



A Review of State of the Art of Public Administration in Western Academia

Lessons for the Gulf States

Simon Okoth, Ph.D.

Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

Email: shrokoth@gmail.com



A Review of State of the Art of Public Administration in Western Academia

Lessons for the Gulf States

Simon Okoth, Ph.D.

Abstract

The state of the art of public administration in Western academia is characterized by continuous adjustments in approaches and at times by complete transformations. For the past one hundred years or more, paradigm shifts as well as socio-economic and political dynamics have dictated those fine-tunings. Moreover, there has been consistent effort by the academia to link the theoretical perspectives to the core values that drive public administration practices. These core values also face continuous adjustments. This paper explores the literature to demonstrate how these forces have shaped the art of public administration particularly in the United States. Additionally, with the forces of globalization, the paper highlights the need for and ability to interface between the practice of public administration in the West and the Gulf States. The challenges that lie ahead of this effort are identified and possible solutions stated.

Keywords: Public Administration, Arts and Sciences, Core Values, Paradigm Shift, Academia, Western, Gulf States.

Introduction

The art of public administration in Western academia continues to be in a state of flux. This is attributable to two fundamental forces. One is the paradigm shift forces. The other is shift in core values. From its emblematic foundation in the late 1900s, particularly in the United States, to the first decade of the twenty-first century, the art of public administration in Western academia has gone through consistent adjustments, and, at times, complete transformations (Lynn, 2001). This dynamic behavior is akin to the history of scientific revolutions described by Thomas Kuhn (1962). Kuhn observed that a scientific paradigm generally thrives until the more potent one displaces the first. The displacement occurs once the newer paradigm, supported by additional proof, logical disputations and reason, invalidates the claims of the former.

To understand how these two forces have shaped the practice of public administration, this paper first describes two intellectual developments that shaped its very foundation as a field of study. The second part explores the major theoretical debates and approaches that have guided the practice of the field since its debut in the United States. The third part examines the preoccupation with the core values that inform its practice. The fourth part addresses the question: How can public administration as practiced in the West, interface with that of the Gulf States? The paper then goes on to identify interface challenges and recommends some solutions.

Background to the Art of Public Administration

Conceptual Intrigues

The terms “science” and “art” of public administration can be intriguing and at the same time confusing. As a concept, “science” can be defined as a body of knowledge that can be applied to gather information and to enhance existing knowledge. Scientific knowledge is one that can be generalized across space and time. Therefore, the goal of science is both to inform and to solve specific problems regardless of socio-economic and political contexts. When applied to public administration, Vagdo (2005) observes that

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 (p. 7).

Woodrow Wilson (1887), cognizant of the practicality of science and its transferability, called for the “science of administration” to change the manner of public administration practice in the United States. That call was later affirmed by other scholars including Frank Goodnow (1900), Leonard White (1926), William Willoughby (1927), and William Mosher (1937). The unanimity of that appeal meant that public administration deserved to derive its competence from the application of universal principles such as hierarchical structures and employment of efficiency in the delivery of services. What distinguished these traditional thinkers from the later ones, was their inclination to the separation between politics and administration -- in which the former is the ‘master’ and the latter the ‘doer’.

In the 1930s, the science of administration trajectory was validated by the publication of “Papers on the Science of Administration” (Gulick and Urwick, 1937). That endorsement resonated Frederick Taylor’s Scientific Management approach that introduced the “one best way” to accomplish a task (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011; McSwite, 1997). Because of its promise to increase efficiency, the U. S. federal government applied Taylor’s scientific methods to study government agencies after a testimony by Taylor himself to the Taft Commission on Economy and Efficiency (McSwite, 1997; Caiden, 1971, p. 35).

Within the first three decades of its acclaim, the “science” of administration trajectory began to lose some ground following Dwight Waldo’s (1968) prediction that it would not last long. Equally harsh and skeptical of the scientific principles were Herbert Simon (1946) and Robert Dahl (1947). To both, such principles were unreliable. More recently, Eran Vigoda has taken sides with Waldo by adding that “Public administration is an eclectic science” characterized by instability (2005, p. 3). Therefore, its survival is predicated on the ability to incorporate diversity and intricacies (p. 7).

On the other side of spectrum is Public administration as “art.” Those who ally themselves to this position claim that public administration as art involves the employment of mixed approaches,

imagination, and emotions to address public sector problems. These attributes mirror the definition of art by Merriam-Webster dictionary, where “art” means skill or craft acquired by experience. It is also defined as the conscious use of skill and creative imagination. Consequently, there is a growing body of literature that either adds the word “art” to their titles or dedicates area of investigation to the art of public administration (McSwite, 1997). In this paper, the term “art” is used to mean the “practice” of public administration.

Intellectual Roots

Whereas the art of public administration finds its intellectual roots from notable personalities across time, for the purpose of this paper we begin our exploration from 1887 in the United States. This focus on the personalities and the timing is realistic given the significant influence that the development of the field, in terms of approaches and practices, have had in the management of public affairs elsewhere.

