

**STORYTELLING FOR THE MASSES: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO PUBLIC
SECTOR TRANSFORMATIONS IN LITHUANIA****Zilvinas ZIDONIS**Mykolas Romeris University
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neringa.jaskunaite@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper aims to shed new light on the “old-fashioned” concept of New Public Management from the perspective of rhetorical managerial activities. The role of rhetoric and narratives in governance, management and philosophy of science is discussed. Second, it is showed how and why post-modern private and public management has adopted persuasive speaking and narratives as a new managerial practice. The paper argues that New Public Management, rather to be considered as a theory or normative model, should be approached from the perspective of meta-narrative, based on classic myths, such as the myth of the Manichaeian battle between Good (public sector reformers) and Evil (old-fashioned bureaucrats), and the myth of Salvation of Israelites (managers as public sector saviours). The arguments are illustrated with cases of propaganda rhetoric in the Lithuanian public sector: the construction of the nuclear power plant station and the development of knowledge economy. Finally, the article concludes that the rhetoric of public management reforms seeks to direct public opinion and aims to suggest “the agenda of our concern”.

Keywords: managerial rhetoric, narratives, myths, New Public Management**JEL classification:** D78, D83**1. INTRODUCTION**

According to Fisher (1984), the rational world paradigm presupposes that humans are essentially rational beings, and “the world is a set of logical puzzles which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as an argumentative construct” (Fisher, 1984, p. 4). However, in the 1970s, postmodern ideas proposed the new paradigm about subjective truth and limits of human rationality. Postmodern management and public administration have started to emerge in the same vein as well. They were based on the assumption that, rather than search for objective truth, management and governance

should concentrate on creation and interpretation of alternative realities. The works of H. Mintzberg (1973, 1994), K. Weick (1995), G. Morgan (2006) introduced a new kind of understanding of the manager's goals and decision-making. The new paradigm condemned as obsolete both the rational and limited rationality management models. It was proposed that, by employing rhetorical tools, the manager should communicate subjective realities to persuade subordinates, colleagues and the public.

Donald McCloskey (1983) was probably one of the first researchers to voice the idea that, in economy and management, scientific arguments become are replaced by the art of persuasive speaking and writing, with metaphors, historical precedents and the power of (scientific) authority. In other words, in the postmodern world, the rhetoric became a method of scientific cognition. The "objective" and scientifically approved truth is replaced by popular persuasive opinions. McCloskey notes that rhetoric is an art about what people believe in and what they would like to believe in rather than about what is the truth. Rhetorical arguments should lead to more or less convincing conclusions.

As methods of management practice, rhetoric and narratives have started to gain considerable importance and have become an object of management science research. In March 2011, ESADE (Barcelona) business school hosted the fourth international conference "Rhetoric and Narrative as an Object of Management Research", attended by world renown scholars, such as Barbara Czarniawska and Deirdre McCloskey. However, rhetoric has got quite a poor reputation in the contemporary discourse of management and public administration. By saying that speech or report is rhetorical, we aim to disqualify it on the grounds that it is presented in a literary form, it lacks of in relevant content, and diverts audience from real reflections and actions, or even it pretends to manipulate and deceive people. On the other hand, the concept of rhetoric, as the art of oratory and persuasion, has three different meanings. First, it is important to emphasize that people possess innate capacities for speaking and persuading and that they exert them which they exert on different occasions. For instance, primitive oral cultures do not have any formal education, and some people who are extraordinarily skilful in verbal persuasion become teachers and spiritual leaders in those cultures. In this sense, the concept of rhetoric means actual persuasive practices of specific persons, cultures, periods, and ideologies. Therefore there is the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, the rhetoric of managers and researchers, and also the rhetoric of Market Economy or Welfare State. Second, it is the tradition of the ancient dispute and discussion. We can find impressive testimonies of it in Homer's epic poems - the Iliad and the Odyssey. Based on the tradition of epic narration, in the fifth century BC in Greek city-states, and especially in Athens, a new discipline emerged called rhetoric emerged in the Greek city-states, particularly in Athens, in the fifth century BC. Rhetors (or teachers of rhetoric) trained people on in the art of public speaking. Hence, we can say that rhetoric is an art or a set of theories on persuasion with words. Third, since Alexander the Great, rhetoric was has been taught in formal schools following a unified curriculum through in all the countries and cultures of the empire. In this sense, rhetoric is an educational discipline that has been used to teach students for centuries. In the following sections 2 and 3 we will show the role of rhetoric in governance, management and economics. Section 4 discusses how rhetorical tools are employed to create and to communicate the myth of the New Public Management as a universal remedy for all public sector "diseases". The last section provides cases and a discussion about the role of the propaganda rhetoric in the Lithuanian public sector and local governance.

