
Re-conceptualisation of Accountability: From Government to Governance

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ABSTRACT

Significantly changed the role of state, as it no longer can be seen as single locus of power. Instead, a network of other actors has surfaced alongside the traditional state apparatus. Also, the nature of public administration as an actor has changed. The insertion of market type mechanisms into the public sector has blurred the traditional border between the public and private sector. The internationalisation of public administration and public policy agendas has also come to challenge the state as a single source of authority and new forms of global and multi-level governance are said to have emerged. The governance literature emphasises that this shift in locus of power has made the traditional means of accountability ineffective. How is this then apparent among the traditional types of accountability?

In this paper, focus would be to analyse the traditional types of accountability and point out some changes in institutional design that can be seen to have eroded them. My argument is that traditional state- centric types, or mechanisms, of accountability such as political, bureaucratic and personal accountability have lost some of their capacity to control the administration, whereas the mechanisms of professional accountability have become more central due to the increasing complexity of government tasks. This development has in my view diminished the openness of decision-making, both in bureaucratic and political spheres and increased expert authority.

Key-Words: *Internationalisation of public administration, market type mechanisms, global and multi-level governance, professional accountability, deliberation as a mechanism of accountability.*

INTRODUCTION:

The traditional idea of democratic accountability is based on the institutional environment of a nation state.ⁱ However, public administrations throughout globe have been subjects of a structural change from the late 1980's to the present day. This development has been characterised by redefining the role and scope of public sector and state. From the point of view of the state, this can be seen to consist of three kinds of outbound shifts in power: an upward shift emphasising the role of international organisations, a downward shift of decentralisation granting local government more autonomy and a shift towards private and non-governmental organisations in terms of externalisation of government activities.ⁱⁱ

These shifts have significantly changed the role of state, as it no longer can be seen as single locus of power. Instead, a network of other actors has surfaced alongside the traditional state apparatus. Also, the nature of public administration as an actor has changed. The insertion of market type mechanisms into the public sector has blurred the traditional border between the

public and private sector. The internationalisation of public administration and public policy agendas has also come to challenge the state as a single source of authority and new forms of global and multi-level governance are said to have emerged. ⁱⁱⁱThe governance literature emphasises that this shift in locus of power has made the traditional means of accountability ineffective. How is this then apparent among the traditional types of accountability?

In this paper, focus would be to analyse the traditional types of accountability and point out some changes in institutional design that can be seen to have eroded them. My argument is that traditional state- centric types, or mechanisms, of accountability such as political, bureaucratic and personal accountability have lost some of their capacity to control the administration, whereas the mechanisms of professional accountability have become more central due to the increasing complexity of government tasks. This development has in my view diminished the openness of decision-making, both in bureaucratic and political spheres and increased expert authority.

THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

Due to the process of globalisation and its impact on the role of state, the market with its merits and demerits gained prominence roles in the process of Governance, Hence, The governance literature emphasises that this shift in locus of power has made the traditional means of accountability ineffective. How is this then apparent among the traditional types of accountability?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

To understand and analyse the concept of Accountability and its major type and nature.

To discuss and analyse how, Changing structure or administrative context, force to re-conceptualise the concept of Accountability in the fast changing process of governance.

To outline brief Conceptual and theoretical bases of accountability in the developments of administrative discourse .

METHODOLOGY:

The study would be based on secondary sources that are various journals, books, articles and other source of secondary sources.

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

Traditional Types of Accountability :

Melvin Dubnick traces the origins of the concept 'accountability' to the emergence of royal legal traditions in England, well before the rise of the modern bureaucratic state^{iv}. According to Mulgan, the concept of accountability has gained ground on the term responsibility. Mulgan's view, accountability was first conceptually included in the idea of responsibility, but later gained ground as an individual concept, even to the extent of overweighting responsibility in both importance and scope.^v

In my view the different definitions, or types, of accountability are highly dependent on the structure or administrative context in which they appear. Scholars have argued that different types of accountability apply in different administrative contexts and that there are no

universal solutions for organising accountability systems. I will try to summarise the definitions, or rather, the types of accountability often cited in governance literature by their features, mechanisms of accountability and typical context in the following:

Political accountability:

The concept of accountability is closely tied to concepts of democracy and legitimacy.^{vi} Those who govern have to answer for their actions to a wider public either directly, answer for their actions to a wider public either directly, when politically elected or appointed, or indirectly as subordinates of politically elected bodies. If they fail to do so they can be substituted in democratic elections. This constant threat forces the ruling government to respond to the demands of a constituency, who can thus hold their government to account. The political accountability is external in nature, since the body in control, a constituency, resides outside the body of that is being called to account. Political accountability reaches even non-elected bodies of government through a 'chain of accountability' that makes them accountable as subordinates of democratically elected representatives. This kind of accountability system is typical in the context of a democratic state. However, the decision-making in the open parliamentary process has declined due to the internationalisation of policy-making, and decisions previously made on a national level are now increasingly being made in various international organisations.^{vii}

