
RETHINKING THE IDENTITY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS AND THOUGHTS ON MANAGERIAL RECONSTRUCTION¹

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Abstract

Public administration is in a state of identity distress. Whereas for many years the questions of politics and policy were those which unconditionally ruled the discipline, at present public administration as a science, art, and profession is undergoing far-reaching transformations. Two major forces of rectification have increasingly augmented the conservative ones to create a more interdisciplinary orientation of the field. These are cultural and social inputs and organizational, managerial, and economical influences. This merger began many years ago, but only recently has it attained sufficient critical mass to direct the public sector through various necessary changes. This paper accordingly suggests a revision of the evolution of public administration in the modern era, and argues that interdisciplinary reflections may be beneficial for the healthy development of the field in the years to come. Based on relevant literature the paper explains how a multi-level, multi-method, and multi-system approach may revitalize our understanding of a scholarly domain that is currently in a state of some perplexity and in search of the way forward

Introduction

The world of government and public administration has traveled far since the early days of its struggle for disciplinary independence. Lately, there has been talk of the advent of a new spirit in the public sector, or at least expectations of its coming. Some say that such a spirit is already here. Others aver we are witnessing only the tip of change. The world wide globalization process supported by stronger orientations towards open markets, open highways of information, growing levels of organizational learning and interdisciplinarity in the social sciences have also made their impact on the study of our bureaucracies. Yet by all definitions public administration in the beginning of the 2000s still lacks the sense of identity that other fields of the social sciences has long since obtained. In other words, the

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field is looking back and down into its individuality, searching for orientations and signs that can direct it on its way forward. Today, public administration is already very different from what it used to be forty, thirty, and even twenty or ten years ago. In the coming years it is going to be even more different.

This paper is based on a previous work by the author (Vigoda, 2002). It tries to portrait the uncertain identity of public administration and possible developments waiting ahead. Rethinking this identity we should be interested in two main questions: Which scholarly ground are we stepping on when we talk about public administration? What is the legacy of the field in its current phase and what are its ambitions for the future? Naturally, these questions raise many others, for example, how to improve governments actions; how to revitalize public administrations services; whether bureaucracies are responding to economical/ social/ political challenges and changes ahead, and with what tools; what is the impact of a high-technology environment and the information age on our public agencies; how to attain the (im)possible goal of effective integration between citizens and governments in an ultra-dynamic society; and what are the implications of such transitions for democratic governments, their stability, and legitimization in the eyes of citizens. I argue that in order to resolve these questions one should seek better scholarly identity, which may be acquired through interdisciplinary analysis.

Practically, such an analysis needs to be presented gradually. Hence, I first suggest a theoretical entry and rationality for the mixture of analytic levels, methods, and viewpoints that are proposed by the various mother-disciplines of public administration. More specifically I focus on the roots and foundations of public administration in both American and Non-American cultures that furnish the background and terminology for the discipline in its basic frame, as well as in its more advanced composition. Next, three academic origins are discussed, namely (1) policy, politics, and political economy, (2) sociology, culture, and community and (3) management and organizational studies. Each represents a separate layer of investigation. The closing section suggests a synthesis and looks to the future. It attempts to portray areas and orientations for the new generation of public administration and for its way forward.

The dilemma of independence and interdisciplinarity in public administration

For many years public administration has struggled for its independent position in the social sciences. While in its early years it was part of the more conservative fields of Law, Politics, and Economy, it has been developed today to a unique field, independent in many ways but still enjoying mutual contributions of other disciplines in the social sciences. Moreover, in the last century it has developed a theoretical but also an impressive practical agenda that created remarkable achievements in different ways. The public sector, both as a science and as a profession is responsible for much of these achievements.

At the dawn of the new millennium, however, various new social problems still await the consideration and attention of the state and its administrative system. The question of independency of public administration as a science seems today less important than in the past. Instead, there are many calls to take advantage of multi disciplinary orientations in the social sciences and to find better ways to integrate them in the current

ethos of public administration. It is also suggested that such interdisciplinary ideas, tools, and methods can help to overcome social problems and create effective remedies for the new type of state maladies. Interdisciplinarity is also translated into cooperation, collaboration, and a share of information and knowledge. The multi-level, multi-method, and multi-system analysis with a look towards the future are the main frontiers of modern public administration.

The interdisciplinary view endeavors to provide an insight into the complexity of the field by combining different levels of analysis into an integral whole, which better accords with reality. This knowledge may well serve our understanding of how the state, and its executive branches, is managed and of the obstacles to better public performance. An important task is to illuminate cross-disciplinary principles for greater effectiveness and efficiency of public management in future generations, when environmental pressures will grow, together with an increase in citizens' demands and needs. An interdisciplinary approach to public administration may thus be of merit for a contentious field in a state of rapid change. It may stimulate new and viable thinking that can lead to additional positive innovation in the old type of bureaucracies.

The central assumption of this essay is that slowly and gradually, but constantly and extensively, a change is being nurtured in public systems and in the attitudes of public managers, politicians, and citizens to the conservative role of public institutions. These transformations carry many challenges, as well as risks, that citizens, governments, an administrators of the future will have to confront and address. They all represent new alternatives for the evolution of public administration as an art, perhaps also as a science and as a profession (Lynn, 1996). Our task, as stemming from such a perspective, is to understand better the changes ahead, which have the potential of building bridges into the future of modern democracies. A core assumption, as will be developed here, is that this goal can be achieved only through cooperation among the public, private, and third sector organizations that collaborate through mutual efforts and combined knowledge available in all the relevant social sciences.

