Why does public management—the art of the state—so often go wrong, producing failure and fiasco instead of public service, and what are the different ways in which control or regulation can be applied to government? Why do we find contradictory recipes for the improvement of public services, and are the forces of modernity set to produce worldwide convergence in ways of organizing government? This study aims to explore such questions, which are central to debates over public management. It combines contemporary and historical experience, and employs grid/group cultural theory as an organizing frame and method of exploration. Using examples from different places and eras, the study seeks to identify the recurring variety of ideas about how to organize public services—and contrary to widespread claims that modernization will bring a new global uniformity, it argues that variety is unlikely to disappear from doctrine and practice in public management. The book has three parts. Part I, Introductory, has three chapters that discuss various aspects of public management. Part II, Classic and Recurring Ideas in Public Management, has four chapters that discuss various ways of doing public management. Part III, Rhetoric, Modernity, and Science in Public Management, has three chapters that discuss the rhetoric, and culture of public management, contemporary public management, and the state of the art of the state.

Contemporary Public Management: A New Global Paradigm?
Christopher Hood

in The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric, and Public Management

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Returns to the general question of what sort of science public management is or can be and how cultural theory can contribute to that science. Critically discusses the pervasive ideas of modernization and global convergence in a cultural-theory framework, suggesting there are more forces for divergence and less common ground on what modernity means in matters of organization than is commonly recognized. It argues that modernization is a rhetorically successful idea because when the powerful but implicit metaphor of technological development that underlies it is carried over into human organization it is inherently ambiguous—so it lends itself to quite different and contradictory ideas about the wave of the future that fit with each of the world views identified by cultural theory. Further, it argues that a vision of global transformation of public management into a convergent modern style is likely to be exaggerated because it ignores powerful forces of path-dependency and self-disequilibration—i.e. the capacity of management reform initiatives to produce the opposite of their intended result. The main sections of the chapter are: Modern, Global, Inevitable? The Claim of a New Paradigm in Public Management; Public-Management Modernization as Deep Change; Public-Management Modernization as Irreversible Change; Public-Management Modernization as Convergent Change; Public-Management Modernization as Beneficent Change; and Modernization—or ‘Fatal Remedies’?