According to Moncrieffe, the conditions for political accountability are constrained by prevailing power relations, institutional design and political culture.^{viii} In this sense the conditions for political accountability on a national level have to also be analysed against the constraints set by international politics and economics. Political accountability can also be seen highly dependent on the publicity of decision-making. Therefore, when assessing the developments in political accountability, one should look into the conditions for 'account giving' and especially the possible decline of openness in the policy processes. If the internationalisation of governance has indeed diminished the public nature of various policy processes then one should ask, how this has influenced the political accountability. This also stresses the importance of bureaucratic accountability. If the decision-making in open parliamentary process has declined there will ultimately be more pressure on the mechanisms of bureaucratic accountability and especially the openness of administration.

Bureaucratic accountability:

Separating administration from politics weakens the link of accountability between elected and non-elected bodies, which inevitably creates pressures for inventing other mechanisms of administrative accountability^{ix}. Perhaps the strongest degree of control can be achieved through hierarchy based 'bureaucratic accountability'. There seems to be a wide consensus that bureaucratic accountability is based on a hierarchic relationship between superiors and subordinates, rules and regulations and superiors and subordinates, rules and regulations and supervision. These kind of hierarchic relationships and traditional mechanisms of accountability tend to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy.

However, whether the source of control is internal or external to the administrative body. That is being held to account seems to divide authors. Some have stressed the internal nature of bureaucratic accountability, dividing it from legal accountability, which in their view is clearly external and thus divides the "lawmaker" from the "executor" (public administration).

Robert Goodin and Torben Beck Jorgensen see the hierarchy based accountability of the state sector stemming from both legal control (external) and hierarchic relations of superiors and subordinates (internal). Richard Mulgan also notes that from the point of view of the bureaucracy the internal control of superiors and the external control of other institutions tend to appear as a single mechanism of control.^x

As stated, the traditional bureaucratic accountability with checks and balances based on hierarchic relationships and rules and regulations tends to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy. However, the new governance structures are seen to possess a more complex nature, often referred to with a metaphor of network. This complexity is seen to have eroded the traditional mechanisms of bureaucratic accountability. Network-based governance might also be problematic in terms of accountability if networks fail to represent a wider constituency. According to Stoker all networks are, to a certain extent, exclusive and tend to promote the interests of those involved.^{xi}

It might not be right to assume that networks as such would be automatically less democratic than traditional state administration. In some cases networks can even be more transparent than traditional hierarchic public institutions. However, in terms of rectification the hierarchies are likely to provide better means of accountability: a network does not necessarily have a single body or institution that could be called to account if mistakes are made, whereas a hierarchy is more likely to provide one. If accountability is seen as an 'ability' to call someone to account a hierarchy is more likely to provide more efficient mechanisms of accountability than a network.^{xii}

The means of controlling civil servants have also changed due to the New Public Management reforms. Instead of rules and regulations civil servants are increasingly being controlled through performance contracts and results. Another important development in public administration is the agencification of public bureaus. This has meant that several organisations which were previously under democratic control are no longer accountable for their actions in terms of bureaucratic accountability. As a consequence of introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector, the 'public authority' has become increasingly difficult to define, which also makes it difficult to assess what mechanisms of accountability should be applied.^{xiii}

The mechanisms and institutions of bureaucratic accountability have evolved over a long period of time alongside the development of the modern state. As the traditional model of government is replaced with new governance models there is a risk of compromising these traditional mechanisms of accountability. Along with institutional design, administrative culture has also been said to have changed. The possible changes in the key values of public administration are also likely to affect the values and ethics of civil servants.

Personal accountability:

The idea of internal control as means of accountability is perhaps best captured in so called 'personal accountability',^{xiv} which refers to personal values and ethics as guidelines for acting in the public interest. The personal integrity of an individual is largely shaped by shared values, ethics and beliefs communicated within the organisation or within a certain collective. In public administration, the mechanisms of personal accountability are closely tied to the prevailing administrative culture and its values and ethics.^{xv}

These normative constraints can, to a certain extent, be seen as complementary to the institutional arrangements enhancing administrative control. Administrative culture may provide moral guidelines for acting, sense of involvement, commitment and boundaries for identification, and it can foster self-regulation by deeming certain behaviour undesirable. One may therefore conclude, besides the legal and bureaucratic framework defining duties and responsibilities of public service, that the continuity of public administration is largely based on administrative culture. Thus, shared norms, values and ethics effectively act as a mechanism of accountability.

