

Contemplating the big five questions in public administration and management curriculation

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abstract

Public Administration and Management, as an applied discipline, needs to be reviewed and adjusted constantly. In this way it will remain relevant to scholars, students, public sector practitioners and society in general. Within a dynamic higher education landscape this process is known as curriculation.

Through the application of the principles of Complexity Theory, this article aims to facilitate curriculation endeavors in Public Administration and Management by means of five 'big' questions that should be contemplated by all those involved in curriculation decisions. The article does not attempt to provide answers to these questions, but rather to guide a curriculation discourse by posing the 'right' questions. It is argued that these questions will contextualise any decisions regarding curriculation and could contribute to the discourse on relevancy regarding Public Administration and Management teaching at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

Orientation

Any discipline which has as locus (research domain) and focus dynamic phenomena such as societal challenges and governance trends has to stay abreast of the latest developments, including new practices, theories and cognitive frameworks. It is imperative for the curricula of disciplines to remain relevant and thus provide students with the latest developments in practices and theories and make a contribution to society in general. Therefore it is

vital that these curricula are reviewed periodically. This exercise is known as 'curriculation'.

A curriculum can be regarded as a set of course-work and content offered by a university (including universities of technology for the purpose of this article) as part of a specific learning programme (i.e. qualification; Jackson 1992:3). A curriculum collectively determines the teaching, learning, and assessment that are applicable to a given learning programme. A critical point is that role-players involved in curriculation need to define the programme's objectives clearly. These are usually expressed in terms of learning outcomes in an outcomes-based, educational paradigm. Thereafter the role-players should demarcate the content (course material), as well as the teaching and assessment strategy (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman 1995:76). The outcomes are typically grouped in modules or study units, and a curriculum comprises a collection of such modules or study units. For the purpose of this article curriculation refers to the modification of existing programmes in Public Administration and Management in terms of their design and content.

Any curriculation effort (or perhaps it is more correct to refer to *re*-curriculation in cases where a body of knowledge and curriculum already exist for established disciplines), cannot occur within a vacuum. Subject matter experts, programme design professionals, and practitioners, should take into consideration the wider context within which the academic programme will be offered.

The purpose of this article is not to explore the principles and processes associated with the curriculation exercise as such. No attention will therefore be paid to the technicalities associated with curriculum design, such as the appropriate cognitive levels in terms of the following aspects: National Qualifications Framework (NQF), course design, learning outcomes, articulation, admission requirements, assessment criteria, core, fundamental or elective modules, credits, and so forth. Rather, five fundamental ('big') questions are proposed, which should guide discourse in Public Administration and Management (PAM). The aim of these questions will be to assist role-players in their curriculation efforts. It is argued that such questions will contextualize any decisions regarding curriculation and could contribute to the discourse on relevancy regarding PAM teaching at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

To contextualise curriculation efforts, the dynamic environment of higher education in South Africa will be explored first. Complexity Theory will then be highlighted and applied in order to illustrate the necessity to unpack a complex phenomenon by means of its constituent parts. Lastly, the five big questions will be posed with appropriate sub-questions to help guide curriculation endeavors.

The dynamic landscape of higher education

A curriculum usually defines the learning that is expected to take place during a course or programme of study in which knowledge, skills and attitudes are transferred. A curriculum should also reflect the teaching, learning and assessment methods and provide an indication of the learning resources required to support the effective delivery of the course (McKimm 2003). Curriculum development is not carried out in isolation from other activities. It rather forms part of an iterative planning, development, implementation and review cycle. In the case of South Africa, curriculum exercises in PA Mare are also part of regular review, programme evaluation, and quality assurance cycles at universities. Curriculum therefore does not occur in isolation, but should take into consideration the realities the one encounters in higher education.

