THE STRATEGIC PLACE AND ROLE OF INTEGRITY AMONG GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: *One of the capstone concepts within NATO nowadays is integrity. Along with accountability and transparency it plays a major role in driving reform in the defense sector. However, these principles characteristic of (good) governance are not the only ones employed in reviewing and transforming public administration in democratic countries. Consequently, the goal of this article is to overview the governance framework as described by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union, the World Bank (WB) and NATO in order to identify the place and role of integrity among the key principles and values that drive the development and strengthening of democracy in the public realm in developing countries. Based on the findings, the article proposes a framework that allows building integrity initiatives to be approached from a strategic perspective.*

Keywords: integrity; governance; accountability; transparency; rule of law; responsiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept that best encompasses the principles and values required of contemporary public administration in democratic countries is that of (*good) governance.* Its definitions are dependent on the context of its usage (i.e. corporate, international, national or local) (Singh & Sachdeva, 2011), the goal (i.e. political, social, economic) or the arguable normative framework generated by the adjective "good", according to a United Nations document on public governance (2011:6-7).

As an overall term, good governance refers to "creating the conditions" for a retrenchment of governing processes, namely state institutions and related processes employed in "maintaining public order and facilitating collective action" (Biju, 2007:23). In such a case the concept refers to

a high level of organizational effectiveness in relation to policy-formulation and the policies actually pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth, stability and popular welfare " (Healey & Robinson, 1992:146)

while heeding the principles of accountability, transparency, participation, openness and the rule of law. In line with the above, the European Union views the concept as indicating the manner in which power is employed when managing a country's political, economic and social resources (European Social Fund Thematic Paper, European Commission, 2014) for development purposes while abiding by a number of basic principles identified by the Commission of the European Communities in a white paper on European Governance (2001) as follows: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence.

In the same realm of terminology, "governance" refers to the processes involved in making and implementing decisions, as well as to the formal and informal decision makers and structures in place (Singh & Sachdeva: 2011).

According to the World Bank (2017:3), governance concerns policy making and policy implementation in political and social environments riddled with complexity by state and non-state actors driven by conflicting interests and with unequal power. Moreover, the term is related to (WB, 1994) institutions concerned with economic development and public sector reform. As such there are four pillars that sustain governance and reinforce one another in shaping the environment in which they exist: public sector management, accountability, legal framework development, and transparency and information. While viewing public sector management and

associated initiatives like changing the organizational structure of public sector to reflect new objectives, retraining staff, better budgeting approaches, reviewing payment and grading structures to incentivize employees, or binding public managers through performance contracts as the cornerstone of governance, the World Bank also emphasizes the role of the other three in molding the performance of the field.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) definition of governance (2004) highlights its multi-level dimensions: political, economic and social as represented by three main actors - state, civil society and private sector. These form a "system of values, policies and institutions", "mechanisms and processes", "rules and practices" that both allow citizens to make their voice heard through the exercise of their legal rights and obligations, and establish boundaries and incentives for "individuals, organizations and firms". The principles that underpin the UNDP concept are, according to document titled *Governance Principles, Institutional Capacity and Quality* : participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, strategic vision.

In the security and defense field, the definition of "(good) governance" is more often than not a matter of implicit rather than explicit statements. In this respect, NATO, for example, views good governance as represented by three major principles: integrity, accountability and transparency. The latter are viewed as means by which building integrity initiatives can contribute to providing security and stability and reducing the obliterating effects of corruption.

2. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CORE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

All of the above considered, it becomes obvious that (good) governance is both a goal for development, security, equity (World Bank: 2017:4), and a means to achieve these desiderata. As an instrument, a better understanding of the principles and the values that support them contributes to guiding public sector management initiatives and reforms. The definitions and approaches of EU, UNDP, WB and NATO overlap to a certain extent outlining what may be called a two-layered hard core of principles, and a soft core. The fundamental principles that cross cut these organizations' definitions of governance and make the kernel of the concept are the principles of

accountability and transparency or openness (in EU's terminology). The second layer of this nucleus is described by the overlap between World Bank and UNDP's approaches through the principle of "rule of law/legal framework for development" on one hand, and by EU' and UNDP's definitions consisting of: participation/equity, effectiveness and coherence/strategic vision, on the other. Apparently, the principles of integrity, responsiveness, equity are mainly dependent on the goals of specific organizations (i.e. NATO and UNDP). However, they are mostly of an implicit qualitative nature and their identification and measurement are mainly possible at behavioral level, rather than at normative level.

