

Reactionary tensioners to combat and progressive tensioners to encourage to achieve institutionalization and public innovation in Latin America

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present a set of theoretical and practical reflections on the current situation and proposals for the future of the processes of institutionalization and innovation of public administrations in Latin America. More specifically, the objectives of this text are two: a) to expose in an articulated way and by way of diagnosis the set of reactive tensors that have hindered, and even aborted during the last years, the processes of institutionalization and innovation of the administrations public from Latin America; b) present a set of progressive tensors, by way of proposals, that must be encouraged and incentivized in order to achieve public administrations in Latin American countries that combine greater institutional strength with a greater capacity for innovation in the definition and management of their policies. It is about advancing in the ambitious intention of combining greater institutional capacities, which provide institutional and legal security to Latin American societies, with superior potential for innovation to face the demands and requirements derived from modernity.

Keyword : *public innovation in Latin America, tensioners to combat*



A. INTRODUCTION

This separation has generated many difficulties for the regeneration and improvement of our institutions. On the one hand, the academic community is developing an increasingly sophisticated theoretical discourse, but one that distances itself from reality and tends to be of little use in the face of the need for real improvement of our institutions. On the other hand, innovation from practice achieves some successes, but they are relative, since, at one time or another, it encounters a lack of discourse and conceptualization capacity that causes its contributions to be lost down the drain of irrelevance. . It is, therefore, essential to reconcile the theoretical dimension, always with a pragmatic orientation that allows a positive advance in the real world, with the practical dimension, but wrapped in deep and conceptual approaches. In this sense, this text attempts to combine, with greater or lesser success, both worlds due to the professional characteristics of its author. From the theoretical dimension, this text will use the most recent theoretical sources of institutionalism, specifically, neo-institutionalism and the theory of organization applied to public administration, that is, public management. But these theoretical sources are going to be used underground: they are going to be very

present at an implicit level and apparently absent at an explicit level. What is relevant is that the theory is present and that the concepts, analyzes and proposals are robust from a conceptual perspective. The key element on which the work is based is the distinction between the concepts of institution and organization. Usually, an institutional orientation was an academic vision with few practical ramifications. In contrast, the organizational orientation has presented a practical vision but with few academic roots. And this situation has generated a kind of specialization in relation to the object of study that is public administration: on the one hand, academics dominate the institutional orientation with the negative externality that in practice they do not improve public institutions, and, on the other hand, managers and consultants have dedicated themselves to organizational orientation built without a clear foundation. Once again we find the perfidious schizophrenia. This double personality that has always walked through our administrative reality is totally perverse and we must try to overcome it. Thus, for example, our public administrations have been dominated by the so-called New Public Management for twenty years, which has treasured innovations and successes in management but which has not contributed, in my opinion, to improving the quality of our public institutions.

The logic of separate and unshared views has led us to forget in practice the most essential elements to build solid public institutions. The concept of institution, from the theory, means an aggregate of norms, rules of the game and shared values, and its problems are not theoretical but rather real. The concept of organization, from practice, implies a toolbox to improve public management. But it is of little use to solve the organizational unknowns without previously solving the institutional problems. For this reason, the objective of this work is to elaborate reflections and eminently practical proposals (of an organizational nature), but from a totally institutional perspective. The great problems of our public administrations are institutional and it is only when the magnifying glass is put that organizational deficiencies appear. It is useless to solve small problems, even though they have a clear impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, if institutional problems are not previously solved. From the practical dimension, the great challenges of improvement and innovation that public administrations currently face will be addressed. It is obvious that our institutions have to be more transparent, that they know how to handle information better in order to be intelligent, that they have to use technological innovations, that they must encourage public-private collaboration. And that this agenda of priorities cannot be treated only in an autistic way from an academic point of view, but must be faced in practice and answering with a certain solvency the questions that urge us: what exactly must be done? and how to do it. The metaphor of the famous film is used here in which Phil Connors (Bill Murray), a somewhat frustrated meteorologist, goes to broadcast the behavior of a groundhog to the small town of Punxsutawney, where every February 2 she determines

how much time is left until let winter end; this local tradition is known as “groundhog day”. What the protagonist does not imagine is that he will have to spend the night in the town due to a snow storm and, the next morning, he will mysteriously relive the same day. And so on.