Public administration in transition

The evolutionary process

The foundations of modern public administration can be discerned thousands of years ago, across cultures, and in various nations around the globe. The Bible mentions a variety of hierarchical and managerial structures that served as prototypes for governance of growing populations. Ancient methods of public labor distribution were expanded by the Greeks and the Romans to control vast conquered lands and many peoples. The Persian and Ottoman empires in the Middle East, like India and imperial China in the Far East, and the Mesoamerica cultures paved the way for public administration in the modern age, wherein European Christians, and later Christians of the New World, were in the ascendant.

All these, as well as other cultures, used a remarkably similar set of concepts, ideas, and methods for governing and administering public goods, resources, and interests. They all employed professionals and experts from a variety of social fields. They all used

authority and power as the cheapest control system for individuals, governmental institutions, and processes. All of them faced administrative problems close in type and in nature to problems of our own times: how to achieve better efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in government, how to satisfy the needs of the people, and how to sustain stable political hegemony despite the divergent demands and needs of sectorial groups. Not surprisingly, all the above cultures and nations also used similar managerial tools and methods to solve problems of this sort. They all used, fairly effectively, division of work, professionalism, centralization and decentralization mechanisms, accumulation of knowledge, coordination of jobs, complex staffing processes of employees, long-range planning, controlling for performance, and so on. Intuitively, one feels that nothing has really changed in the managerial and administrative process of public organizations for centuries, possibly millennia. But this feeling is of course exaggerated. Some major changes have taken place in recent centuries to create a totally different environment and new rules, to which rulers and citizens must adhere and by which they must adjust their operation. In fact, a new kind of governing game has taken shape, in which public administration plays a central role.

Despite basic similarities, the public administration of our times is entirely different from public services in the past. These differences can be summarized in 7 key points:

- (1) It is *larger* than ever before, and it still expanding;
- (2) It is more *complex* than in the past, and becoming increasingly so by the day;
- (3) It has many more *responsibilities* to citizens, and it still has to cope with increasing demands of the people.
- (4) It is acquiring more *eligibilities*, but must restrain its operation and adhere to standards of equity, justice, social fairness, transparency and accountability.
- (5) Modern public administration is considered a social *science*, a classification that carries high esteem but also firm obligations and rigid constraints.
- (6) For many individuals who decide to become public servants it is also a *profession and occupation* to which they dedicate their lives and careers.
- (7) Public administration is one of the highly *powerful institutions* in modern democracies.

Thus, it is evident that public administration of our time wields considerable power and influence in policy framing, policy making, and policy implementation. Hence it is subject to growing pressures of political players, social actors, managerial professionals, and the overall economic market.

An eclectic science

Public administration is an eclectic science. It was born towards the end of the 19th century when the business of the state started to attract social-academic attention. The revolution turning public administration into an independent science and profession is traditionally related to the influential work and vision of Woodrow Wilson (1887) and Frank J. Goodnow (1900). These scholars were among the first who advocated the autonomy of the field as a unique area of science that drew substance from several sources. In the first years, law, political theory of the state, and several “hard sciences” such as engineering and industrial relations were the most fundamental and influential mother disciplines. Over time, these fields strongly influenced the formation and transition of public administration but the extent and direction of the influence were not linear or consistent.

Kettl and Milward (1996:7) argued that traditional public administration, as advocated by the progenitors of the discipline, consisted in the power of law. Representatives of the people make the law and delegate responsibility to professional bureaucrats to execute it properly. Highly qualified bureaucrats, supported by the best tools and resources, are then expected to discharge the law to the highest professional standards, which in return produces good and accountable managerial results that best serve the people. According to Rosenbloom (1998), the legal approach views public administration “as applying and enforcing the law in concrete circumstances” and is “infused with legal and adjudicatory concerns” (p.33). This approach is derived from three major interrelated sources: (1) administrative law, which is the body of law and regulations that control generic administrative processes; (2) the judicialization of public administration, which is the tendency for administrative processes to resemble courtroom procedures; and (3) constitutional law, which redefines a variety of citizens’ rights and liberties. Several legal definitions argue that public administration is law in action and mainly a regulative system, which is “government telling citizens and businesses what they may and may not do” (Shafritz & Russell, 1997:14). However, with the years it has become obvious that law in itself does not maintain satisfactory conditions for quality public sector performances to emerge. Constitutional systems furnish platforms for healthy performance of public administration, but do not account for its effectiveness or efficiency. Put differently, good laws are necessary but not sufficient conditions for creating a well-performing public service. They only highlight the significance of other scholarly contributions.

One such important contribution came from the classic “hard sciences” of engineering and industrial relations. In its very early stages public administration was heavily influenced by dramatic social forces and long-range developments in the western world. The ongoing industrial revolution in the early 1900s, which was accompanied by political reforms, higher democratization, and more concern for the people’s welfare, needed highly qualified navigators. These were engineers, industrial entrepreneurs, and technical professionals who guided both markets and governments along the elusive paths to economic and social prosperity. Various fields of engineering, the subsequent evoking area of industrial studies, and other linked disciplines such as statistical methods became popular and crucial for the development of management science in general, and were also gradually found useful for public arenas. The link between general management and public administration has its roots in the understanding of complex organizations and bureaucracies, which have many shared features. Here, much contribution was made in non-American societies such Germany, France, and Britain. In fact, early American public administration was influenced by the works of various European. Thus, the current state of public administration can not be covered without adequate understanding of the seminal works by Max Weber (1947), Henry Fayol (1925), Lindel Urwick (1928), and others. Their ideas and theoretical development of the field are considered today as core-stones for the emergence of modern public administration and management.

