

Contemplating the Big Five Questions in Public Administration and Management Curriculation

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ABSTRACT

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

Through the application of the principles of Complexity Theory, this article aims to facilitate curriculaion endeavors in Public Administration and Management by means of five 'big' questions that should be contemplated by all those involved in curriculaion decisions. The article does not attempt to provide answers to these questions, but rather to guide a curriculaion discourse by asking the 'right' questions. It is argued that these questions will contextualize any decisions regarding curriculaion and could contribute to the relevancy discourse 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 thought frameworks. To remain relevant - meaning to provide students with the latest developments in practices and theories and to make a contribution to society in general - it is vital that the curricula of disciplines are periodically reviewed. This exercise is known as 'curriculaion'.

A curriculum can be regarded as a set of course-work and content offered by a university (inclusive of universities of technology for purposes 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 applicable to a given learning programme. A critical point is that role-players involved in curriculaion need to clearly define the programme's objectives – usually expressed as learning outcomes in an outcomes-based, educational paradigm – and 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. Curriculaion for purposes of this article refers to the modification of existing programmes in Public Administration and Management in terms of their design and content.

Any curriculaion effort (or perhaps it is more correct to refer to *re-curriculaion* 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 the wider context within which the academic programme will be offered, into consideration.

The purpose of this article is not to explore the principles and processes associated with the curriculum exercise itself. No attention will therefore be paid to the technicalities associated with curriculum design such as the appropriate cognitive levels in terms of the 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, that should guide discourse in Public Administration and Management (PAM), are proposed in order to assist role-players in their curriculum efforts. It is argued that these questions will contextualize any decisions regarding curriculum and could contribute to the relevancy discourse regarding PAM teaching at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

To contextualize curriculum efforts, the dynamic environment of higher education in South Africa will first be explored. 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 guide curriculum 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 terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. 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, but is part of an iterative planning, development, implementation and review cycle. In the case of South Africa, curriculum exercises in PAM, are also part of regular review, programme evaluation, and quality assurance cycles at universities. Curriculum therefore does not occur in isolation, but should take the higher education realities into consideration.

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 with a single governing body. Especially mergers between universities and former technikons (now universities of technology) are significant for purposes 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 delivery 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 formerly with the Department of Education. Attempts were also 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 skills development strategy. 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 to make South Africa's comprehensive national infrastructure development programme a success. Vocational education at the FET colleges must 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 kind of mobility? How should universities gear itself to bridge the potential gap between vocational training (FET) and theoretical-based programmes typically offered by universities?

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, furthermore, guide the registration and curriculum of new programmes.

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). Important for university knowledge production is the focus areas that the NRF developed to guide the assessment of grant applications as well as the way research is funded. Only research that have scientific merit and have relevance for South Africa, that is, to build high-level infrastructure and to become more globally 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 typical of social sciences is currently not adequately funded.

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), and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) are obliged to, among 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 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 and 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.

A further issue that could influence curricula 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 of first-year entrants. Due to the potential implication on admission requirements, articulation, tuition, and assessment, curricula efforts need to take these realities into consideration.

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 that may, to varying degrees, influence eventual decisions regarding a curriculum. Due to the complexities associated with it, the curricula for a highly dynamic subject discipline like 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 recognize.

A complex system can be regarded as a system that comprises of interconnected and interdependent parts that as a whole (system) portrays certain properties 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 in 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 comprise 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 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 associated with a combination of these parts interacting interdependently are negated.

By bringing 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) functioning within a bigger system (i.e. developmental state). The five big questions below are based on this argument. The 'bigger 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 is offered. The next level within the complex system refers to the nature of the discipline, its

paradigmatic development, to finally, its content (curriculum). Inductive logic as well as Complexity Theory are thus utilised to unpack and better understand the complex system, as well as its smaller, interrelated parts (content) – hence the need for asking the right questions in curriculum efforts.

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

THE BIG FIVE QUESTIONS FOR PAM CURRICULATION

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 serious discipline, 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 curriculum effort boils down to choices: choices of balance, content, weight, and relevance. By asking the right *questions* would facilitate the making of the right *choices*.

The five questions below are an attempt to suggest such fundamental or big questions, but within the context of curriculum. It should be noted that the variables that should be considered in adequately answering each question are interconnected and interdependent. In other words, issues impacting on question 1 (Q1), for example, also effect ‘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 further be noted 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 to only *guide* or facilitate curriculum discussions through typical questions that should be asked, and does not endeavor to *answer* these questions. The tone of the article is thus a discourse amongst colleagues in 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 that comes to the fore is to what extent will changes in the state 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, welfare states, etc.)?

A state as 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 should the curriculum of PAM reflect the direction (inclusive of the means to get there such as policy, strategy, programmes, etc.) of the state? With this fundamental question as basis, 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 theory building and testing to further develop the discipline? How do scholars in PAM *serve* the state without becoming a *servant* of the state? What is the nature of ‘serve’ – not to lose 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 – to 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 ‘*what is*’-focus towards a ‘*what should be*’-focus? 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?

