Knowledge and Skills Required by Public Servants in a Fast-changing World of Work

L C van Jaarsveldt
Department of Public Administration and Management
University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

This article explores scholarly literature and international standards in respect of curricula on Public Administration in order to determine what skills and knowledge students should have in order to function adequately in a fast-changing world and work environment. Since it is the responsibility of inter alia, universities to prepare students for their future work environment, it is essential that the curricula used remain relevant concerning changing needs and expectations. Consequently, it is the aim of this article to determine what skills and knowledge should be included in Public Administration curricula to prepare students adequately for a fast-changing world and work environment. Based on an assessment of literature and international standards; this article determines that current curricula on Public Administration probably do not provide students with sufficient skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of a fast-changing world and work environment. The outcomes indicate that communication skills, collaborative skills and the ability to work with diverse groups of people in multinational and international teams are becoming increasingly important. This study contributes to the development of initiatives relating to Public Administration curricula to assist students and public servants to be successful in their work environment.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, current societal needs demand that students gain the knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes that will equip them to contribute to the workforce
(Barrie 2007). Related to this, Dickinson and Sullivan (2014:3) state that academics and literature suggest that there will be a significant change in what public servants do as demographics shift, new technology emerges and citizens’ expectations change. In addition, aspects such as political turmoil, poor leadership, service delivery protests, corruption, refugees and xenophobia attacks, global warming, the depletion of natural resources, financial crises, urbanisation and the eradication of poverty; affect most governments around the world, including the South African government. At the frontline of these challenges are public servants. According to the Institute of Public Administration in Canada (2015), public servants are the face of government. They play an important role in society; they should be committed to delivering the best administration possible and providing high-quality service, while solving new and challenging problems with integrity.

Public Services International (2015), states that public servants are currently working in a complex and challenging reality that they should be prepared for. However, Raadschelders (2011:916) points out that, in many instances, what universities teach Public Administration students in their curriculum changes slowly while the expectations and needs of government change fast. Raadschelders (2011:916) continues to state that curricula in the field of Public Administration have not adapted to meet the changes, challenges and requirements of the environment that public servants have to work in. According to Wessels (2000:315), universities traditionally have the role and the function of providing higher education and intellectual preparation for students with the aim of preparing them for their future work environment. Linking to this, Pauw (1999:10–11) states that it is the duty of a university to provide scientifically inspired career education to students. A student studying for a career should be able to gain knowledge about their field of study and gain the necessary skills to be used in practice. This view is supported by Clapper (2012:71), who states that tertiary education institutions have a responsibility to prepare and produce graduates that have the skills and the ability to deal successfully with the challenges they will face in their work environment. Thus, in this instance it can be deduced from the above authors that they are of the opinion that it is the responsibility of universities to make sure that the attributes, knowledge and skills that public servants require in order to be successful in their future work environment are considered in the design of Public Administration curricula. According to Van Jaarsveldt and Wessels (2015), a curriculum should provide for the learning of competencies needed by a student to participate effectively in the world of work. Therefore, the goal of this article is to determine what skills and knowledge should be included in Public Administration curricula to prepare students adequately for a fast-changing world and work environment.