With time, dramatic changes occurred in the nature and orientation of general organizational theory, and in its application to public administration of modern societies. A major transition resulted from the exploration by the Hawthorn studies in the 1920s and 1930s, conducted by a well known industrial psychologist from Chicago University, Alton Mayo. A behavioral apparatus was used to drive a second revolution, beyond the revolution of its original emergence, which swept the young science into its first stages of

maturity. Today, trends and developments in the public sector cannot be fully understood without adequate attention to behavioral, social, and cultural issues. These aspects conjoin with questions of policy making and policy evaluation, as well as with managerial, economic, and organizational contents, better to illuminate public systems. The human and social side of public organizations became central and critical to all seekers of greater knowledge and comprehension of the state's operation. People and groups were placed at the heart of the discussion on organizational development and managerial methods. The human side of organizations was made an organic part of the art of administration. Still today it is an indispensable facet of the craft of bureaucracy. All who are interested in the healthy future and sound progress of public organizations and services both as a science and as a profession have to incorporate humanistic views well in their basic managerial ideology.

However, major transitions still lay ahead. International conflicts during the 1930s and the 1940s wrought immense changes in national ideology and democratic perspectives in many western societies. Consequently, public administration and public policy had to be transformed as well. During the Second World War theoretical ideas were massively supported by advanced technology and higher standards of industrialization. These were pioneered by professional managers and accompanied by new managerial theories. Ironically, the two world wars served as facilitators of managerial change as well as accelerators and agents of future developments and reforms in the public sector. The political leaders and social movements of the victorious democracies were convinced that the time had come for extensive reforms in the management of western states. The assumed correlation of social and economic conditions with political stability and order propelled some of the more massive economic programs in which the state took an active part. The rehabilitation of war-ravaged Europe involved governmental efforts and international aid, most of it from the United States. Major attention was dedicated to the creation of better services for the people, long-range planning, and high-performance public institutions capable of delivering quality public goods to growing numbers of citizens. To build better societies was the goal. A larger and more productive public sector was the tool.

In many respects the utopian vision of a better society generated by the post-war politicians and administrators in the 1940s and 1950s inexorably crumbled and fell during the 1960s and 1970s. A sizable number of governments in the western world could not deliver to the people many of the social promises they had made. The challenge of creating a new society, free of crime and poverty, highly educated and morally superior, healthier and safer than ever before, remained an unreachable goal. So during the 1970s and 1980s, citizens' trust and confidence in government, and in public administration as a professional agent of government, suffered a significant decline. The public no longer believed that governments and public services could bring relief to those who needed help, and that no public planning was good enough to compete with natural social and market forces. The promises of modern administration, running an effective public policy, seemed like a broken dream. Political changes took place in most western states, largely stemming from deep frustration by the public and disapproval of government policies. By the end of the 20th century the crises in public organizations and mistrust of administrators were viewed both as a policy and managerial failure (Rainey, 1990). In addition, this practical uncertainty and disappointment with governments and their public administration authorities naturally diffused into the academic community. Theoretical ideas for policy reforms in various social fields that once seemed the key to remedying illnesses in democracies have proven unsuccessful. Within

the last decade the search for new ideas and solutions for such problems has reached its peak, as premises originally rooted in business management have become increasingly adjusted and applied to the public sector. Among these ventures are re-engineering bureaucracies (Hammer and Champy, 1994), applying benchmarking strategy to public services (Camp, 1998), re-inventing government (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), and the most influential movement of New Public Management (NPM: Lynn, 1998; Stewart and Ranson, 1994). These are receiving growing attention accompanied by large measures of skepticism and criticism.

Transformations in the academic realm

Throughout those years public administration as an academic field was also in transition. Today, many examples exist in universities of independent public administration units; some operate as schools and some as free-standing faculties. But in at least an equal number of universities, public administration programs on all levels are only part of larger units such as Political Science departments, Business and Management schools, or even Public Affairs schools. This disciplinary schizophrenia certainly yields a science that is more complex and heterogeneous, but also more challenging and full of promise.

The scientific background and identity of public administration in the late 1990s and early 2000s is still not stable and has not overcome its childhood ailments. On the contrary. Identity conflicts have only intensified with the years. Some 30 years ago, Waldo (1968) noted that ongoing transformations in public administration reflected an identity crisis of a science in formation. During the last three decades Waldo's diagnostics on public administration as a science struggling with a pernicious identity problem has not changed much. The evolution of alternative sub-disciplines inside and around the field (e.g., policy studies, public personnel management, information management, etc.) carried promises but also risks for its position and role as a central field of social study. As recently noted by Peters (1996), modern public administration greatly reflects lack of self-confidence both as a science and as a profession. This lack is expressed in many ways, the most significant being incapacity to guide governments through a safe circuit of public policy change. Much of the accumulated wisdom in the science of public administration has been obtained through social experiments, the commission of policy errors, and sometimes even learning from them about better ways to serve the people. But mistakes cost money, much money, money from all of us, the taxpayers. Like good customers in a neighborhood supermarket, citizens should and have become aware of the services they deserve, of the high prices they are asked to pay, and of governmental actions that should be taken to produce useful changes. Demands for better operation are generally aimed at governments, but they should be, and are, also targeted at the science and at academia. Science has the potential of exploring new knowledge, generating better explanations for relevant administrative problems, applying sophisticated and useful professional methods, and most importantly directing all available resources to produce successful and practical recommendations for professionals. Its prime goal is to design a comprehensive theoretical view of public systems that is clear, highly efficient, effective, thrifty, and socially oriented at the same time. This cannot be achieved without extensive understanding of the diversity, complexity, and interdisciplinarity of the science of public administration.