We begin with Woodrow Wilson, a scholar and former president of the United States. Like any other citizen of his time, Wilson was very concerned about the inefficiency that existed in the government (1887). Particularly disconcerting to him was the ‘spoils’ system that tarnished the public service. The spoils system, more or less, guaranteed key supporters of successful presidential and higher ranking political candidates with public service jobs. As Emerson et al (2011) explain, it was a system “in which most government jobs were viewed as favors to be given out to political supporters in exchange for votes—and each time an election brought in a new administration there was workforce turnover” (p. 176). The shooting of President James Garfield by a disgruntled job seeker who had expected a government job as reward for his campaign support is an evidence of how deeply-rooted the spoils system was (HistoryLink.org Essay 2494, 2013). The unintended consequence of that assassination was the passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883 by Congress. The goal of that Act was to transform the civil service from one based largely on the spoils system to one based on merit (Emerson et al. 2011; McSwite, 1997).

That spirit of public service reforms enlisted an academic in the name of Woodrow Wilson, who published a seminal paper titled “The Study of Administration” (Wilson, 1887). That seminal paper signified the illustrative beginning and systematic study of public administration practice in the United States (Stillman II, 2010; McSwite, 1997). Central to that paper was the idea that administration ought to be conducted by elites or “enlightened ‘Man of Reason’” (McSwite, 1997, p. 149). In Wilson’s words, “administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions” (cited in Stillman 2010, p. 10). The inherent dichotomy from that statement implied that the role of politics was to make decisions and administrators to implement them. The presumed separation also implied that public administrators were to remain accountable to their “supervisors”, the elected officials (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011).

The politics/administration has attracted a lot of reactions. Svava (1999) for example argues that the dichotomy was never viewed by those who founded the field as divisive in how government decisions are to be made and implemented. Rather it is “a model of complementarity... It stresses interdependency, reciprocal influence and extensive interaction between elected officials

and administrators...” (p. 676). Despite the pejorative spin that scholars have put to the dichotomy, Dehnardt and Denhardt (2011) have recently observed that it has in fact shaped how the government operates.

Wilson further suggested that public administration ought to be run like a business in order to achieve efficiency. His assumption was that businesses employed scientific principles to increase efficiency, production and profits. Also cognizant that those scientific principles had their roots in Europe, Wilson cautioned on their direct application. Instead he recommended that they be tailored both in “thought, principle, and aim” (Stillman II, 2010, p. 8). What Wilson seemed to acknowledge, was that the practice of public administration ought to open up to foreign approaches but at the same time tweaked to fit the local conditions. Welch and Wong (1998) similarly argue that “failure to incorporate ideas from other contexts can be detrimental to the long-term development of public administration theory in America” (p. 42).

The art of public administration also owe its foundation to the ideas and influence of German sociologist, Max Weber. Weber conceptualized and developed the idea of bureaucracy which he defined as “the means of carrying ‘community action’ over into rationally ordered ‘societal action’” (Weber cited in Stillman II, 2010, p. 60). His conceptualization of ideal bureaucracy is one characterized by hierarchy that separates superiors from the subordinates; division of labor in which employees are specialized in their tasks and have tenure; and, rules that are impersonal. He also identified three types of authorities that constitute the “ideal type” of modern bureaucracies. The first was the “traditional” authority in which beliefs system dictated the legitimacy of rulers. Second was “Charismatic” authority that allowed rulers to exercise their authority over the ruled. The third was the “legal-rational” authority that defined supervisor-supervisee relationship within modern bureaucracies. He argued that the legal-rational structure was superior to all other forms because it systematized administrative tasks where competence, division of labor, and organization rules guided administrative functions. Additionally, it is to be preferred because of the “precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction of material and personal costs” (Weber, cited in Stillman, 2010, p. 59). Weber further maintained that bureaucracies were the most efficient because the hierarchical structures enabled the men at the top, selected based on merit and expertise, to guide the organization to its best performance (Rieger, 1995).

Although Weber’s formulation of the “ideal-type” bureaucracy has improved our understanding of how public organizations, critics have focused on its omission of communication networks and how the relationship between employees and supervisors can impact on organizational outcomes (Stillman II, 2010, p. 53). The critics maintain that public bureaucracies perform rather poorly compared to their private sector counterparts. The reasons for this include government interventions, dependency on the government as the only underwriter, strict adherence to organizational rules that impede creativity, communication barriers between the top officials and lower level employees, and unchecked supervisor-employee conflicts (Goodsell, 2004, p. 12). Goodsell goes on to observe that “public bureaucracy in the United States, at all levels of government, inevitably involves individual instances of waste, incompetence, abuse of power, and breakdown, [but] it does, on the whole and in comparison to most countries and even in the business sector in [the United States], perform surprisingly well” (p. 3). Those who seem to agree with Goodsell add that bureaucracies provide the necessary technical expertise needed

to formulate policies, reduction of uncertainty, and ability to ability to make choices (p. 20-21). Similarly, bureaucracies provide structures through which public service tasks can be organized and carried out.

The stated intellectual foundations have been complemented by theoretical forces that aim to provide explanatory guidance of how public bureaucracies ought to achieve efficiency and effectiveness that Wilson and Weber had hoped for.

Theoretical Forces

Theories and paradigms evolve through time. Lynn (2014) notes that “public administration and management literature has featured a riveting story: the transformation of the field’s orientation from an old paradigm to a new one” (2001, p. 144). Waldo (1961) similarly justified these paradigmatic shifts when he observed that “a generation of younger students have demolished the classical theory, again and again; they have uprooted it, threshed it, and thrown most of it away... In many ways the classical theory was crude, presumptuous, incomplete-wrong in some of its conclusions, naïve in its scientific methodology, [and] parochial (1961, p. 220). By and large, we continue to witness these leaps both in terms of theories and sentiments similar to that of Waldo.