2. RHETORIC AS A TOOL OF GOVERNANCE

In the fifth century BC, the Athens polis was experiencing an extraordinary flourishing of economy, development of economy, democracy and arts – the so-called “Golden Age”. Under the system of direct democracy, political and public projects were submitted to the assembly, which was comprised by of a very large number of members and each member has had a right to vote. Young people who wished to make have a political career had to be excellent persuasive speakers, able to control the crowd of voters. Rhetors trained young people in the art of political speaking, and, to some extent, rhetors were the first professional consultants in politics and public administration. One of the most important rhetors, Protagoras, was an advisor of Pericles and the his/a? teacher of rhetoric. Greek city-states did not have professional lawyers and people had to present and to advocate their claims to a jury comprised by of a large number of representatives. Therefore, rhetors helped their clients to formulate arguments and to defend them in persuasive speeches. Philosophers such as Socrates and Plato claimed that rhetors were sophists. Philosophers accused rhetors of teaching how to use beliefs, rather than logical reasoning, in order to persuade the audience, and how to employ examples rather than concepts and theories. It is worth to stress that the nature of post-modern managerial work used to be described in the similar terms as it was to those in the times of Ancient Greece: persuasion, communication, motivation. Aristotle identified three kinds of rhetoric: deliberative, judicial and ceremonial. According to Aristotle, in deliberative rhetoric, the audience has to judge the possible benefits and harms of a future action. In judicial rhetoric, the audience has to judge whether past actions were just or not. from the point of view if they were just or unjust. In ceremonial rhetoric, the speaker has to show for in front of an audience a certain artistic skill. All three types of rhetoric were used to address the citizens and to deliver public speeches. Aristotle identified three means of persuasion: *logos*, the arguments; *ethos*, the words that show the speaker’s good will, competence and reliability; and *pathos*, the feelings that speakers words induce.

In many aspects, the Roman culture was inspired by and inherited an heir of Greek civilization; however, it focused on more practical things, such as legal and military issues. As a result, the profession of lawyer became one of the most respectable and influential in political life. Rhetoric was one of the core disciplines for educating young people who wanted to pursue a public career in law or politics, and rhetors had enjoyed big great power in Roman society. Cicero, the most influential Roman rhetor, wrote classic texts on rhetoric. Essentially, his rhetoric followed the lines of Aristotle, but he concentrated on the eloquence, rather than the logic of arguments.

He argued that a good speaker must possess the sensitivity of dialectician, the thinking of a philosopher, the language of a poet, the memory of a lawyer, the voice of a thespian, the body language and the gracefulness of an actor. Quintilian received a permanent salary from the Roman Emperor for teaching rhetoric because this discipline was basic for training Empire administrators. The main purpose of rhetorical education in the Roman culture was the development of the moral character of people for public life. We can say that since the Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, rhetoric became has become a crucial part of state officials’s training curriculum.

3. RHETORIC IN POSTMODERN MANAGEMENT

Persuasion is a key link between the classical rhetoric and the postmodern management. Aristotle describes rhetoric as an ability to discover the appropriate means of persuasion in each particular case. Persuasion pervades all kinds of personal, social, and public activities. We persuade people to accept new ideas and to undertake particular activities. In that sense, we consider that rhetoric is both a form of verbal action and a logic that makes possible any kinds of activities. Managers persuade their subordinates, colleagues and bosses. They are persuaded by others and persuade themselves. Mintzberg, in his book, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, was one of the first management scholars who provided empirical evidences to support the fact that a manager's work relies on language and on narrative creation. In his another work, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Mintzberg emphasizes that strategic plans have never been implemented completely, and therefore the development and implementation of strategies should be addressed as a continuously evolving process, in which rhetoric plays an important part through clarification, persuasion, and myth-building. On the other hand, the creation of meanings and symbols relates rhetoric with to modern management. Weick, in his book, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, considers that an important activity of managers is to create meanings and to make senses of the objects, situations, and events. He argued that meaning comes out of action, but not *vice versa*. Therefore, when we look back and contemplate about the work we have done, and we identify our actions as a strategy, we learn from the past and attach a meaning to it. This fabricated meaning, the narrative, is passed on to other members of the organisation through rhetorical communication. Hence, managers are creators of meanings, they are storytellers and rhetors.

