Globalized Public Management: An Interdisciplinary Design Science?

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ABSTRACT

This essay complements that of Hou et al. (Hou, Yilin, Anna Ya Ni, Ora-orn Poocharoen, Kaifeng Yang, and Zhirong Zhao. 2010. The case for public administration with a global perspective. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 20) on globalized public management. It focuses on public management as an interdisciplinary design science that reconnects with the themes of prior discussion, make links to the current array of theoretical and conceptual frameworks already in use, and discusses institutional capacity in the field to meet the globalization challenge. The essay concludes that although public management has come along way, an exciting journey is still ahead for the field.

“Public administration with a global perspective” penned by Hou et al. (2010) represents an endeavor that would be subscribed to by the majority of scholars working in the field. Globalization has grown over recent centuries, and levels of global interconnectedness most recently resulted in the need for major public intervention in response to the financial crisis that flooded out of the housing markets of the United States across the world resulting in the near collapse of the economies of some countries. This interconnection has become typified by turbulence in organizational environments—that is change-on-change in relation to complexity, uncertainty, and dynamism. Public management scholars need to keep apace of such change to ensure that their work has real-world relevance, be this the management of complex social programs or climate change that spans the boundaries of jurisdictions. This essay proposes that one possible way to address and better understand these issues of globalization, interconnectivity, and real-world problems is through revisiting discussions of public management as an interdisciplinary “design” science (Frederickson 1990; Shangraw and Crow 1989; Simon 1996).

The balance of this essay picks up on three themes raised by Hou et al. (2010) that are of importance to the topic of globalization. The first issue addressed is that of globalized public management as an interdisciplinary design science that reconnects with the themes of prior discussion. Second, topics of relevance to a globalized public management are touched on to illustrate the extent to which our current array of theoretical and conceptual frameworks are already ideally suited to the study of public management and point to ways...
in which contingency theory can be used to develop new theoretical perspectives. The final topic of this essay is institutional capacity in the field to meet the globalization challenge—the tools necessary to achieve interdisciplinary research—and includes a briefly sketched action plan.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY DESIGN SCIENCE**

Interdisciplinarity is concerned with the integration of theory, methods or knowledge from two or more traditionally distinct disciplines. Brewer (1999) identifies four characteristics: problem orientation, contextuality, multiple methods, and an overriding concern for the human dimensions and values. These speak directly to the heart of public administration and management scholarship that is by its very nature interdisciplinary. To advance the public good or public values, it is necessary to have an understanding of economics, finance, law, political science, management and organizational studies, and so forth. Efforts explicitly addressing interdisciplinarity in public management journals are, however, lagging in comparison to other areas of enquiry and the field of interdisciplinary studies. A review in January 2010 on the Web of Science’s Social Science Index searching for the term interdiscipl* in title of abstract of articles led to the identification of 5750 articles. Of these, 45 (or 0.008%) were published in journals defined by the search engine as belonging to public administration. This clearly does not mean that those who identify themselves as primarily public management scholars do not publish on this issue, they may not feel it is necessary to use such a term in a field constituted by other disciplines or may do so in journals located in other fields. It does, however, suggest that if interdisciplinary is a route to a more globalized public management more explicitly needs to be done or that we need to reinvigorate the field through interdisciplinarity.

One way to achieve this is by revisiting the notion of public administration and public management as a design science. Public management is a field of endeavor that addresses real-world problems, and as such is what Herbert Simon (1996) termed a “science of design.” A design science is orientated to solving real-world problems that are complex, human-related and involve value judgments—these notions are central to the endeavor of interdisciplinary research as noted above. Shangraw and Crow (1989, 156) make the case that “Defining public administration as a design science means that the role of the field is to design and evaluate institutions, mechanisms, and processes that convert collective will and public resources into social profit.” Although interdisciplinarity and a science of design are at the core of what the majority of those working in the field seek to attain, it is infrequently articulated—often competition is seen for public administration and law, public administration and personnel, and so on. These areas are clearly important areas of enquiry, but if the quest is about how public administration can make a unique contribution to social science knowledge, building upon its inherent design science and interdisciplinary components, then we need to be more explicit.