Generally, sound theories enable us to understand why things happen and to predict future occurrences and behaviors. Theories also provide guidance to formulate new or improved strategies to tackle “wicked” problems within the public sector (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Wicked problems are those persistent and difficult to resolve issues including unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation (Sementelli, 2007, p. 740). Hill and Lynn (2004, p. 5) see possible solutions to wicked problems in the application of theories because they enable researchers and practitioners to “study government processes [and]... to develop a body of empirical knowledge concerning what works and why” (p. 4). Another important attribute of theories is their origin. They can either be borrowed from other countries, from sector to sector, or designed in-house for a specific sector. Woodrow Wilson (1887) alluded to the borrowing of science of administration from Europe although advised on their fine-tuning to the local conditions.

The following theories are briefly appraised to show the historical shifts in thinking and their relevance to the art of public administration: Scientific Management, Rational Decision Model, the Human Relations Approach and the New Public Management Theory (NPM).

Scientific Management Theory

The Scientific Management approach was an outgrowth of the intellectual discourses initiated by Woodrow Wilson and subsequent scholars that called for the institutionalization of the science of administration. However, the theoretical approach was developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor (1947). The theory suggests that there is “one best way” (Schachter, 1989, p. 471) to accomplish tasks. The “one best way” is defined as a scientific approach to determine the performance standards that guide workers to improve efficiency.

Following an experiment at the Bethlehem Steel Company in Pennsylvania, Taylor concluded that the best method to perform a task and to maximize productivity was to apply scientific principles in the selection of employees, division of labor, training, and in the payment of wages (Rimer, 1993). He therefore introduced “time and motion” studies to streamline performance standards. The result was an increase in productivity by 280 percent compared to 60 percent in wages (p. 271). The approach further made it possible to compare the work of each employee in terms of costs, time and quality, and how the combination of the three variables contributed to absolute efficiency. The notion of absolute efficiency has been questioned by Schachter (1989) over its assumption that it is only possible once the worker is financially remunerated.

Since the scientific management approach relied on the supervisors to instruct the employee of how to do the work, it is deemed authoritarian in style (Schachter, 1989). Stivers (2003) has similarly observed that the scientific management engendered “Centralization of authority in order to regulate and systematize the work process [that] required a new kind of employee, [and] the ‘manager,’ in recognition of the fact that pure coercion was insufficient to effect the necessary thoroughness of control” (p. 214). Meir (1997) and Spicer (2007) assert that rigorous scientific approach to governance can be tricky for the art of public administration. This is because “it ignores the conflicting ends and values and the freedom and uncertainty that we have come to experience as part and parcel of our own tradition of politics” (Spicer, 2007, p. 779). Box agree with the assessment when he observes that there is less interest by public administration practitioners in purely scientific approaches such as “multiple regression equations, factor analyses, or similar techniques” (1992, p. 65). These criticisms notwithstanding, scientific management has found home in several organizations because it focuses on increased production and efficiency.

Human Relations Approach

Waldo (1968), Schaster’s (1989), Box (1992) and Spicer (2007) were not wrong in their prognosis about the troubled waters of governance that scientific approach was treading on. Of particular interest to social scientists is what motivates workers to increase productivity and to perform well in a given task. Elton Mayo’s (Rieger, 1995) research conducted at the Western Electric’s Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois, between 1927 and 1932 showed that improvement of working conditions were not by themselves key to productivity nor was money. Instead, what mattered most was the ability to “treat people well”; how supervisors interact with employees; and, recognition (p. 56). From that study emerged a human relations approach to managing organizations. Mayo’s findings thus challenged Taylor’s scientific management premise that the manipulation of the working environment and worker conditioning as the primary mechanisms to increasing worker productivity. It also challenged Weber’s bureaucratic model that emphasized organizational structure as primary to efficiency in the workplace. This new shift of thinking attracted industry officials. Examples of the integration of this approach can be seen in the Total Quality Management in which the workers’ views are taken into consideration by supervisors and team work emphasized (Heinrich, 2007, p. 27).

Rational Decision Making Model

Perhaps more pervasive in its application is the ‘Rational Decision Making Model’. The model involves several steps to making a decision (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). The first is the identification of the problem. The second involves developing alternative options that can potentially address the problem. The third entails the assessment of consequences of each alternative. The fourth requires the decision-maker to choose the “best” alternative that optimizes the goals or societal welfare. Although the process is sequential, the actual operationalization is cyclical. This means that that process can start at any stage. Similarly, different decision activities can take place concurrently (Hoy & Tarter, 2004).

Despite its application within organizations, the model has some limitations. Herbert Simon (2000) was among the first to identify these limitations. He maintained that it is impractical to arrive at any best solution because of human cognitive limitation and the difficulty of amassing all the relevant information needed to decide which among the alternative is best. Instead, what is practical is making decisions based on “bounded rationality”. This implies that humans make decisions that are merely ‘satisficing’ or satisfactory rather the best.

New Public Management (NPM)

To label an approach as “new” means that there is a clear departure from the past. According to its proponents, the New Public Management reflects a paradigm shift that offers newer explanation of how governments ought to achieve efficiency. But there are those who argue against its newness. Instead, this form of management is said to have “evolved incrementally from past administrative traditions” (Page, 2005, p. 713). Catlaw et al (2007) point that the NPM is simply another approach to elucidating a phenomenon that has been around at the national, state, and local levels, at least in the United States. The approach “add to the toolbox of public administrators-it does not replace the toolbox” (p. 341). The question that must be asked is: What made paradigm shift any different from previous practices?