The theory of argumentation establishes important relationships between rhetoric, on one side, and epistemology of science and scientific research on the other side. Aristotle emphasized that one of the most important means of verbal persuasion is *logos*, or the arguments presented by the speaker. In this line of thought, he developed a theory of argumentation based on the following ideas: there is a parallel between logical proves proofs and reasonable (rhetorical) arguments. In the case of logical deduction, if the premises are true, then the conclusion is necessarily true. In reasonable arguments, we can only claim that, if the premises are true, then it is reasonable to accept that the conclusion is true. From an epistemological point of view, scientific knowledge is defined as a belief formulated in precise propositions which are true and this truth has been rigorously proven. For example, in the geometry, we start with axioms that are evident, in the sense that our mind directly realizes that they are true, and then we prove the theorems. In that way, it seems that there is no room for rhetoric in science. But if we consider other disciplines such as medicine, we will find that they are developed by using reasonable arguments or, in other terms, using rhetorical persuasion. Management theories are highly rhetorical, based on the interpretation of the meanings and values of the actors. Science is involved in continuous rhetorical debates. Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, is an excellent case and an important precedent of the rhetoric of science. Rhetoric is an important tool of communication which focuses on persuasion, meanings, and arguments. Historically, it has focused on public speeches, which have been very influential in public life. The rhetoric of science argues that articles and books writing is crucial for the research process and that the communication process influences development and acceptance of theories. Rhetoric involves a humanistic approach to science and to management research because verbal

persuasion and meaning creation require not only logical and reasonable arguments but good understanding of the feelings, motives, purposes, interests and values of the people.

Rhetoric and management have one thing in common. Rhetoric aims at persuasion, and the goal of management is also to persuade people to undertake certain actions. The premise here is that the underlying method of management is not coercion but persuasion. Early management theories oversimplified the issue of motivation and concentrated on the issues of proper evaluation of employees input in terms of monetary and other material rewards. However, in the post-modern society, this kind of mechanistic “stimuli-reward” concept has lost its power. Managers do not just speak the language of money, they communicate with their subordinates in the language of people.

It is in sharp contrast to the prevalent management tradition, which relies on the rational and limited rationality decision-making models. These models presuppose that there are certain goals and different ways to reach them. The ways may vary in their rationality or effectiveness, or, according to Simon (1997), they should be adequate to reach the goals. The traditional approach rests on the presumption that in management, like in physics, it is possible to model situations and to make experiments in order to see how particular actions lead to particular effects. However, a lot of managerial practices call for knowledge that is not obtained by analysis, modelling or precise calculations, but rather in the process of creation of meanings, based on the assumption that common or inter-subjective interpretation of reality should exist. Therefore, a manager’s primary task is to interpret situations and assign meanings to facts.

4. THE RHETORIC OF THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Even though the New Public Management, as a reform programme and as the theory, is old-fashioned and is widely criticised, this kind of approach has left a deep footprint both in the theoretical, and practical discourse of public administration. It is therefore worth to look at the NPM as a case of effective management rhetoric and mythology. Hughes (2003) has emphasized that the NPM does not have either a clear concept, nor content or even a purpose, and it could be interpreted in many different ways whatever as the interpreter likes. In line with Hughes, we can say that the NPM is a set of rhetorical tools designed to persuade the audience.

The book *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* written by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, is one of the most prominent examples of NPM rhetoric and mythology. Pollitt and Bouckaert note that “anyone who tries to read Osborne and Gaebler’s *Reinventing Government* under the illusion that it is a neutral scientific text will find themselves in considerable difficulty. Reform language is very frequently deployed with an overtly persuasive purpose <...>” (2004, p. 22). Tūmėnas is right when saying that Osborne and Gaebler deviate even from even the minimum scientific requirements in their case studies. The authors match a single case to every management concept, but the evidences they present are illustrative and lack in scientific arguments.

However, this book can also be viewed from a different perspective as a piece of work that applies the classical principles of rhetoric. The text is peppered with epithets, metaphors, comparisons. Just like ancient orators, Osborne and Gaebler employ practical examples (stories) of American public administration and management rather than logical

arguments to persuade their readers. The title of the book itself involves a certain amount of allegory and metaphor:

- a) government has to be reinvented (i.e. altered, reformed);
- b) entrepreneurial spirit (i.e. a progressive, inventive, dynamic, insightful political will).

