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A Reflection on Cultural Change Processes for Public Sector Employees

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Introduction
Since Internet invaded our everyday environment in the 1990s, public sector organizations have been pressed to adapt their management policies in order to develop a new conception of their relationships with other public and private institutions, with the citizens, and even with their own employees; as maintaining the traditional standards of bureaucratic behaviour is certainly anachronistic in today’s information society. In this respect, the implementation of a public culture that facilitates and promotes the acceptance of these new tools within the municipal organizations plays a crucial role in the subsequent quality of public services provided to the citizens. This new culture refers to the change in the organizational culture of the public sector toward a customer oriented approach, reinforcing values that provide effectiveness, orientation toward results and needs, receptivity and connectivity, openness and proactivity.

The organizational culture is a powerful unifying force, which limits political conflict and promotes mutual understanding, agreements in the procedures and common practices. It ensures cohesion among the members of the organization, especially when working in collaboration with other organizations, either public or private, because that is strongly linked to the decision-making process. However, it is also a powerful limiter of change: any threat to the established organizational culture will face strong resistance. Organizational inertia that limits bureaucratic transformations can only be overcome by appropriate training programs, which not only provide civil servants with the necessary technical skills, but also with an attitude of commitment.
and understanding of the new values that must prevail in the organization. And they must be aimed not only for base technicians, but also for those having political and managerial responsibilities. This is not a matter of learning techniques, but of integrating in a new culture that governs society and reaches the public sector but does not seem to materialize.

The role of public sector employees is therefore crucial, as they will be the ones that defend and promote a particular organizational culture with their everyday acts and the way in which they carry out their work. In short, the transition to a modern administration geared to the citizens will inexorably involve the acceptance and defence of the cultural values specific to this model by the civil servants, to the extent that these values will boost the acceptance and development, both at individual and collective level, of the underlying techniques and philosophies in a management model that is more in line with current requirements.

To foster this change, it is necessary to work both at organizational level as well as at individual level. Civil servants, both collectively and individually, have to accept, in the first place, and divulge and defend, in the second place, the new procedures that derive from the development project of the NPM. In this respect, we found some recent papers that analyse the behaviour, both individually and collectively, of this type of employees within a cultural change of this size. Seijts and Roberts (2011) studied the correlation between different attitudinal and organizational variables that can contribute to generate a climate that is suitable for the acceptance of change in municipal governments. These variables are: the degree of professional competence that the workers perceive about themselves, their degree of emotional commitment to the organization, the opportunities for the development and growth that the town or city council offers them, the satisfaction in their relations with their superiors, the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, and the respect that they receive in their positions.

The aim of this chapter is to review the works that, from both theoretical and empirical points of view, deal with the actions taken to manage the change from a traditional bureaucratic culture to the new public culture, especially specifying the role that civil servants play in this movement when it comes to accepting and disseminating cultural values that promote such organizational change.
To fulfil this purpose, first we will highlight the importance of flexibility in the organizational structure of any organization for the achievement of its objectives in terms of efficiency, since such flexibility is heavily influenced by cultural values that foster constant change in the organization. Particularly, we will discuss the necessary transit from a bureaucratic culture that is characteristic of public sector organizations to another one, of a more organic character, that boosts the shift toward an administration that is more in line with the needs of the citizenry. Subsequently, the dominant role played by the employee of this type of organizations, both individually and collectively, when it comes to driving cultural change within the organizations, will be highlighted.

Next, we will focus on the necessary changes to promote the required cultural values that foster the adoption and development of a model of government and management that meets the expectations of the citizens. In this regard, it is advisable to adopt an analytical methodology of study, demonstrating that these organizational changes originate in both certainly broad areas such as the specific national cultures of each country for this purpose we will use one of the cultural tools that is most commonly used at the international level: Hofstede’s model of cultural dimensions. We will finish the chapter with a presentation of final thoughts on the organizational shift to a more modern management adapted to the new times, instruments and demands of the citizens.

