



# Exploring the Nexus between the Antecedents, Public Management Reforms and Ethical Standards in Public Service: The Case of the United Arab Emirates

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims at investigating how different antecedents such as globalization, economy, politics, and socio-cultural dynamics affect public management reforms (PMRs) which subsequently influence public service ethics in terms of integrity, professional values, and trust in government. This article is based on conceptual research. In doing so, it has reviewed existing literature, identified the limitations, and developed a new conceptual framework, which is examine the case of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). International comparative studies such as Worldwide Governance Indicators (WWGIs), Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International, and Edelman Trust Barometer have been used for measuring the outcomes. The findings of this study reveal that the antecedents have had important fallouts on the design and implementation of PMRs, which have resulted in persistent performance in terms of public service ethics in the UAE. The article has theoretical and practical implications. The existing literature does not reflect on the relationships between the antecedents, the design and implementation of PMRs and public service ethics. The current article proposes an integrative conceptual framework, which posits that different antecedents have impacts upon PMRs, which subsequently result in enhanced public service ethical standards.

**Keywords:** Environmental Antecedents, Public Management Reforms, Public Service Ethics, Middle East, United Arab Emirates

**JEL Classifications:** O1, O2, Y8, H1

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the global economic crisis in 1970, neo-liberal market ideology under the banner of 'Washington Consensus' with active support of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) came up with market-oriented economic and administrative reforms. The adoption of New Public Management (NPM) boded well with the emerging paradigm of the neo-liberal market model. While the appeal of the NPM model waned in the beginning of the new millennium, new models such as new public governance, joined-up governance, digital-era governance, political economy and so forth cropped up in the literature (Hughes, 2017; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2015; Aoki, 2019). With the triumph

of neo-liberal market ideology and the end of the cold war, new reform programs implemented in the Western world also swept the developing world under the direct or indirect influence of the World Bank and IMF (Koike, 2017; Sarker, 2006; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2015).

The world has, therefore, witnessed remarkable changes in the theory and practice of public administration over the last four decades. Kim (2008) identifies each country's paradigm shift in public administration on a different path and stage, some countries maybe approaching the governance paradigm, while others still following the traditional public administrations model. Therefore, an understanding of the changing nature of public administration

requires exploring the context which necessitates reforms of public administration (Andrews, 2008). O'Toole and Meier (2015) stress on the 'context' and conceptualize it as something more exclusive than the 'environment' or the 'organizational environment'. There are some studies on the impacts of the contextual factors on the design of the reform programs (Andrews, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; Levy, 2015). However, a comprehensive overview of the antecedents as contextual factors to PMRs is warranted in the literature which calls for bringing the systematic study of context into theories of public management research. O'Toole and Meier (2015) mention that this topic has not been widely treated in the scholarship on public management except (Pollitt, 2010). However, the antecedents covered up by Pollitt only address time, place, and technology as parts of context. When the focus is on seeking explanations to the relationship between management and performance, it is deemed to develop a parsimonious framework of antecedents that covers the multidimensional aspects of management and public administration field.

Countries going through the adoption of NPM lack transparency and accountability in the public management and public policy. Kim (2008) vocalizes about integrating ethical standards and ethical policies in a government's national integrity programs to achieve accountability. However, it is not clear which antecedents of public management reforms could bring up transparency and impact on the public service ethical standards. While voluminous research has been conducted on the impacts of different models of PMRs on administrative efficiency, effectiveness, and public service ethics (Caron and Giauque, 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; Maesschalck, 2004; Sarker, 2006), only limited studies explore the influence of external environmental factors on public sector reforms (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Levy, 2015; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011; Samaratunge et al., 2008). The studies which do focus on the external environmental antecedents, however, lack an exploration of the effects of PMRs on ethical standards and simply see the effects of environmental antecedents on the PMRs. Therefore, there is a dearth of research exploring the direct influence of environmental antecedents such as globalization, economy, politics, and socio-cultural dynamics on PMRs and their effects on public service ethical standards.

Based on the above, the objective of this paper is to provide a clearer understanding of whether external environmental factors of globalization, politics, and socio-cultural dynamics affect public management reforms and consequently the ethical standards. The specific aims of the study are:

- (a) To build a suitable model of external environmental antecedents of NPM which relate to the ethical standards of public service,
- (b) To link if these antecedents influence PMRs, and
- (c) To analyze how these reforms impact upon ethical standards of the public service in the UAE.