Foremost is the bureaucratic reforms espoused by the New Public Management in the 1980s. One element of the model is the shifting government roles accompanied by the diffusion of authority (Lane, 2000; Christensen & Laegreid, 2002). Another is the application of new institutional economics (NIE) to improve the performance of government and to address the demands faced by the public sector (Catlaw et al., 2007, p. 341). The logic of the new institutional economics is that institutions, public or private, are the primary determinants of economic performance or overall efficiency. As Zafirovski (2003) explains, social institutions are “efficiency devises” (p. 798) that can be managed through the lens of the market place.

The integration of the NIE model into the public sector has three primary features. One is the adaptation of performance-based institutional structures and approaches. This includes “incentives, and measurement in government performance” (Lynn, 1998, p. 232.), “decentralization, cross-functional collaboration, and accountability for results” (Page, 2005, p. 714). One question asked is: If the performance indicators are successful in the private sector, why not in the public sector? (Smith, 1993) It is this question that motivated the Reagan and Thatcher administration in the U.S. and U.K respectively, to experiment with NPM. The

outcome of that experiment was the reinventing of government (Kettle, 2000). Not long before the maturity of the experiment, Maucourant (2012), among others, charged that the price system, self-regulation and competition in the marketplace that was part of NPM do not produce “social optimum” (p. 193), an expected outcome in the public sector.

Core Values

One other distinct force that continues to influence the art of public administration is public service values. Values can be defined as societal ideals or archetypes of “how people should live and the ends they should seek” (Jelovac, 2010, 75). Fisher and Lovell (cited in Jelovac, 2010, p. 75) describe values as “simply expressed generalities, often no more than single words such as peace and honesty...” Examples of values common to the practice of public administration in the West include efficiency, effectiveness, social equity/fairness, ethics, and accountability. Others include representativeness (Hebert Kaufman, 1956); public interest, citizenship, serving, and valuing people (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011, p. v-vii). Despite their contribution to service and governance, a more rigorous investigation about public service values is still in nascent stages in Western academia (Jorgensen and Bozeman, 2007). A public values inventory conducted by Jorgensen and Bozeman recorded only 230 studies that deal with directly with this topic (p. 255).

Public values can be divided into six categories (Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007). There are those associated with public sector’s contribution to society, transformation of interests to decisions, relationship between public administration and politicians, intraorganizational aspects of public administration, and with the behavior of public-sector employees (p. 364-370). These can be further collapsed into two for ease of comparison: public values attached to political action and those attached to public administration action. Even though values are varied in their functionality, they also have some common characteristics.

One important characteristic of values is that they are transient. They change with time (Jelovac, 2010, p. 75) as external or universal values creep in and get accepted by the locals. As these “foreign” values get incorporated into a given social or organizational context, those who are reluctant to accept them are criticized for being conservative. This often results in resentments as the external and local values collide (Jelovac, 2010). Even more daunting is the reconciliation of Western values with non-Western public service values. As we will shortly find out, the porosity of national borders due to globalization is making this reconciliation occur even faster than originally anticipated.

Another unique characteristic of public service values, but one that is yet to be debated conclusively by Western academics, is the likelihood that some values are of higher order than the others. For example, which of these should be rated higher than the other, efficiency, effectiveness, social equity, or accountability? Or is their weighting in society primarily determined by the socio-economic and political dynamics at a particular time? On this hierarchical ranking of values, Denhardt and Denhardt (2011) observe that “In the New Public Service, ideals such as fairness, equity, responsiveness, respect, empowerment, and commitment do not negate but often outweigh the value of efficiency as the sole criterion for the operation of government” (p. 165). Another strand of argument is that of complementarity. Is it enough to be efficient without making public programs socially equitable? Ford and Schellenberg (2002, p.

87) maintain that values generally tend to complement each other and thus lead organizations to achieve higher proceeds.

The last characteristic of the values is their ambiguity. As Deborah Stone (2002) notes, this vagueness arises from the fact that public service values are socially constructed. Consequently, this leads to little agreement as to exactly what they mean to different constituencies. The result is conflicts. Overall, Stone (2002) observes, values “unite people at the same time as they divide” (p. 37).

Additional enduring but related question raised earlier is: how can these competing public administration values be reconciled? Jorgensen and Bozeman (2007) ask the same question but differently: “How do public values fit together?” (p. 362). Although this paper does not attempt to address these questions, they are highlighted because of the importance they have been accorded in the Western academic discourse, and of course their relevance to the art of public administration. Let’s examine four values that seem to feature prominently in the public administration literature.

Efficiency: This was the primary public service value that captured Woodrow Wilson’s interest when he wrote the “Science of Administration” paper. Denhardt and Denhardt corroborate this historical fact by stating that efficiency was a dominant value common to the old public administration (2011). Generally, efficiency can be defined as the ratio between input and output (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011; Deva, 1985), or “getting the most output for a given input” (Stone, 2002, p. 37). Efficiency also assumes that workers will not work towards the attainment of organizational outputs unless they are provided with financial incentives. Therefore, the trick is to design tasks in such a way as to maximize the output from each employee accompanied by low financial perquisites.