**The Role of the Employee before the Challenge of Flexibility and Efficiency of Public Sector Organizations**

The German sociologist Max Weber (1979) was the first author that identified and grouped the characteristics of organizations with the objective of streamlining organizations’ processes in order to make them as efficient as possible, naming it bureaucracy. The original definition of bureaucracy is ‘formal institution with a clear and obvious division of labor, abstract rules, fair procedures and decision-making, taking technical qualifications and professionalism as the basis for the promotion of employees’ (Weber, 1979). Thus, in accordance with this definition, in any organization there is a division of labor and specialization organized under a hierarchical system and a set of abstract rules called standard operating procedures. Decision-making is rational, fair and universal, based on technical and professional qualifications.
In spite of its original meaning, currently, the concept of bureaucracy is assimilated to that of public administration, which still follows the formalized parameters of hierarchy and centralized decision-making, to the detriment of more flexibility, but with the purpose to be as efficient, socially equitable, and transparent as possible, given that it is funded by the public purse. The search for stability in the provision of public service, and the political independence of its executors are some other goals that justify the conformism and the resistance to change and innovation found in public agencies. All this hampers the dynamic management of its resources and capabilities, which will result in redundant and growing costs that generate allocative inefficiency (excessive or insufficient production) of any type (production at excessive cost).

The acknowledgment of these inefficiencies is the seed of change for public sector organizations in response to the needs of the new society, better informed and more aware, and the new economy. As a result, public services must face a review of their organizational practices to comply with these requirements and demands. In this way, an area that is so traditionally bureaucratic and formal, such as the public sector in both past and present times, must develop new approaches that allow for the implementation of the modernization processes listed above, and, for this, it sets its eyes on private management, exploiting their similarities with this sector, giving rise to localized versions of some of the models specific to the private sector (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew, 1996). To this end, the New Public Management (NPM) movement emerges.

The first manifestations of this movement were detected in the early 1990s at international level (Hood, 1991, 1995; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). The NPM implies abandoning the traditional bureaucratic conception, based on patronage, on which public organization and management are based in some cases, as well as the adherence to the legal-rational perspective of Weber, which is insufficient to confront the challenges of state-level management in an unsettled and uncertain context. In this way, the NPM is geared toward organizational flexibility, seeking to create organizations that are more organic in order to expedite public service.

In line with this last consideration, and before dealing with the study of culture as promoter of the organizational change for the modernization of public administration, it is necessary and desirable to describe
the role that the civil servant plays in this change process, both as a productive resource of the organization and as its internal customer. Indeed, the required organizational flexibility specific of the NPM necessarily involves the acceptance and assimilation, on the part of the employees of these public sector organizations, of the skills and values that promote, first and foremost, flexibility of the processes and structures of the organization, and ultimately the increase in the efficiency of these bodies in their public service to the citizenry.

In this sense, there are already some basic cultural differences among civil servants with regard to those of the private sector that can lead to greater incidence when dealing with certain cultural values that are more suitable for the adoption of organic and non-bureaucratic management models. In this way, the work of Hoogervorts, van der Flier and Koopman (2004), notes that there are significant differences between both sectors in the cultural field in favour of the private sector, such as goals, outcome-orientation or the ability to adapt. That is to say, in the private sector, a more clear aim, and a determination of objectives leads to a greater cultural orientation toward them on the part of the employees, as well as a greater capacity to adapt to changes, as these are more frequent in this sector. Thus, taking as base an organizational culture that is less prone to changes and less focused on results, it is obvious that civil servants have to make a greater cultural change effort to gear toward a new management model.

Regarding this, the transit to the NPM from the point of view of the civil servant not only means a change to be dealt with by the organization, but also by the worker of the body at individual level. Like any change, the management of this change is crucial for the subsequent success or failure of the project to be developed. Poor management of these changes may generate a set of negative feelings in the civil servant, such as anxiety, confusion, frustration, fatigue, cynicism, and sense of loss or resistance (Bordia et. al, 2004; Kiefer, 2005; Wanberg & Banes, 2000). Therefore, within the scope of the corporate culture it is essential to foster those values that encourage the shift toward the project in question.