This film seems like a good metaphor in a double sense: on the one hand, all of us scan the horizon almost daily to see when the institutional winter in which Latin America is submerged is going to end. The institutional spring seems close but it has not just arrived and we cling to any indication that announces it to us as imminent. In a second sense, most of us have experienced a series of events in the past that have led us to think that we were winning the fight to achieve greater institutional strength, but, after a while, we woke up one morning and noticed that nothing had changed and that, in a state of cyclical regressions, we were returning to the past to relive institutional miseries that we had already considered overcome. The institutional reforms promoted during the last decades have always followed the same sequence: progress is made strongly, albeit with unsteady steps, in improvements and arrangements aimed at achieving greater institutionality and after great efforts, it returns to the starting point without achieving crystallize and generalize the partial successes achieved so far. And we start again until we reach a state of general despondency, totally exhausted from reliving the same administrative situations that we had already considered overcome and we feel submerged in a loop of time that prevents us from advancing in institutional development. This may be the feeling that we all have and it is obvious that it is not a product of our imagination: we move forward and forward to return from time to time to the starting point and start again. In any case, although it is true that we constantly suffer from a series of periodic institutional regressions (which we will have to analyze later to discover and propose the necessary mechanisms to get out of this perverse time tunnel), it must also be said that this constant revival Groundhog day has its nuances. In this sense, we want to point out that each institutional day seems the same as the previous day but that it is not exactly the same. The setting, the distribution of the actors, the aromas and the events seem the same as in the past, but they are not quite. There are nuances that make one day different from the other and that deny that we are inserted in a time loop. In any case, what can be affirmed is that we are advancing very, very slowly and that this is unacceptable; we have to find the formulas to advance institutional time to the times that we demand of ourselves and those that economic and social times force us to go much faster. In short, we must start from the principle that we have been advancing for two decades towards a greater institutional strength of our public administrations. The advances are almost imperceptible if we look at them through the filter of our demanding expectations and if they are analyzed in limited periods of time or in moments of crisis and regression of the system. But if you look at them now, in most countries, the situation in relation to a few years ago, it is possible to perceive an evident

improvement. We have more and more “islands of excellence” in the critical sectors of our network of public organizations that function in a solvent manner and with high institutional performance: regulatory agencies, tax and customs collection units, health policy planning centers, educational and social, control units (controlling), operational units for the provision of services or administrative procedures, etc. They also improve planning instruments, organizational design of structures and processes, human resource management, participation, performance evaluation and even regulation of professional public management. In addition, the legislation clearly advances in matters of transparency, regulation, public function (professionalization of public employment), although at a material level the progress is more discreet. It is obvious that we are much better off than one or two decades ago and it is evident that we are not in the positive situation that we all consider that, due to the efforts made, we should be. The pre-modern and client-loom institutional system is still very much alive and present in our administrative reality due to some reactionary tensioners that make it difficult for us to advance more decisively in the reformist agenda.

