

The Proposal for Public Administration with an International Focus

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has posed unprecedented challenges to public administration theory and practise. Major policy challenges that span national borders cannot be resolved without international participation; even domestic issues will be better understood and addressed with a global perspective. In order to better comprehend and explain context-specific occurrences, we must investigate concerns beyond national and ethnodemographic boundaries in order to improve Public Administration theory construction. In this paper, we suggest for a shift toward "Public Administration with a Global Perspective" (PAGP) in order to make our teaching, research, and participation more relevant to the changing realities of globalisation. PAGP stresses servicing a global society by developing theories with better explanatory power, acceptance, and responsiveness to needs in different and unique situations.

Keywords: *Public administration, Public Administration with a Global Perspective (PAGP)*

INTRODUCTION

To remain relevant as an interdisciplinary applied discipline, Public Administration should produce ideas that are beneficial to both researchers and practitioners. Critical public problems are increasingly interconnected across national boundaries in the twenty-first century. Conventional comparative Public Administration is no longer appropriate, nor is traditional US-oriented Public Administration. We propose "Public Administration with a Global Perspective" (PAGP) to enhance knowledge creation, solve practical challenges, improve Public Administration education, and, ultimately, boost the field's relevance. PAGP stresses theory development that blends "particularism" with "universalism," paying attention to observations in specific ethnic, cultural, and political settings while also seeking better explanatory power, broader practical consequences, and more.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES DEMANDING A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In recent decades, the globe has been increasingly interconnected and altered as a result of the globalisation process. The influence of globalisation on public administration and governance has elicited a variety of philosophical and practical reactions. Critical public issues are becoming increasingly interconnected across national borders (Robertz 2004). Antiterrorism battles, natural and human disasters, pandemic illnesses, economic crises,

energy and environmental challenges, and ethnic conflicts are all internationally interrelated. Even problems in traditional domestic policy domains, such as public transportation, information management, and defence and security, have been pushed across national boundaries by extensive privatisation and contracting efforts, necessitating global perspectives in knowledge building and problem solving. Such public-sector issues pose challenges to the often-US-centric Public Administration ideas and practises. We require a new theoretical approach in public administration that welcomes the potential to learn on a global scale. Dissatisfaction with American public administration's ethnocentric and provincial character has been extensively addressed in the literature (Heady 1995; Hood 1989). Many people did not believe that US-centric public administration was either instructive or relevant to non-western countries. Non-western states and European communities have investigated practical solutions and learned significant insights that should not be overlooked by mainstream Public Administration literature. The more connected and energised European societies are challenging the United States' leadership position in Public Administration theory development and practise innovation. The enormous experience of the former Soviet administrative systems in their pursuit of democracy and capitalism is useful to other transitional or nondemocratic governments in Asia, South America, and Africa. The extensive expertise gained through E-government development in Singapore,

Hong Kong, and Korea substantially complements the experiences gained in the United States and Europe. Many of the struggling western economies may learn from the success stories of China's economic development zones along its coastlines.

GLOBAL COMPONENTS ALREADY IN PA LITERATURE

Traditionally and even currently, Comparative Public Administration (CPA) has been regarded as a “subfield” of Public Administration. Reflecting a parochial and US-centric orientation, this perception has influenced our thinking of Public Administration for the last 50 years. It demonstrates the assumption that American Public Administration is the mainstream, whereas studies of other countries, all categorized in CPA, are non-mainstream or substreams. This interpretation should have been changed as we have reached a “destination” (Riggs 1991, 474) that “we shall no longer need to speak of ‘comparative administration,’ but only of the study of ‘public administration,’ and of its subfield, the study of ‘American Public Administration’” (Riggs 1976, 652). CPA grew as a subfield of Public Administration in the United States after World War II. The American Society for Public Administration created the Comparative Administration Group (CAG),² which, with grants from the Ford Foundation and the US government, published a series of occasional papers focusing on development administration. Attempts by former colonial countries to learn from western nations, the establishment of international organizations such as the United Nations, and extensive funding opportunities during the Cold War were some of the driving factors that shaped the scope and perceptions toward CPA in the United States (Farazmand 1996).

It is of value to assess the global inclusiveness of American Public Administration journals and curricula as they are the main vehicles for Public Administration knowledge dissemination. Tummala (1998) reported that only 14% of National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration member schools in 1996 offered an option in comparative administration. Our survey of articles from 2003–2008 in 12 selected journals⁴ shows that only 35% of all the articles published covered cases outside the United States (753 articles out of a total of 2136). The other two-thirds were all US focused. Overall, the theoretical perspective and practical relevance of Public Administration scholarship is still seen as lagging behind the

increasing pressure for global Public Administration knowledge. Observation of these journals’ composition of their editorial boards reveals that most board members are US-based scholars (213 out of the total 400 members or 53%).⁵ The lack of diversity among editorial boards also suggests the dominance of American scholarship, which can lead to biases in the decision to recommend articles for publication. We contend that if the leading journals of Public Administration were to broaden their scope of research coverage beyond a US perspective, Public Administration scholarship could be strengthened and generalized to cover a greater range of contexts and issues facing nations around the world. Achieving this goal requires a new set of strategic initiatives for integrating public administration research and practice with a global perspective.

ESSENTIALS OF A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The global nature of public administration practice, training, and scholarship in the 21st century necessitates a new perspective that fully addresses the transnational connectedness, interdependence, and complexity of the field. PAGP will avoid ethnocentrism, the tendency to study and make judgments about other societies in terms of one’s own cultural assumptions or bias. Objects of study and observation are no doubt always taken from the context of specific cultures and countries, with traces of certain political and state characteristics. But our research should not be so relativistic that it becomes impossible to apply any generic cognitive or evaluative criteria. PAGP will also emphasize historicism. Researchers should place their studies into the context of the stages of human development in socio-economic dynamics, with a retrospective view into the past for lessons, experience, and inspiration, and with a prospective view into the future for challenges and solutions. When placed in a longer historical frame, even the most stable political, social, and economic institutions are amenable to change; hence, they should not be treated as reasons for particularism but instruments from which we can learn. PAGP further requires balancing nomotheticism, the tendency to generalize, and idiographicism, the tendency to specify. PAGP is not proposed as a grand theory nor a movement toward grand theory. It is best viewed as an “approach,” an epistemological calling in conducting research. It is not designed (it does not

even attempt) to offer “a comprehensive theory” to “unify the study” or “a central demarcating concept” (Raadschelders 1999).⁶ It does not impose restrictions with tools to be used or the deductive or inductive inclination in conducting research. PAGP aims to redefine the scope of Public Administration to be globally relevant in all our activities of teaching, research, and services. PAGP entails knowledge of, or familiarity with, diverse cultures and countries. Researchers or cross-cultural collaborative teams employing PAGP will be more advantageously situated,⁷ so they can overcome with relative ease those global challenges mentioned in the first two sections.

CONCLUSION

We propose PAGP as a new approach for Public Administration in the 21st century. PAGP is an idea to be further explored and substantiated. Transcending the division between cultures and national boundaries, PAGP builds and tests theories outside of country-specific contexts to study global issues of public administration. This essay advocates that PAGP become the mainstream for Public Administration education in the United States. We offered some preliminary suggestions to advance Public Administration scholarship, both in research and teaching, in the hope that it will generate wider discussions to clarify what PAGP should or should not include. We believe that adopting a global perspective will make the field of Public Administration more relevant and vibrant in the quickly globalizing world.

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