Thus, the seed of cultural change in the organization must germinate in the values, principles, behaviours, attitudes, and so on, of civil servants, individually and collectively, within a single entity. Therefore, it is now time to fully enter into the analysis of the literature on the role that cultural change (feeding off the values of the civil servant) plays as
a driver of organizational change processes toward a more up-to-date management: toward the NPM.

The New Public Culture

As is the case with companies in the private sector, generalizations on the matter of organizational culture cannot be established; that is to say, each public body is a unique organization. Even within the same country or system, public services behave differently from each other, and the same thing is true for their multiple agents and independent bodies within them, as the local police, firefighters, etc., that are part of each public subsector. Each agency, therefore, will face their own problems in a personal and different way, according to their unique and independent nature (Claver et al., 1999).

However, going from a global to a more specific approach, it is true that there are certain cultural patterns in large geographical areas, such as nationwide, that will constrain the culture of their public administration due to certain behaviours, procedures, values, ideals, patterns of behaviour, etc., that have taken roots in the daily life of their citizens, and, therefore, in the performance of their public sector organizations. In this sense, although there are some models that studied and described the cultural differences among several societies extensively (Douglas, 1978; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2000; Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson 2003; House, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta 2004; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), without doubt, the one that has achieved a greater recognition and popularity at international level is that of Hofstede (2001) which identifies 5 defining dimensions of a society’s culture:

1. Distance to power: it expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that the power is distributed unequally.

2. Risk aversion: it expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.

3. Individualism vs. Collectivism: Individualism can be defined as the preference for a social framework without greater cohesion in which people are concerned almost exclusively about themselves and their immediate families. On the contrary, in collectivism, there is a concern for the collective good and collaborative work.
A Reflection on Cultural Change Processes

Table 1: Comparison of Cultural Values between Spain, Poland and UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Column (1)</th>
<th>Column (2)</th>
<th>Column (3)</th>
<th>Column (4)</th>
<th>Column (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Column headings are as follows: (1) distance to power, (2) risk aversion, (3) individualism vs. collectivism, (4) masculinity vs. femininity, (5) pragmatism vs. normativity. Adapted from http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html

4. Masculinity vs. Femininity: Masculinity represents a preference in society toward achievements, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards as recognition of success. Its opposite, femininity, represents a preference for cooperation, modesty, care of the weak and quality of life.

5. Pragmatism vs. normativity: In pragmatic societies, people believe that the truth depends greatly on the situation, context and time. They show ability to adapt to the new conditions and traditions, a strong tendency to save and invest, and frugality and perseverance predominate when it comes to achieving results. Societies that are more based on regulations generally show a strong concern about the establishment of the absolute truth. They are normative in their way of thinking. They show great respect for traditions, a low tendency to save for the future, and are focused on achieving quick results.

With regard to individualism, Willem, Janvier and Henderickx (2005) point out the need for a greater degree of individualization and decentralization of the practices of human resources management for the development of the so-called New Public Management. However, in his study of six European countries, only one of them (Sweden) shows evidence of this flexibilization of human resources regarding individualization (Horton, 2006).

On the other hand, according to this study, the relationship between the degree of risk aversion and the feature of ‘masculinity’ of a society’s culture does not show significant relation with the development of new management processes.

Therefore, taking into account these results, in Table 1 we can see a comparison between the cultural values of Spain and Poland, also taking as comparative reference an especially prevalent culture within the European context as is the English culture.
The first remarkable fact that we can observe from these data is the cultural similarity between Spain and Poland. Both cultures have similar values in almost all the cultural dimensions, of which we can particularly highlight their extremely high degree of risk aversion and tendency to normativity (relatively low rates of pragmatism), being these two aspects still slightly more notable in the Polish culture that in the Spanish culture. On the other hand, the most differentiating element between the cultures of these two countries appears to be the greatest tendency to the values identified as ‘male’ of Poland against Spain. However, as we have already mentioned, according to the literature, the nature of ‘masculinity’ of a culture does not seem to have a clear meaningful relationship with the process of NPM.