By proposing an integrative, parsimonious model this study significantly contributes to the literature. The existing literature lacks a comprehensive model which shows a direct impact on the ethical standards of PMRs. The transparency, on the other hand,

is at the heart of the NPMs. Nonetheless, a clear explanation of what factors of PMR result in ethical standard, to our knowledge in prior literature.

The model will be employed in analyzing the case of UAE. Our study is distinctive in the global, regional and local contexts because there are only some scattered studies on the PMRs in the UAE (Elbanna, 2013; Mathias, 2017; Elbanna and Fadol, 2016; Mansour, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018) and a little attention has been given to a comprehensive study focusing on the interrelationships of the three important dimensions of PMRs: antecedents such as globalization, economy, politics, and socio-cultural dynamics, the design and implementation of PMRs and ethical standards.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, it explores the literature on the antecedents of PMRs and the subsequent impact of these reforms on public sector ethical standards, followed by the development of the proposed integrative model. Then, the case of the UAE is discussed considering the proposed model, followed by conclusions, policy implications, limitations, and future research directions.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1. Antecedents of Public Management Reforms

The UAE is an oil rich country in the Gulf. The federal state of the UAE came into existence in 1971. It is basically an executive-dominated state with the Rulers at the helm of power. The formal administration is modeled along Weberian lines with substantial overlapping with informal institutions (Mansour, 2018). The oil boom in the 1970s brought the country into the limelight, followed by remarkable progress in infrastructural and socio-economic development. The pace of globalization, the volatility of oil prices, the need for economic diversifications and competitiveness propelled national political leadership to embark on PMRs (Sarker and Al Athmay, 2018).

Various countries across the globe have undertaken PMRs mainly in response to a wide range of environmental factors. However, the reform strategies often fail to consider the contextual factors (Bery, 1990). PMRs posit a complex interplay between contextual factors or antecedents such as political, economic, socio-cultural, and globalization. Depending on the contextual settings, these antecedents have triggered different versions of PMRs implemented in many countries (Pollitt, 1991). The following section explores how different antecedents can influence PMRs.

#### 2.1.1. Globalization

Globalization has impacted the world economies in a far-reaching manner due to its scale. It has significantly shaped the role of the state and the consequent efforts for development (Carnoy et al., 1999). Due to diverse cultural and social contexts, the degree of the impact of the forces of globalization differs regarding the various areas and reforms initiated by countries, with the most significant impact in the economic and administrative realms (Sapir, 2006; Peerenboom, 2001).

Globalization posits that there could be increased economic interdependence of countries which requires reduction in trade barriers, increased flow of goods and services across borders, more multinational activities, foreign direct investment, outsourcing, and immigration. All these challenges require the initiation of appropriate and relevant institutional reforms (Goldberg and Pavcnik, 2007). The evolution of the knowledge-based economy has also triggered various reforms around the globe because of the rapid pace of globalization (Mok and Lee, 2003). Countries may benefit from the wave of globalization (Mahadevan, 2003) or merely use it to justify their local political agendas (Mok and Lee, 2003).

### *2.1.2. Political factors*

Historically, countries have witnessed large scale reforms because of a severe crisis of political systems (Capano, 2003). Political factors are critical given the self-interest of politically powerful sectors and the rigid characteristics of political systems (Bery, 1990). This can either impede or facilitate PMRs. Due to the existing political context, PMRs can take different trajectories. This is explained by the study conducted by Robinson (2007) in which he analyzed the implementation of governance reforms in Uganda. He indicated that the reforms resulted in initial success but gradually lost momentum due to the need to preserve the institutional foundations of neo-patrimonial politics. However, neo-patrimonialism alone does not signify the failure of managerial reforms. Despite the prevalence of neo-patrimonialism, different developmental states demonstrated their efficacy in pushing through administrative reforms. The classic examples include Singapore, China, Malaysia and so forth. Singaporean political leadership achieved success in implementing selected market-oriented reform programs such as the Block Vote Budget Allocation, the Singapore Government Management Accounting System, the Budgeting for Results Initiative, the creation of Autonomous Agencies and so forth (Sarker, 2006). Being a developmental state, Singapore virtually intervenes in every aspect of social life by framing policies based on pragmatism and meritocracy. In a similar fashion, political leadership pursued NPM reforms without being succumbed to any kind of pressures (Aoki and Tay, 2015). Tian and Christensen (2021) have provided a trajectory of administrative reforms. According to them, Chinese reforms entail the co-existence of the old, NPM and post-NPM models. Being a developmental state China had complete control over the implementation of the reform programs and developed necessary institutional devices to rectify the pitfalls triggered by the introduction of NPM. Siddiquee's (2019) empirical research on Malaysia's reforms reveals positive outcomes in enhancing performance of civil service.