B. METHOD

Clientelism and neo-clientelism. Patronage is not an evil specific to Latinos, nor is it linked exclusively to the public sector. It is a global problem that stems from the most basic human nature. It could be said that men and societies operate in a clientelistic way by nature. But, as Weber very well realized, clientelism fosters mediocrity, discretion and social asymmetries and we must try to eradicate it by all means, at least in public institutions that belong to everyone and for everyone in the professional defense of the good, common and general interest. Fighting clientelism is difficult, since it means fighting behavior patterns that are natural and instinctive with rules and institutional arrangements. In all countries of the world there is still patronage in public administrations. The strength of some countries (very few) is that they have managed to corner them in marginal spaces, and of others, in limiting them quite a bit. Most countries (some developed and most developing) are losing this fight. And this topic is very relevant, since there is a direct correlation between patronage and economic and human development, in the sense that the more patronage, the less economic and social development. Non-clientism is linked to institutional strength and this is correlated with development. Let's go a ser sinceros: las administraciones públicas más serias del mundo padecen, aunque sea de forma marginal, pulsiones clientelares a pe-sar de cumplir con todos los requisitos formales para impedirlo. Las mejores universidades del mundo, públicas o privadas, las empresas más sobresalientes, etc., sucumben ocasionalmente al clientelismo. Su éxito consiste en que este clientelismo es relativamente excepcional y que la institucionalidad que domina es la de la meritocracia. En otros países bastante institucionalizados, como es el caso de España, los logros en sus sistemas meritocráticos

han facilitado estrategias de flexibilidad en la contratación de nuevos empleados públicos e innovadores sistemas de reclutamiento de directivos públicos por criterios de mercado sin renunciar aparentemente al mérito. Es lo que propone Longo (2004) al buscar la convivencia entre el mérito y la flexibilidad y con lo que no podemos estar más de acuerdo. Pero esta flexibilidad ha generado en España relajación y con esta ha entrado de nuevo un feroz clientelismo que parecía erradicado. Es complejo y hay que buscar la fórmula mágica para que de la convivencia entre el mérito y la flexibilidad el ganador no sea el clientelismo. Most Latin American countries have spent several decades trying to combat clientelism or the patronage model through laws to professionalize public employment and they have succeeded and are succeeding, for the time being, partially, in some cases, and residual, in most. But this has allowed three institutional systems to coexist in the most advanced Latin American countries in this area: patronage or patronage, meritocratic, and managerial or senior management. The one of patronage or patronage is the one that must be fought; the meritocratic is the new model (old in countries like Brazil and for decades in Argentina or Chile) to which they aspire. And, finally, the managerial or senior management model is the one that opens up to the market through open and flexible systems for hiring the first professional and managerial line in direct contact with the higher political level. But this modern model, which is pertinent and necessary, tends to succumb most of the time in its most clientelistic aspect. The majority process is that in most countries the meritocratic model enters with great force, stimulated by a new law and by a great political and social conviction. At first it gains ground over the patronage or patronage system and it seems that it is going to become the dominant and definitive model. But, over the years, the meritocratic model loses steam and ends up being most Latin American countries have spent several decades trying to combat clientelism or the patronage model through laws to professionalize public employment and they have succeeded and are succeeding, for the time being, partially, in some cases, and residual, in most. But this has allowed three institutional systems to coexist in the most advanced Latin American countries in this area: patronage or patronage, meritocratic, and managerial or senior management. The one of patronage or patronage is the one that must be fought; the meritocratic is the new model (old in countries like Brazil and for decades in Argentina or Chile) to which they aspire. And, finally, the managerial or senior management model is the one that opens up to the market through open and flexible systems for hiring the first professional and managerial line in direct contact with the higher political level. But this modern model, which is pertinent and necessary, tends to succumb most of the time in its most clientelistic aspect. The majority process is that in most countries the meritocratic model enters with great force, stimulated by a new law and by a great political and social conviction. At first it gains ground over the patronage or patronage system and it seems that it is going to