Effectiveness: This can be defined as the ability to produce desired outcome. As an instrument, effectiveness assesses the organizational ability to achieve its goals and objectives (Kumar and Gulati, 2010). *Accountability* is another important public sector value. It is a relational concept that prescribes how the employee ought to justify her actions to the supervisor. The concept can be best understood through the principal-agent theory. This theory suggests that the actor or agent “must answer to his boss, the principal (Laffont, 2003). As Anderson (2009) explains, this is strictly a hierarchical relationship in which the “principal has ownership, physical or moral, of some resources, and an (normally expert) agent is designated to do specific thing or to manage resources in the best interests of the principal” (p. 324). In this kind of association, the agent serves the interest of the principal and can be punished for failing to do so. The framework also assumes that the agents have the ethical responsibility to conform to the demands of those in authority. Additionally, it assumes the role of catalyst to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The mechanisms and structures that promote the success of accountability are information and bureaucracy. The latter privileges authorities at the top of the organization to issue orders and instructions to those lower in the hierarchy (Monfardini, 2010).

Social Equity is the other value that has gained prominence in the Western public administration literature (Riccuci, 2009). According Frederickson, social equity “includes activities designed to enhance the political power and economic well-being of ...minorities (1971, p. 311). It denotes

just and fair treatment of citizens and equitable distribution of societal benefits. The benefits are not limited to salaries and employment but also to access to decision making on matters affecting minorities.

How can these Western-based theoretical and public service value forces interface with the practice of public administration in the Gulf States such as the United Arab Emirates? This is explored in the next section.

Interfacing Western and Gulf States Public Administration

The Issues

As we have noted from the intellectual history of public administration, Wilson's original thinking about the occasional need to borrow some of the best practices and adapt them to local conditions can be relevant to the Gulf States. For example, he noted that "our own institutions can be understood only by those who are familiar with other systems of government. Through the use of a thorough comparative and historical method, a general clarification of views may be obtained" (1889/1892, p. xxxv). He further added that "Legislation and administration ought under every well-devised system to go hand in hand. Laws must receive test of their wisdom and feasibility at the hands of administration: administration must take its energy and its policy from legislation" (1889/1892, p. 591). These two features, comparative and the distinctive roles of the politician and the administrator, and how they have shaped America's art of public administration can be of relevance to the Gulf States (i.e., Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman).

Another intellectual tradition that has had a far-reaching appeal and is clearly evident in the Gulf States is Weber's bureaucratic model. This is surprising given the unabated stigmatization and constant flogging that the model has been subjected to especially in some quarters of Western academia. Take for example Michael Barzelay's stigmatization. He asserts that

"a bureaucratic agency is focused on its own needs and perspectives and on the roles and responsibilities of the parts; defines itself both by the amount of resources it controls and by the tasks it performs; controls costs; sticks to routine; fights for turf; insists on following standard procedures; announces policies and plans; and separates the work of thinking from that of doing" (1992, p. 8-9).

Barzelay's views thus diminished the traditional bureaucratic paradigm as diametrically opposed to the new order of public management that must be responsive to the fresh values and demands of society such as representativeness and democracy. It is on the same light that Osborne and Gaebler (1992) stated that the new forms of governance have replaced those of the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore the new approaches ought to replace the old ones, so the argument goes. But, the stigmatization of bureaucracy has had unintended positive consequences. For one, bureaucracies have learned to muddle through by correcting the mistakes. Consequently, they have become more resilient and adaptive. No wonder, Goodsell (2004) has observed that, overall bureaucracies have performed quite well in the United States as compared to their counterparts

elsewhere. The Gulf States can similarly stick to the muddling through approach; learning by mistakes.

Additionally, bureaucracies are pervasive (Goodsell, 2003; Gajduschek, 2003; Farmer & Farmer, 1997). Like Goodsell, Gajduschek asks the question: If bureaucracy is not efficient, then why is it ubiquitous in social spheres? His answer is that it has the power to reduce uncertainty, or what Max Weber referred to as rationality. As an organization phenomenon, bureaucracy helps with coordination to reduce confusion of who should do what. The rule specifies the best way to deal with a task, while expertise ensures the perfect completion of a given task based on knowledge.

Although these features have contributed to the way public administration is practiced in the West, they can also “lead to unintended dysfunctions, most of all to goal displacement” (Gajduschek, 2003, p. 702). Herbert Simon (1946) was among the first to identify some of the internal inconsistency of the bureaucratic model followed by a group of contingency theorists such as Blau and Meyer (1971) who claimed that bureaucracy is relatively inefficient. The problem lies on the probability that bureaucrats do not act wholly in the public interest but occasionally in the private interest. This is the view of public choice theorists (Tullock & Brady, 2002). But what are the solutions to the bureaucratic dysfunctions that the Gulf States can learn from?

Farmer and Farmer (1997) suggest that we shouldn't think of bureaucracies in terms of the “bureaucratic man” but rather as “bio-psychospirituo-social-cultural beings” (1997, p. 507). Additionally, we ought to avoid focusing on the surface ailments (or symptoms) of bureaucracies and prescribing short-term antidotes only for the malady to resurface. The solution is to focus on the in-between of bureaucracy; “the nonbureaucratic” (p.507) in order to detect the origin of ailment and then provide the right treatment. One way to deal with this is to listen to the human experience rather than focusing on the visible effects of bureaucracy. Given that hierarchy has engendered more than enough blame, Farmer and Farmer recommend the “lateralization” of our public organization to provide more autonomy or even liberty.