Therefore, understanding these two cultures as similar and comparing them with a culture of reference as the British culture, we do observe significant differences. On the one hand, distance to power is significantly lower in the British culture with regard to the Polish or Spanish cultures. This difference is even more intense in the case of risk aversion, so that the English culture seems to be more prone to the implantation of new procedures. It is also a more individualistic and pragmatic culture.

We shall remember that, according to the literature, the cultures that are most prone to the development of NPM processes would be those characterized by low levels of distance to power, low risk aversion, high individualism and high pragmatic awareness. In this sense, among the practices catalogued as NPM, the so-called e-government seems to gain special relevance, since this model meets the challenges of flexibility and efficiency raised above, although it requires, of course, of a cultural change in accordance with the specific values that promote its implementation.

To illustrate these arguments, we can use some works which conclusions are revealing in the field of e-culture and e-government. One of them is the one developed by Zhao (2011) which deals with the impact of national culture (using Hofstede’s cultural dimensions tool, explained before) in the development of e-government. The work of Zhao starts from a survey conducted by the United Nations (United Nations, 2010) on e-government, in which it is concluded that the web pages of public agencies have played an important role as means of information and interaction about the current situation of economic crisis with regard to both citizens and businesses. From this point on-
wards, Zhao proposes the study of how cultural values that are characteristic of a society influence the implementation processes of the e-government models. Even though there are other works that have dealt with the study of e-government and the parameters of national culture, among which we wish to underscore those of Aykut (2009) and Kovačić (2005), one of the main contributions of the work of Zhao is that, in addition to having a global scope, it focuses not only on the cultural dimensions from the point of view of the citizen as an external customer of the e-government process, but also in the influence that these cultural values have in the acceptance of the model by the civil servants of the organization (internal customers).

According to Zhao’s study, a lack of high levels of pragmatism would be counterproductive for a correct acceptance and development of e-government, and, although for Zhao the relationship between the dimension of the aversion to risk and e-government is not meaningful, there are other works, such as those of Erumban and De Jong (2006) or Aykut (2009) that do find a negative relationship between this dimension and the development of e-government processes. Thus, the two cultural dimensions in which Spain and Poland stand out (high risk aversion and not very high pragmatism) would be cultural barriers to the development of e-government, not only from the perspective of the citizen as external customer, but also from that of the civil servant of the city council as internal customer. In all these dimensions the British culture presents some values that are more favourable to the development of e-culture than those of Spain and Poland.

Therefore, there are cultural differences that account for facilitators or barriers to the implementation of organizational changes in public sector organizations, especially in the context of electronic models where, in addition, it is necessary to overcome certain obstacles that are specific and characteristic of the nature of these organizational changes in particular. In this regard, in a work developed by Harris and Ogbonna (2007), the importance of the organizational culture is stressed, not only in the implementation of the tools specific to the e-administration itself but also in the design of the web pages of both companies in the private sector as well as other organizations. Thus, these authors distinguish in their study up to 6 discrepancies or cultural gaps to cover in order to promote success in this new form of administration:
• Cultural gap between employees and Internet operations management. The first discrepancy emerges from the different concept that employees and the managers of the web may have about the symbols, values, behaviours, and so on, specific to the organizational culture.

• Cultural gap between the organizational culture and Internet operations management. While the top management has an interpretation of the culture of the organization, Internet operation managers may have another interpretation that, although being slightly different, may constitute a significant subculture.

• Cultural gap between Internet operations management and the design parameters of the web. This discrepancy arises when communication errors are generated between cultural values interpreted by Internet operations managers and the drafting of documents with the specifications of the future website that reflects these cultural parameters.

• Cultural gap between the design parameters of the website and their interpretation by its designers.

• Cultural gap between the interpretation of the designers and the final design of the site. This gap arises from the possible discrepancy between the intention of the designers at the time of translating certain values in the website and its final result.