The higher education landscape changed significantly in the last decade in South Africa. The restructuring of the South African higher education system ranges widely from new political direction, new legislation, the creation of new or rationalised institutional arrangements, and mergers. Mergers entail the combination of two or more separate institutions of higher learning into a single entity under a single governing body. Especially mergers between universities and former technikons (now universities of technology) are significant for purpose of this article. Multi-campus were formed in cases where unitary institutions have geographically distant delivery sites. An example of distant delivery sites is North-West University (NWU), which, as unitary institution, has decentralised sites on Potchefstroom, Mahikeng, and Vaal Triangle campuses.

The *Higher Education Act* 101 of 1997 (as amended by Act 39 of 2008) was promulgated and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was formed in May 2009 as a new department, bringing together all post-school education and training institutions that formerly resided under the Department of Education. Attempts also were made to curb the plethora of new programmes and module offerings through the development of a Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM).

Based on the National Plan Vision 2030 it seems that Further Education and Training (FET) colleges will play a more significant role in the country's strategy to develop higher education skills. The skills development strategy interfaces with existing strategies and plans such as the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan 2, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010-2030, and the Ten-Year Innovation Plan. According to Vision 2030 and the Department of Higher Education and Training's Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (issued on 12 January 2012), FET colleges should produce at least 30 000 artisans a year in specific skills areas, such as civil engineering, mining technology, information technology, finance, electrical

infrastructure and construction and accounting. These skills are needed to make South Africa's comprehensive development programme of national infrastructure a success. Vocational education at the FET colleges should not be a dead-end; the Green Paper makes proposals to ensure pathways that allow students to move on to university education after completing their vocational qualifications if they wish to do so. What are the curriculum challenges for Public Administration and Management associated with this type of mobility? How should universities gear itself to bridge the potential gap between vocational training (FET) and the theoretical-based programmes typically offered by universities?

The registration and curriculum of new programmes are guided by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and the respective levels on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), as well as the principles of outcomes-based education.

The National Research Foundation (NRF), established in April 1999, is responsible to support research and innovation through its *Research and Innovation Support and Advancement Agency* (RISA). An important factor in the production of knowledge through universities is the focus areas that the NRF developed to guide the assessment of grant applications, as well as the way that research is funded. Only research that have scientific merit and show relevance for South Africa's development programmes (building high-level infrastructure and becoming globally more competitive), typically receive grants. NRF-funding thus supports the research agenda of the state. Critique against this position could be that more normative, theory-building research that is typical of social sciences is currently not funded adequately.

Based on the *Skills Development Levies Act* 9 of 1999 (as amended by Act 24 of 2010) and the *Skills Development Act* 97 of 1998 (as amended by Act 37 of 2008), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) are obliged to, amongst other activities, develop Sector Skills Plans, and receive and evaluate Workplace Skills Plans and Annual Training reports from employers. These plans are aimed at accelerating the delivery of scarce and critical skills in the country. SETAs are also expected to design Learning Programmes (formerly known as 'learnerships') in conjunction with training service providers to implement apprenticeships and vocational skills programmes.

It is expected of universities that wish to partake in short learning programmes to register as a service provider with the relevant SETA. The university also should ensure that the nature of the programme (curriculum) conforms to the unit standards, credits, and assessment criteria specified by the SETA. This has implications for the formal recognition (credits) and alignment of short learning programmes with formal programmes at the institution.

A further issue that could influence curriculum efforts in the higher education landscape is the perceived lowering of Grade 12 standards. This is a

highly contentious and politically-charged issue, but universities increasingly report weaker reading and writing abilities amongst first-year entrants. Due to the potential implication on admission requirements, articulation, tuition, and assessment, curriculum efforts need to take these realities into account.

This concludes a brief overview of the dynamics associated with the higher education landscape in South Africa. In the next section PAM as a complex, adaptive system is explored to illustrate the necessity to unpack the discipline in smaller parts by means of five 'big' questions.