2.1 Accountability and Transparency: the inner core of integrity. Accountability is first and foremost about the clarity of roles at institutional or government level (e.g. legislative and executive processes) and the incurred responsibility of those involved in policy making and implementation, regardless their rank, status or office within public administration. On one hand, from a traditional standpoint, accountability is a matter of hierarchical subordination and responsibility of administrative structures to political leadership. On the other, the term stands for decentralization, participation, competition, performance and hence for managerial accountability for not just employing inputs, but also for generating outputs and outcomes. Control, verification mechanisms and the capacity to prosecute and convict offenders are an essential part of the principle.

The concept has three dimensions (Agere, 2000:43): political accountability, financial accountability and administrative accountability, each of these being described by specific values and implementation mechanisms.

Political accountability refers to the say that citizens have in electing officials for the executive and legislative branches of the government and inherently to the expectations they frame when casting their vote. The freedom and fairness of the process of elections, along with the respect shown for the results are inherent values of this dimension, whereas the very election process is a mechanism that ensures this type of accountability.

Financial accountability is concerned with the economic and efficient usage of financial resources, as well as with the goals that need to be achieved through budget expenditures. It is relevant and useful in making decisions about "resource allocation and mobilisation" (Agere:

2000). The governing values are timeliness and accuracy in reporting on how budget is used, as well as audit quality reflected in the attention paid to the outputs and outcomes achieved. Some of the mechanisms employed for this dimension are a matter of internal control such as: "power of prior approval" employed to safeguard decisions related to staffing, expenditures, etc., budgeting rules, internal accounting and auditing offices; formal performance targets, or they may have a retrospective nature and are represented by external independent audit offices, parliamentary committees, ombudsmen, the press, etc.

Administrative accountability concerns appointed officials' obligation to account for how they have completed their duties within a given authority framework and resources. If the previous two types of accountability are the result of a quite simple process consisting of: identifying the values that a government should observe; establishing the standards, rules, regulations, procedures for implementing these; requiring extensive documentation of compliance; auditing for compliance; sanctioning non-compliance, the administrative accountability is concerned with performance, namely with outcomes. That makes the job of control and verification more complicated because apart from establishing what the expectations are, the verification acquires a qualitative dimension triggered by the need to analyze the consequences/impact of action or non-action (Christensen & Perry, 2015:7). Additionally, public participation is necessary and that is a shady area even though it is often regulated by law since it does not necessarily generate real engagement on behalf of public.

What is worth noting concerning accountability in the public sphere is that its exercise is not always visible. It is rather its absence characterized by tell-tale signs such as

> poor service delivery, inability to mobilize resources, waste or mismanagement of available resources and neglect of the maintenance of public goods and equipment" (Christensen & Perry, 2015:8)

that draw attention to its necessity. In the end, accountability is a concept which involves not only the obligation or willingness (or both) to assume responsibility and thus become responsible for one's decisions and courses of action, but also the capacity of outer parties to hold a person or institution accountable for roles and duties assigned.

Transparency or openness (in EU's terminology) basically concern the way the work of government and affiliated institutions, as well as decisions made are unveiled to the public and to the media. It is noteworthy that there are areas like national, international or operational security and defense where transparency and openness are counterproductive, but these are exceptions and not the rule. Apart from the necessity to use accessible and understandable language, institutions should allow for easy access to documents of public interest, or discussions on legal initiatives.

Transparency is a benchmark for accountability. Public institutions have the obligation to be responsive to citizens' requests for access to information. Both accountability and responsiveness make it possible to track, monitor, evaluate and align performance of government bodies to public's expectations (Christensen & Perry, 2015). To achieve this goal, the information made public needs to be complete and usable, namely it needs to present all the facets of an issue (completeness) not just the benefits in a timely manner and in an understandable language (usability) (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, *apud* Christensen & Perry, 2015). Moreover, citizens should also be provided with the means to intervene in relation with the information to which they gain access so that the parties concerned are held accountable. Thus, one question that needs to be asked when passing laws on transparency is the extent to which they also contribute to achieving the goal of accountability.