Cohn (1997) related the public sector reforms to political activity, where governments can politicize the initiation of public sector reforms through instilling a self-generated macro-crisis. This situation enables them to undertake broad reordering of governance in the name of NPM in order to eliminate the role of the state. This undertaking facilitates the avoidance of blame for the costs imposed on society as a result of the transition to the NPM paradigm. However, such a push for PMRs raises concerns for their effectiveness and desired outcomes.

### *2.1.3. Economic factors*

Economic downturn triggers the intense need for reforms and requirement for improvement (Pollitt, 2010). Countries around the world have taken a major shift in terms of policy reforms given the economic recessions which have highlighted the flaws in terms of size and capacity of the public sector for achieving economic growth. In order to achieve greater efficiency and economic growth, governments are adopting contemporary approaches for achieving commercialization of public sector undertakings. Samaratunge et al. (2008) asserted that the contextual factors such as macroeconomic conditions influence the success or failure of NPM. Lee and Haque (2006) also acknowledged the role of macroeconomic factors in shaping the NPM initiatives in addition to political history and party politics.

However, reform programs have faced challenges particularly in poor countries, due to the weakness of institutional capacity and limited economic base. Gilson and Mills (1995) refer to the example of health sector reforms in sub-Saharan Africa where worsening economic conditions made the policy options very limited. Sarker (2006) also identified the low level of economic development as one of the reasons for the failure of PMRs in least developed countries.

### *2.1.4. Socio-cultural factors*

Socio-cultural factors have become increasingly important in shaping the reform agendas of countries. Public management practices are influenced by the culture of a country or region (Schedler and Proeller, 2007). In fact, Fred Riggs made a significant contribution in this discourse through his seminal works (Haque, 2010). Past events and contextual settings determine the extent to which public sector reforms function properly and are positively received by the public (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Schedler and Proeller (2007) contend that the reforms happen within cultural structures, which underpin the importance of socio-cultural factors as antecedents of PMRs.

The notion of civic culture helps in explaining the polity outcomes in terms of cultural variables. Cultural factors determine the level of stability of democracy in a given context (Laitin, 1995). It is pertinent to consider different aspects, such as use of authority and historical understanding of power, which determine if a country could institutionalize democracy (Gault, 1999). These cultural aspects potentially impact various reform initiatives in a given cultural context and may fail to generate any required changes in public sector.

## **2.2. Public Management Reforms and Ethical Standards**

The bureaucratic model of Max Weber is considered a hallmark in the study of public service ethical standards because of its emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and equity (Haque, 2001). However, in the real world, the model attracted criticisms on account of moral hazards of public bureaucracy because of over-reliance on a rule-based system (Sarker, 2006). Since the 1980s, public administration has adopted a businesslike approach known as NPM. The NPM model focuses on efficiency, results-based management, performance measurement, corporatization and

so forth. The approach was also widely acclaimed as it views proactive transparency as the central premise of the market-oriented reforms. Transparency in decision making, policy content and policy outcome enhances citizen's trust on the government when the policies produce good results (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2014). Ekhaton (2012) identifies that ethical standards are affected by the principles of NPM, and governments focuses on commercial activities of the public institutions rather than improving on their processes, products, and services.

Overall, scholars have observed a significant shift in public service ethical standards and resultant unethical behavior (Hondeghe, 1998; Van Wart, 1998; Van Wart and Berman 1999). There are two views on this: First, reforms can lead to corruption because of the powers given to managers in public firms. Second, reforms in the public sector reduce corruption because there is greater competition and transparency in the modern-day public sector (Ekhaton, 2012). In many instances, PMRs are largely responsible for triggering unethical behaviors; this is also evident from various public sector scandals in many countries (Maesschalck, 2004). Maesschalck (2004) contended that in many cases, public sector reforms not only provide the opportunity of being involved in unethical activity, but also help in justifying the unethical act based on moral standards. This propagates the pattern of systematic unethical behavior.