There are also claims that administrative culture has been affected by the public sector reforms, which could have implications for accountability. The New Public Management doctrine has challenged traditional public administration models, imposing new result oriented imperatives on the public institutions. It is likely that this has also changed administrative culture and the values that are embedded in it as new managerialistic values have spread to public administration. Kernaghan has identified this as a shift from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organisation, where both old and new values prevail. Virtanen has argued that if traditional values and ethics of administrative culture are challenged, mutual understanding of "common cause", commitment to it and trust in others doing the same might become compromised.^{xvi} As traditional and newer values can be potentially contradictory, there are concerns about awareness of obligation and the moral character of civil servants.

According to Amanda Sinclair the shared values and beliefs communicated in an organisation reinforce 'personal accountability'. However, the contradicting "old" and "new" values in an organisation are likely to diminish the effect. If civil servants no longer know according to which values they should behave then personal values and ethics cease to serve as guidelines for acting. It would also be worth considering how this shift in public sector ethics has influenced the openness of public administration.

Professional accountability:

Due to the increasing complexity of the tasks of public administration, public bureaus are more and more becoming expert organisations specialised in executing certain specific tasks. Controlling and supervising this kind of expert activity requires 'professional accountability', which according to Romzek and Dubnick is largely based on 'deference to expertise within the organisation'. This definition stresses expert scrutiny since the technical knowledge inherent in the routines of an expert organisation makes other forms of external control difficult and ineffective. Therefore, the key mechanisms of a professional accountability system are peer-review and expert scrutiny.

The method of peer-review might also involve a wider academic community or experts outside the organisation in question, adding an element of external control to professional accountability. Professional accountability also has a personal aspect to it, since it builds on the professional role of experts and their desire to keep up their professional credibility. Expert organisations can also be seen as accountable to the public through their ability to meet their objectives.

Professional accountability can be seen to have become a more common mechanism of accountability in policy fields involving complex tasks such as financial management,

biotechnology, food safety, and energy and transport policy. Apart from increasing complexity it can also be linked with result-oriented public management agendas, globalisation and the increasing importance of international organisations responsible for negotiating international standards and agreements.

However, there are concerns among scholars regarding the possible anti-democratic nature of expert authority. The key mechanisms of a professional accountability system are peer-review and expert scrutiny, which tends to create situations where the experts are accountable to their peers rather than to the public. This may potentially diminish the perceived need for public debate on various decisions that require expertise, leading to the exclusion of the wider public from the decision-making process.

Re-CONCEPTUALISATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY:

As I have discussed the traditional types of accountability and some key transformation, If the traditional means of accountability cease to apply in the new administrative context, then what are the perceived solutions for calling administration to account? And how do these new alternatives reflect the changes in the institutional design?

Changes in government due to the fragmentation of power and the decline in role and scope of a state have been seen to create situations where the traditional means of accountability no longer fully apply. As a consequence new means of accountability are sought and identified. There are two "new" alternative types of accountability often cited in governance literature, namely '*performance*' and '*deliberation*'.

'Performance' regards policy outcome and results as a means of holding administration accountable whereas 'deliberation' emphasises the importance of public debate, openness and transparency. The debate around both of these new alternatives can be linked to the changing conditions for holding politicians and administration accountable. The debate around 'performance' as a type of control can be traced to the late 1980's when the NPM reforms were first introduced to the public sector. The idea of 'deliberation' as means of accountability is more recent and can, to a certain extent, be seen as a critique of performance discourse, since they are usually seen as counterparts or alternatives to each other. Even though both undoubtedly reflect the changes in the conceptualisation of accountability, I wish to argue that instead of simply analysing these two as individual types of accountability one should perhaps see what role they play in the transformation of accountability systems and traditional types of accountability.

Performance:

Since the late 1980's there have been references to output-oriented 'responsiveness' or 'performance' as a new means of accountability. Even though traditional political accountability bears some similar features, this new type of accountability is distinctively different from the traditional types due to its market and client-oriented nature and market type mechanisms. According to Robert Goodin, market environment emphasises results as subject of accountability and competition as a mechanism of accountability. This result-orientation is also evident in the public sector, where the NPM reforms have blurred the traditional border between the public and private sectors. Many traditional public sector tasks

are now being executed according to market-based principles shifting the subject of accountability from policy process to policy outcomes.^{xvii}

Public bureaus are increasingly being controlled by results instead of rules and regulations. This kind of 'market-based authority' has also introduced the mechanisms of self-regulation to the sphere of public policy. There has also been a shift in the citizens' role, as they are now increasingly seen as clients or customers instead of active participants in a policy process. A clear link can be seen between the New Public Management doctrine and the rise of performance as a perceived type of accountability. Introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector has lead to the new result and client-oriented thinking apparent in the discourse of 'performance'.