The contribution of an interdisciplinary view to public administration identity

In many ways the persistent public mistrust of governmental services and institutions, together with the marked instability of public administration as a science, inspired us in the present venture. The fragile status of the theory of public administration is a port of departure for a different kind of discussion, which is broader and multi-perceptual. Our core argument is that one can find many ways to depict the administrative system, its functionality, and its relationship with the public. But the identity crisis of public administration cannot be solved until many approaches are combined and coalesce to explain the very basic constructs that modern societies encounter at the start of the new century. A foremost assumption of this paper is that only mutual efforts and quality combination of critical knowledge from a variety of social disciplines and methods can yield a real opportunity for overcoming public administration's post-childhood problems. Such a crisis of identity, which has existed for more than a century now, carries risks, but also promises, which must be well isolated, assessed, analyzed, and only then fulfilled. The translation of science into operative acts by government must rely on such wisdom, which can be sufficiently accumulated from various social branches.

Interdisciplinary heredity

The desired comprehensive understanding of public administration, as portrayed earlier, should rely on the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of its sister disciplines (and not necessarily the conventional mother disciplines) in the social sciences. Unfortunately, so far most writing on public systems has adopted a uni-dimensional viewpoint. Public administration was frequently understood through the eyes of policy analysts or political scientists. Alternatively it was considered a specific field of management science or as an organizational studies domain. While the roots of the administrative process are definitely, and with much justification, identified with political science, policy studies, and managerial constructs of public institutions, it would be greatly in error to point solely to these arenas in portraying the domain and nature of public administration. An integrative approach has much merit and potential in this case, and it must be well developed to conform to the complex reality of serving the public.

More specifically I argue that the administrative science is a discipline in transition that involves politics, but not only politics. It deals with policy, but reaches much farther and deeper than policy questions. It incorporates sociological and cultural aspects that change rapidly in a mass communicative global world, but it goes even beyond these issues. It deals with people as workers, as citizens, as clients, and as consumers, as leaders and managers, as well as with a variety of other human constructs that fuse into a unique branch of knowledge. A multi-disciplinary approach is evidently required to explain better what every scholar already knows from his or her personal perspective: that the truth about public administration has many faces and no monopoly exists any longer on the discipline's status and orientations.

In light of the above I identify three main disciplines that serve today as core sources of knowledge in the study of public administration.

- (1) *Policy analysis, Political science, and Political Economy;*
- (2) *Sociology, Cultural studies, and Community studies;*
- (3) *Management and Organizational studies;*

Policy, Politics, and Political Economy

The political approach to public administration was depicted by Rosenbloom (1998) as stressing the values of representativeness, political responsiveness, and accountability to the citizenry through elected officials. These values are considered necessary requirements of democracy, and they must be incorporated into all aspects of government and administration. Wallace (1978) argued that ultimately public administration is a problem in political theory. It deals with the responsiveness of administrative agencies and bureaucracies to the elected officials, and through them, to the citizens themselves. Shafritz and Russell (1997) provide several politics-oriented definitions of public administration: it is what government does (or does not do), it is a phase in the policymaking cycle, it is a prime tool for implementing the public interest, and it does collectively what cannot be done so well individually (pp. 6-13). Hence it is impossible to conduct a politics-free discussion of public administration. This political debate in public administration is also heavily influenced by the sub-field of political economy. Questions of budgeting and financing the public sector (Wildavsky, 1984) as well as bringing more economical rationality to decision making processes usually conflict with political considerations (Jackson & Mcleod, 1982). However they also put them under economical restraints and enhance "checks and balances" to a system mostly monitored and controlled by politicians, political parties, and other federal or national institutions, rather than professionals and practitioners.

Yet, politics is definitely the heart of public administration processes. Politics focuses on citizens as members of groups or on highly institutionalized organizations that sound the public's voice before political officials and civil servants. The politics approach to public administration involves strategies of negotiating and maneuvering among political parties, public opinion, and bureaucracies. It involves an incremental change in society, which relies on open debate, a legitimate power struggle, distribution and redistribution of national resources and budgets, and a heavy body of legislation and law to regulate these processes. Perhaps the most obvious linkage between politics and public administration stems from policy making and policy implementation processes. It is naive to distinguish political systems from professional administration systems in regard to public policy. As Rosenbloom (1998:13) suggested, "public administrators' involvement in the public policy cycle makes politics far more salient in the public sector than in private enterprise. Public administrators are perforce required to build and maintain political support for the policies and programs they implement. They must try to convince members of the legislature, chief executives, political appointees, interest groups, private individuals, and the public at large that their activities and policies are desirable and responsive".

The theoretical contribution of political science to the study of public administration is therefore multi-faceted. It invokes better understanding of the power relations and influence dynamics that take place inside and among bureaucracies (Pfeffer, 1992) and determine their operative function as well as outcomes. It also employs a rather vast knowledge from economics and rational thinking. Party politics acknowledges that the investigation of pressure and interest groups, and the better understanding of conflict relationships among various players of the state, are used to build models of decision making and policy determination that are rational and realistic. In addition, political

psychology is implemented more thoroughly to explore personality traits of political leaders as well as public servants. For the same reasons, budgetary studies and policy analysis methods are an integral facet of the political approach, which assumes limited rationality as well as high constraints of time and resources on the administrative process.