NPM instills a market mentality in which ethics potentially become irrelevant through undermining the social contract (Paul Battaglio Jr. and Condrey, 2009). Hence people become vulnerable to the practice of administrative evil (Zanetti and Adams, 2000). Drawing upon the NPM model, Harrow (2002) also argued that public officials have the tendency to behave in their own self-interest which may result in unethical action.

Jingjit and Fotaki (2010) examined the challenges associated with the implementation of NPM in the non-Western context such as Thailand. They found that the civil service remained internally oriented despite the large-scale reforms. The reforms also did not make any noticeable shift in the underlying value system. Webb (2010) referred to the public service reforms in South Africa and noticed that the reforms had many unintended consequences and created opportunities for corruption. In this regard, Kolthoff et al. (2006) emphasized the need to establish practical principles to ensure that business-like approaches such as NPM are exercised in an effective and ethical manner.

### **2.3. Existing Frameworks of Public Management Reforms**

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) presented a model of PMR which considers the impact of socio-economic forces and political systems on elite decision making. Further, the conceptual model proposed by Samaratunge et al. (2008) considers variables such as political history, macroeconomic factors, state tradition, and state of civil society. These external factors trigger NPM initiatives which could be selective or comprehensive in nature, having expected outcomes such as increased efficiency, accountability, increased institutional capability, and participation of citizen groups.

Levy (2015) described a good-fit framework for governance reforms and drew upon four different ideal types of country patterns underpinning dominant and competitive political settlement. These entail dominant discretionary, rule-by-law dominant, personalized-competitive, and rule-of-law competitive. Dominant discretionary relates to strong political leadership, whereas a rule-by-law pattern underlines monopolized political control with impersonal institutions. Personalized-competitive pattern reflects personalized rules for governing polity and economy with competitive politics, and finally rule-of-law competitive typology reflects impersonal political and economic rules. These four country patterns varyingly affect governance reforms.

Brinkerhoff (2000) examined the role of political will in designing, initiating, and pursuing anti-corruption activities. The proposed model of political will incorporates the role of external factors in determining the expression and intensity of political will and the ultimate influence on anti-corruption reforms. The conceptual framework includes the characteristics of political will such as locus of initiative, continuity of effort and degree of analytical rigor. Some of the environmental factors as depicted in the framework include social, political, and economic stability, vested interest, and extent and nature of corruption.

Though not directly focusing on public sector reforms, De Vries et al. (2016) proposed a conceptual framework of public sector innovation. Their model incorporates the influence of environmental, organizational, and individual antecedents on innovation types. The associated outcomes of public sector innovation mentioned in the model mainly relate to effectiveness and efficiency.

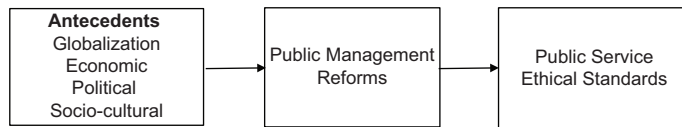
An extensive review of theoretical literature reviewed above focused on different models which are interrelated. The developmental state model discussed as a political antecedent derived certain precepts of the Weberian model, particularly the focus on meritocracy. The NPM model built on the drawbacks of the bureaucracy and the supremacy of business management principles had mixed results. However, widespread criticisms were mounted against the NPM on account of the deterioration of the ethical standards in public service. While the good-fit framework for governance reforms focuses on the types of regimes and their suitability to the types of reforms, it failed to show the ethical implications of the reforms.

The above-mentioned frameworks do not explore environmental antecedents and their effect on the PMRs and, subsequently on the ethical standards. Further, the consequent effect of the antecedents on the ethical standard has not been investigated in the literature adequately. The preceding section presents a theoretical framework which emphasizes on suggesting antecedents to PMRs and their effect on the ethical standard.

### **2.4. Towards Developing an Integrative Framework of Antecedents, Public Management Reforms, and Ethical Standards**

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) of the study illuminates the influence of antecedents on PMRs and considers the ethical

**Figure 1:** Towards developing an integrative framework of the antecedents of public management reforms for achieving ethical standards



standards as an outcome of reforms, specifically when these antecedents are linked to PMRs. The choice of antecedents is based on their impact on the perceived trust development when government policies bring positive outcomes. Ethical standards can be measured in terms of integrity, professional values, and trust in government. Integrity is a general ethical value and encompasses honesty and probity. Professional values include belief in meritocracy, continuous improvement, impartiality, effectiveness, creativity, loyalty to professional colleagues, and putting the clients' interests first (Pollitt, 2003). Trust entails such characteristics as credible commitment, benevolence, honesty, competence, and fairness (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2014). Public servants possessing service-enabling processes such as promptness, helpfulness and so forth provide better services and attract trust (Kim, 2005).