Public administration and management as a complex adaptive system

Any attempt to contemplate the content of any academic programme in Public Administration and Management should consider a wide variety of possible variables. Such variables may, to varying degrees, influence eventual decisions regarding a curriculum. Due to the complexities associated with it, the curriculum for a highly dynamic subject discipline such as PAM may be described as a 'wicked' problem. In Complexity Theory vocabulary a 'wicked' problem is defined by Camillus (2008:99) as a complex problem that is difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognise.

A complex system can be regarded as a system that comprises interconnected and interdependent parts that as a whole (system) portrays certain properties, which are not evident when observing the individual parts (Joslyn and Rocha 2000:72). Dynamic systems can be classified as chaotic, complex adaptive, or nonlinear (Newman 2010:45). A complex adaptive system is diverse in nature and consists of multiple interconnected elements. Such systems are adaptive in the sense that they have the capacity to alter, change and learn from experience. An example of a complex adaptive system is a social grouping (such as a political party) that engages in particular activities and behaviour within a certain society (Cohen and Havlin 2010:45).

Based on Complexity Theory it is argued that in order to understand a system it is necessary to unpack it into smaller subsystems, entities or parts that assemble the 'whole'. It is argued that the whole could be better understood based on its smaller parts. Complexity Theory, however, furthermore holds that although it is useful to understand the smaller parts in terms of the whole, the researcher may lose sight of the intricate interdependencies between the smaller parts when viewed in isolation. In other words, when one views the smaller parts in isolation the dynamics that are associated with these combined parts interacting interdependently are negated.

By placing the principles of Complexity Theory within the realms of PAM curricula, one may argue that this discipline could be regarded as a system comprising of smaller subsystems (functional domains), which function within a larger system (i.e. developmental state). The five big questions below are based on this argument. The 'larger system' refers to the nature of the state (as locus and focus of PAM research and theory-building endeavors), as well as the nature of the tertiary fraternity (i.e. university) within which PAM programmes are offered. The next level within the complex system refers to the nature of the discipline, its paradigmatic development, and finally, to its content (curriculum). Inductive logic as well as Complexity Theory are thus utilised to unpack and grasp the complex system better, as well as its smaller, interrelated parts (content) – hence the need to ask the right questions regarding curricula efforts.

In the next section five 'big' questions are posed to guide such a curricula inquiry. The author does not imply that these questions are complete, in other words that these are the only questions to be asked, but rather contend that these are the most fundamental questions that should be posed by all role-players involved in curricula. In turn, each question should be guided and refined by further 'smaller' questions (constituting parts of a system), again to inform the 'whole'. These five questions are intended to underscore the complexities that are associated with PAM teaching in general and PAM curricula in particular.

The big five questions for PAM curricula

Any dynamic discipline, such as PAM, continuously finds itself struggling to answer its "big questions". Neumann (1995:410), for example, argues that Public Administration lacks an understanding of what its big questions should be – or even how to define those questions. Other scholars such as Behn (1995) further states that if Public Administration wishes to be considered a discipline that is serious about its field of study, it must ponder its own big questions. According to Behn (1995) true big questions in PAM should focus on the nature of knowledge production (i.e. research, theory-building, etc.) and teaching.

Any curricula effort boils down to choices: choices of balance, content, weight, and relevance. Asking the right *questions* would facilitate making the right *choices*.

The five questions below are an attempt to suggest such fundamental or big questions, however posed within the context of curricula. It should be noted that the variables that should be considered in answering each question adequately are interconnected and interdependent. In other words, issues impacting on question 1 (Q1), for example, also affect 'answers' to other questions. As far as possible the author followed inductive logic in the way

questions are ordered. This implies that 'answers'(consensus) to question 1 will guide role-players in the curriculum effort to answer question 2, then 3, and so forth. It should be noted further that due to their complexity, any debate regarding the content of these questions warrants or deserve an article (or various articles) on their own. Within the limitations of this article the author thus attempts only to *guide* or facilitate discussions on curriculum through typical questions that should be asked, and does not endeavor to *answer* these questions. The tone of the article is thus one of a discourse amongst colleagues within the discipline.