Apart from the benefits of transparency, there are also counter arguments. In this respect, there is research (Hood, 2007; Barberis 1998) suggesting that in the case of disclosing negative information on a state actor, there is the tendency to shift the blame to another party; or subordinates feel constrained to respond for fear they might embarrass their superiors. Such behaviors actually raise difficulties in finding the right solutions for the problems. Another downside of control-oriented mechanisms that limit the freedom of managers and excessively focus on transparency and strict accountability is what is called "conformist behavior" (Prat, 2005), namely public employees' tendency to discard their expertise and perform well on the job in favor of following the strict standards imposed by the control and verification mechanisms in order to avoid punishment. In such cases, recognizable behaviors are "It is not my job…" or blind acceptance of orders under the motto "He who does not think, does not make mistakes". Last but not the least,

transparency can be used by politicians to exert control over public administration, which endangers the very core of democratic values. Therefore, transparency needs to be a means towards solving public management aspects and should not be an end in itself.

Transparency heavily depends on the observance of the freedom of speech and civil liberties, and also on the strength of civil society, according to Transparency International (1998:14).

2.2. Rule of law, Participation, Effectiveness and Coherence: the outer core of integrity. Rule of law/legal framework for development. According to UNDP, the rule of law is based on the following values: independence of the judicial system,

> fairness, honesty, enforceability and speed of the court system/due process, fairness, honesty and competence of the police force, respect for the law by citizens and public authorities, and equal treatment of citizens before the law.

B. C. Smith (2007:77-80) indicates the multi-faceted aspects of the concept rendered by the different views on justice which make it all the more difficult to bound within a definition. From such a perspective, the features of the rule of law are: regularity, equality, ubiquity, and natural justice. Regularity consists in the consistent administration of law "under relevant circumstances", namely those which exclude arbitrariness of power, equal recommendations with the ability to carry them ("Justice under the rule of law recognizes that "ought" implies "can""), acknowledge the ability to obey laws and orders while not making it a responsibility to perform what is beyond the ability to perform, or accepting "performance as a defence… or mitigating circumstance". Equality is about cases and people. Concerning the former, the principle is that of "like cases are treated alike" and if circumstances do not allow such an approach, then justification based on legal principles must be provided. Hence, discretion can be accepted by the judicial system, especially in cases related to policy, only if it provides for flexibility and timeliness, does not contradict the principle of predictability underpinning legal framework and does not lead to arbitrary decision-making. Equality for people refers to the need to treat all citizens alike, regardless of their official status or other features (ethnic, religious, gender, etc.). The ubiquity of the law refers to the fact there "can be no offence without a law". Additionally, laws set

clear expectations as to citizens' legal obligation, and "should be known, general, expressly promulgated, clearly formulated and not retroactive".

The principles of predictability and subsidiarity are important in relation with the rule of law. Concerning the former, namely its values of clarity in terms of formulation and delineation of line of authority, and fairness in application, it is enforced by the elements that make the rule of law: rules known in advance, rules in force, mechanisms ensuring the application of rules, the existence of independent judiciary or arbitrary mechanisms to solve conflicts, and procedures to amend the rules when they are not applicable any longer (Druckman:1992).

However, there are voices that indicate the "Janus-like nature of governance" (Eckert *et al.*, 2013) when it comes to the rule of law and which is rendered by the increasing number of actors that become part of the governance mechanism and by the division and practice of legal responsibility among different governing bodies. Common practices characteristic of governance like de-centralization, privatization, outsourcing, sub-contracting, delegation, cooperation, competition disperse, compartmentalize responsibility and in some cases make it difficult to directly connect it to authority. Thus, the very principle of subsidiarity, namely the allocation of governing tasks by areas of specialization, along with the less formal organization of the tasks pertaining to various governing parties brings legal responsibility very close to the point of dissolution. The tell-tale signs of such a situation are the clashes, overlaps or gaps among the governing bodies and, as a consequence, their shifting of responsibility form one to another and claims to non-liability: "The diffusion and privatization of governmental controlling and surveillance practices in the exercise of their internal sovereignty, however diffuse and compartmentalize liabilities, which in effect, threaten to dissolve responsibility".

Participation refers to an inclusive approach in relation with policy development and implementation which brings to the table not only public officials but also stakeholders. It also concerns the involvement of civil society, non-governmental organizations and community representatives in the active fight against integrity related issues. The values guiding the measures ensuring this principle are (UN, 2004): transparency, contribution to decision making processes, respect, promotion and protection of the

right to "seek, receive, publish and disseminate information concerning corruption".