## 2.5. Research Questions

This study aims at investigating following research questions:

- How do the antecedents of PMRs, the design and implementation of PMRs and the ethical standards of public service as reform outcomes interact in tandem?
- How do the external forces such as globalization, economic, political and socio-cultural factors act as antecedents of PMRs?
- What are the impacts of the reform programs on the ethical standards of public service?

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This is a conceptual study based on the extensive review of literature. Like empirical research conceptual research has also tremendous value as it helps derive insights from diverse models and develop a new one to validate the social realities. For the initial validation of the model, this article focuses on the UAE. Data and information on the UAE have been gathered from government documents, global comparable databases and scholarly journal articles and books. Selected ethical standards have been measured with the aid of international comparative data generated and published by the World Bank, Transparency International and so forth.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Antecedents of Public Management Reforms in the UAE

#### 4.1.1. Globalization

Globalization has unprecedented impacts on the global economy and the competitiveness of nations. The UAE took cognizance of the dynamics of globalization and acted prudently to adapt

to the changing circumstances by liberalizing, diversifying, and modernizing the administration (Sarker and Al Athmay, 2018; Mansour, 2017).

While globalization led by the neo-liberal market ideology enhanced inter-connectedness among nations for trading purposes, studies identified that it also contributed to the decline of moral standards in societies (Haque, 2001; Kolthoff et al., 2006). On account of increasing moral hazards in societies, the United Nations adopted the resolution on International Code of Conduct for Public Officials in 1996 and recommended that member states should use UN codes as guidelines for their own anti-corruption initiatives. The second landmark UN initiative was the United Nations Conventions against Corruption (UNODC, 2014). As many as 140 countries ratified this convention. The UAE is one of the signatories. This simply affirms the government commitment to curbing corruption. Since then, a number of regulatory reforms have taken place. The noteworthy ones include Human Resources Law in the Federal Government (2008), Amendment of Federal Law 3/1987 (the Penal Code) (2018) at Articles 234 to 239 (Extending the bribery provisions to include bribery of foreign public officials, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2010), and the Dubai Law No. 37 of 2009 on the Procedures for the Recovery of Illegally Obtained Public and Private Funds (Financial Fraud Law) (Laubatch and Zaidi, 2019).

The global financial crisis and the dwindling oil prices exposed vulnerabilities in the economy of the UAE. These two events led to the grafting of diversifications into the economic domain, further opening the economy for foreign investors and increased attention on governmental efficiency. Dubai has been the forerunner in this respect (Gukasyan et al., 2016).

#### 4.1.2. Economic factors

Being a resourceful country, the UAE has always been able to finance overly ambitious PMRs. As its ambition to become one of the finest deliverers of public services by 2021, it has heavily invested in digital technology, innovation labs, and the state-of-the-art training programs for Emirati civil servants (Ahrens, 2013; Jones, 2017). On other hand, political leadership had to think seriously about the post-petroleum economy on account of the declining oil prices. In order to prosper in a diversified knowledge-based service economy, the government felt the pressing need to modernize the administrative system that could result in enhanced global competitiveness, superior innovative capacity and world class public service delivery (Hvidt, 2009; Jones, 2017).

#### 4.1.3. Political

UAE political leadership has played the most dominant role in orchestrating PMRs. The UAE state has been designated as clientelist, neo-patrimonial and rentier (Hvidt, 2009; Mansour, 2018; Jones, 2017). Whatever the nomenclature is, the efficiency of the UAE political system resembles that of the developmental states in East and Southeast Asia with considerable state autonomy, insulation from pressure groups and growth-enhancing determination (Hvidt, 2009; Jones, 2017).