From a somewhat different perspective, Ellwood (1996: p.51) argued that political science has simultaneously everything and little to offer public management scholars, hence also public administration scholars. Everything, because both fields deal with political behavior, processes, and institutions. Little, because political science deals only with the constraints forced on the administrative process with no practical contribution to the managerial improvement of public systems. Ellwood further concurs that both fields rely on other academic disciplines, employing techniques of anthropology, economics, game theory, historiography, psychology, and social psychology, as well as sociology. In line with this it would be only natural to conclude that the relationship between political science and public administration is described as an on-again, off-again romance. Kettl (1993, p.409) suggested that “the importance of administration lay at the very core of the creation of the American Political Science Association...when five of the first eleven presidents of the association came from public administration” and played a major role in framing the discipline. As Ellwood puts it, with the years, public administration became public but also administration. It shifted its focus to a more practical and client-service orientation, which necessarily incorporated knowledge from other social disciplines like personnel management, organizational behavior, accounting, budgeting, and so forth. The methodological contribution of a political approach to public administration studies is also meaningful. Here a macro analysis is necessary if one seeks an understanding of the operation of large bureaucracies and their coexistence with political players. A political approach delivers these goods by means of comparative studies, policy evaluation methods, rational choice models, and simulations, as well as content-analysis techniques and other tools useful for observation of the political sphere.

Sociology, Culture, and Community

Studying public administration is also a social issue. Thus, another approach that is highly relevant to the understanding of public administration bodies and processes rests on a sociological apparatus. It has a very close relationship with the political approach, so it is sometimes defined as a socio-political view of public systems or as a study of political culture (Shafritz & Russell, 1997:76). Yet its core prospects are beyond the political context. The voice of society has a special role in the study of public administration arenas not only for democratic and political reasons but also because of its fundamental impact on informal constructs of reality such as tradition, social norms and values, ethics, life style, work standards, and other human-cultural interactions that are not necessarily political.

The theoretical contribution of a sociological and cultural approach to public administration consists of several elements. An essential distinction must be drawn between inside and outside cultural environments. An outside cultural sphere incorporates informal activities and behaviors of small groups as well as of larger social units which interact with the administrative system. Included in this category are customers' groups, private organizations, not-for-profit volunteering organizations, and citizens at large. Considerable attention has been turned to communities and to the idea of communitarianism

(Etzioni 1994; 1995) as well as to the emergence of the third sector as rapidly changing conventional structures and beliefs in modern societies (Gidron, Kramer, and Salamon, 1992). An inside cultural environment is related to internal organizational dynamics and to the behaviors of people as work groups. Thus, it is sometimes termed organizational culture, or organizational climate (Schein, 1985). Like the outside organizational environment, it has some observable constructs but it mostly expresses many covert phases. In many ways, “culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual – a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction and mobilization” (Kilmann et al., 1985). It includes basic assumptions as to what is right and what is wrong for a certain organizational community, norms and beliefs of employees, unseen social rules and accepted codes of behavior, as well as tradition, language, dress, and ceremonies with common meaning to all organizational members. All these distinguish “us” from “them”, promote group cohesiveness, and improve common interests.

Several sociological sources can be effective in analyzing public administration dynamics. First is group theory, which is also closely related to the study of leaders and leadership. Second are ethnic studies, which concentrate on minorities and race questions such as equity, fair distribution of public goods, and integration in productive public activity. Third is communication and the technological information revolution, which have had a radical effect on society, public policy, and public administration units and structure. Information networks and communication have become an immanent feature of the cultural investigation of bureaucracies. For many years a plausible approach in management science and in the study of public administration called for the formulation of a universal theory in the field, one that is culture-free and applicable across all nations. With the passage of time and with giant technological developments this perception became ever more anachronistic.

Today, the goal of a universal administrative paradigm is hardly achievable. An alternative viewpoint is more balanced and contingent. It argues that basic similarities do exist between public organizations and public administration mechanisms, but at the same time intra-organizational and extra-organizational culture fulfills a major mediating role. Culture in its broad context constantly affects the operation of bureaucracies as well as political systems that interact with them. Examples like Theory Z of W. Ouchi (1981) and lessons from a more recent Chinese and east European experiences stimulated the scientific community and initiated culture-oriented ventures in general management inquiry (Hofstede, 1980). They especially promoted the investigation of work values and culture-oriented management in private but also in public arenas. Many scholars became convinced of the necessity of incorporating social and cultural variables as core elements in the administrative analysis of public arenas. A sociological and cultural approach to public administration also made an important methodological contribution. It initiated culture-focused surveys of individuals and groups who work in the public sector or of citizens who receive services and goods. Culture-focused observations and analyses possess the merit of being sensitive to people’s (as citizens or employees) norms, values, traditions, and dispositions, and sometimes they overlap other politics and policy-oriented studies the better to explore dynamics in public organizations.

Finally, several ethical considerations should be included under any sociological understanding of the public sector. Ethical dilemmas are frequent in public administration

and relate to cultural aspects, to norms, and most importantly to the individual behaviour of public servants. For example, hand-in-hand with governmental operation, questions of ethical standards, integrity, fair and equal treatment to clients, or appropriate criteria for rewards to public servants become more relevant. Today, public services in Europe are wider than ever before (Gladstone, 1995; De-Leon, 1996). As a result, public servants are taking care of growing budgets. They control the transference of more capital to and from the state treasury. This exposes many of them to ethical dilemmas as to how to properly manage, distribute and redistribute economical wealth. Other ethical difficulties arise as a result of the instability between business and social requirements in the public environment. For example, when the cost of certain medicine is too high for citizens to purchase, should the state take responsibility and help them? When state prisons are full of convicted prisoners, should the state release some of them to create more places for others? Responding to such moral issues is difficult. However, public policy which neglects considerations of ethics, equal treatment of the public, or basic justice and fairness among its members is initiating a self-destructive process which may damage its functioning in the long run (Wilenski, 1980).