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Bad political culture and the “Penelope” effect. The region has always been characterized by a political culture of little respect and little institutional generosity. Institutions and fundamental public policies (regulation, taxation, education, etc.) are like cathedrals in the process of construction, which takes many decades and even centuries. The most beautiful cathedrals are the eclectic ones that combine the artistic trends that have dominated each era: Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque. This is how public institutions are (or should be): constructions shared through collaborative systems between various parties and political leaders over time. Each legislature leaves its mark and the next makes some technical adjustments to what was done by the previous one and adds its own architectural vision. All, never better said, in favor of the work. In the most critical moments (design of the first plans or construction of the central vault or the bell tower) it is necessary that the architects of the most relevant parties agree and reach a consensus (in our case, for example, would be the civil service law, the organization law, the justice system law or the education law). At the end of the day, these are critical decisions that will condition extensive periods of construction, of several presidential mandates and that will affect several parties. It is with this criterion that public institutions are built in the most advanced countries. A certain consensus between architects with different ideologies and interests and respect for what was built by the master builder of the previous government not only strengthens the institution, but also provides legal certainty and coherence to public policies over time. In Latin America it is not usually known how to build cathedrals (institutions) and not for lack of ingenuity or mastery of construction techniques. The problem lies in the fact that each leader, each institutional architect is sectarian and wants to undertake alone and in a very short time (normally four or five years) works that require several decades. The result is that there are never solid institutions, but institutions in an incipient state of construction that, when they reach a certain prominence, are demolished by the next architect who wants to start from scratch. It's the Penelope effect: we weave throughout the day of a mandate to unweave the night of the change of president. It has always caused us great discomfort to travel to a city in the region and see that a bridge is half built and still is when we return after a few years. When we ask what is happening with this bridge, the taxi driver tells us that it was an initiative of the previous president or mayor and that the current one is no longer interested. The same happens with institutions, be they organizations or systems of rules of the game (civil service, educational system, judicial system, etc.). It is totally critical and essential to change the political culture on this issue.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An excessively managerial and scarcely institutional vision. Twenty years ago, the high political and administrative leaders of Latin America discovered, thanks to the New Public Management, that their institutions basically had organizational problems. Public administrations were unable to provide services with sufficient levels of effectiveness and efficiency, and this was a problem of poor management and excessively archaic and complex organizational designs. The diagnosis was correct and the solutions involved improving the organizational capacities of public institutions. Items such as the rationalization of procedures, process reengineering, operational or organizational audits, ISO, quality plans of the EFQM model type, service charters, comprehensive dashboards with countless indicators, simplification of structures, relaxation of internal rules, results-based management, reunion with strategic and operational planning, etc., became the fashionable instruments. There is no doubt that these management instruments are essential for the good performance of a public organization and that their implementation for more than two decades has achieved very significant successes. But over time a serious underlying problem of a conceptual nature with devastating negative consequences (in fact so subtle and silent that many scholars of the subject have not yet noticed it) emerged in a subtle and silent way: the confusion between organization and institution. The domain of managerial thought made it possible to perceive that the only problems of administrative institutions were of an organizational nature and only organizational, and that through these instruments not only would management improve but also public institutions would be strengthened. And this has not been the case. Sibylline institutions are confused with organizations. For many public managers, a public administration, whatever it may be, it is fundamentally a holding of organizations (or management areas) that provide services. Some time ago we participated in a round table before a forum of Spanish businessmen, and the then chief manager of the Barcelona City Council stated that his city council was basically a group of organizations providing services. His objective was to seek complicity with businessmen and make it understood that public managers, deep down and in form, are also "businessmen", but in this case providers of public services. We, on the other hand, argued that "the Barcelona City Council is above all a public institution whose fundamental objective is to provide society with institutional and legal security to promote and favor the economic development of the city, which is nothing more than an instrument to achieve the ultimate goal, which is to achieve maximum human development and the highest level of happiness for citizens". And -we continue- "besides (that is, in addition) to being a public institution, it is an organization that provides services under the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency". This confusion is capital, since in order to "dress the saint" of effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of public services we have tended and tend to "undress the holy trinity" of institutional and legal security, which is the basic competence of any public institution. It is not at all a question of discrediting the managerial vision, but of

contextualizing it and clarifying what it positively contributes, what it does not contribute, and to perceive the negative externalities that it can generate. In this sense, management is useful to achieve more effective and efficient organizations, but it is useless (and it can also generate counterproductive effects), in our opinion, to achieve solid, stable and solvent public institutions that provide the system with greater security. institutional and legal. The instrumental and pragmatic vision of the postulates of the New Public Management implies the search for flexibility, discretion, deregulation and, with all this, implicitly, implies deinstitutionalization. What is the fundamental problem facing public and administrative institutions in Latin America? The obvious answer is its institutional weakness and, faced with this problem, organizational solutions are totally useless. Let's take an example: imagine that a European businessman wants to invest his capital in a Latin American country to create a company. It turns out that in this country the times of the complex inter-administrative processes to register a company have been reduced in just fifteen days, thanks to a good implementation of innovative management techniques.