Effectiveness is built upon a need based approach that frames goals, actions through an evaluation of future consequences and, if case may be, a review of previous experience. Moreover, it is related with the best use of available resources to reach organizational goals.

Effectiveness cannot be treated though on its own. It only makes sense in the presence of efficiency – namely the extent to which resources allocated/inputs are fully employed to reach outputs; impact - that is the added value generated by outputs and outcomes; and sustainability across time as a result of continuous improvement at process level.

Coherence/strategic vision is the answer to complexity and the guarantee of continuous support to integrity. Therefore, political leadership and consistent behavior across various and diverse realms of public administration are the main ingredients that secure this principle. Strategic vision also involves a long-term perspective that takes into account a variety of factors like economy, social trends, legal framework, environment and technology (UNDP, 1997).

2.3. Integrity and Responsiveness: tell-tale signs of functioning democratic systems. Integrity is one of the soft mantles that along with the other principles underpinning public administration contributes to public trust.

Integrity is defined from a multifold perspective engendered by its very translation from Latin (*integritas* - wholeness). As such, according to OECD (2009:12), it refers to:

– the behavior of officials in accordance with moral values, norms and rules accepted by an organization's internal and external stakeholders;

– the climate of an organization as created and maintained through "procedures, informal norms, divisions of labour, incentive and accountability systems, monitoring processes, and use of resources";

– an organization's relation with its external environment in terms of its outcomes, openness, responsiveness.

An important acknowledgment of the key role played by integrity in the governance framework, legitimating the latter, granting effectiveness and trust to government activities is made by OECD in a 2009 document. More importantly, the same organization makes a very fine distinction: integrity is about key positive values, and the reverse is not corruption (OECD:2009:15-16) per

se, but vulnerabilities in terms of internal and external accountability, internal administrative controls, statement of goals, resource allocation, political legitimacy, division of labor, management of social expectations, legitimate qualification to access services and benefits, political/bureaucratic/private influence.

What is worth noting though concerning all these principles and values is that they come to life only through actionable validation not just as mere concepts on paper. Thus, according to Howard R. Balanoff and Warren Master (2010):

> Programs are good. Audit plans, work plans, investigative plans, strategic plans, resources, and people to carry out those plans are all good, but they are not the answer. These are what public administrators typically focus on when the conversation turns to integrity and accountability. They are all important bricks in the wall, but they are only as strong as the personal integrity of the people who use them and report the results.

Responsiveness includes two aspects: timeliness of action taken by institutions and processes to meet the needs, requests, complaints of concerned stakeholders and responsibility "in letter and spirit".

3. INTEGRITY BUILDING – TOWARDS A STRATEGIC APPROACH

The Integrity is a two fold issue. On one hand, it is a matter of personal, individual moral, ethical and legal responsibility. On the other hand, it is also the result of organizational factors that influence individual behavior, the principles delineated above playing an important role in this respect. Therefore, when approaching it in an organizational framework, it requires acknowledgment of the part it plays within the strategic management of an establishment. As such, it is decisively the capstone of strategic management since it incurs responsibility and accountability on behalf of top and line managers to design and to operate management systems that are integrity proof.

Integrity as part of a strategic approach bridges the gaps between legal standards, ethical values and moral concerns. Establishing a legal framework addressing integrity related matters like conflicts of interest, protection of whistleblowers, and access to information is an important landmark and step in any initiative towards building

institutional integrity. However, this is just a compliance framework. In this respect, in an article of 1994 published in Harvard Business Review entitled *Managing for Organizational Integrity*, Lynn S. Paine highlights the key prerequisites of an integrity strategy to succeed beyond mere conformity. These are: breadth, depth and demand and they concern not just the hard core of an organization, namely its management systems, but especially cross-cutting soft aspects like "patterns of thought", behavior, organizational ethos and values and active endeavors towards identifying an organization's "ethical compass" and steering course accordingly.

The implementation of these features as part of a clear-cut strategy requires:

− identifying the governance principles and their associated values that best concur with an organization's existing strategy and the behavior envisaged as necessary to implement it across all levels.

− taking both horizontal and vertical approaches to the identification of the pivotal positions and people who need to contribute and/or be made part of the decisions concerning the design and implementation of an integrity strategy in order to avoid mid and long term roadblocks, critics and unnecessary hassle when strategy outcomes must become evident;

− focusing the education and training of senior officials and managers on ethical decision making, while also highlighting the role played by values in supporting compliance targeted standards and legal provisions;

− integrating values into the operating systems of an organization and making them part of performance overviews and reviews.