Relevance of Theories

The debate over which brand of theories ought to inform the art of public administration lingers without any degree of consensus. One brand of theory emphasizes the employment of the scientific approach across all organizations (Hill and Lynn, 2004). Spicer (2007) discounts this empirical ‘manifesto’ as technically misplaced given the value-based political character of public administration. The other brand of theories emphasizes human relations. The Human Relations School emphasized the importance of treating workers as humans and not as machines. This requires employers to give primacy to the intrinsic rewards (i.e., caring, relationship, and friendship) rather than focusing wholly on extrinsic incentives (i.e., salaries, bonuses). The dearth of public administration literature makes it quite difficult to succinctly single out theoretical frameworks unique to the practice in the Gulf States. However in general, most of these states tend to borrow the best practices, including theoretical approaches, from western societies in the name of “benchmarking”. Whenever an agency plan to undertake a new initiative or to resolve a social problem, practices by other industrialized countries are examined in detail and compared for merit in terms of social, cultural, ethical and political feasibility before

selecting the best option. Benchmarking as a novel paradigm, goes back to Wilson's call for comparative studies and taking only what is contextually applicable. These best practices borrowed best practices are by and large, informed by theories rooted in Western intellectual traditions already reviewed in this paper. Arguably, and more often than not, some of these theoretical approaches and paradigms are not good fit to the practice of public administration in non-western states of the Gulf as they tend to conflict with the local norms and values. As will be argued in the next section, the Gulf States particularly in the United Arab Emirates, scholars along with students of public administration are beginning to question the relevance of these theoretical approaches to their own situation, in terms of cultural practices and Islamic traditions that inform the ways the public sector is run and managed (ElKaleh & Samier, 2013).

Relevance of Values

As already alluded to above, the application of Western-based public administration values to Gulf States can be a challenge. Although efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and social equity, including economy, are documented in Western-based literature as the main pillars of public administration, such values can be difficult to transfer in whole or in parts. Whereas values generally shape behaviors either within the organization or the society toward desired ends, their transferability across national borders without contextualizing some aspects can be complex if not confusing. Views differ on this.

One argument is that the American public administration for example, is generally not "informed by international theoretical perspectives or very adaptable to other national contexts" (Welch & Wong, 1998, p. 40). Therefore, it is not advisable to try to transfer Western public administration practices and values to non-western states. Welch and Wong (1998) states, "When literature that was designed for the West or Europe is applied to non-Western nations, it rarely fits well, [thereby] exaggerating the tension between theory and practice" (p. 40). What makes this view somewhat logical is the fact that public administration in the Gulf States is practiced under different historical experience, cultural and political contexts. In fact, all of the Gulf States are constitutional monarchies in which Islamic traditions and closely-knit societal values are integral part of public services dispensation (ElKaleh & Samier, 2013).

Challenges and Solutions to Bridging the Gap

What makes the idea of bridging the gap between Western and non-Western public administration trickier, is its Eurocentric character. Foremost, the development of public administration literature in non-Western societies has lagged behind if non-existent (Welch & Wong, 1998). Although efforts by some western scholars who have perched their nests in the region in an effort to understand and to document the practices in Middle East is gaining momentum, the task has proven quite difficult. Bits of information available on government websites do not provide theoretical or value-based guidance to the practice of the field that is unique to the region. Here and there however, one will find the employment of latent values such as 'solidarity' or even "Wasta" (Arabic for 'networking' and 'favoritism') (Alijbour, 2011) in addition to efficiency, effectiveness and social equity. Alijbour argues that *Solidarity* and *Wasta*, can negatively affect the employment of efficiency in public management.

Another problem of linking the gap between the practice of public administration in Western and the Gulf States is the differences in contexts. As Dahl (1947) rightly contended, public administration ought to be practiced on the basis of “historical, sociological, economic and other conditional factors” (p.11). But yet the differences in contexts seem to be diminishing with globalization. In this regard, Welch and Wong (1998) observe that, with the present rate of globalization, both Western and non-Western academia have the opportunity to look for ways of management that can be applicable to different socio-political and cultural contexts. What this means at least for Western countries such as the United States is that, missing the opportunity to integrate “ideas from other contexts can be detrimental to the long-term development of public administration theory in America and for the applicability of American public administration theory abroad” (p. 41). The solution to bridging the gap, according to Welch and Wong, therefore lies not on the universal quantification of the field but on the ability to apply comparative approaches and taking the best out of it.

Nevertheless, the employment of comparative studies to bridge the gap can also encounter additional problems. For example, as Welch and Wong seem to acknowledge, it is not always practical to align Western-based theories and values with external socio-economic and political situations. What is recommended is to modify the concepts, language and theories to fit the local conditions. Farazmand (1994) has gone further to suggest the need for structural adjustments, including organization reforms, in order to accommodate the forces of globalization that currently eases the flow of public administration values and norms across national borders. Keith Henderson (1994), like Farmer and Farmer (1997), urge for the in-between position, one that finds the middle ground between the ‘indigenization’ and ‘internationalization’, where the former is inward looking and the latter outward looking. Here lies the challenge for the practice of public administration in the Gulf region. For example, in the United Arab Emirates the government has embarked on nationalizing the public sector workforce (or “emiratization”). The goal is to slowly displace international labor force in all sectors of the economy and replace them with Emiratis (or nationals). This national goal presents a complex mix. On the one hand is the need to emiratize the public sector, and on the other hand the desire to internationalize public administration practice. The problem that accompanies this effort is the disparity between the local work ethics informed by local values such as *Wasta* and Solidarity, and internationalized public administration practices that are generally influenced by foreign values.