To achieve this goal, this article will start with an overview of the most recent scholarship to provide a theoretical perspective about the concepts of knowledge and skills. This theoretical perspective will help to illustrate the importance
of knowledge and skills within the context of higher education. For this article knowledge will refer to the information, understanding and skills that a student acquires through education; while skills refer to being highly trained or experienced in a field of work with the ability to do something well. Second, the methodology used in this article will be explained. The methodology includes the use of scholarly literature, for example, books and journal articles, as well as international standards for Public Administration education. Third, a description will be provided of the complexity in the external environment and the challenges facing government from the external environment. Fourth, the skills required by public servants in a fast-changing work environment will be determined. Lastly, through relevant recommendations, this article will explain what aspects should be included in a Public Administration curriculum to prepare Public Administration students adequately for a fast-changing world and work environment.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Haider (2003:2) and various other authors (for example, Nelson and Winter 1982; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Snowden 1997; Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001; and Kokt 2010) the importance of knowledge and skills in education has been discussed and written about extensively. Linking to this Chetty (2012:15), states that to be employable a graduate needs specific knowledge and skills. Knowledge, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005:821), refers to the information, understanding and skills gained through education or experience. According to Kokt (2010:91), knowledge is fundamental to upholding the development of people and essential for addressing societal challenges and needs. Knowledge includes the use of concepts and constructs. Knowledge is more than knowing how things work; it is a resource that contributes to the development of the knowledge economy. Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001:973) state that knowledge is the individual capacity to draw a distinction within a specific area based on context or theory. Apart from knowledge based on theory there is an essential personal element related to knowledge, namely, ‘tacit knowledge’, according to Polanyi (1966). This refers to knowledge that is intuitive and unarticulated and can be viewed as knowledge that is personal to the individual. This is in contrast to explicit knowledge that is related to theories and that is learned by an individual or a student. Haider (2003:5) states that regardless of the type of knowledge – tacit or explicit knowledge – it is a strategic asset that is important for the survival and growth of any organisation, government or industry. In terms of higher education, graduates are expected to have three different layers of knowledge, according to Bernstein and Osman (2012:46). These
different layers of knowledge include, first, field-specific achievements, which include the possession of a body of knowledge and qualities related to a specific field of study, for example, Public Administration. Second, graduates should have shared achievement that pertains to the possession of more general attributes and knowledge that can be found in a specific degree such as a BAdmin degree. Lastly, generic achievement is required, which includes general attributes and knowledge that graduates should have. This can also be referred to as working or functional knowledge that graduates should have when they enter the world of work, for example, communication skills, technology skills, being able to work in a team, self-efficacy, the ability to find information and the ability to recognise problems and to solve them (Griesel and Parker 2009).

Closely related to knowledge, ‘skill’ can be explained as the state of being “highly trained or experienced in a field of work, the ability to do something well” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2005:1378). “Skills are abilities that are minimally involved with understanding, that are essentially physical and that are perfected by practice at the activity itself” (Winch and Gingell 1999:221). According to Doyle (2017) and Shuttleworth (2012:245), there are numerous definitions of skills by various authors. However, skills can be classified into vocational skills (practical skills that include crafts and trades); higher-order skills (thinking skills based on education found in, for example, Bloom’s taxonomy); soft skills (personal attributes like the ability to listen, communicate and be assertive); hard skills (relevant to the specific work or job requirement); and meta-skills (pragmatic knowledge that applies to a variety of circumstances). According to Coetzee (2012:121), knowledge, skills and competence form the foundation of personal attributes, for example, values, attitude and behaviour; that will enable graduates to be proactive in their chosen career and professional life.

Apart from the importance of having personal attributes to be successful in their chosen career Smith, Cronje, Brevis and Vrba (2007:303) state that a graduate needs specific abilities. Ability refers to an individual’s capacity to do different tasks in the work environment. Ability, according to these authors, consists of two aspects, namely, intellectual capacity and physical capacity. Intellectual capacity refers to a person’s intellectual capacity, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication. In addition, physical ability refers to an individual’s stamina, coordination, strength and ability to work for long hours. Associated with individuals’ skills and ability is their competency. According to the Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1988:162), the word ‘competence’ refers to having the ability or authority to do what is required. The Department of Public Service and Administration (Public Service Regulations 2001) defines competence as “… the blend of knowledge, skills, behavior and aptitude that a person can apply in the work environment, which indicates a person’s ability to meet the requirements of a specific post”. Competence, therefore, does not refer to unique characteristics of an individual worker, but serves as a measure against
which individuals may be judged for the purpose of formal or informal evaluation. According to Smith et al. (2007:303), competency refers to knowledge, skills and value orientation applied in the relevant context, for example, public administration. The Informal Education homepage (2017) created by George Williams College states that competence can be reduced to competencies, that is, a series of activities that people should perform and the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to be effective. Competence is also concerned with what a person can do, for example, the skills and knowledge that a graduate possesses to do work successfully. However, Holtzhausen (2012:192) points out that over the past two decades, knowledge and skills within a higher education context have been renamed to refer to a student’s employability. De Beer, Van der Westhuizen, Bekwa and Petersen-Waughtol (2012:404) describe employability as not only the knowledge and skills acquisition to gain employment, but also the continuous updating of skills to ensure lifelong progression and fulfilment in the world of work. Graduates should, therefore, be prepared adequately for their chosen careers in the world of work by acquiring the required knowledge, skills and competence to be employable. According to Holtzhausen (2012:193), it is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to develop employability in graduates by including the required knowledge and skills in the curriculum of a specific discipline, in this instance, the Public Administration curriculum.

**METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research method was used for this study to determine what skills and knowledge should be included in Public Administration curricula to prepare students adequately for a fast-changing world and work environment. The author reviewed a number of sources, including books, articles, international standards, online information such as university websites and curriculums that focus on the skills required by graduates in the 21st century. This review also assisted to determine the influence of the external environment on the work being done by public servants as well as the significance of the concepts ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’ and why these concepts are important within the public service and a higher education context. The most relevant literature was identified according to the following criteria:

- A purposive sample of scholarly literature was selected by searching for literature that will assist the researcher to answer the research question.
- Relevant literature was grouped into three categories namely:
  - Scholarly views from academics that write extensively on the education, knowledge and skills required by Public Administration students or public servants.
• International associations that focus on the discipline of Public Administration and accredited programmes with the aim of providing quality education to students.

• Universities that develop Public Administration curricula and are responsible for the transfer of knowledge and skills to students.

• Literature from authors, associations and universities written before 2008 was excluded from this research. Literature written after 2008 was included in this research, since the author is of the view that the financial crisis that started in 2008 had a global impact on the work being done by public and private institutions and the skills required by graduates.

• The literature that was selected in each of the three categories for this research include the following:

**Table 1: Selected literature for this research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Verhulst (2013)</td>
<td>Verhulst holds a UNESCO chair and is co-founder of the governance laboratory at the University of New York. He writes extensively on how to create effective government. This includes the use of knowledge and skills to improve the work of government.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mau (2015)</td>
<td>Mau graduated from the University of Oxford and specialises in public leadership and competencies. His article ‘Leadership competencies for a global public service’ was used for this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dickson and Sullivan (2014)</td>
<td>Dickson and Sullivan conducted interviews with government officials on different levels, former public servants, community organisations and consulting firms to determine the skills and knowledge required by public servants. These findings were documented in ‘Imaging the 21st century Public Service Workforce”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>International association</td>
<td>International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA)</td>
<td>IASIA is situated in Brussels and has 174 members across the world, including in South Africa. IASIA compiled standards for Public Administration education in conjunction with the United Nations Department of Economic Affairs (IASIA:2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA)</td>
<td>NASPAA is situated in the United States of America and has, to date, accredited Public Administration degrees for more than 300 universities in various countries by making use of their guidelines and standards for Public Administration education (NASPAA:2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>Melbourne University</td>
<td>According to the World University Rankings (2018) Melbourne University is the best university in Australia and number 32 in the world. The School of Government has done extensive research on the 21st century public workforce. This university was also selected to get an Asian-Pacific perspective concerning the knowledge and skills required by public servants.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University of South Africa (Unisa)</td>
<td>Unisa was selected since it is the biggest university on the African continent and represents students from a variety of countries. Unisa was also selected to provide an African perspective on the knowledge and skills required by graduates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Author’s own representation 2018)

Although the selected literature for this article might be interpreted as a limitation due to its size, the author is of the opinion that the selected literature will provide the relevant information required to answer the research question.

