiley, & Searing, 2020). This is particularly significant in the realm of policy capacity, as it ensures the acceptance of policies by the public and stakeholders, compliance with legal and procedural requirements, and upholding the perception of fairness (Mazepus, 2018). Besides, with the amount of power they possess, they can even influence the policy direction, administration of public organizations, and public perception, which are key determinants in achieving policy success (Young, Wiley, & Searing, 2020).

4.2 Enhancing policy capacity through NPM

In examining the relationship between NPM and policy capacity, research indicates that certain NPM practices can enhance policy capacity. For instance, incentivization can enhance policy capacity, specifically operational capacity, which revolves around officials' managerial abilities. Incentivization, as defined by Lapuente & Walle (2020), involves rewarding specific performance by public employees, managers, or external providers delivering services for the government. The act of incentivization is particularly visible in the hiring and evaluation of top managers. Managers are rewarded for achieving specific, measurable performance targets or goals. With incentivization, public sector organizations can attract and retain managerial talent from the private sector, which is believed to bring crucial managerial values such as results orientation, efficiency, and openness to innovation (Lapuente & Walle, 2020). Evidence from a survey conducted by Lapuente, Suzuki, and Walle (2020) among central government top managers in 18 European countries supports this notion. They found that public managers with private sector experience exhibit managerial values such as a stronger orientation toward achievement, results, and efficiency, along with a more innovative attitude, compared to those without such experience. Additionally, they utilize more managerial tools, which enhances their efficiency. Implementing managerial values within organizations is pivotal for enhancing policy capacity, as managerial capacity is essential for navigating the complexities of policymaking and achieving successful policy outcomes. Officials with managerial capacity possess the ability to efficiently mobilize and deploy resources, enable effective communication, and manage collaboration and negotiation with stakeholders.

Moreover, competition also strengthens policy capacity in several ways. NPM encourages competition by outsourcing tasks to external actors, aiming to enhance efficiency and reduce costs (Lapuente & Walle, 2020). Through the establishment of "quasi-markets," public providers become reliant on market forces (Lapuente & Walle, 2020), thereby increasing pressure to operate efficiently and maintain accountability to attract and retain clients. In a competitive market environment, public providers are compelled to improve efficiency, reduce costs, allocate resources effectively, and enhance overall productivity. This pressure arises because public providers face the risk of losing clients to competitors if they fail to meet expectations or offer competitive prices (Lapuente & Walle, 2020). Therefore, they must streamline operations, eliminate inefficiencies, and optimize resource allocation to remain viable in the market. As a result, this competitive pressure reduces the slack previously enjoyed by public providers due to their monopolistic positions (Lapuente & Walle, 2020). Consequently, it strengthens policy capacity since inefficiency is eliminated, and thus resources such as personnel and finances can be more effectively utilized. Resources are among the core building blocks of policy capacity. As evidenced by Godfrey's (2020) study on third-sector sports organizations in England, the lack of financial resources can significantly impede organizational capacity and responsiveness to policy changes. However, in a competitive market environment, public providers are compelled to allocate resources strategically to remain competitive, mitigating the challenges posed by resource constraints. Therefore, by reducing inefficiencies and maximizing resource utilization, competition contributes to the overall enhancement of policy capacity.

4.3 The erosion of policy capacity due to NPM

Despite its potential benefits, NPM has also been associated with the erosion of policy capacity in certain contexts. Outsourcing under the NPM aimed to streamline operations but inadvertently reduced policy capacity within the government, as highlighted by Sikivou (2023), Mukherjee et al. (2021), and Drew (2020). Outsourcing can diminish policy capacity in several ways. First, by transferring public services to private sector or non-governmental entities, internal expertise within government agencies diminished. This scarcity weakened the government's ability to effectively design and manage policies, leading to an increasing reliance on external expertise (Sikivou, 2023). Second, outsourcing shifts organizations' attention toward complying with contract requirements. This could potentially diminish the organization's competence or expertise in its core area of operation as it begins prioritizing contract compliance (Drew, 2020). However, relying on external expertise has its downside, as experienced by the Republic of Fiji (Sikivou, 2023), where contractors have faced challenges in compliance and failed to adequately deliver public services. These could have further exacerbated the loss of policy capacity within the government.

Another consequence of NPM's emphasis on performance management is the evident diminishment of policy capacity (Peters, 2018; Wu, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2018). While performance management aims to quantitatively assess and reward organizational outcomes, its focus on implementation often sidelines the need for comprehensive policy evaluation. The underlying assumption is that effective implementation equates to good policy risks creating a superficial understanding of policy effectiveness (Peters, 2018). This lack of in-depth analysis makes it difficult to identify areas for improvement and ensure policy efficacy beyond mere implementation. Ironically, in an era of information age, there is a concerning trend of putting less emphasis on the content and detailed analysis of implemented policies. This shift further undermines policy capacity by prioritizing outcome-based assessment over nuanced policy

analysis. Consequently, the NPM's reliance on performance management ultimately contributes to a general loss of policy capacity within governmental frameworks.

Furthermore, the politicization of the recruitment process, as facilitated by the principles of decentralization and contracting out, has significantly diminished policy capacity within government structures (Sikivou, 2023). By allowing politicization in the appointment and contract extensions of key officials such as ministerial heads or Permanent Secretaries, it compromises the fundamentals of non-partisan, neutral, and apolitical public service (Sikivou, 2023). According to Sikivou (2023), this has been a dilemma and a major lesson for the Fiji Government. This is because, politicizing personnel appointments may lead to selections based on political loyalty rather than competency, discouraging highly skilled individuals from participating in the recruitment process. Furthermore, it undermines the independence of public servants in providing well-researched and impartial policy advice. Consequently, the quality of policy formulation and implementation suffers, resulting in a reduction in policy capacity within government agencies. This highlights how NPM reforms when combined with politicization, can jeopardize the government's ability to effectively design, implement, and evaluate policies.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Overall, this conceptual study provides insight into the complex relationship between NPM and policy capacity, specifically reporting previous findings about how NPM affects policy capacity. Findings show that NPM and policy capacity are interconnected through intersections, enhancements, and erosions. At the intersection of NPM and policy capacity, both theories converge on the importance of autonomy for policy managers and the recognition of political influence. Additionally, this study uncovers instances where NPM practices can enhance operational capacity. For instance, incentivization can enhance operational capacity by attracting managerial talent. However, amidst these enhancements, as initially perceived, NPM also contributes to the erosion of policy capacity. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a reminder of the intricate relationship between policy capacity and NPM. While NPM facilitates agile governance, policy capacity remains indispensable for effective crisis response. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. This study's scope was limited to analyzing existing literature, which may have introduced biases or overlooked nuanced contexts. Additionally, the reliance on secondary sources may limit the depth of understanding compared to empirical studies. Thus further research should incorporate primary data to validate the identified interconnections in real-world contexts. Besides, future research should also explore the long-term effects of NPM reforms on policy capacity and governance structures. In conclusion, recognizing the diverse impacts of NPM practices on policy capacity is essential for fostering resilient and effective governance frameworks in an ever-evolving policy landscape.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the field by shedding light on the interconnection between NPM and policy capacity, filling gaps in previous studies, and laying the groundwork for future policy capacity studies. Besides, the insights gained from this study are valuable for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners seeking to navigate positive change within the public sector by enhancing administrative capacity and improving policy outcomes.

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