Q1: What is the nature of the (South African) state?

Gerald Caiden, in his 1971 publication *The Dynamics of Public Administration*, stated that "...no one has yet produced a simple definition of public administration that is fully acceptable to both practitioners and scholars ...". Also Nicholas Henry (1992:20–51) reflects that "... Public Administration is a broad-ranging and amorphous combination of theory and practice." More contemporary attempts to define PAM, such as those of Fox and Meyer (1995:105), Thornhill and Hanekom (1995) and Wessels and Pauw (1999:9–25) portray some commonalities. These authors seem to concur that scholars in the subject field typically focus their studies on:

- The executive branch of government
- The public or civil service
- The bureaucracy charged with the implementation of public policy.

If we concur with these commonalities, the question arises as to what extent changes in the state will impact on the discipline. Should scholars in PAM only focus on the South African state? What about comparative analyses between various kinds of states (e.g. developmental states, paternalistic states, nanny states, failed states or welfare states)?

A state as a legal and political entity can be typified by its goals or direction (see Wiechers 1995:237). A fundamental question that needs to be debated in any curriculum exercise is to what extent the curriculum of PAM should reflect the direction (including the means to reach it, such as policy, strategy, programmes, etc.) of the state? Based on this fundamental question further sub-questions come to the fore, such as: To what extent should the curriculum of PAM reflect the socio-economic, political, demographical and developmental realities of the state? Should knowledge production and tuition activities in PAM mainly serve the needs and interests of the state, or should it rather focus on building and testing theories to develop the discipline further? How do scholars in PAM serve the state without becoming *servants* of the state? What

is the nature of 'serve' – without renouncing academic freedom, as defined by the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (18 Sept 1988)? Does it mean that PAM's curriculum will always be *reactive* in nature (i.e. reviewing and including the latest policy, strategy and programmes of Government into the curriculum), or can scholars, and is it expected of them, become more *pro-active* (i.e. leading and facilitating a research agenda to suggest innovative, cutting-edge responses to societal challenges)? How do we as scholars thus transcend the focus on '*what is*' towards a focus on '*what should be*'? How can scholars organise themselves to serve as 'think tanks' in the interest of the state and how should they disseminate this information to practice within society?

Furthermore, to what extent should PAM reflect the values, intensions and interventions of the state? Vil-Nkomo (1998:132) in this respect argues that "... a major responsibility is placed on scholars of public management and administration to advance the public sector and the country through relevant pedagogical approaches and innovative research". Is the acceptance of such a responsibility evident in current curriculum practices?

With the clear policy directives issued by the ruling party (African National Congress) it is evident that the aims of a 'developmental state' will be pursued in the years to come (see National Planning Commission Vision 2030). The Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (issued on 12 January 2012) makes the position of Government and the role of universities in this respect clear: "Improving research capacity will be a major focus for universities, with a particular focus on research to meet our developmental objectives." On a pragmatic level, how should the curriculum of PAM enhance this developmental agenda? What kind of knowledge, skills, and behavior is appropriate for public officials to facilitate a developmental state and adhere to the principles contained in Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa?

On a more theoretical level, a curriculum discourse about the interface between state, Government (practice) and PAM (theory) should consider the issues of political 'neutrality', the nonpartisan nature of the administration, and the dichotomy between politics and administration. These theoretical considerations should be juxtaposed on the agenda covering ideological dynamics and transformation in South Africa.

Q2: What is the nature of a (South African) university?

Since the formal establishment of universities, dating back to the establishment of the University of Bologna in 1088 (Kerr 2011:16), societies debated the nature and role of universities as public institutions. In short, it is argued that a university should pursue scientific studies for the transfer of knowledge and for

tuition and research purposes. Usually an addition is made: universities should also render a service to society (Huff 2003:122).