Management and Organization studies

The third core-stone of public administration is based on knowledge from management and organizational sciences. A managerial definition of public administration proclaims that it is the executive function in government or a management specialty applied in public systems (Shafritz and Russell, 1997:19-23). Although public sector management is distinguished from private sector management, in many ways the two systems share a surprisingly broad area of similarities (Rainey, 1990). For many years, differences stemmed from the nature of services each sector customarily provided, from diverse structures and functions, but mainly from discrepancies in the environment. However, when the environment started rapidly to change, organizations had to change as well. Modern societies have become more complex, flexible, and dynamic. Cultural, industrial, technological, economic, and political environments of organizations have undergone rapid transformations that are still in progress today. On the one hand, public and private organizations have to adjust and comply with similar changes in the environment to safeguard their interests and existence. But on the other hand, the starting point of public organizations is far inferior and urgently calls for rethinking and reinventing (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

Conventional wisdom accepted a classic assumption regarding the relatively stable and unshakable structure of public organizations. Drawing on the Weberian approach, hardly anyone disputed the need for large bureaucracies in modern democracies. Moreover, the advantages and disadvantages of large bureaucracies were well known among academics and practitioners. A weighty bureaucracy was considered an axiom of public administration. Only with the emergence of new management trends in old bureaucracy were these basic assumptions questioned. For example, Kettl and Milward (1996) stated that management in the public sector matters. It matters because citizens' demands increase and because the standards of performance expected from governments are higher than ever before. Performance is related in the minds of people and in scientific studies to quality of management, quality of managers, and the administrative process between them. Accordingly, it has much to do with the human aspects of administration. Perhaps this

perception has led to some recent developments in public administration, making it client-oriented and more businesslike. Scholars frequently define these shifts as the principal change in public administration and its transition into a revised field of study named public management.

Current trends: A public managerial reform?

What is the future of modern public administration and what new frontiers are awaiting ahead? The wisdom of managing states and communities in the 21st century relies on manifold disciplines and multiple sources of knowledge. The information era and the immense technological advancement with which our nations struggle necessarily create higher levels of accessibility, availability, and transparency to the public. The emergence of e-government is no more a fantastic dream but blatant reality. Public administration in America and in the world is moving through reforms and changes that are aimed at downsizing, privatization, de-bureaucratization, higher professional managerialism, and above all strict dedication and aspirations to become a better "science" by improving measurement tools and adhering with positivism and empiricism.

Since the early 1980s much work has been conducted in public administration theory and practice that claimed to go beyond the conservative approach in the field. This "liberalization" of public administration is recognized today as the "New Public Management" (NPM) trend. The self-identity problem of public administration was greatly aggravated by the launching of the idea of NPM. As noted by Kettl and Milward (1996: vii), "public management is neither traditional public administration nor policy analysis since it borrows heavily from a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches". Mainly drawing on the experience of the business/industrial/private sector, scholars have suggested taking a more demanding attitude to the dynamics, activity, and productivity of public organizations. However, "competing academic disciplines dueled to establish bridgeheads or, worse, virtually ignored each other as they developed parallel tracks on related problems" (p. 5). Consequently, a cross-fertilization, which could have accelerated learning and improved performance of public systems, was delayed.

What are the roots of NPM, and in what way is it actually a *new* arena in the study of the public sector? Several theoretical foundations, as well as practical factors, can answer these questions. The first, and probably the deepest source of NPM emerges from the distinction between two proximate terms or fields of research: administration and management. As noted earlier, since the late 1880s the monopoly on the term administration has been held by political scientists. Scholars like Goodnow and Wilson were those who perceived public administration as a separate and unique discipline that should consist of independent theory, practical skills, and methods. However, the term management referred to a more general arena, used by all social scientists and mainly by those who practice and advance theory in organizational psychology and business studies. Consequently, conservative administration science tends to analyze the operation of large bureaucratic systems as well as other governmental processes aimed at policy implementation. Management, on the other hand, refers to the general practice of empowering people and groups in various social environments and in handling multiple organizational resources to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in the process of producing goods or services.

NPM has indeed become extremely popular in the theory and practice of contemporary public administration. Still, it is not clear if we can define it as a long-range revolution in public administration theory. Some will say that NPM has only revived an old spirit of managerialism and applied it in the public sector. Others will argue that this in itself has been a momentous contribution to public administration as a discipline in decline. Relying on an extensive survey of public management research in America, Garson and Overman (1983:275) argued that this increasing popularity was due to the more virile connotation of the term management than administration. Over the years, a growing number of political scientists came to perceive public administration as an *old* and declining discipline. It was unable to provide the public with adequate practical answers to its demands, and moreover it left the theoreticians with epidemic social dilemmas awaiting exploration. Interesting evidence of this process could be found in many schools of public administration that during the 1980s and 1990s decided to become schools of public management. Looking for alternative ideas, management theory was proposed as the source for a new and refreshing perspective. It was suggested that public management rather than public administration could contribute to a new understanding of how to run the government more efficiently, hence to surmount some of its pandemic ailments.

Thus, Perry and Kraemer (1983) stated that a greater impact of new ideas and methods from the field of public management on the administrative science was essential and natural. It reflected a special focus of modern public administration that was not to be ignored. Rainey (1990:157) claimed that this process was a result of the growing unpopularity of government during the 1960s and 1970s. Ott, Hyde, and Shafritz (1991:1) also stated that public management was a major segment of the broader field of public administration since it focused on the profession and on the public manager as a practitioner of that profession. Furthermore, it emphasized well-accepted managerial tools, techniques, knowledge, and skills that could be used to turn ideas and policy into a (successful) program of action.