One factor behind the "performance as accountability" discourse could be the loose conceptualisation of 'accountability'. As the concept bears positive connotations and is often seen to crop "all things desirable", there is the temptation of politically motivated (mis-)use of the term (Bovens 2005). In this sense the concept of accountability runs a risk of becoming a catchword that can be redefined and used for legitimating various political agendas or decisions already taken.^{xviii}

There is a clear link between the changes brought on by the NPM doctrine and the emergence of the idea of accountability through performance. Even if one would not regard performance as a type of accountability as such this kind of result-oriented thinking has undoubtedly influenced our ideas of controlling those who govern. Even the shift in the terminology from 'control' to 'accountability', stemming from the sphere of accounting, can be traced to the rise of the New Public Management doctrines. It is evident that 'accountability' as a term has nowadays outgrown its original context of bookkeeping. Then again, one can argue that the calculative techniques of accounting have also penetrated our thinking of government.^{xix}

The changes have not only substituted the old mechanisms for controlling the government but have also penetrated their ethical foundations, norms and practices. This has influenced our ideas of citizenship, the role and duties of civil servants and the ways the policy-making is conducted. Therefore, instead of just trying to identify 'performance' as a type of accountability it might be worth asking how the NPM doctrine and new forms of expert authority have affected our understanding of political, bureaucratic, professional and even personal accountability.

Deliberation:

There has been a more recent surge of scholars stressing the importance of deliberation as a mechanism of accountability. This line of thinking owes a debt to the idea of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996), which Paul Hirst has defined as two-way communication between the governors and governed based on an exchange of information and consent. According to Hirst, this dialogue conducted in the public sphere enables the citizens to hold the administration accountable for its actions and keeps up the legitimacy of government.^{xx} The relationship between the administration and the civil society is thus largely built on an openness of decision-making, transparency of administration and public access to information.

When discussing the dislocation of traditional mechanisms of accountability or democratisation of emerging processes of governing, the idea of holding policy-networks

accountable through public scrutiny, dialogue and public debate is increasingly seen to have potential to enhance accountability. The ideas of public debate, transparency and access to public information as mechanisms of accountability are by no means new and they have been an integral part of both traditional bureaucratic and political accountability. In this sense deliberation is rooted in the traditions of controlling government.

Some scholars, due to the institutional changes it might come to require, find the idea of deliberative democracy somewhat ambitious or problematic when related to the efficiency of decision-making. Richard Mulgan notes that public scrutiny is an integral part of accountability systems but, in his 'core sense' of accountability, the public should have 'rights of authority' over public officials, whereas the process of debate in deliberative democracy treats these different parties as equals (Mulgan 2000: 570). If deliberation is understood as general democratic dialogue among equal citizens, it does not fit Mulgan's core definition of accountability since it does not implicate the 'rights of authority' - the right to demand answers and impose sanctions. If one analyses 'deliberation' in Mark Bovens' terms, deliberation might provide one with an 'accountability forum' but an obligation for account giving might still be missing.^{xxi}

Even if deliberation would not qualify as a new type of accountability, the on-going debate on the topic has shaped the conceptualisation of accountability. Transparency, public scrutiny, dialogue and public debate conducted in the public sphere are increasingly seen to have the potential to enhance accountability. These demands for publicity can in my view be linked to the structural changes that have diminished the publicity of various policy processes and administrative practices. If debate around 'performance' can be seen as an outcome of the NPM reforms, then why has deliberation become a topic of concern? To a degree one could perhaps see the demands for deliberation as a counter-action to the emphasis previously given to performance, and the transformations that have taken place in the traditional means of accountability. I will try to elaborate on this in the following:

Bringing Back the Public:

Mark Bovens has identified two conditions for 'public accountability': the account giving is done within the context of public administration and in the public sphere. The reasons for the debate on deliberation to arise can in my view be traced to the structural changes that have influenced these conditions. The NPM reforms have imposed result-oriented imperatives on public organisations, increased expert authority and blurred the lines between public and private organisations, all of which has diminished the open and deliberative aspects of policy-making. Also, the internationalisation of governance is seen to have excluded the wider public from the decision-making. This has led to general demands for publicity through deliberation, public debate and transparency.