Within the transformation agenda of the Government of the day in South Africa a vibrant discourse exists regarding the role of universities in society. What role do universities play in the system of governance in the country? To what extent should universities contribute to issues such as global competition, national development, and the political economy of the state? Should a university remain only accessible to students who can afford such studies ('elitism') or is access to higher education a right that the state should facilitate through the 'massification' of education? By 2030, for example, the DHET aims to raise university enrolments to 1 500 000 (a projected participation rate of 23%) as opposed to the 2011 enrolments of 899 120 (a 16% participation rate). Are universities adequately funded, equipped and organised to accommodate such an increase? It could also be argued that nature of the state (Q1 above) will influence the research agenda and ultimately direct any decisions regarding research funding, student admission policies, as well as the way universities are subsidised.

Kraak (2000:89–92) convincingly illustrates how universities in South Africa experience changing 'modes' and that new knowledge production has significant implications for higher education. He (Kraak) explains that universities rapidly are moving away from a more traditional form of knowledge production and tuition (Mode 1) to a more entrepreneurial, skills-based paradigm (Mode 2). Based on international developments in especially Britain, Van Jaarsveldt and Wessels (2011:380) argue that there is evidence that PAM as discipline is moving away from a more generalist type of training to a more technical orientation. Should we make a choice between technical and academic relevance in curriculum, or attempt to strike a healthy balance between the two?

Mainly due to dwindling subsidies from the state, third-stream income generation has become a necessity. In the context of PAM, third-stream initiatives almost exclusively focus on managerial competencies and skills. A good example of such third-stream endeavours is the R10m contract obtained from the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA). According to this contract consortia of universities are tasked with the delivery of the *Executive Development Programme (EDP)/Post-graduate Certificate in Executive Leadership* to approximately 10 000 senior managers from national and provincial departments country-wide. This usually requires a curriculum effort to facilitate academic articulation to learners who successfully complete third-stream (short courses and skills-based learning programmes). Such an effort also will ensure that credits obtained non-formally can lead to access into formal qualifications and programmes. This, in turn, generally results in a focal point that is more vocationally oriented.

Minister Naledi Pandor commented on 4 April 2012 that universities are “... partly to blame for a lack of innovation ...”She continued to state that “... universities continue to focus on producing talent rather than technology”. These statements are indicative of the role that Government ascribes to universities in society in general and to economic development in particular.

Q3: What is the nature of the discipline?

Is PAM a social science or an applied management discipline? Does the focus of the discipline fall on vocational training to prepare prospective public officials for the labour market, or should the focus rather fall on the academic discipline that provides knowledge production, research, theory building and theory testing – or should the focus fall on both aspects? These are some of the pertinent questions that should be asked in curriculum.

Key sub-questions to guide a discourse on these big questions further include: What is the nature of a public institution in contrast to a private sector enterprise? How does the political milieu influence public institutions in comparison with those in the private sector? What does the administration and management of a public institution entail? What kind of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior is necessary to administer and manage such an institution successfully?

There seems to be general consensus amongst social scientists that Public Administration covers the field of study concerned with society and human behaviour (Potter 1988; Byrne 1998; Flyvberg 2001). Social sciences can be regarded as an umbrella-term for a wide variety of study fields, which stand in contrast to the natural sciences.

Roux and De Beer (2010) contend that the social sciences in South Africa are in a ‘state of crisis’. They base their argument on the inappropriate emphasis on the development of natural science and the pursuance of economic ideals (i.e. profit motive). Insight into human existence, reflection on social dynamics, and the loss of ‘thinking about thinking’ all lead to the increasing shallowness of social sciences. Roux (2012:23) further argues that ‘human’ is removed from the humanities and that ‘social’ is taken out of the social sciences, which have led to a general lack of a ‘moral consciousness’ in science. The distorted biasness towards natural (technical) sciences, the emphasis on relevance, and the way universities are organised, Roux (2012:32) argues, have led to a situation where social sciences are regarded as the ‘black sheep’ of the tertiary sector. He (Roux) further makes a case that knowledge production in the social sciences should entail far more than the search for empirical evidence and facts (positivism), but that insight, comprehension, interpretation, reflection, and the application of various schools of thought should be part of a ‘journey of discovery’. To what extent do we as scholars in our curriculum efforts prepare students to embark

on such a journey? In this regard Langrod (in Van Jaarsveldt and Wessels 2011:379) argues that universities should seek to 'create cultivated individuals rather than to train for specific professions'.