In their book, the authors present 10 stages of governmental reforms as if they were the 10 Old Testament Commandments that “every member of the NPM church” should remember:

1. Catalytic government: steering rather than rowing.
2. Community-owned government: empowering rather than serving.
3. Competitive government: injecting competition into service delivery.
4. Mission-driven government: transforming rule-driven organisations.
5. Results-oriented government: funding outcomes, not inputs.
6. Customer-driven government: meeting the needs of the customer, not the bureaucracy.
7. Enterprising government: earning rather than spending.
8. Anticipatory government: prevention rather than cure.
9. Decentralised government: from hierarchy to participation and teamwork.
10. Market-oriented government: leveraging change through the market.

Some of these principles are rhetorical metaphors, such as “steering rather than rowing”. The others are but statements that, along in Cicero’s line of thought, affect the will and actions of the audience, for instance: “meeting the needs of the customer, not the bureaucracy”, indicate the direction of an action, for instance: “from hierarchy to participation and teamwork”. Most of the statements appear to be two-fold, their first part defining the type of government (anticipatory, catalytic, decentralised), and the second part giving a brief explanation on the basis of logic (“earning rather than spending”) or an allegory (“steering rather than rowing”).

But why should public sector managers believe in myths? Kieser (1997, p. 61) is straightforward: “The trick of myth creator <...> lies in the replacement of the unfamiliar with the familiar, the explanation for the inexplicable, the name for the unnameable”. Myth is necessary when something happens what and is hard to explain or comprehend, and when we find ourselves in an extreme hostile situation (Campbell, 1988). The New Public Management offers a “ready-to-use” toolkit of how to fix the crisis in the public sector. However, NPM arguments are based on beliefs rather than scientific evidences, in other words attempts are made to persuade the audience with rhetoric. The NPM meta-narrative could be reduced to the two basic myths:

1. There is one way of how to create the modern state, and this way is NPM. It is a rhetorical game with such terms as “modern” and “modernisation”. According to Tuménas (2010), from the scientific research point of view, the term *modern* is just as empty as the words *good*, *beautiful*, *nice*. Yet, management employs *modernisation* narratives, and, as a rhetorical tool, they serve perfectly well persuading different audiences – employees, citizens, colleagues. The narratives of modernisation and progress are based on the myth of Prometheus who brought fire to the humans, which makes them immensely persuasive and “capacious” at the same time – the *modernisation* can accommodate virtually any type of content.

2. The NPM is the antithesis of the traditional public administration. The struggle between good (NPM managers) and evil (bureaucrats) is a rhetorical tool that is used to add drama to the situation and draw the audience's attention.

In Tumėnas's (2010) words, the main rhetorical instrument is the creation of different stories, which are primarily designed to instil emotion rather than critical thinking. Morgan (2006) suggests that, first of all, good managers and leaders are good interpreters of situations and storytellers. Managers use mundane language to tell stories for employees about organization's strategy, development, goals and objectives. From this perspective, the NPM is also a myth or a "story"; however it is used as a management tool to persuade colleagues, subordinates and citizens that public management reforms are necessary.

5. PROPAGANDA RHETORIC ACCORDING TO BASIC MYTHOLOGICAL SCHEMES: THE DISCOURSE OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REFORMS IN LITHUANIA

In this section we aim to show how rhetoric tools of propaganda are employed to interpret the crisis situation and to create an explanatory story in order to shape public opinion. Propaganda is a form of public, institutionally regulated communication network to persuade the masses or certain social groups (Mažeikis, 2010). From the perspective of social discourse, propaganda aims to form public opinion, to introduce particular topics, and seeks to focus citizen's attention on the certain objects/phenomena. For example, one of the key issues of the New Public Management agenda is the introduction of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model and the adoption of private sector management methods. However, this is not just a matter of managerial technique but also the matter of citizen's attitudes and beliefs. The proponents of liberal ideology argue that private sector management is the best and most effective way to improve the quality of public services. The role of state in economy is used to be described in a negative light, employing, for example, rhetorical contrasts like "the state is a bad owner", "the state is the biggest capitalist in Lithuania". Private business representatives like to stress that they are able to manage companies and know how to do it, because it is "their" money that is at stake, whereas directors of state-owned companies and institutions *a priori* are accused for of taking no liability towards the people; they do not accept any risk and are prone to embezzlement. This kind of rhetoric is very convenient because it hides up the true goals that the society should be aware of. Rhetoric often appeals to historical precedents and in some cases even to *counter-precedents*. For instance, it is popular to stress that in Soviet times all companies were controlled by the state, therefore they were inefficient, management was unprofessional, and all citizens were struggling with a deficit of in consumer goods. On the other hand, people tend to "forget" instances when companies that had already been privatised in Post-Soviet times were mismanaged, either wilfully or for because of lack of competence. Yet, as we have already mentioned in the beginning of this article, rhetoric is an art of what people believe in and what they should believe in rather of what is than the truth.