First of all, the perceived structural complexity of decision-making can be seen to have highlighted the question of transparency. The new policy-networks and decision-making processes are often perceived to be complex and opaque which has raised demands for transparency that is seen to bring clarity to "the system".^{xxii} In this sense transparency often gets expanded beyond its limits, which has made it to become something of a catchword for "generally desirable" development. Also, the decision-making by expert authority has led to demands for organising counter-expertise within the civil society in order to bring the decisions back to public debate.^{xxiii}

A decline of parliamentary politics can also be seen as a factor for deliberation and transparency to become issues of concern. Significant amounts of decision-making previously conducted in an open parliamentary process have been shifted to international actors, such as. As this internationalisation of politics and administration has increased the importance of various international organisations, we find an increasing interest in their democratisation, where deliberation and transparency are seen as remedies. The internationalisation of public policies has also shifted the decision-making to the executives on a national level, since policy planning and implementation is increasingly done in national central administrations. This can be seen to highlight the importance of transparency in bureaucratic processes on a national level.

This takes us back to the argument presented earlier, that the accountability systems are always dependent on the prevailing institutional design. Public scrutiny and public debate are key elements in political and bureaucratic accountability, which are now slowly being implemented in international organisations and expert organisations alike. This can be seen as an attempt to create conditions for increasing the accountability of these organisations, for which certain practices of openness and access to information are elementary. In fact, one may ask, if there can even be accountability in a meaningful sense without at least limited publicity.

Even if the deliberation, in broad sense, might not qualify as a mechanism of accountability, several elements that are emphasised by this line of thought are widely acknowledged to have significant potential for enhancing accountability in various administrative contexts. The question remains to what extent these ideas are in fact "new". Public debate, public scrutiny, transparency and access to information can be seen as key elements in the traditional mechanism of accountability. Perhaps the demands for publicity and deliberation could be seen as longing for traditional mechanisms of accountability that have developed over time and proved their functionality, but which now have been undermined by a process of change.

In this sense 'governance' becomes the 'missing third term', allowing us to re-evaluate and bypass these dichotomies. I wish to argue that dichotomies such as public-private and democracy-efficiency do still matter in the organisation of accountability. When looking at performance and deliberation one should perhaps not regard them as mechanisms of accountability as such but rather as two elements of democratic rule which should be balanced within each administrative context. Performance and deliberation do have a role in the organisation of accountability, but primarily as ideological elements of governing that influence the composition of accountability systems. In this sense performance and deliberation can be seen as reflections of a more historic debate on the trade-off between efficiency and democracy. When assessing the transformations in accountability systems this is certainly an important dichotomy.

CONCLUSION:

There are indications that the shift from government to governance has challenged the traditional accountability systems. As the traditional means of accountability are being challenged in the new administrative context, there have been attempts to find new means of accountability. This has been said to have altered the conceptualisation of the term. How has the conceptualisation of 'accountability' changed? And especially why has this happened?

The debates around performance and deliberation have undoubtedly altered the conceptualisation of accountability. As there is no uniform way of organising accountability, the changes in administrative context also affect the composition of the accountability system and ultimately the way in which the term is conceived. This is evident when looking at the changes that the new governance agendas have brought to public administration. In a sense, the academic debate around performance and deliberation reflects the changes in structures and conditions of governing. The performance discourse can be coupled with the rapid changes in public administrations at the turn of the 1990's. As the traditional borders between public and private organisations became blurred the means of controlling government were also rethought. Even to the extent that the terminology shifted from 'control' to 'accountability'.

In a similar manner the debate on deliberation can be seen as a result of this structural change that has led to new demands for bringing the 'public' back in. The adoption of NPM doctrine and the internationalisation of governance have both come to question the 'public' nature of public administration. As public organisations are increasingly being run according to result-oriented imperatives and expert authority, the deliberative elements in their decision-making processes are bound to diminish. Transparency is also sought in an effort to bring clarity to new policy-networks that are often seen as complex and opaque. Also, the shifting of important policy decisions from their national contexts to an intergovernmental level will most likely exclude the wider public from the decision-making. In accordance with this, decision-making in an open parliamentary process is seen to be on the decline. This has shifted decision-making to the executives, highlighting the need for transparency for the organisations involved and raising calls for new deliberative forums.

As mentioned earlier, the 'shift into governance' can be seen to have increased executive powers and expert authority. The remedy for this has traditionally been public debate and public scrutiny through transparency. Therefore, I hold it most likely that the issues of public debate, deliberation and transparency will remain central in future debates on accountability. This is also likely to shape our understanding of 'accountability'.

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