How philosophically grounded is a Philosophy Doctor (PhD), a D. Litt. et. Phil., or D.Phil in PAM currently in South Africa? White (1995:279) maintains that PAM is a social science with the 'least philosophical sophistication'. The author concurs with this assumption. It seems that the new generation of academics in PAM is not interested or adequately versed in the fundamental underpinnings of the discipline. Due to the perception that theory is 'boring' and 'irrelevant for the world of work', students are not adequately exposed to theories that are relevant to the discipline, such as Classical Organisational Theory, Social Contract Theory, Public Choice Theory, Contingency Theory, Postmodernism, Human Relations School of Thought, and so forth. The same remains true of the fundamentals of knowledge production such as phenomenology, epistemology, and positivism. The result of this theoretical 'impoverishment' is that students struggle to pursue a particular theoretical vantage point in especially postgraduate research and are not adequately adept at applying the principles of inductive, deductive or retroductive logic in their argumentation. Studies conducted by Wessels (2007:97–120) and Cameron and McLaverty (2007:69–96) illustrate how vocationally minded and technically focused PAM research has become.

Another sub-question that should be contemplated is the fact that the majority of schools and departments offering PAM at universities are situated in Business and Economic or Management faculties. Practice thus reveals the perceived acknowledgement that PAM fits better into the management domain – rather than into that of pure Social Sciences. The New Public Management (NPM) paradigm with the introduction of 'managerialism' and private sector practices and vocabulary, significantly influence this trend. This led to the blurring of distinctions typically made between public and private sector practices. Recent developments and trends, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), outsourcing, commercialisation and privatisation, further contributed to this haziness in distinction. A lack of clarity amongst the distinctions between public and private sector practices is further evident from the debates that often surface in university senates on the 'publicness' of *public* financial management and *public* human resources and how it differs from 'normal' typical B.Com. modules.

How does this trend towards 'managerialism' influence the practice of curriculum? Parties involved in curriculum should ask themselves: Do we prepare 'generalists' or 'specialists' for the labour market? Traditionally, PAM was supported or assisted by related disciplines such as Political Sciences, Sociology, Philosophy to operationalise the learning outcomes (usually 'generalist' in nature) that are associated with a BA or B. Admin. degree. However, if PAM

is part of a programme where other disciplines do not enhance outcomes typically associated with PAM teaching, one may end up with a student who is not adequately versed in societal dynamics, theory, humanities and statehood and citizenship issues. It seems further that if PAM is situated in management faculties, emphasis is placed increasingly on specialist 'how-to' (skills focus) training rather than on general contextual, 'why' questions (knowledge building). This issue accentuates the debate on 'technical versus academic relevance'.

If members of a particular school or department in PAM decide to pursue a more vocational focus in their curriculum, the question should be asked: To what extent should the curriculum cover the respective competency profiles that are to be developed for the various managerial positions in the Public Service? The SMS (Senior Management Service: positions from Directors to Directors General) Competency Profile or Framework (DPSA 2003), for example, focuses on critical generic competencies, which senior managers would be expected to possess, rather than functional/technical competencies, which are essential to a certain department or a specific job. The SMS Competency Framework consists of a set of ten generic competencies that communicate what is expected of Senior Managers. To become more vocationally orientated and more 'relevant' from a developmental focus, should these generic competency areas replace existing traditionally accepted knowledge or functional areas of PAM? (also see Q5 below).