Political leadership also understood that without an efficient government, the goal of achieving respectable rank of competitiveness at the global level would not materialize. Therefore, the UAE government made the necessary legislative changes and embarked on ambitious management reform programs in the government. Selected reform programs such as the SKGEP, the GPMS, the EPMS, the BPR, outsourcing and so forth were inspired by the NPM model (Ahrens, 2013; Mansour, 2017; Elbanna and Fadol, 2016). On the other hand, the government has implemented a good number of initiatives in the IT sector in order to facilitate the IT-enabled service delivery system which also bodes well with the global trends (Sarker and Al Athmay, 2018; Kisner and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Petrakaki, 2018)). The prudence of political leadership regarding managerial reforms in the government can be comprehended from the observation of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (2015, p. 65):

... If managers do not develop the public sector quickly, privatization will take its toll. With the exceptions of security and national defense, the private sector can assume practically all the functions of the public sector. Although the public sector may not have to compete with the private sector, the way it can survive is through competition and through increasing efficiency and productivity.

Again, disregarding the tenets of resource-curse theory, the ruling elites first utilized oil money for high quality infrastructure and social development (Jones, 2017). Their vision was further manifested in two important national documents – UAE Vision 2021 (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2010) and the National Innovation Strategy (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2015). The UAE Vision 2021 entails four central tenets: united in ambition and responsibility; united in destiny, united in knowledge; and united in prosperity. The document is not merely a treatise on economic development. It portrays a social engineering by the UAE political leadership aiming at making the country a developed one, with the Emiratis in charge of their own prosperity (Jones, 2017). With a similar tone, political leadership considers innovation as human investment. Understandably, the innovative government is one of the three champions with innovative individuals and innovative institutions and companies.

#### 4.1.4. Socio-cultural factors

It is pertinent to see whether the tribal roots of Emirati society have any implications for PMRs. Though rapid social and economic transformations have taken place, inherited socio-cultural practices remain quite vibrant. To a considerable extent the UAE is a collectivist society. Well-connected social relations, including mutual help and loyalty to elders and allegiance to the Rulers, are the hallmarks of Emirati society. There is no doubt that there are glimpses of the role of the social networks in public employment and resource allocation processes (Mansour, 2017; 2018). Contrary to the belief that social patron-clientage hinders modernization drives, such piecemeal practices have rather facilitated the progress of the design and implementation of PMRs (Elbanna, 2013; Ahrens, 2013). The SKGEP and strategic management are cases in point. While there was initial inertia among the rank and file of

the government entities, political leaders' motivational approach helped overcome that inertia (Elbanna, 2013; Ahrens, 2013).

The UAE state derives its legitimacy from the distinctive socio-cultural features. Paternalistic leadership as assumed by citizenry has played extensive role in the socio-economic life. There is high level of trust of citizenry in the UAE government (Khalid and Sarker, 2019). This trust facilitates the pursuit of pragmatism and meritocracy embodied in the reform package of the government. There is wide acceptance of the reform programs among the rank and file of the administrative hierarchy. The members of public bureaucracy take it for granted that they must work hard to implement the mandates of the government (Sarker and Al Athmay, 2019).

#### 4.2. Public Management Reforms in the UAE

Reform became a vocabulary in the UAE public management system in the 1990s. Over the last two decades, many administrative reform programs were implemented (Table 1). One significant feature of the UAE trajectory of PMRs is that the national leadership has been very selective in choosing the reform items (Mansour, 2017). In fact, the UAE system entails both traditional and NPM elements which is now a global trend (Ferlie, 2017).

At the state government level, Dubai has always been the forerunner in reforming public administration. The Dubai Government Excellence Program is a case in point. It was first introduced in the late 1990s following the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. The model was replicated in 2008 in the federal government entities, known as Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence Program (SKGEP). It consists of three pillars: achieving the vision, innovation, and enablers. The focus of the first pillar is on the achievement of the objectives set in the strategic plan of each federal government entity. It is worth mentioning here that strategic plans must be framed in line with the ethos of the UAE Vision 2021. The second pillar, innovation, aims to enhance the performance of the government through the design and implementation of new policies, programs, and services. The enabler pillar emphasizes the efficient and effective program and resources' management of the leading government entity in tandem with the highest standards of transparency, integrity, governance, and effective risk management. The model evaluates the capacity and results of the government entities. While capacity evaluation entails effectiveness, efficiency, and learning and development, result evaluation focuses on comprehensiveness, employability, achieving results, performance improvement, and pioneering position (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2019).

The civil service law, known as the Human Resources Law in the Federal Government enacted in 2008 and amended in 2016 (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2016) entails elaborate provisions on public service ethical standards in chapter 10 (organizational culture). These standards are listed in Articles 65 (workplace relations), 66 (personal conduct), 67 (compliance with the law), 68 (disclosure of information), 69 (customer service), 70 (gifts and bribes), 71 (conflicts of interests), 72 (working with the third parties), and 73 (employment of relatives).