Interdisciplinary design science public management, by connecting theory to practice in the implementation of public policies, can be the launch pad for a globalized public management. It opens up what is a black box for other disciplines and examines the variables that influence the adoption of new practices, their implementation, and the effectiveness of the strategies adopted. Given the growing complexity of the issues facing public organizations, governments, and their agents have turned to governance strategies, networked partnerships, and collaboration that represent interdisciplinary in practice drawing
together agencies from the realms of the public, private, and civil society (see recent work in *JPART* from different parts of the world: Andrews and Entwistle 2010; Daley 2009; Krueathep et al. 2010; and a special issue edited by Heinrich and Milward [2010] on the “state of agents”). Many public management scholars have been engaging with this debate, often from a perspective of networks and governance that have global appeal (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; O’Toole 1997), whereas others have touched on this issue by seeking to blend disciplines (see, e.g., Nickel’s [2009] discussion on sociology and public administration).

The final building block to establish an interdisciplinary design science is alluded to in the above. Simon envisioned a design science as one where the problems seeking to be solved arise from the external environment. The articulation by Shangraw and Crow (1989) of “public administration as a design science” addresses the topic of inner and outer environments. In other fields of the social sciences contingency theory plays a central role in the development of explanations (Lorsch and Morse 1974). Contingency theory has a long pedigree in public administration (see Greenwood et al. 1976) and contends that it is only possible to understand public administration and policy outcomes when the relationship between internal organizational practices are examined in relation to the environments in which they are examined.

**TOPICS OF GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Interdisciplinarity has grown from problems of human existence—researchers have turned their attention to complex questions such as sustainable development and more recently climate change, poverty, and public health epidemics. Although public management has a core role to play in these areas, an interdisciplinary effort can also be targeted on home grown public management topics where there is a pedigree of research and an accumulation of knowledge. Such topics include accountability, corruption, goal ambiguity, management reform, publicness, performance, and red tape (Bozeman 1987, 2000, 2007; Boyne and Walker 2005; Chun and Rainey 2005; Peters and Pierre 2003; Pollitt and Bouckeart 2004; Rainey 2003; Walker et al. 2010). Scholars around the world have been engaged in a science of design as they seek solutions to these problems.

These topics have global reach. Management reform, to just touch on one of these areas, has been studied as a largely global phenomena, though one typically associated with liberal democracies (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2005; Pollitt and Bouckeart 2004). A recent review by Walker et al. (2010) of English language public management literature in South and East Asia points toward a global enquiry on variables central to the discipline. Most widely studied was management reform with the unit of analysis focusing upon systems of government, budgeting or management, and with an emphasis upon comparative work and understanding work in its context. A review of public management literature in Chinese by Wu et al. (2010) identifies philosophy and ethics, local government, management reform, human resource management, and organizational theory as the five most popular topics that Mainland China scholars grappled with between 1998 and 2008. Questions of management reform are ripe for interdisciplinary study because the adoption of new practices is not just an organizational phenomenon. They are, first, also design science questions about the best way to make arrangements for the delivery of public services and as such are influenced by behavioral, system, and natural sciences. Second, they are predicated upon contingency theory and as such it would be
anticipated that the factors leading to successful policy outcomes and contributing toward
the public good will be very different in Canada and China, and France or Fiji. More spe-
cifically, the work of Gao (2010) has sought to show how performance management re-
gimes have become something very different from their Western origins in Mainland China
as they have been used as systems of personnel control (rather than management control) to
achieve the objectives of higher levels of government.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR GLOBALIZED PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Scholars working on questions of interdisciplinarity are keen to point toward a second key
dimension that has to go hand-in-hand with integration and formation: institutional capac-
ity (Aboelala et al. 2006). Without this, it would not be possible to achieve design science
outcomes.

Public management programs have a long pedigree in North America and Europe
providing the capacity to develop their field. The American Society for Public Adminis-
tration was set up 1938, *Public Administration*, established in the United Kingdom in the
1920s, is now publishing its 88th volume making it the longest established journal in the
field, and in continental Europe, the International Institute for Administrative Sciences,
established in 1930, draws together practitioners and scholars with a global reach. Hou
et al. (2010) point toward the growth (and subsequent decline) or the comparative admin-
istrative group and much of their focus is upon the isolationist position the US community
took or rather arrived at. If we take a global perspective on emerging institutional structures
for capacity, there is much to be optimistic about.