• Cultural gap between the final design of the website and internal (employees) and external (citizens/users) customers. The last difference is the one that best represents cultural incompatibility concerning the contact of the organization with its users in two ways: on the one hand due to the discrepancy between the cultural values of the employees who have to use the web as a working tool and as a tool to be in contact with citizens and, on the other hand, due to the inconsistency of this website with the conception that the latter have about the organization.

The research work carried out by Pina, Torres and Royo (2009) follows this line of thought, in which a comparative analysis about the development of e-government in 75 European cities, including 5 of the largest cities of Spain, is carried out. The study performs a comparative analysis at 3 levels: on the one hand, the ranking of the cities, on the other hand, grouping by countries, and, finally, grouping by European
areas, distinguishing between the Anglo-Saxon, northern, central Europe and Mediterranean (which includes Spain and its 5 represented municipalities: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Sevilla and Zaragoza) areas. In this regard, some interesting conclusions that we can highlight from this work are that while the styles of public administration in the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries presented a greater orientation to citizen participation and greater focus on the needs of their users, the central European and Mediterranean styles are geared more toward the compliance of the legislation imbued in a bureaucratic type of culture. In fact, other works such as those of Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000) or Torres (2004) conclude that the Germanic and Mediterranean countries were opposed to the precepts of the New Public services as they do not fit in the legislative framework of their organizational structures.

In addition, Carter and Weerakkody (2008) carry out a comparative analysis, at cultural level, of the process of implementing e-government in agencies from two Anglo-Saxon cultures: the British culture and that of the United States. These authors conclude that both the confidence in the new management model as the relative advantage that supposedly this new model (e-government) has on the previous (traditional management), are two significant variables for the development of e-government in both cultures (British and American). However, other factors that are more related to the accessibility of the Internet and the capacity to use this tool seem to be an important barrier to the development of the model in American organizations, but do not have a significant impact on the British ones. In this regard, and according to this study, it appears that the ethnic origin of the citizens can be an important factor for the development of e-government in the fields of accessibility and skills for the use of the Internet, whereas ethnicity is not a relevant cultural factor in the case of the organizations from the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, entering into a higher level of detail, these differences in the degree of development of e-government are not only clear at national level, but even, as has been pointed out above, among various municipalities in the same country, being the size of the municipality and the style of the public administration two of the main constraints in this respect (Pina et al., 2009). In this same line of argument de Jong and Lentz (2006) note that, although the problems faced by the various municipalities in the design of their web pages may seem sim-
ilar, the solutions with which these public services face them tend to be substantially different.

Certainly, within the e-government, not only the websites of the public services gain special relevance, but also all kinds of information and communication technologies (ICT) whose implementation allows to increase the efficiency of public sector organizations, as they reduce costs and time (Cortés, 2001; del Águila, 2000; Johnson and Mullen, 2000). However, the adoption of these ICT represents a new paradigm shift, becoming tools for all employees and permeating through all the layers of the public structure. It is clear that, by its very nature, the public sector is a sector that is ‘intensive in terms of information,’ so that, to a greater or lesser degree, ICT are needed to process, distribute and make accessible, quickly and effectively, the information on which the service to be provided to the citizens is based. Therefore, tools such as web sites or databases, specific to knowledge management, allow to provide and channel information and relevant documentation for the development of internal governmental activity and the provision of public services (Prokopiadou, Papatheodorou, & Moschopoulos, 2004). At the same time, civil servants are required to develop new knowledge-related competences, which will force a review of the entrusted and required duties, as well as recycling and continuous training (Galindo, 2004).

Despite this, the majority of the literature concerning the development of e-government, is articulated around aspects such as information technology, infrastructure and resources, policies and strategies, social-economic effects and so on (Aldrich, Bertot, & McClure 2002; Carter and Belanger, 2005; Criado and Ramilo, 2003; Dewan and Riggins, 2005; Kaylor, 2005; Barzilai-Nahon, 2005; Heeks, 2006; Heeks and Bailur, 2006; Gouscos, Kalikakis, Legal, & Papadopoulou, 2007; Boateng, Heeks, Molla, & Hinson, 2008; Sang, Lee, & Lee 2009; Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2009) but few addressed it from a cultural perspective, and even less through the dissemination and acceptance on the part of civil servants.