During the last two decades many definitions have been suggested for NPM. Yet nothing seems wrong with the relatively old perception of Garson and Overman (1983:278), who defined it as "*an interdisciplinary study of the generic aspects of administration...a blend of the planning, organizing, and controlling functions of management with the management of human, financial, physical, information and political resources*". As further discussed by other scholars (e.g., Lynn, 1996:38-39), six differences exist between public administration and public management that make the former a new field of study and practice. These are (1) the inclusion of general management functions such as planning, organizing, control, and evaluation in lieu of discussion of social values and conflicts of bureaucracy and democracy; (2) an instrumental orientation favoring criteria of economy and efficiency in lieu of equity, responsiveness, or political salience; (3) a pragmatic focus on mid-level managers in lieu of the perspective of political or policy elites; (4) a tendency to consider management as generic, or at least to minimize the differences between public and private sectors in lieu of accentuating them; (5) a singular focus on the organization, with external relations treated in the same rational manner as internal operations in lieu of a focus on laws, institutions, and political bureaucratic processes; (6) a strong philosophical link with the scientific management tradition in lieu of close ties to political science or sociology.

While the emergence of NPM is frequently related to the increasing impact of positivist behavioral science on the study of politics and government (e.g., Lynn, 1996:5-6), the practical aspect of this process should also be considered. Practical public managers (Golembiewski, 1995), as well as political scientists, will refer to the difficulties in policy making and policy implementation which faced many western societies in Europe, America, and elsewhere during the 1970s. These practical difficulties are viewed today as an important trigger for the evolution of NPM. Reviewing two recent books on NPM (Aucoin, 1995; Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996), Khademian (1998:269) argues that American and Westminster advocates of the field find common ground in explaining why such reforms are necessary. The problem of an inflexible bureaucracy that often could not respond efficiently and promptly to the public needs conflicted with some basic democratic principles and values in these countries. Peter Aucoin elegantly summarizes a "trinity" of broadly based challenges with which western democracies have struggled, and will probably continue to struggle in the future, partly through management reform. These are (1) growing demands for restraint in public sector spending, (2) increasing cynicism regarding government bureaucracies' responsiveness to citizens' concerns and political authority and dissatisfaction with program effectiveness, and (3) an international, market-driven economy that does not defer to domestic policy efforts. These challenges have apparently led many western governments, in America, Britain, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere, to the recognition that firm reforms and changes in the public service should be made.

There is no doubt that at least some of the accumulated wisdom of the private sector in many countries is transferable to the public sector (Pollitt, 1988; Smith, 1993). In an attempt to liberate the public sector from its old conservative image and tedious practice NPM was advanced as a relevant and promising alternative. NPM literature has tried to recognize and define new criteria that may help in determining the extent to which public agencies succeed in meeting the growing needs of the public. NPM has continuously advocated the implementation of specific Performance Indicators (PIs) used in private organizations to create a performance-based culture and matching compensatory strategies in these systems. It has recommended that these indicators be applied in the public sector (e.g., Smith, 1993; Carter, 1989) since they can function as milestones on the way to better efficiency and effectiveness of public agencies. Moreover, citizens' awareness of the performance of public services was suggested as a core element of NPM since it can increase the political pressure placed on elected and appointed public servants, thereby enhancing both managerial and allocative efficiency in the public sector. Scholars who advocate NPM liken this process of public accountability to stakeholders/citizens to the role adopted by financial reporting in the private/corporate sector (Smith, 1993). As in that sector, increasing exterior-related outcomes can have a profound impact on internal control mechanisms, as managers and public servants become more sensitive to their duties and highly committed to serve their public customers.

Thus, Lynn (1998:231) suggested that the NPM of the late 1990s had three constructive legacies for the field of public administration and for democratic theory and practice. These were (1) a stronger emphasis on performance-motivated administration and inclusion in the administrative canon of performance-oriented institutional arrangements, structural forms, and managerial doctrines fitted to particular context, in other words, advances in the state of the public management art; (2) an international dialogue on and a

stronger comparative dimension to the study of state design and administrative reform; and (3) the integrated use of economic, sociological, social-psychological, and other advanced conceptual models and heuristics in the study of public institutions and management, with the potential to strengthen the field's scholarship and the possibilities for theory-grounded practice. While the first two "legacies" are widely discussed in contemporary literature, the third is much understudied and needs further theoretical development, empirically guided research, and practical implementation.

Moreover, Kettl and Milward (1996) argue that one of NPM's most significant contributions to public administration as a discipline in transition is the focus on the performance of governmental organizations. According to their analysis, this scientific orientation needs to draw on "a wide variety of academic disciplines for the full and richly textured picture required to improve the way government works. Only through interdisciplinary cross-fertilization will the picture be rich enough to capture the enormous variety and complexity of true public management (and administration) puzzles" (p.6).

The journey continues

This paper has relied on previous works to describe public administration as a discipline in transition. In many ways it has always been in continuous movement, but not always in the same direction. Contrary to the heavy, formal, and inflexible image of bureaucracies, public sector bodies in America, Europe, and elsewhere have been in rapidly intensifying transition since the early 1990s. During the last century public administration has undergone gone significant changes resulting from crises, as well as breakthroughs in an ultra-dynamic environment. Generally speaking, Waldo's (1968) assertion that these ongoing transformations reflected an identity crisis of a science in formation is also relevant today, albeit with some amendments. Whereas in the past these crises signaled a struggle for the recognition and legitimacy of public administration as a scholarly academic field, today the identity problem leads to other dilemmas, which are beyond simple existence and legitimacy.