Looking initially from within the United States and *Public Management Research
Association* and *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, there are clearly
signs of change and internationalization within the United States as PMRA seeks to broaden
its vistas (see Bozeman and Frederickson [2006] for an overview of this process). This
includes two small-scale sponsored conferences (see Boyne and Walker 2005; Boyne
et al. 2006; Walker and Boyne 2009). The first “off year” *Public Management Research
Association* conference was hosted in Hong Kong in October 2010 in conjunction with
*International Research Society on Public Management*. These patterns are reflected in
in *JPART*, and of these 69, representing 31.4% of authors, were based at Universities out-
side the United States. At the 2009 Public Management Research Conference meeting held
at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at the Ohio State University, 92 universities were
represented, and 36 of these were non-US institutions, totaling 65 international delegates.
These figures represent a rapid increase in the number of international delegates attending
the biannual *Public Management Research Association* meeting (one that was invitation
only until early 2000s).

Looking at other institutional arrangements points toward the globalization of public
administration. The *International Research Society for Public Management* has a board of
20 drawn from 10 countries—Australia and the United Kingdom are represented by five
each, the United States has three members, and Brazil, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New
Zealand, South Korea, and Switzerland have a member each. The *International Public
Management Network* traverses the globe with its membership and conference. The *Asian
Forum on Public Management* was relaunched in January 2010 as the *Asian Association for
Public Administration*. This followed a similar pattern to other associations, moving from
a small group of academics that were known to each other for their scholarship and common interests into an open membership organization.

The growing international interconnectedness of the public management community testifies to growing capacity in the field as more and more scholars engage with questions about the most appropriate way to design systems of public management and policy. Although this capacity is growing, it has a long way to go and needs to include changes to teaching curricular, research questions, the ways in which research is funded (the UK Economic and Social Research Council now mandates grant applicants discuss the interdisciplinary nature of their proposal), the way research teams form, and the mechanisms that universities put in place to ensure that interdisciplinary design science can flourish. As an example of this growing capacity, in the Peoples Republic of China, there were 24 MPA programs in 2004, the number is now in excess of 100 with over 1500 academics. These students are schooled on an international diet of truly international public management translated from the best-known authors around the globe. It may be in a global setting that the interdisciplinary design science of public management bears most fruit.

An action plan to take forward public administration as a global interdisciplinary design science requires building upon what has been done to date. Collaboration in research is likely to require institutional support and have incentives. To date the majority of researchers have focused on national topics—this is to be expected given the need to resolve domestic problems. Growth in the global interconnection of domestic topics and the emergence of global problems are likely to move this agenda forward more quickly. To move beyond this position to focus on global public management, nonetheless, requires action. For research, this can include more proactive approaches by research funders toward collaborative projects, the need for collaboration between academics beyond bilateral relationships, establishing and funding working groups (perhaps first in regions and then between regions), and establishing stronger relationships between public administration associations in different places. Critically, global public administration research has to be theory driven to maintain its interdisciplinary design science focus. Teaching can also play a very important role. An initial place to commence would be with exchange programs for students. However, it is unlikely that real progress can be made until joint programs are in place that requires students to spend time gaining credits for their degree in sister institution in a different continent. Such programs may enable an undergraduate to spend 1 year in a different country or at the Executive MPA level see students traveling to different locations for modules on their course. Barriers to progress will include identifying a common language, developing understanding of different contexts and resources. For example, the review by Wu et al. (2010) notes that of the thousands of articles reviewed a large number do not contain research questions or methods, whereas Walker et al. (2010) note that over half the studies they reviewed were argumentation pieces. Research at the level of argument and description is unlikely to fulfill the goal a design science, and much will need to be done to raise capacity. However, these are not insurmountable. Prioritizing a global interdisciplinary design science in public management programs and developing new knowledge on the theme of global public administration should provide the incentives to drive forward such an agenda.

This brief essay lightly treads upon topics and issues long debated in public management—as noted in the introduction the issues of design sciences and interdisciplinary work have been raised since 1950s, were discussed at Minnowbrook III, and continue to
inform our scholarship (Bouckaert et al. 2005; Mosher 1956; Shangraw and Crow 1989; Simon 1996). We have much excitement to look forward to over coming years—the agenda for future scholarship is open and wide and is ripe for the taking as interdisciplinary design science questions based on either policy and practice or stemming from intellectual curiosity abound. Hou et al. (2010) importantly note that global public administration should not be a subfield of the discipline; this essay contends that an approach based around interdisciplinary design science should integrate global issues into its study. Moe (1994, 24) noted integrating knowledge from different fields in public management should lead to “the most exciting theoretical work in social science” concluding:

“Sounds pretty good to me.”

Same here!

REFERENCES


