FROM PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TO GOVERNANCE: SCIENCE OR IDEOLOGY?

*V.N. Louw
Department of Public Administration and Management
University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

Governments have been launching major public sector reforms. Traditional public services are under pressure to transform and seem to be evolving – but into what? In the 1970s one could generally talk of public administration. In the 1980s came the new move to the New Public Management (NPM), and some to Public Administration and Management. Recently some authors have argued that there is a further shift from the NPM to governance. Although public sector reforms are influenced by global precedents, local dynamics necessitates specific responses from politicians, academics and public officials. This much is so in South Africa where evidence shows that theory played a secondary role in the praxis of public administration. Instead, that praxis is dictated by political agendas and what is taught at traditional universities and the universities of technologies are uncritically supportive of these agendas. The aim of this article is to provide a content analysis of the ongoing shift from the concept of public administration to governance by looking at the theories and approaches that have dominated the public administration arena from the traditional administration approach to the current governance approach. The article also seeks to investigate the reasons for this shift.

INTRODUCTION

In the article titled Research in Public Administration and Management: A view on pragmatic research undertakings, Hanyane (2005:48) writes that “the discipline of Public Administration and Management requires a process of re-conceptualisation and re-thinking of its focus and area of operation”. As Hanyane (2005:48) further argues, for public administration to survive as a discipline, researchers in the field have to observe certain responsibilities and respond to the challenges presented in a postmodern world. He is also of the opinion that “…other forms of research inquiry (paradigms) must be promoted” (Hanyane, 2005:48). In the Public Administration Dictionary Fox and Meyer (1995:2) define administration as “the execution of activities by persons charged with common objectives” while management is “the act or art of managing, the conducting of something as a
business, especially the executive function of planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, controlling, and supervising any industrial or business project or activity with responsibility for results” (Fox & Meyer, 1995:77).

In the *Oxford English Dictionary of Current English* Soanes and Stevenson (2003:587) define governance as “the act or manner of governing, of exercising control or authority over the actions of subjects; a system of regulations”. Public administration is concerned with procedures and translating policy into action, while management has to do with achieving the set objectives with maximum efficiency but also responsibility for better results, and governance appears to be a synthesis of various connotations that appeared over many centuries of the etymological evolution of the phenomenon. The aim of this article is to look at the shift from public administration to governance and whether it is influenced by science or ideology. Perhaps for reasons of coherence in thought, it is important to succinctly reflect on the meanings of science and ideology as they are key concepts that undergird the essence of the discourse in this article.

**CONCEPTUALISATION FOUNDATION OF THE DISCOURSE**

Before unpacking the concepts that will be discussed in this section, it is important to first understand what a concept is. According to (Pauw, 1999:11) a concept is a ‘tool of thinking and (they) inform action or practice’. In explaining what a concept is, Pauw (1999:11) distances it from a ‘word’ and a ‘term’. For him “words accumulate their meanings” from use in contexts and therefore may have different meanings whereas a term consigns to “one or more words with a fixed meaning in a specific discourse” (Pauw 1999:11). Therefore it is important to note that to understand the meaning of concepts, it is important to understand their contextual settings. Maserumule (2004:76-78) is of the opinion that concepts are used to lay bare philosophical and ideological suggestions, and “if they are used incorrectly, particularly in developing policies, the thinking that undergirds them would be inexact”. The following unpacks concepts that undergird the conceptual foundation of the discourse in this article.

**SCIENCE**

Science is a critical tradition that strives to find, systemise and share new knowledge and insight about things that are not obvious. The question whether public administration is a science is a highly contested one. However, some scholars believe that it is science. Pauw (2001:133) explain public administration as that part of science that strives to find, systematise and share new knowledge and insight about factors of the non-political executive functions of the state that are not immediately apparent (Pauw, 2001:33).
IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a comprehensive system of concepts and beliefs, often political in nature, held by a group or individual (Hunt, 1985). Karl Marx in Eagleton (1991:3) explains ideology to be “false systems of political, social and moral concepts invented and preserved by ruling classes out of self-interest”.

FROM PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TO GOVERNANCE

Nicolas Henry (in Thornhill, 2006:793-806) is of the opinion that scholars of public administration should know that the discipline is static, but dynamic, because a new direction has emerged since the 1980s in response to the political changes and responses to the increasing needs and demands from society. In an attempt to put together a call for the shift away from public administration it is important to comprehend what a paradigm is and how it relates to Public Administration. The idea of a paradigm in the social science was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in 1970 in his work titled Structure of scientific revolutions. Kuhn’s work elevated scholarly debate in intellectual circles. For Babbie and Mouton (2006:6), a paradigm is the “authority of a certain theoretical tradition” and therefore a paradigm shift directs the efforts of scientists away from solving the serious administrative problems there are to the study of theories.