**Table 1: Public management reforms in the UAE**

| # | Items   | Focus   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence Program, 2008  | Measuring capability and results  |
| 2 | Human Resources Law in the Federal Government, 2008 | Professional management and the highest ethical standards in the public sector.   |
| 3 | Strategic Management                                | All federal government entities are required to prepare their strategic plans in line with the national strategic priorities. |
| 4 | Business Process Reengineering (BPR)                | Service efficiency  |
| 5 | Digital Government                                  | The IT-enabled public service delivery  |
| 6 | Outsourcing and Public-Private Partnership (PPP)    | Private sector participation and service efficiency   |
| 7 | Government Performance Management System (GPMS)     | Development of performance culture  |
| 8 | Employee Performance Management System (EPMS)       | Enhancement of accountability and professional and personal integrity of employees  |
| 9 | Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, 2010       | Enhancement of professional and personal integrity of employees   |

Akin to the Human Resources Law in the Federal Government, the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2017) is another milestone in the realm of PMRs in the UAE. It is quite comprehensive and encompasses all probable aspects of public service ethical standards.

Despite considerable efforts in pursuing of the reform agenda and the achievements of outcomes, the UAE's reform approach has been incremental rather than radical. Mansour (2017, p. 131) succinctly observed:

The transformation of the administrative system, though profound, produce a unique and successful system of public management in which modern NPM culture coexisted with the legacy of the inherited tribal system. Nevertheless, this coexistence of the two concepts, though harmonious in many cases, hinders the complete transformation of the administrative system and the economy. This is because of pressures on the government to employ its nationals in the public sector, leading to problems of overstaffing in that sector.

### 4.3. Impacts of Public Management Reforms on Ethical Standards in the UAE

The ethical standards of public officials might be affected by the reform programs. Available literature confirms that certain strands of PMRs have had positive impacts on the ethical standards of the UAE public officials. For example, before 2010, the UAE's rank in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of the Transparency International was quite high. Over the last 5 years, the UAE has remained among the top 25 countries in the world (Table 2).

According to the latest CPI index, the UAE is ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> while there remains a grim reality in other countries in the Middle east and Northern Africa. With a score of 70, the UAE leads the region. The Transparency International has attributed UAE's progress to the 'level of stateness and human development, i.e., efficient public administration, and high levels of gross domestic product (GDP), health and education' (Transparency International, 2019). Efficient public administration can be attributed to the design and implementation of numerous reform programs such as the Human Resources Law, in the Federal Government, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and Managerialism (SKGEP, BPR, strategic

management etc.) (Rahman et al., 2018; Sarker and Al Athmay, 2018; Elbanna, 2013; Elbanna and Fadol, 2016).

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators provide details of the improved performance of the UAE's control of corruption and government effectiveness (Table 3). Until 2002, the percentile rank of the UAE was quite grim (e.g., 61.4 in 2000). After this period, the UAE did not need to look back. In fact, since 2002 the percentile ranks of the UAE remain stable.

The UAE's good record in corruption control contradicts the findings of numerous empirical studies that managerial reforms increase corruption in government because of increased managerial autonomy and contracting out of public services (Haque, 2001). Despite the adoption of SKGEP, outsourcing, PPP and so forth, the level of corruption has not increased (Tables 2 and 3).

The similar trends can also be found in government effectiveness (see Table 3). Since 2011, the percentile ranks for government effectiveness have been on the rise and can be attributed to numerous PMRs. More specifically, PMRs have bolstered certain aspects of ethical standards, for example, professional values (Elbanna and Fadol, 2016).

The Global Competitive Index (GCI) of 2018 gives further positive results in relation to the integrity, professional values, and trust in government. The overall rank of the UAE is 27<sup>th</sup>. However, the performance in institutions, the first of the twelve pillars of GCI is better (21<sup>st</sup>) than the overall rank (27<sup>th</sup>). Institutional strength is measured in terms of security, property rights, social capital, checks and balances, transparency and ethics, and public sector performance (WEF, 2018). Edelman Trust Barometer (2018) measures trust in government. According to this study, the UAE is one of the most trustworthy countries in the World. The scores over the last 5 years reveal that, except in 2017, people polled in the study expressed their trust in the government (Table 4).