Furthermore, to what extent should PAM reflect the values, intentions 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 this 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 to 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 politics-administration dichotomy. These

theoretical considerations should be juxtaposed on the ideological dynamics and transformation agenda 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 is the role of universities 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 those who can afford it ('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 this 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 subsidized.

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 try to strike a healthy balance between the two?

Mainly due to dwindling subsidy 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. The R10m contract obtained from the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA), according to which 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, is a good example of such third-stream endeavors. To facilitate academic articulation to learners who successfully complete third-stream (short courses and skills-based learning programmes) usually requires a curriculum effort to ensure that credits obtained non-formally can lead to access into formal qualifications and programmes. This, in turn, generally leads to a more vocational focal point.

Minister Naledi Pandor said on 4 April 2012 that universities are '... partly to blame for a lack of innovation ...' She further continued to state that '... universities continue to focus on

producing talent rather than technology.’ These statements are indicative of the role Government ascribes to universities in society in general and 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 through knowledge production, research, theory building and theory testing – or both? These are some of the pertinent questions that should be asked in curriculumation.

Key sub-questions to guide a discourse on these big questions further include: What is the nature of a public institution in contrast with 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 successfully administer and manage such an institution?

There seems to be general consensus amongst social scientists that Public Administration belongs to 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 with 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 natural science development and economic ideals (i.e. profit motive). Insight into human existence, reflection on social dynamics, and the lost of ‘thinking about thinking’ all lead to the increasingly shallowness of social sciences. Roux (2012:23) further argues that the ‘human’ is removed from the humanities and that the ‘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 be 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 prepare students to embark on such a journey in our curriculumation efforts? 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 philosophical is a Philosophy Doctor (PhD), a DLitt 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 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 is true about the fundamentals of knowledge production such as phenomenology, epistemology, and positivism. The result of this theoretical ‘poverty’ is that students struggle to pursue a particular theoretical vantage point in especially postgraduate research and are not adequately adept in 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 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 better fits into the management domain – rather than 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 in 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 BCom modules.

How does this trend towards ‘managerialism’ influence curricula? Parties involved in curricula 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 and so forth to operationalise the learning outcomes (usually ‘generalist’ in nature) associated with a BA or BAdmin degree. However, if PAM is situated in 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 further seems that if PAM is situated in management faculties, emphasis is more placed on specialist ‘how-to’ (skills focus) training rather than on general contextual, ‘why’ questions (knowledge-building). This issue accentuates the ‘technical versus academic relevance’ debate.

If a particular school or department in PAM decides that they will pursue a more vocational focus in their curricula, the question that should be asked is to what extent should the curriculum cover the respective competency profiles 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 specific 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’, 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 become rapidly productive

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 to ‘real life’ situations, cases and so forth provide 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 speak to real life issues, and lecturers may lose their legitimacy as an authoritative figure or source of expertise. Such 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 university research. It is argued that this ‘practice-theory’ interaction is a necessity to prevent stagnation in the discipline and will enhance the relevance of the curriculum. In this regard Atkinson and Bekker (2004:454) make a case 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 birth 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. To what extent will the curriculum reflect a particular paradigm? Are we still in the Public Administration paradigm criticized by some for its ‘reductionist’ nature (Schwella 1999; Cloete 2007) or is it necessary to transcend to a broader public governance paradigm (see Sing 1999:98-100)? What 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 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, ‘reinventing’, 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 paradigmatic development question is further compounded by the observation that PAM does not have a uniform, unifying theory. Ostrom (1989) in this regard argues that there are deficient attempts at successfully establishing an identity for Public Administration, leaving it in an ‘intellectual crisis’. If we add ‘governance’, which has a far broader scope of focus than PAM to the existing curriculum, it will further add to this problem.

The particular paradigmatic view that lecturers at a particular university hold determines to large extent the name of the department or school and its training foci. The vast variety of names of schools and departments that offers PAM programmes currently in South Africa reflects this statement. 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 globally. How do these trends influence decisions regarding curriculum design?

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 (content and credit weights) on the right NQF-levels in the semesters of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Sub-questions relevant here 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 functional areas which were identified are:

- 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

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 adequately ‘captured’ 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 (inclusive of 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 in society?

Often, only six months (semester) are available to deal with a particular functional area such as Public Financial Management. Based on current curriculum design realities, this area will typically not again be addressed in subsequent years of study and 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 to prepare 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 regarding the inclusion/exclusion of certain areas in the curriculum should further be guided 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 five big questions).

Due to the ‘wickedness’ of 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 one single curriculum at a particular university can accommodate the multifaceted nature of PAM. 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 compliment. In this way could the University of Stellenbosch, for example, focus on Leadership, WITS on Development, NWU and University of Johannesburg (UJ) on Governance, and so forth. Students then have a wider choice to specialise and the developmental state will benefit from having future public administrators, managers and leaders who are generalists (knowledge of the discipline), but also specialists (knowledge of certain applications or functional areas within the discipline).

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