− refocusing the attention from compliance based mechanisms only meant to prevent misbehavior or to document the latter and allow legal action to be taken, to an active involvement in continuously communicating all throughout the organization the underpinning governance principles and values, providing the right means and resources for guidance and consultation on these and addressing the integrity related issues at the right time, by the right people, in the right manner.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, governance principles and values are universal. However, the choices concerning which are more relevant are highly dependent on national cultural values, as well as on organizational culture and climate. The strategic outcomes targeted by organizations filter the breadth of values to an enduring core and that should be the driver for further action in the direction of establishing an integrity strategy. What is more, organization's vision informs on the behavior required of all levels of management and employees, as well as the lenses through which organizations can be scrutinized by external stakeholders to hold them accountable to their promises.

When it comes to integrity in public administration, according to OECD (2009:10) there is a number of salient values like: justice, equity, transparency, accountability and efficiency. Nonetheless, even in such a case, the OECD signals the need to employ some of them, especially efficiency, in a cautious manner given the type of outputs or "public goods" that various public functions like education, justice system elicit.

An integrity strategy needs consensus, consistency and sustainability. Public administration is about elected officials, appointed personnel, current employees, but also about external stakeholders like the general public and the private sphere, to mention just few. That leads to paradoxes in cases where the integrity framework is not solid enough to lead to enduring changes. Reality has it that the moment political elected officials and appointees are out of office and replaced by new ones, sometimes of opposing views, soft issues like integrity fall short of attention on political agendas in no time. Therefore, identifying key players who are likely one way or another to become involved for short, mid and long-term time periods in the public and private arenas of a state and allowing them to agree that they disagree, that is to reach consensus, sets the stepping stone for building an enduring integrity strategy.

Compliance integrity strategies and supporting institutional tools and techniques are concerned with setting overt regulatory action framework and inducing reactive behavior. They play an important role in oversight (as it is the case with accounting authorities, risk and audit committees and various councils and committees fulfilling this role), assurance of integrity in various areas (e.g. external and internal audit bodies), or support (e.g. professional bodies, business fora, labor organizations).

Therefore, top management and not only may be inclined to associate law with ethics and preclude themselves of an often encountered assumption that if something is legal, then it must also be ethical. What is more, an integrity strategy that solely relies on compliance only touches upon

the surface of things leaving the in-betweens in a gray area. That ultimately constitutes the "slippery slope"[1] (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011), or in other words the grounds for gradual decay in upholding integrity standards. It is a well-known reality that "…covert organizational ineffectiveness, inefficiency, inertia, and/or irresponsibility can be as debilitating as overt inadequacies" (Petrick & Quinn, 1997). Therefore, an attitude of awareness that oblivion of minor covert details concerning integrity transgressions triggers the most appalling disasters is mandatory on behalf of senior managers. That furthermore must be supported by proactive support to putting in place an organizational infrastructure that benefits from consistent and long-term advocacy down the chain of command, adequate policies, resources, and incentives built around organizational core governing principles and values.

4.CONCLUSIONS

Integrity building in public administration from a strategic viewpoint involves, according to OECD: a national system consisting of a number of institutions mandated and assigned to design and implement integrity related policies; a monitoring and evaluation framework aimed at reviewing the effectiveness and impact of the policies in the field; and assessments of integrity risks at national level along with internal and external control mechanisms for mitigating these.

Such a high level approach to integrity building is a two-edged sword. On one hand, it guarantees an important rationale supporting further efforts of breaking the concept down and introducing integrity building initiatives into the framework of public administration, and mandates efforts in the field. On the other hand, such a topic may be sensed by the managers tasked to peruse it and implement it at the level of the organizations they run just as additional bureaucratic burden that imposes a compliance framework. This is the case especially when the integrity building initiatives are top to bottom generated: that is they are recommended from the outside of the national system as part of accession goals to international organizations such as the European Union, or result from development needs that can only be met by complying with the requirements of

funding institutions like the World Bank, United Nations, OECD.

Therefore, integrity as the soft mantle that encompasses accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, effectiveness and coherence is the result of two important factors: strategic demand and incentivizing factors that reach out beyond mere compliance.

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[1] "Slippery slope" refers to the tendency of accepting major wrongdoings after minor transgressions have been accepted gradually.

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