**THE COMPLEXITY OF THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

According to Burke (2017:1) and Minnaar and Bekker (2005:21), the external environment refers to the aspects outside an organisation that surround it. The organisation exists to serve the environment. In this instance, the organisation refers to the government or the public service that needs to serve the needs of the citizens but is constantly influenced by the changes and demands of the external environment. The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2017) defines the external environment as the conditions and events outside an organisation that affect the way it operates. In addition, Van der Walt, Van Niekerk, Doyle, Knipe and Du Toit (2002:91) state that the macro or external environment refers to, for example, the political, economic, social, cultural, natural, technological and legal aspects outside the scope of a public institution that have a direct effect on the institution and the country. These aspects also influence everyday life and have a profound impact on the way a state will be governed. According to Smith *et al.* (2007:57), an organisation can be seen as a subsystem of its environment. This theory was first developed in physics and shows the interdependence between an organisation and its environment. A system can be explained as a set of interrelated elements that function as a whole. Therefore, an organisation, just like a government, can be viewed as a system that operates in a specific environment and that has different subsystems. Organisations are not self-sufficient, nor are they self-contained. Organisations exchange resources with, and are dependent upon, the external environment in
which they function. An organisation and the environment therefore depend on each other for existence just like a government is dependent on its environment for existence. Subsystems in the external environment that have an influence on organisations, according to Willyard (2015), Smith et al. (2007:61) and Van der Walt et al. (2002:93–103), include the following:

- The technological environment, which is responsible for innovation and change and the development of new technology, for example, e-government, smart phones, new applications, the World Wide Web and Wi-Fi.
- The economic environment, which refers to aspects related to inflation, recession, exchange rates, monetary and fiscal policy; the creation of wealth and the use of scarce resources.
- The social environment within which people’s lifestyles, habits, values, culture and demands on organisations are formed and expressed. This subsystem also includes quality of life, social progress and the development of health, security, education and employment/unemployment.
- The ecological/natural environment, which comprises natural resources and relates to aspects such as global warming, industrialisation, natural disasters, flora, fauna and minerals, and man-made improvements such as buildings, roads and bridges.
- The political environment, which refers to the government and its political involvement, as well as political leadership, state power, political decisions, policies and legislation.
- The legal environment, which relates to accountability, ethics, laws, the international legal system, principles of justice and the International Court of Justice.
- The international environment, which includes local and foreign trends and events such as international cooperation, the enforcement of power over different states and international relations with organisations such as the United Nations.

The interrelatedness of these different subsystems in the external environment can lead to increased instability, uncertainty, complexity and unpredictability in organisations or governments. Therefore, the system becomes increasingly complex and unpredictable as the environment within which the system operates changes. According to Brevis-Landsberg (2012:173), changes in an organisation’s external environment such as a financial crisis, new technology, political and social instability or changing legislation have an influence on the organisation and should be anticipated and managed as far as possible. It is, therefore, important for organisations as well as governments to understand the environment in which they function and to be prepared for any changes and challenges. Minnaar and Bekker (2005:23) support this view by stating that in an open systems theory, organisations exist and function in close and constant interaction with their environment.
Organisations receive the resources they require to operate, for example, skills, finances, buildings and information; from the external environment. Since the citizens being served are also from the external environment, the demands placed on organisations are also determined and influenced by the external environment. In turn, organisations, just like governments, influence their external environment by the services they provide to satisfy the needs, expectations and problems in the external environment. The external environment cannot be ignored or underestimated, as can be seen in the challenges currently confronting governments from the external environment.

**Challenges confronting governments from the external environment**

Since the external environment acts as a driver of change that affects how governments function and provide services, it is inevitable that most governments at some point will have to adapt to meet the needs and address the challenges posed by the external environment. The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF 2014) states that in the past 20 years the world and the environment external to governments have changed significantly and these changes are not just related to globalisation and the increased use and development of technology. Challenges currently affecting governments, including the South African government, include the following:

- **Youth population**: The world currently has the largest generation of young people ever. An estimated 43% of the world population is below the age of 25. This requires of governments to invest more in education and to create job opportunities for the youth (UNPF 2014). This is particularly important for the South African government, which has to provide quality education, more schools, teachers and resources such as books for the increasing number of children attending schools. In addition, the country has an estimated 48% of citizens between the ages of 18 and 34 who are unemployed (UCT 2017).