The Public Service in general experience high levels of staff turnover. New recruits, especially from the private sector, entering the public domain usually require high-impact orientation, induction and skills programmes to ensure that they promptly reach their productive capacity and fit into the culture of Government. This suggests that a *lacuna* of skills in especially specialized functional areas need to be transferred to new incumbents.

Due to his involvement (facilitator and participant-observer) in capacity-building programmes for the past 20 years, the author can testify to the significant contribution that access for students to 'real life' situations or cases make to enhance both research and teaching. Academics can become isolated from the cutting-edge experiences of development, and since some information is simply not available in traditional means of information, such as text books and scholarly articles, the content of study material may not address real life issues, and lecturers may lose their legitimacy as authoritative figures or sources of expertise. Practical exposure enriches tuition since the lecturer can draw from real life cases to provide appropriate examples of certain management applications. This type of exposure could also impact on research endeavors. A more phenomenological perspective (i.e. action research) and multidisciplinary vantage point could be developed in addition to a more traditional positivist paradigm – typical of scientific university research. It is argued that interaction based on 'practice-theory' is necessary to prevent stagnation in the discipline and will enhance

the relevance of the curriculum. In this regard Atkinson and Bekker (2004:454) contend that an 'intellectual bridge' needs to be built between the 'thinkers' (academics) and the 'do-ers' (public officials). Striking the right balance between traditional tuition and research responsibilities on the one hand, and consultancy services, community-outreach, and competency based skills programmes on the other hand, is probably the best way forward in curriculum efforts.

Q4: What is the nature of paradigmatic developments in the discipline?

Since the inception of Public Administration as discipline, earlier in Europe and in America in 1887 with the works of Woodrow Wilson, it has undergone various paradigmatic changes. These paradigmatic shifts are well documented, both nationally (McLennan and FitzGerald 1991; Schwella 1999:333–355; Theron and Schwella 2000; Thornhill 2007:1–18; Cloete 2007:19–42) and internationally (i.e. Nicolas Henry's 'Five Paradigms of Public Administration' [1973]; Goodnow 1997; Simon 1997; Hughes 2003:17–43) and fall outside the scope of this article. Although authors such as Cooke (1997) argue that the so-called paradigmatic development of the discipline is a 'deceptive illusion' and that these are normal developments within 'one paradigm', the paradigmatic perspective provides a useful tool to guide curriculum.

The question remains as to what extent the curriculum will reflect a particular paradigm. Are we still in the Public Administration paradigm criticised by some for its 'reductionist' nature (Schwella 1999; Cloete 2007) or is it necessary to transcend to a broader paradigm on public governance (see Sing 1999:98–100)? What knowledge do we convey to students in class: do we make them aware of the respective perspectives regarding the paradigmatic development, but convince them about the 'right' one? Or, do we leave the debate 'in the air' and expect students to make up their own minds? How must students interpret all of the different perspectives they will encounter when they do a PAM literature survey? How will these paradigms be packaged in the respective year levels? Will we, for example, follow a model whereby first year students will be exposed to an 'administration' paradigm (generalist, theoretical and contextual focus); in their second and third years to a more 'managerialist' paradigm (New Public Management, skills, specialist, vocational focus); and on postgraduate level to a 'governance' paradigm (broad, 're-inventing', joined-up, network focus)? How will we accommodate, in other words, the recognised approaches to PAM teaching (i.e. politics/administration dichotomy, conventional, generic administrative, business management, and comprehensive approaches) in the curriculum?

The question on paradigmatic development is compounded by the observation that PAM does not have a uniform and unifying theory. Ostrom

(1989) in this regard argues that attempts at successfully establishing an identity for Public Administration, fall short, leaving this discipline in an ‘intellectual crisis’. If we add the paradigm of ‘governance’, which has a far broader scope of focus than PAM, to the existing curriculum, it will add to this problem.