It turns out that, in Europe, this process can take several months (in Spain, in an incomprehensible way, this process can last up to nine months). Obviously, the businessman will be delighted with the impressive level of effectiveness and efficiency that the public administration of this Latin American country possesses. But the key question is: is this element of good management going to be decisive for this businessman to decide to invest his capital in this country? The answer is obvious: not at all. He is going to decide to invest his capital and take risks if he detects solid, solvent and stable public institutions that ensure maximum institutional and legal security for his investment. If, in addition, the administrative procedures are fluid and fast, well, better, but they are not going to be the determining factor in attracting this investment and, with it, more human development. Well, this is the issue: sometimes, by strengthening our organizational capacities, we weaken our institutional capacities and, in this way, there is no way to achieve greater economic and human development. The solution to this crossroads is not to neglect organizational and management issues, but to address them in parallel with institutional strengthening strategies and detect contradictions between both vectors of improvement and innovation to rule out those organizational measures that may imply deinstitutionalization. Let's use another metaphor: improvements through organization and management are like a lens to look closely at; they make it possible to improve operations, processes, structures, etc.; allow to read more clearly the fine print of public administrations. These lenses are totally necessary and essential for administrative improvement. But, in parallel, we must use other lenses to look from afar: to be able to perceive the problems and solutions of an institutional nature that require a more general, more strategic, more political, more social and even historical vision of the phenomenon. You have to use lenses to look far away and lenses to look up close (for this

there are bifocal or progressive lenses on the conceptual market); possess, at the same time, an institutional vision and an organizational vision. The problem, during the last two decades, is that most of the senior political and administrative managers of our public institutions have only put on the glasses of management to look closely and do not have the ability to read the most distant but capital letters, that is, to detect problems and solutions of an institutional nature. It is like a self-imposed institutional myopia, which is one of the fundamental causes that has prevented

D. CONCLUSION

Let us continue with the proposal of progressive tensors linked to achieving institutional strength within the framework of a new sniper strategy, in which all forces are concentrated to achieve a few but absolutely fundamental objectives for institutional strengthening. These are classic tensors, totally adapted to contemporary demands.

- Meritocracy and modern selection systems for new public employees. The issue of human resource management is one of the great items within public management. Indeed, the quality of public policies and services depends on good personnel policy and management. It is the most important and most critical institutional area. There are many variables that draw attention to human resource management, with performance evaluation linked to variable remuneration as the best formula for increasing the effectiveness of public organizations being the star topic for some time. Obviously, we agree with this orientation, but perhaps we should be concerned with more basic elements, since what use are sophisticated performance evaluation and incentive systems if we do not have the best public professionals? In our opinion, the key issue is meritocratic selection, under the principles of equality, ability and merit. Performance evaluation, on the other hand, is like the icing on a cake or cake: it draws a lot of attention and everyone notices it, but for it to make sense there must be a cake first, and the base, This cake is a good meritocratic selection system. A selection based exclusively on merit is what allows us to ensure maximum strength and institutional quality. This element is especially important in countries where clientelism or patronage systems still dominate. And it is even relevant in countries with a high professionalization of public employment but which, although they select impeccably at a formal level, do not do so at all at a material level. Achieving systems materially based on the principle of merit and that, furthermore, these are fluid and not very bureaucratic, is difficult but possible. In any case, for its ultimate success in Latin American countries, the following considerations are in order.

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