Despite the prevalence of a strong traditional culture, the performance of government entities has been satisfactory. The percentile ranks in Worldwide Governance Indicators, particularly in government effectiveness (Table 3) does not validate the high trust-traditional culture nexus. The World Happiness Survey measures happiness of people. The 2019 report ranks the UAE

**Table 2: Corruption perception index**

|       | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2010 | 2008 | 2006 | 2004 | 2003 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Rank  | 23   | 21   | 24   | 23   | 25   | 26   | 27   | 28   | 35   | 31   | 29   | 37   |
| Score | 70   | 71   | 66   | 70   | 70   | 69   | 68   | 6.3  | 5.9  | 6.2  | 6.1  | 5.2  |

Source: Transparency International, 2019 [https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi\\_2000/0](https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2000/0)

**Table 3: Worldwide governance indicators**

| Indicator                | Year | Governance score<br>(-2.5 to +2.5) | Percentile rank<br>(0-100) |
|--------------------------|------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Government effectiveness | 2013 | 1.18                               | 83.41                      |
|                          | 2014 | 1.44                               | 89.42                      |
|                          | 2015 | 1.51                               | 91.35                      |
|                          | 2016 | 1.40                               | 90.38                      |
|                          | 2017 | 1.40                               | 90.38                      |
| Control of corruption    | 2013 | 1.28                               | 87.20                      |
|                          | 2014 | 1.20                               | 83.17                      |
|                          | 2015 | 1.07                               | 82.69                      |
|                          | 2016 | 1.17                               | 84.13                      |
|                          | 2017 | 1.13                               | 82.69                      |

Source: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>

**Table 4: Trust in government**

| Year | Score |
|------|-------|
| 2019 | 83    |
| 2018 | 80    |
| 2017 | 75    |
| 2016 | 77    |
| 2015 | 82    |

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer (2018)

21<sup>st</sup> among 156 countries. Chapters two and three of the report exclusively deal with the government-people nexus. According to the report (Helliwell et al., 2019, p. 7):

Governments set the institutional and policy framework in which individuals, businesses, and governments themselves operate. The links between the government and happiness operate in both directions: what governments do affects happiness and in turn the happiness of citizens in most countries determines what kind of governments they support.

## 5. CONCLUSION, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The existing frameworks of PMRs are inadequate in considering the effects of environmental antecedents on PMRs and the consequent impact on public service ethics. Particularly, the interplay of antecedents, PMRs, and public service ethics in the Middle Eastern context is under researched. In order to address these gaps, the current study proposes an integrative conceptual framework, which contends that environmental forces such as globalization, economy, politics, and socio-cultural dynamics are linked to PMRs in, which subsequently influence public service ethical standards in terms of integrity, professional values and trust in government. The conceptual framework is then employed in the case of the UAE given its unique contextual settings. Contrary to the mainstream literature linking PMRs and public service ethics, it is revealed that the UAE has initiated numerous PMRs in response to environmental antecedents which have resulted

in persistent performance in terms of public service ethics. The burgeoning literature on the state capability have nullified the spurious conclusions that the states in the Arab world cannot pursue successful PMRs (Jreisat, 1990). The UAE has become a role model of how the state has orchestrated the enactment of the critical antecedents for the design and implementation of PMRs which have resulted not only in efficiency but also in effectiveness and enhanced ethical standards of public service (Jones, 2017). Andrews et al. (2017) correctly observe that strong state capability of the UAE is the culmination of successful PMRs. While all the antecedents have contributed to the reform regime, the political antecedent as characterized by the nature of developmental nature of the state has played the most pivotal role in the reform process that has resulted in acceptable level of ethical standards in public services (Sarker and Al Athmay, 2019; Khalid and Sarker, 2019).

The proposed framework will potentially serve as a springboard to conduct future comparative and empirical studies in order to better understand varying trajectories of PMRs in response to the enactment of antecedents. Future studies are clearly needed to explore the antecedents-PMRs-ethical standards nexus embodied in the model at both federal and state government levels. Moreover, it is also imperative to conduct comparative empirical research between the UAE and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as well selected developed countries. The proposed study will also guide policy makers in identifying critical factors impacting PMRs and their subsequent results and ethical implications.

This study has certain limitations too. It is conceptual in nature. There is a need for empirical research to operationalize the proposed model. Additional organizational level factors may also be considered which can possibly affect PMRs and their impacts on public service ethics.

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