In this sense, the evolution of e-culture has to go in parallel with that of the development of e-government. As Sandoval and Gil (2012) point out, a further development of the model allows and requires greater collaboration and participation in it, both from the external client (citizen) and the internal client (civil servant), and therefore certain cultural values that foster the use of these electronic services and
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Online Information on Screen
Online Service Provision
Development of Interacting Tools
Opening Participation Channels
Concession of Collaboration Opportunities

**Need for Integrating E-Culture**

**E-Government Development Stages** (adapted from Sandoval & Gil, 2012, p. 574)

The fact that culture can have remarkable influence on the degree and style of development of the practices not only specific to those of the e-government, but to those of any organizational change within public bodies is documented, giving special relevance to the role that the employee has in these organizations, acting as a catalyst for these changes aimed at the modernization of the public sector.

**Final Reflections**

Traditionally, administration in public bodies has been characterized by its high level of both internal and external bureaucratization, that is to say, both in internal processes as well as in the provision of services to the citizens. The shift from this bureaucratic management to another one that is more flexible, more organic, oriented toward modernization and toward increasing the parameters of effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of its services necessarily passes through the adoption of quality and knowledge management, customer orientation, and many other aspects that have already been or are being developed by the private sector, which incidence in the public sector is rather incipient though. In this regard, the role of the civil servant as knowledgeable, defender and diffuser of the values of this more open and flexible public culture is crucial.

Although organizational cultures can be discerned from one body to another, it is true that certain cultural patterns can be perceived in accordance with the geographical area or country where these organizations are located. Hence, although the managers of these organizations should put special emphasis on the development of the cultures
according to the differentiating and identifying features of these cultures, it could be very helpful for them to know the cultural patterns of the geographical areas where they are located since, besides the specific idiosyncrasy of each organization, both civil servants and citizens (as members of the same community and culture) share certain values that influence their behaviour, attitudes and philosophy. Thus, in those countries (such as for example in the UK), where the national culture seems to be more conducive to the implementation of these processes of modernization in the administration of public bodies, it is noted that, indeed, this model is better established in this type of organizations.

Within this cultural analysis, special regard should be paid to Hofstede’s study of cultural dimensions (due to its extension and recognition at global level), by which the consideration of the values that a given culture holds on the various dimensions of this model can be of important aid for managers of public agencies. The cultural parameters that are more appropriate for the implementation of a culture would be: low distance to power and risk aversion, high rates of individualism and pragmatism, not being conclusive if the values defined by Hofstede as ‘male’ hold a significant relationship with this purpose. In this sense, cultures such as the Spanish and Polish ones should pay special attention to their high rates of risk aversion and promote long-term guidance practices with more pragmatic content, since these seem to be the main barriers against organizational change.

As we have been able to see, the styles of public services of the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries have a greater orientation toward citizen participation and to the satisfaction of the needs of the citizens, while central European and Mediterranean styles are more geared toward the compliance of the legislation within the framework of a bureaucratic type of culture. These two facts could be an important cultural barrier to the development of the new public culture both from the point of view of the citizen and from that of the civil servant. Even within Anglo-Saxon countries we can find important cultural differences: for example, we have seen that, while in the USA the ethnic origin of the user seems to affect the process of modernization of its public sector, this is not the case in the United Kingdom.

In this way, observing the processes carried out by other organizations, culturally more prone to these changes (as for example those of the UK), values and procedures that reduce the different cultural gaps
that they will encounter in the process of shifting to the e-government could be developed through benchmarking techniques. Among the latter, the cultural gap between employees and Internet operations management as well as the cultural gap between the design of the web and both internal (employees), and external (citizens) customers gain special importance.

Finally, the introduction of ICT, especially those based on the Internet, allows and supports the development of competencies and behaviours specific of this culture, which has been renamed as e-culture. At the same time, this e-culture is a fundamental part of the implementation of strategies of e-government that introduce public administration into the digital economy, in a loop of cultural, technological and strategic modernization.

References