According to Schuyler (in Van Jaarsveldt, 2010:28) “a paradigm shift occurs when difficulties begin to appear in functioning of existing paradigms in that they cannot function properly anymore”. Van Jaarsveldt (2010:28) is of the opinion that in Public Administration new paradigms should be developed to solve new problems. There are those scholars that proclaim that Public Administration cannot be given paradigmatic status because it does not have universally accepted theories, and can be regarded as more of an art than a science. Gullick and Urwich (1937:191) argue that the theoretical foundation of Public Administration is not appropriately determined and expressed. It is the researcher’s view that Public Administration is indeed a science and supports Pauw’s conception of what a science is, and that Public Administration indeed strives to find, organise and share new knowledge and insight about factors of the non-political executive functions of the state that are not instantly obvious (Pauw, 2001:133).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the Public Administration Dictionary Fox and Meyer (1995:105) refer to public administration as the executive branch of government; civil service; bureaucracy charged with the formulation for, implementation, evaluation and modification of government policy. Fox, Schwella and Wissink (1991:2) are of the view that public administration can be defined as “that system(s) of structures and processes, oper-
ating within a particular society as an environment, with the objective of facilitating the formulation of appropriate governmental policy and the efficient execution of the formulated policy”. These terms therefore refer to government and its relationship with society promoting government policy responsive to societal needs. According to Pauw (1999:22) Public Administration investigates public administration, which he refers to as the “organised, non-political, executive functions of the state”. In the Handbook of Public Administration, Rabin, Hildreth and Miller (2006:5) are of the opinion that the 1880s were the starting point of public administration. For many scholars in Public Administration Woodrow Wilson’s essay, ‘The study of administration’, published in 1887 in the Political Science Quarterly laid the foundation for a study of Public Administration. This view Maserumule (2011) strongly contested in the thesis titled Good governance in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD): A Public Administration perspective. In the pages of this edition Basheka also contests the view that Wilson is the father of Public Administration as an academic discipline.

Wilson’s essay set the tone for a separate field of administration while advocating that Public Administration was worth studying. The views that Wilson held in ‘The study of administration’ led to many controversies, interpretations and ideological bases for reforms in administration in the 19th century (Prasad et al., 1989:3-4). Various authors, including Nicolas Henry in his book Public Administration and public affairs wrote widely on the development of Public Administration. Frank J. Goodnow (1900) and Leonard White (1926) wrote on the politics/administration dichotomy from 1900-1926. In his book Politics and administration: A study of government Goodnow argues that administration should be separated from politics (Shafritz & Hyde, 1992:7-9). It is Luther Gulick and Lyndal Urwick in the publication ‘Papers on the science of administration’ who proposed the seven principles of administration and gave students the anagram POSDCORB. It was at this time that Public Administration was threatened with being absorbed into other branches of administrative sciences such as business administration. In South Africa the development of Public Administration education went through many stages. According to Cloete (in Van Jaarsveldt 2010:56) the University of the Free State was the first to create a Department of Public Administration separate from the Department of Political Science in 1962. Cloete also states that the first courses in Public Administration presented at the University of Pretoria were a number of randomly selected facets by lecturers in agreement with students and officials working in various state departments and municipalities.

For Maserumule (2011:4) despite the “recognition of public administration as an important variable in the contemporary development paradigm, its theoretical and pedagogical focus as a field of study lacks developmental perspective”. Here Maserumule argues that as an academic discipline, Public Administration is
limited to administration, which merely studies government activities or functions. It ignores the development dimension or approach to the study of government. The Mount Grace debates arrived at the same conclusion. According to Mthembu (2001:2) a shift from public administration to public management is highly admirable, since South Africa, like other countries, is not immune to the impact of globalisation on the public service. He also adds that public management appears to be a strategy aimed at meeting the challenges of globalisation and promoting professionalism, accountability, transparency and a service oriented public service (Mthembu, 2001:2).

MANAGEMENT

During the 1970s scholars and practitioners were searching for alternatives with which to develop Public Administration. In South Africa the debate on whether management should be included in the study of Public Administration started in the 1980s. The discussion on management focused on the intricacy of the public sector (Thornhill, in van Jaarsveldt, 2010:73). In his 1985 article titled ‘Public Administration or Public Management – another perspective or why not Public Administration and Public Management’ Shwella refers to the fact that although the term public management is used internationally it is still evaded in South Africa. His article marked the shift in the study of Public Administration in South Africa. It was Cloete (1997:197-200) who stated that management as a concept in Public Administration is very important because it is crucial to the success in providing goods and services to the people. Various authors differ with Cloete on the basis that the public sector is different from the private sector.