The reality is that the global pressures faced by the public sector in several countries will require that the Gulf States, along with non-western nations, respond in three ways: One, the willingness to borrow foreign theoretical frameworks but tailored to local situation. Two is the incorporation of universal public sector values such as efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and social equity. This is desirable given the unabated force of globalization and the need to international public sector performance, standardized outputs and the unavoidable linkages with the rest of the world through these outputs. The third way of response is the restructuring of public sector institutions into “replicas of global institutions.” The choice is hard, but to function in a globalized world of public administration in which the Gulf States is part will require simultaneous and judicious adoption and adaptation of practices that will bring about improvement and consistent with the local context.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the state of the art of public administration in Western academia is primarily characterized by theoretical adjustments, application of public service core values, and the deferment to intellectual foundations as the lens for making adjustments. The adjustments have been necessitated by the dynamic social, economic and political conditions of which United States is part. Moreover, a convincing body of literature emphasizes the need to incorporate comparative approaches and tweaking them to suit the local conditions. The current wave of globalization obliges academics and practitioners to monitor and to incorporate theoretical models or public administration values developed elsewhere, although this can be tricky. Can the gap between Western and Gulf States be fulfilled despite the challenges stated in the paper? How about the dysfunctions of bureaucracy? The paper suggests muddling through and learning through mistakes. Finally, for the global village in which we must function, the question is not about 'indigenization' or 'internationalization', but finding the in-between where both elements can bring about effectiveness and efficiency in the public service.

About the Author

Dr. Simon Okoth is the Director of Graduate Studies, Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. Prior to that he taught as a professor of Public Administration at Zayed University, UAE. He can be reached at: shrokoth@gmail.com

References

- Alijbour, R. H. (2011). *Wasta* and non-Arab training, characteristics, task, and culture in Arab markets. (Doctoral dissertation, n.a., 2011). Abstract retrieved June 10, 2012 from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses.
- Anderson, J. (2009 Sept). Illusions of accountability: Credit and blame sensemaking in public administration. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 31(3), 322-339.
- Barelay, M. (1992). *Breaking through bureaucracy: A new vision for managing in government*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Blau, P. M. & Meyer, M.W. (1971). *Bureaucracy in modern society* (Rev., 2nd ed.). New York: Random House.
- Box, R. (1992). An examination of the debate over research in public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 52(1), 62-69.
- Caiden, G.E. (1971). *The dynamics of public administration: Guidelines to current transformations in theory and practice*. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden.
- Catlaw, T., Chapman, J. and Page, S. (2007 Mar/Apr). A comment on Stephen

Page's "What is new about the New Public Management"/Gurus, theory, and practice: A reply to Catlaw and Chapman. *Public Administration Review*, 67(2), 341-342.

- Christensen, T. & Lægreid, P. (2002). *New public management: The transformation of ideas and practice*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Dahl, R. A. (1947). The Science of Administration: Three problems. *Public Administration Review*, 7(1), 1-11.
- Davis, C. R. (1996). The administrative rational model and public organization theory. *Administration & Society*, 28(1), 39
- Denhardt, J. V. & Denhardt, R. B. (2011). *The new public service: Serving, not steering*, (3rd Ed.). Armonk, NY and London, England: M.E. Sharpe.
- Deva, S. (1985 August). Effectiveness and efficiency in public administration: A theoretical framework. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XX (35); *Review of Management*, M94.
- ElKaleh, E. & Samier, E. A. (2013). The Ethics of Islamic Leadership: A Cross-Cultural Approach for Public Administration. *Administrative Culture*, 14 (2), 188-211.
- Farazmand, A. (1994). The new world order and global public administration: A critical essay. In J. C. Garcia-Zamor & Khator, R. (Eds.). *Public Administration in the Global Village (pp. n.a.)*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Farmer, D. J. & Farmer, R. L. (1997 Nov). Leopards in the temple: Bureaucracy and the limits of the in-between. *Administration & Society*, 29(5), 507-528.
- Ford, J.D. & Schellenberg, D.A. (1982). Conceptual issues of linkage in the assessment of organizational performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 7, 49-58.
- Frederickson, G.H. (1971). Toward a new public administration. In F. Marini (Ed.). *Toward a new public administration. The Minnowbrook perspective*, (pp. 9-31). Scranton, PA: Chandler.
- Emerson, S.R.M. & van Ness, K. (2011). *The public administrator's companion: A practical guide*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.
- Gajduschek, G. (2003). Bureaucracy: Is it efficient? Is it not? Is that the question?: Uncertainty reduction: An ignored element of bureaucratic rationality. *Administration & Society*, 34(6), 700-723.
- Goodnow, F. (1900). *Politics and administration*. New York: Macmillan.