LEO LT was the biggest and most controversial Public Private Partnership (PPP) project in Lithuania. In 2008, the Lithuanian government signed an agreement with the private Lithuanian company *NDX Energija*, to create *LEO LT*, a national investment company to build a nuclear power plant and energy links to the EU. *NDX Energija*, a firm controlled by the owners of the retail giant *Vilniaus Prekyba*, the largest retailer in the Baltics, was the key private investor and main shareholder of *LEO LT*. However, from the

very beginning, the *LEO LT* project sparked controversy regarding the competences and experience of *NDX Energija* in electrical power business. In anticipation of negative public opinion, *NDX Energija* involved rhetoric to convince politicians and citizens that only a private investor would be able to implement such a complicated project. Žilvinas Marcinkevičius, a director for of the former *NDX Energija* (*LEO LT* investor), put it harshly during a talk show on *LNK TV* channel:

"<...>What makes me different from all of you sitting here now is that I am really committed to built nuclear power plant together with my colleagues. Second, I am the only one among those present here today who has his own personal money and the money of his colleagues at stake. <...> Governmental money is not yours and you should keep hands away." (Damulytė, 2008).

Rhetorically, this passage echoes the Old Testament tale of the Prophet Moses and the Israeli tribe. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and Moses rescued them and leaded led them to the Promised Land. Moses made a radical decision, but he was inspired by God ("*<... I am really committed to build...>*"), appearing to him as a burning bush. Even after joining the EU, Lithuania is has been dependent on Russian energy sources thus suffering from energy "slavery", and *NDX Energija*, as a "new Moses", proposes a solution on how "to save the Lithuanian tribe". *NDX Energija* was "inspired" and "called" by our new God – private interest. From the perspective of the economic logic of the project, the investors should talk about efficiency, energy prices and other details. However, all these things are too complicated and too hard to understand for ordinary people. As it was stated above, in such cases, rhetoric hides the true goals of the advocates. Further development of events showed that the main aim of *LEO LT* was to monopolise the Lithuanian energy power market and to benefit from rent seeking activities. In 2009, the Lithuanian Government, as the main shareholder, decided to break up *LEO LT* and voted in favour of company liquidation.

Therefore, the discourse of public management reforms is supported by propaganda rhetoric, which, according to Mažeikis (2010), is one of the most important instruments of persuasion, people's motivation, and symbolic world development. From the perspective of form and content, rhetorical arguments are based on the logic; however, the procedure of persuasion uses a lot of different arguments that are not all just logical. One of the most common arguments is reference to precedents and authority.

Propaganda rhetoric generalises, accentuates, embellishes, highlights, and provides additional reasoning for government bodies, managers, economists, and sociologists (Mažeikis, 2010). The knowledge economy "building" in Lithuania is one more case of propaganda rhetoric in the public sector. In 2000, the European Council set a strategic EU objective – in ten years to make the European Union economy the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world in ten years' time. An association of *Knowledge Economy Forum* was founded in Lithuania the very same year. This forum pursues different goals. First, it is lobbyism, or promoting an environment that favours knowledge economy development; second, it is propaganda, or dissemination of the ideas, values and mentality of knowledge economy. As Vytautas Naktinis, a *Knowledge Economy Forum* board member put it:

"We are leaving the Industrial Age behind and, whether we like it or not, are moving towards the Age of Knowledge, the age of the knowledge economy." (Naktinis, 2001).