- **Growing economic inequality**: Currently, 8% of the world population has 82% of global wealth and an estimated billion people continue to live in extreme poverty without access to social protection, work opportunities, education or health services. According to the Oxfam report (2017), South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world, with 1% of the population owning 42% of the total wealth in the country.

- **Financial crises**: The financial crisis that, according to Ergun (2011:131), started in 2008 in the United States of America and has since spread to Europe and Asia had a negative impact on the income, wealth and living conditions of most countries. From a South African point of view, economic growth has
slowed down, unemployment has increased and the country’s economic status has been downgraded (Mthanti 2017).

- **Population growth:** The world population is estimated to be more than seven billion and resources like water and food are becoming increasingly scarce, especially when taking climate change, which is associated with droughts and floods, into consideration (UNPF 2014). South Africa has been experiencing frequent droughts, which have severe ecological and economic consequences (Venter 2009). Desertification, soil erosion, reduced vegetation, uncontrolled fires and mass migration lead to socio-economic challenges that, in turn, could lead to an economic collapse.

- **Increased urbanisation:** The global urban population rose by 1.8 billion between 1994 and 2014 (UNDP:2015). According to Edmonds (2013), South Africa is one of the most urbanised countries on the African continent. An estimated 62% of the population live in cities. This requires of government to plan for expanding cities and towns and to provide more opportunities, resources and infrastructure in cities where citizens stay close together, sometimes in poor and unsafe conditions.

- **Increased displacement:** Record numbers of people are being displaced within countries and around the world due to conflict and war (UNPF 2014). The increased number of refugees and asylum seekers, especially on the African continent, places an additional burden on government resources to assist asylum seekers and refugees. The increased number of asylum seekers and refugees also gives rise to increased numbers of xenophobic attacks. According to Mavhinga (2017), xenophobic attacks take place every year in South Africa, resulting in the death of foreign nationals. During the xenophobic attacks in Durban in 2015, thousands of foreign nationals were displaced and 60 killed.

- **Crime:** Crime affects economies by placing a financial burden on taxpayers and governments because of an increased need for police, courts and corrections facilities. Violent crime has a negative impact on communities and can result in the movement of people away from crime areas or even the immigration of citizens to other countries that are viewed as safe. It is not only conventional crime that affects governments and citizens, but also corruption, fraud, the mismanagement of resources and cyber-crime (UNPF 2014).

- **Protests, strikes and industrial action:** According to Venter (2016), protests and strikes are taking place more regularly in South Africa. These protests and strikes, which sometimes result in violence and the destruction of property, have a negative effect on government, the economy, the business sector, investments and employee relationships.

In addition to these aspects that are affecting governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP:2015) states that, regardless of the level of
development of a country, its government will have to focus on doing more with less. Governments should expect uncertain futures and outcomes while dealing with continued disruptions and service delivery problems.

Rosenbaum (2015:35) states that governments are expected to function effectively in an environment of rapid change, increasing complexity and ambiguity. Therefore, public servants have to take on tasks and solve problems that previously did not exist. According to Rosenbaum (2015:35), governments and the work they have to do will continue to become more complex and demanding, and problems will become more difficult to solve. Farazmand (1999:517) supports this view and points out that public servants are expected to provide more efficient services to meet the challenging needs of government. Barber, Cassell, Leslie, Ward, Lamy, Martin and Ingebritsen (2007:105) echo this sentiment by stating public expectations of health care, social policy and education are increasing because more is expected of governments and public servants than ever before. Public servants have to provide services that in many instances were not required previously. In addition, these services are needed instantly for people who might not even be citizens of the country that they serve. Consequently, public servants are, in effect, required to demonstrate intercultural skills or a number of other skills that were previously not required.

**KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS**

Taking into consideration the current external and political environment in an increasingly globalised world, Mau (2015:9) and Dickinson and Sullivan (2014:3, 37) state that academics and literature suggest that there will be a significant change in the work environment of public servants as demographics shift, new technology continues to emerge and citizens' expectations change. The public service of the future might be smaller and expect citizens to do more for themselves as the resources of government decrease. Verhulst (2013) supports the views of Mau, Dickinson and Sullivan as well as the Melbourne School of Government (2013) in stating that a 21st-century public servant requires new skills, given the changes and challenges in the broader global environment. According to the Melbourne School of Government (2013), globalisation, the movement of people, financial crises, the increased need for health care, growing demands and expectations of citizens and the proliferation of technology; are some of the aspects that will influence the work of public servants. In addition, the public service will see a rise in the amount of non-routine work and processes that will have to be completed as well as an increased amount of teamwork that will require engagement and interaction with citizens and co-workers. According to Verhulst (2013), Dickinson and
Sullivan (2014:3, 37), Mau (2015:9) and the Melbourne School of Government (2013), the skills required by public servants include the following:

- Communication skills and the ability to understand what is being communicated to be able to collaborate with international partners
- Collaboration skills together with the ability to see the relationships between people, departments and organisations
- Commercialisation skills to get the best value from public, private and community sectors
- Control to ensure that all internal, legal, financial and democratic standards are met with integrity
- Decision-making skills and the ability to exercise judgement
- Social intelligence to relate to other people and situations as well as employee engagement
- Adaptive thinking to find new solutions for problems
- Cross-cultural competency, intelligence and sensitivity to work in different environments and with different cultures
- Computational thinking to translate large amounts of data into useful concepts
- New media and technology literacy and understanding to be able to use technology for communication and to complete tasks
- Transdisciplinary knowledge to be able to solve problems across different disciplines
- Virtual collaboration skills to work with others in a virtual environment and over a virtual distance
- Strategic leadership and thinking, political astuteness, change management, resource management and innovation
- International literacy, to understand a complex global environment and flexibility when working with others
- Conceptual skills to see the organisation as a whole and the ability to not simply react to problems but to work proactively to solve problems

IASIA is an association of organisations and individuals that focuses on Public Administration education and training (IASIA 2017). Owing to the importance of Public Administration education, IASIA also aims to study issues relevant to the public sector, to advance its professional knowledge and expertise and to foster international support for Public Administration education, training and management (IASIA 2017). According to IASIA (2009), the public seeks high-quality public services; therefore, the public sector must be a high-performing institution. In order for public servants to perform proficiently, persons working in the public sector should have a high level of skills and preparation. IASIA, in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, created standards of excellence for Public Administration education and training. These standards
recommend that all academic programmes preparing individuals for the public sector should meet the following requirements (IASIA 2009):

- Include a public sector ethos, public sector skills and an understanding of the nature of the public sector by including the ability to deal with complexity and flexibility.
- Focus on the ability to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity while operating in a political environment and building high-performing organisations.
- Focus on involving other groups and institutions in society to realise policy goals.
- Focus on applying life experiences to support academic and training activities.
- Include transparency and accountability while recognising global interdependence.
- Instil analytical and critical thinking skills and the importance of lifelong learning.
- Ensure and create an understanding of internationalisation, globalisation and different modes of communication.

Linking to IASIA, NASPAA is an international association and resource for the promotion of excellence in education and training for the public service (NASPAA 2017). NASPAA created its first guidelines and standards for undergraduate degree programmes in Public Administration in the United States of America in 1976. Since then, the original guidelines have been amended and reviewed a number of times, the last time being 2014. To date NASPAA accredited more than 300 academic programmes in various countries giving them an international platform. The aim of the NASPAA guidelines is to emphasise the importance of Public Administration education and to provide high-quality Public Administration education that includes the following; knowledge to lay an adequate foundation in the subject area that is fundamental to professional education, and preparation for a career. According to NASPAA (2014), students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding and abilities in new or unfamiliar environments by having the ability to:

- lead and manage in public governance
- participate in and contribute to policy processes
- analyse, synthesise, think critically, solve problems and make decisions
- articulate and apply a public service perspective
- communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

In an attempt to determine the skills that a graduate in the College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS) at Unisa should have, a set of graduate skills and knowledge was developed relevant to a number of departments in the
College, including Public Administration. According to Coetzee (2012:122), the outcomes indicated by the South African government as qualities that all South African citizens should have are incorporated into the CEMS transferable knowledge, meta-skills and personal attributes framework for students. The framework is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Unisa CEMS skills and personal attributes framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General skill description</th>
<th>Transferable skills and personal attributes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive skills</strong></td>
<td>Use of language and technology; the ability to communicate and interact with others; the ability to understand others and to persuade them; and intercultural communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving/decision-making skills</strong></td>
<td>Making use of critical reasoning; structuring information to enhance understanding of a problem; initiating change; ensuring growth in personal and work life; solve problems creatively; adding new knowledge and insight; and being able to make clear decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Continued learning orientation</strong></td>
<td>Keeping abreast of technical knowledge in the selected field of specialisation; always improving knowledge and skills; monitoring performance against deadlines; following up on goals; and asking for information to ensure the successful completion of goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enterprising skills</strong></td>
<td>Keeping abreast of market trends; having good financial awareness; thinking about adding value; functioning in an autonomous logical manner; and recognising and dealing with organisational and team politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presenting and applying information skills</strong></td>
<td>Presenting verbal and written knowledge, facts, ideas and opinions clearly; showing insight; applying information to solve problems in one’s work, in the community and in life; and being able to consider alternatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal-directed behaviour</strong></td>
<td>Setting realistic goals; taking action to achieve goals; meeting deadlines; applying effective time management; accessing information to solve problems; and being able to use technology to find new information to solve problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical and responsible behaviour</strong></td>
<td>Accepting responsibility for decisions and actions; upholding ethical values of a profession, a community and a workplace; giving direction to others; motivating and empowering others; and acting responsibly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analytical skills</strong></td>
<td>Giving clear and accurate explanations, information and data; making rational judgements; breaking down information into components; seeing the relationship between patterns; and drawing insightful conclusions from numerical and qualitative data.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: (Adapted from Coetzee 2012:122–125).*
From the above discussion, it can be seen that the different authors, associations and universities have different views on the knowledge and skills that are required by a public servant in a fast-changing world and work environment. Table 3 presents a review of the knowledge and skills that the different authors, organisations and universities regard as the most important knowledge and skills for public servants to have:

**Table 3: Knowledge and skills recommended for a public servant**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/ facts/ information management/ thinking skills</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of new media/ technology (ICT)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative skills/working with diverse/ multinational people/ teamwork</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being cost- effective/ commercial skills/ financial awareness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercultural/ global/cross- cultural competencies/ internationa-lisation/ globalisation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical/ strategic thinking + leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy planning + knowledge</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Resource management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation/ creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political astuteness</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills (verbal + written)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity/ insight/social intelligence/ empathy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>
From Table 3 it can be seen that all the authors, associations and universities agree that public servants should have communication skills (written and verbal) and collaborative skills that allow them to work with diverse groups and in multinational teams. This indicates the importance of public servants being able to communicate with different people from different cultures and backgrounds to be able to do their work properly in a fast-changing world and work environment. This also includes the importance of public servants being able to work in teams and to communicate in a team setting to be able to get work or projects completed. There was agreement among five of the seven authors, associations and universities reviewed that

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making/ making judgements</td>
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<td>Analytical skills</td>
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<td>People management</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solving problems/new solutions/dealing with uncertainty/complexity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control/ organisation building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans-disciplinary knowledge</td>
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<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working at a distance/ working with international partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive/ critical thinking</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparency and accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand public service ethos</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<td>Goal/ performance oriented</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline/ time management</td>
<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical/ responsible behaviour</td>
<td>X X</td>
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Source: (Author’s own representation 2018)
knowledge of internationalisation, globalisation and a global perspective, as well as the ability to solve problems, find new solutions and deal with uncertainty and complexity is important. The skills viewed as important for public servants to have could be linked to the increased movement of people across borders, a mobile population that moves around to find better opportunities, urbanisation and working with foreigners as well as having to find new solutions for problems.