The particular paradigmatic view that lecturers at a particular university hold provides to a large extent the name of the department or school and determines its training foci. The vast variety of names of schools and departments that offer PAM programmes currently in South Africa reflects this tendency. Some examples include Public Administration; Public Administration and Management; Public Management and Governance; Public and Development Management; Public Leadership; and Public Affairs. This trend is in line with a lack of uniformity that exists globally. How do these trends influence decisions regarding the design of a curriculum?

Q5: What is the nature of the content of the discipline?

Based on ‘answers’ to questions 1–4 above, the last, and probably the ‘biggest’ question is about how to package the most appropriate modules (in terms of content and credit weights) on the right NQF-levels in the semesters of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Sub-questions that are relevant to this issue include: What are the conceptual borders of the discipline? What do we need to include and what can be excluded from the curriculum? How do we accommodate new public sector trends, events and developments, as well as insight gained through inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary research?

During the deliberations of the Standards Generating Body (SGB) of Public Administration and Management (SGB:PAM 1998–2002), eleven functional areas of Public Management were identified. Based on the prescribed processes of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the purpose of the SGB was to develop unit standards per NQF-level and identify outcomes per functional area associated with the discipline. The SGB comprises academics, practitioners, professional bodies, as well as members from specific specialisation areas. The following functional areas were identified:

• Policy Analysis and Management • Development Management • Public Organisational Development and Management • Managing public service delivery • Human Resources Management • Information, Knowledge, Communication and Technology Management	• Public Management Ethics • Public Administration and Management history, theory and research • Inter-governmental Relations • Disaster Studies • Financial Management and Procurement
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This list is not only indicative of the broad, dynamic scope of the discipline, but also raises the question as to whether contemporary thought and developments in the discipline are ‘captured’ adequately by this list. To what extent does – and should – the curriculum reflect these functional areas?

Again, a decision regarding the inclusion or exclusion of these areas or categories should take the ‘answers’ to Q1–Q4 into consideration. For example, to what extent will these areas address the developmental needs of the state or capacitate public (including municipal) officials for their managerial responsibilities? Should ‘Leadership’, for example, receive more attention based on answers to question 1 above, or should ‘Ethics and professionalism’ receive more attention in the curriculum due to the high levels of corruption that are pointed out in society?

Often, only six months (a semester) are available to deal with a particular functional area, such as Public Financial Management. Based on current realities about curriculum design, this area will typically not again be addressed in subsequent years of study. Therefore the lecturer needs to address the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions, covering NQF-levels 5–7 issues, in one semester. This is hardly enough preparation to equip a public official for the complexities associated with the application of this functional area in the world of practice or to appreciate the intricacies associated with it when conducting postgraduate research in the area. Decisions on which areas to include or exclude in the curriculum should be guided further by questions regarding the most appropriate way to convey this knowledge to students (i.e. case-studies, research projects, assignments, group discussions, etc.) and how to assess it.

Conclusion

This article attempted to provide a framework, in the form of five fundamental questions, to assist PAM curriculum endeavours. By applying the principles of Complexity Theory, PAM was unpacked in its smaller parts (in the form of what was termed five big questions).

Due to the ‘wickedness’ facing PAM curriculum within a dynamic higher education and developmental state context, it may be argued that a uniform curriculum for PAM teaching in South Africa is not only not feasible, but also not advisable. Only if the richness of the discipline receive, to various degrees, attention at universities, will the country as a whole benefit. In other words, no single curriculum at a particular university can accommodate the multifaceted nature of PAM as a discipline. It is argued that the country will only benefit if universities offering PAM could decide on their particular niche focuses based on the expertise of their particular staff complement. In this way the University of

Stellenbosch could, for example, focus on Leadership, WITS on Development, NWU and University of Johannesburg (UJ) on Governance, and so forth.

This would provide students a wider choice to specialize in and the developmental state will benefit from having future public administrators, managers and leaders who are generalists (with knowledge of the discipline), but also specialists (with knowledge of certain applications or functional areas within the discipline).

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