In recent decades the struggle over the nature and uniqueness of public administration has continued, some say even intensified. From the very early days of the discipline to the present its boundaries have been in a state of ongoing debate. To talk of the "Public", of "Administration", and of the integration of the two constructs into a useful terrain for study holds out promise as well as involving difficulties. But consensus does exist on at least one issue: the public needs a better bureaucracy, more flexible, working efficiently and effectively, moving quickly toward objectives, and at the same time responding to the needs of the people without delays and with maximum social sensitivity, responsibility, and morality. The public also expects good and skillful administrators, versed in the mysteries of quality services and effective management. Only they can produce better "public goods" and deliver them to all sectors of society in minimum time and at minimum cost. These goals are undoubtedly ambitious but they have the potential of safeguarding the structure of democratic societies. This is a revised version of the ideal type of public administration systems applicable to modern times.

However, reality seems far more complex. There is growing concern among

scholars today that these goals are way beyond reach. Modern states across the world face serious problems of adhering to the public's needs. Achieving one target is usually accompanied by painful compromises on others, and limited resources are frequently cited as the main reason for failure in the provision of services. Moreover, fundamental changes are taking place in people's lifestyles, as in their beliefs and ideologies. They are multiplied through high technology, communication systems, new distribution of capital, and the rise of new civic values that never existed before. All these lead citizens to perceive government and public administration systems differently. The role of the state and its relationship with bureaucracy and with citizens is undergoing a substantial transformation not only in the minds of the people but also in scientific thinking. In a rapidly changing environment, public administration has a major function and new aims that must be clearly recognized. It remains the best tool democracy can use to create fruitful reciprocal relationships with citizens, but on a higher and better level. To uncover the major tasks and challenges facing the new generation of public administration we require a cross-disciplinary strategy and improved integration of all available knowledge in the social sciences aimed at redefining the boundaries of public administration systems in its new era.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the formation of public administration as an interdisciplinary academic field seems certain. Still, it is unfinished business due to the need and demand to make it more of a "harder social science", one which is closer to management science, economics, or even psychology. Hence, the state of the field is in dispute among academics and practitioners from across the world who seek higher and more extensive scientific recognition, by applying a higher level of empirical-based paradigm. It is argued that such inputs may produce a more accurate self-definition and better applicability of the field to rapid changes in modern life. This process presents new challenges for public administration. Perhaps the most important is to integrate more widely existing knowledge of the social sciences with efficient public action and with quality governmental operation. In the coming years public administration will be evaluated by higher standards of theory cohesiveness and by more comprehensive performance indicators rooted in a variety of scientific fields. The exploration of new interdisciplinary horizons for public administration is thus essential, and inevitable for the successful passage of the field into the third millennium. Somewhat contrary to the concerns of Waldo (1968), the identity crises in its new form may carry a positive, not endangering, interdisciplinary merit. The interdisciplinary orientations have the potential of pulling public administration out of its perplexing-stagnating status and lead it towards a more solid scientific position.

In light of the above a consensus exists today among scholars and practitioners that modern public administration decidedly benefits, and will continue to benefit, from the seminal inputs of social and cultural motives and mainly from the impact of managerial and organizational theory. In keeping with these, modern societies question the current obligations of public personnel toward citizens, and urge them to put people and social values first. These tasks can be achieved by treating citizens as customers or clients but also through building a different value of administrative spirit (Vigoda and Golembiewski, 2001). Yet managerial tendencies draw fire from those who argue that a client orientation of the public sector breeds citizen passivity and lack of individual responsibility toward the state and its agencies. It is further assumed that today these obligations and commitments are not clearly decoded, manifested, or satisfactory implied. Consequently they yield an identity problem of the field and strive for redefinition of its unwritten contract with the

people. Scholars are divided over the best way to obtain missions of good-management together with good cultural order. Still, they agree that much more can be done to improve responsiveness to citizens' needs and demands without forgoing the active role of citizens in the administrative process.

Moreover, the information revolution is expected to create a growing impact on public administration of the future both as a science and as a profession. In referring to the modern public sector Caldwell (2002) suggested that "Our task for linking information, social issues, politics, policy and management is a challenge yet to be accomplished. The enthusiasm for public planning, notably in the 1930s, did not survive the Second World War. The so-called "reinvention" of government based on a market-driven model appears to be essentially contemporaneous and superficial in relation to the multiple challenges to be confronted in the 21st century" (p73-174) Thus, Caldwell continues to argue that "governments and their administrators (in our time) characteristically focus on immediate situations and pressing problems. There are few political rewards for anticipating the long-range future. However, the advancement of science and an apparent growth of public acceptance, however slow, of science-based forecasts may enlarge the "educating" role of public administration. We are hardly at the end of the expansion of knowledge and information, and there is growing although limited recognition that we also face formidable challenges to a sustainable future. And so it is more realistic to see the "New Public Administration" as an evolving process continuing to become "new" as it is adapted to meeting the needs of the ever-receding future".

Finally, in this paper I proposed that the application of multi-disciplinary approaches (political, social, and managerial-based) to the public service is essential for somehow resolving the identity conflict of the field. An agreement over self-identity is required before any further development can be achieved. It is argued that some tenets of administrative culture and democratic values need to be explored before higher levels of social theory synthesis and integration can be reached. These may also be the milestones on the way to better linkage, partnership, and cooperation between rulers and citizens in modern societies. Here lies the main challenge of public administration in the coming years: the invention of a new vitalized administrative generation that is interdisciplinary in nature and tightly bounded together with modern participatory democracy. The contribution of this paper is its effort to bring these views together and to produce a multi-faceted analysis of modern public administration.

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