Given the current complex environment that governments function in, it is important to strengthen public sector capacity to address new and unforeseen challenges, according to Bertucci (2006:4). This view is supported by Rosenbaum (2011:160), who states that in view of the complex political, economic and social environment and the complex challenges confronting governments, education and training programmes should be developed to enable public servants to perform their work effectively in the turbulent, fast-changing environment that is likely to characterise the public service over the next decades.

As far as these skills are linked to the study of Public Administration, Raadschelders (2011:916) states that Public Administration as a field of study has to provide an understanding of the complex social problems confronting public servants and political office-bearers. Raadschelders (2011:917) continues to say that the study of Public Administration should serve both the practitioner and the academic, drawing from various sources within and outside academic to be able to advance the understanding of government in society and to develop public servants that are sensitive and ready to comprehend problems and threats in their social environment. Raadschelders (2011:921) concludes that the curricula on Public Administration have not caught up to the social challenges and requirements facing public servants. It can, therefore, be deduced that a curriculum on Public Administration should include aspects related to working collaboratively in teams with other students, especially students from different backgrounds, since this will help students to be prepared for a future work environment that will focus on teamwork and working with colleagues and citizens from different cultures and backgrounds. Cultural sensitisation that includes the capacity to understand different cultures is required. A curriculum on Public Administration should also include aspects that will help students to understand the importance of communication. Being able to communicate properly both verbally and in writing and by using technology for communication will continue to be an important aspect of the work that has to be done by public servants. In addition, a curriculum on Public Administration should include aspects focused on internationalisation and globalisation, since students should be aware of international aspects, for example, conflicts, droughts, climate change, a scarcity of resources and the impact of globalisation on the work that they are or will be doing. Consequently, Public Administration students should not just focus on problems in their local environment, but should also be made aware of the impact that the international and external environment could have on their work environment.
From Table 3 it can also be seen that skills such as resource management, change management, transdisciplinary knowledge, transparency and accountability, deadline and time management and ethical and responsible behaviour; were viewed as less important by all the authors, associations and universities reviewed. Interestingly, only Unisa saw time management, ethics and responsible behaviour as important knowledge and skills that graduates should have. This might be due to the problems relating to corruption that are being experienced in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The researcher started this article by asking what knowledge and skills are required by public servants in a fast-changing world and work environment that should be included in Public Administration curricula. In order to answer this question, the researcher proceeded to review literature from various authors, associations and universities who have written about skills, knowledge and the work that has to be undertaken by public servants. In this article, the researcher first set out to explain what is meant by knowledge and skills, and then determined what is meant by a fast-changing world and work environment. It was found that changes in the external environment such as financial crises, new technology, social instability, conflict and globalisation; influence the work of public servants. In most instances, these changes are unpredictable and cannot be ignored since they could lead to instability, uncertainty, complexity and unpredictability. It was stated that since public servants are at the forefront of working with these challenges, they require the necessary skills and knowledge to do so. The researcher determined that public servants should have communication and collaborative skills for working in multinational teams, allowing them to work with diverse groups of colleagues and citizens. In addition, the researcher determined that most of the authors, associations and universities agree that in a fast-changing world and work environment, it is important for public servants to have cultural knowledge and skills, to be able to work in teams and to have an international perspective. Further research can be undertaken on this topic to determine how many of the Public Administration departments at South African universities currently include these aspects in their curricula.

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR’S CONTACT DETAILS**

Prof Liza Ceciel van Jaarsveldt
Associate Professor
University of South Africa
Department of Public Administration and Management
E-mail: vjaarlc@unisa.ac.za
Tel: 012 429 3771