- Goodsell, C. T. (2003). *The case for bureaucracy: A public administration polemic* (4th edition). Washington D.C.: CQ Press.
- Gulick, L., & Urwick, L. (Eds.). (1937). *Papers on the science of administration*. New York: Columbia University, Institute of Public Affairs.
- Heinrich, C. J. (2007). Measuring public sector performance and effectiveness. In B. G. Peters & J. Pierre (Eds.). *The handbook of public administration* (pp. 24-36). London: Sage Publications.
- Henderson, K. M. (1994). Rethinking the comparative experience: Indigenization versus Internationalization. In O.P. Dwivedi & Henderson, K.M. (Eds.). *Public administration in world perspective* (pp. n.a.). Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Hill, C. J., & Lynn, Jr., L.E. (2004). Governance and public management, an Introduction. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(1), 3-11.
- HistoryLink.org Essay 2494. (2013). Assassination attempt on President James Garfield plunges Seattleites into gloom on July 2, 1881. Retrieved February 23, 2013 from <http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage>.
- Hoy, W. K., & Tarter, C. J. (2004). *Administrators solving the problems of practice: Decision-making concepts, cases, and consequences*. (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Jelovac, D. (2010). The historical-cultural background of public administration values: The case of Slovenia/Zgodovinsko-kulturno ozadje vrednot v javni upravi: primer Slovenija. *Raziskave in Razprave*, 3(3), 75-101.
- Johnson, W. C. (2009). *Public administration: Partnerships in public service*, 4th edition. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Jorgensen, B. T. & Bozeman, B. (2007 May). *Administration & Society*, 39(3), 354-359, 368-381.
- Kaufman, H. (1956). Eg conflicts in the doctrines of public administration. *American Political Science Review*, 50, 1057-1073.
- Kettle, D. (2000). *The global public management revolution*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolution*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kumar, S., and Gulati, R. (2010). Measuring efficiency, effectiveness and performance of Indian public sector banks. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 59(1), 51-74.

- Laffont, J. J. (2003). *The principal-agent model: The economic theory of incentives*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Lane, J. (2000). *New public management*. London: Routledge.
- Lynn, Jr., L. E. (2001 Mar/Apr). The myth of the bureaucratic paradigm: What traditional public administration really stood for. *Public Administration Review*, 61(2), 144-160.
- Lynn, Jr., L. E. (1998 May/June). The new public management: How to transform a theme into legacy. *Public Administration Review*, 58(3), 231-237
- Maucourant, J. (2012 Mar). New institutional economics and history. *Journal of Economics Issues*, 46(1), 193-207.
- McSwite, O. C. 1997. *Legitimacy in public administration: A discourse analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Monfardini, P. (2010). Accountability in the new public sector: A comparative case study. *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 23(7), 632-646.
- Page, S. (2005 Nov/Dec). What's new about the New Public Management? Administrative change in the human services. *Public Administrative Review*, 65(6), 713-727.
- Ricucci, N. (2009 May/Jun). The pursuit of social equity in the federal government: A road less traveled? *Public Administration Review*, 69(3), 373-382, 369.
- Rieger, B. J. (1995 October). Lessons in productivity and people. *Training & Development* 49(10): 56.
- Rimer, E. (1993, May/Jun). Organization theory and Frederick Taylor – Taylorism Transformation. *Public Administration Review*, 53(3), 270-274.
- Rittel, H., & Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4: 155-169.
- Sementelli, A. (2007 October). Distortions of progress. Evolutionary theories and public administration. *Administration & Society*, 39 (6), 740-760.
- Schachter, H. L. (1989). *Frederick Taylor and the public administration community: A reevaluation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sementelli, A. (2007 October). Distortions of progress: Evolutionary theories and public administration 39(6): 740-760.
- Simon, H. A. (2000). *Administrative behavior* (4th ed.). New York: The Free Press.

- Simon, H. A. (1946). The proverbs of administration. *Public Administration Review*, 6, 53-67.
- Smith, P. (1993). Outcome-related performance indicators and organizational control in the public sector. *British Journal of Management*, 4, 135-151.
- Spicer, M. W. (1995). *The founders, the constitution, and public administration: A conflict in world views*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Stillman II, R. J. (2010). *Public administration: Concepts and cases*, 9th edition. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Stivers, Camilla. (2003 May). Administration versus management: A reading from beyond the boundaries. *Administration & Society*, 35 (2), 210-230.
- Stone, D. (2002). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making (Revised edition)*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Svara, H. H. (1999 January). Complementarity of politics and administration as a legitimate alternative to the dichotomy model. *Administration & Society* 30(6), 676-705
- Taylor, F. W. (1947). *Scientific management*. New York: Harper.
- Tullock, A. S., & Brady, G. L. (2002). *Government failure: A primer in public choice* (Eds.). Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute.
- Vigoda, E. (2002). *Public administration: An interdisciplinary critical analysis*. New York: Marcel Dekker.
- Weber, M. (2010). Bureaucracy. In R. J. Stillman II. *Public administration: Concepts and Cases* (9th ed.) (pp. 54-62). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Welch, E. & Wilson, W. (1998). Public administration in a global context: Bridging the gaps of theories and practice between Western and non-Western nations. *Public Administration Review*, 58(1), 40-49.
- Wilson, W. (1887). The study of administration. *Political Science Quarterly*, 2, 97-222.
- Wilson, W. (1892). *The state: Elements of historical and practical politics*. Boston: D.C. Heath. (Original work published 1889).
- Willoughby, W. F. (1927). *Principles of administration*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- White, L. (1926). *Introduction to the study of public administration*. New York: Harper.
- Zafirovski, M. (2003). Orthodoxy and heterodoxy in analyzing institutions: Original and new

institutional economics reexamined. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 30(7/8), 798.