The Knowledge Economy is a broad concept with wide room for interpretations. It is based on the myth of Prometheus who brought the fire to humans. In the same vein, the

knowledge economy protagonists claim for bringing to be the promoters of the progress to in the backward Lithuanian economy. The discussion of on the “age of knowledge”, “society of knowledge”, “economy of knowledge” aims to create what Mažeikis (2010) defines as predisposition – a primitive, pre-reflex tendency to believe that Lithuania is moving ahead quite well towards developing of knowledge economy, suppressing the popular belief that the country’s economy has a low added value and lacks innovations. However, the Innovation Union Scoreboard (2013) indicates that it is too early to speak about the real knowledge economy. Lithuania, together with Portugal, Malta, Greece and some other countries only belongs only to the group of moderate innovators. The lack of any logical reasoning why Lithuania makes so slow progress in creating knowledge economy is compensated by symbols. For instance, *Saulėtekio Slėnis (Sunrise Valley)* – a cluster of science and studies – was founded in 2002; the founders believe that the name will induce associations with the name of Silicon Valley in the US.

Rhetorically formulated, basic statements lead to further logical reasoning, chronological order of events, visualisation of key points (Mažeikis, 2010). The system of basic statements acts as a public opinion “platform”, which enables to construct new spin-off projects. On March 8th, 2002 Vilnius Mayor Artūras Zuokas and Kaunas Mayor Erikas Tamašauskas signed a Letter of Intent, stating that Vilnius and Kaunas municipalities would start to merge the two biggest Lithuanian cities in order to create a new Europe wide centre (“dipole city”) of business, education and science, to accelerate social socio-economic development, and to enhance economy competitiveness. A marketing programme for the “dipole city” was introduced in 2005, aiming aimed to shape a the public opinion and:

“to persuade the Pan-Baltic countries and Lithuanian regions that the city of Vilnius, and Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city”, as well, is an open and attractive area for knowledge economy development, able both to offer intellectual products and service and to become a convenient place for new knowledge-based business.

To persuade the citizens and companies of the city of Vilnius, and Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city”, as well, that they can and should utilise the advantages offered by knowledge economy and turn themselves into structures, organisations and individuals that are even more open to knowledge than they are now.” (Leichteris, Eimontaitė, Kirvaitienė, 2005).

The programme of Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city” was based on a certain belief that knowledge economy already exists in Lithuania. According to the Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city” guide for investors (2006, p. 5), “knowledge economy is a reality, and not just a vision in Lithuania”, according to Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city” guide for investors (2006, p. 5). In terms of population and economy size, Vilnius and Kaunas have serious competitors such as Riga, Warsaw and even Minsk. Therefore, the propaganda rhetoric of “dipole city” knowledge economy has been employed to win a public relations campaign, and aimed to position Vilnius–Kaunas city as a unique place for investors and tourists.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In many cases, such as the construction of a new nuclear power plant or knowledge economy development, governments deal with very complex and complicated issues. It is not easy to reach a consensus on how to manage the public sector, on why it should be reformed, on who should benefit from it and who should sacrifice. That’s why logical argumentation and analysis is substituted by with persuasion and propaganda rhetoric. The paper argues that New Public Management, rather to be instead of being considered as a

theory or normative model, should be analysed from the perspective of rhetorical managerial activities. Rhetorical analysis provides a source for understanding how meta-narratives are employed in order to communicate new ideas about radical transformations in the public sector. In particular, the paper highlights that the contemporary discourse of public sector reforms is influenced by post-modern ideas of symbolic management and storytelling.

The New Public Management is frequently criticised for lacking in scientific rigour and conceptuality; however, in terms of managerial practice, the NPM is a method designed to motivate and inspire public sector managers and to shape public opinion about the ongoing reforms. First, by communicating stories and rhetorical passages, politicians and public sector managers aim to present the interpretation of the current state of affairs in the country. Second, they propose the ways means on how to deal with the crisis. From this perspective, New Public Management provides the ideas based on widely accepted opinions (*endoxa*) and myths, and packed in a simple and “easy to digest” form. The article shows how the project of a new nuclear power plant construction in Lithuania was presented in the light of Public Private Partnership ideas. The positive role of the private investor was communicated by employing the myth of Salvation of the Israelites tribe. Instead of logical argumentation, the commonly accepted opinion that “the state is a bad owner and manager” was also used extensively.

The discourse of public management reforms is constructed according to two basic mythological schemes, such as the fight between Good (progress-minded reformers) and Evil (bureaucrats). The second mythological scheme of modernisation, progress and advancement is based on the Myth of Prometheus. The article shows that the lack of logical argumentation on why Lithuania falls behind to develop in developing knowledge economy is substituted by symbolic speaking. Persuasive rhetorical activities formed the predisposition of an absolute knowledge economy success in Lithuania, and, on this platform, new stories and metaphors, such as the *Saulėtekio Slėnis* (*Sunrise Valley*) and the Vilnius–Kaunas “dipole city”, were created.

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