Drawing from the twentieth-century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Pauw (1999:14) explains that the philosophical perplexities and theoretical problems are caused by language, and if one is not critically aware of the orthodoxy of language it can lead to various invalid conclusions and absurdities. He goes on to say that “terms and concepts are unfortunately also subjected to fashions in the sense of fads”. For Pauw (1999:15-17), the first problem started when new names were given to the subject of Public Administration, for example Public Management and Public Administration and Management. The assumption by Cloete (in Pauw, 1999:15-16), is that ‘public administration’ should be freed from politics and directed by the same motives as those of business administration/management and that the teaching and training of public managers should be the same as that for private business managers”. Pauw disagrees with Cloete in the contention that the word ‘management’ is not necessarily of a higher order than the word ‘administration’ because ‘administration’ in the term ‘public administration’ was never meant to refer to paperwork. What stands out in Pauw’s arguments on ‘management’ and which is true, is that ‘management’ has been considered more glamorous than ‘administration’ in certain countries (for instance, South Africa) at a certain point.
in time, but this is hardly an academic reason to change the name of a subject (Pauw, 1999:16).

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

In the 1980s a new managerial approach to public administration, commonly known as the ‘New Public Management’ (NPM), came to the fore (Perry & Kraemer, 1983; Pollit, 1990; 2000). The NPM has been randomly referred to as a ‘paradigm’, a ‘movement’, a ‘reform programme’ and even as an ‘industry’ (Paterson & Mafunisa, 2005:540). It became popular during 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came into power and with her macro-economic policy of reducing public expenditure with various public sector reforms (Frederickson 2005:112-115). Thatcher ushered in an administrative reform agenda that included privatisation, deregulation, and the re-conceptualisation of the appropriate role of a government in the economy and society.

The implementation of NPM was not only restricted to developed countries, but has also expanded to developing and transnational societies, in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In South Africa the NPM was seen as an administrative agenda that included privatisation, deregulation and the re-conceptualisation of the appropriate role of a government in the economy and society. The Batho Pele framework in South Africa aligned itself with the global trend of adopting the NPM philosophy. Emphasis was on the ‘reinvention of government’ and infusion of private sector ideas into the public service, therefore referring to citizens as customers or clients. It is the researcher’s view that the ideological and value-based assumption of the NPM is based on the presumption that management can be applied to both the public and the private sectors and that it is possible to use the economic market as a model for political and administrative affairs. The NPM is just another management fad, a trend, another thing promising everything. It is nothing more than a set of management gear found to be appropriate for the public service. NPM is the practical result of the normative idea of the 1980s based on the assertion ‘that private is better than public’.

For Schwella (1999:337-338) the 1990s were momentous for South African Public Administration with the New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI) that originated from the Mount Grace conference that was held in the Magaliesburg in November 1991. The NPAI was a response to the transformation that took place in South Africa during that time. The Mount Grace Papers (1991:5-24) that were read at the conference indicated that Public Administration should focus on scientific analysis, explanations and predictions (Van Jaarsveldt 2010:74). The Mount Grace conference should be noted for its effort to make sure that the field of Public Administration will be appropriate in South Africa and to strengthen the link
between theory and practice. But the question that needs to be asked is whether the Mount Grace Resolutions were carried out to achieve what they sought to achieve. Nkuna and Sebola are grappling with this question in their article, which is part of this edition.

The Mount Grace II conference was held in 2000 and the debates were published as a continuation of the Mount grace I conference held in 1991 (Thornhill 2006:801). According to Thornhill (in Van Jaarsveldt 2010:16) the conference presentations focused on current affairs and the challenges facing the discipline, the training needs of public servants, and meeting the changing needs of South African society. It is also at this conference that Cloete states that “Public Administration and Management will have to deal with consequences of globalization especially the more developed societies”. Then there was a further shift to the governance phenomenon.

GOVERNANCE

In its original sense the word governance means ‘steering’, or simply, navigating, giving direction. Governance has become a leading theme in policy development discourse and social science scholarship. Although the phenomenon is well established in South Africa, and despite the popularity of the phenomenon among both theoreticians and practitioners, there is still a lack of conceptual consensus. It has multiple meanings and there is a good deal of uncertainty in its different usages. Governance was popularised in the 1980s by two of the main supporters and financiers of development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after they had realised that the macroeconomic and fiscal policy reforms as applied to developing countries failed to produce the expected economic outcomes.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 set off the disintegration of the Soviet Union which resulted in the decay of the political and economic coalition of the Eastern bloc and paved the way for a discussion on how a government has to be structured in order to achieve (economic) development, hence a discussion on governance (World Bank, 2002). In the World Bank’s 1992 publication on Governance and development, governance is characterised by predictable, open, and enlightened policy making (that is, transparent processes); a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law (World Bank, 1992:1-13). With the IMF governance is mainly concerned with macro-economic stability, external viability and orderly economic growth in member countries.
Maserumule (2005:200) explains that the concept governance is as old as human civilisation and that “scholars in development studies and other related disciplines are cautious to commit themselves to a single definition though in many instances semblances of similarities of perspectives regarding its meaning do exist among them”. In South Africa, governance is a topic of great national interest and was the subject of the so-called King Reports I, II and III. According to Lubatkin et al. (2005:867-888), the theoretical foundation of corporate governance is based on agency theory, transaction cost economics, resource dependence theory and stakeholder theory. Over the last few years corporate governance has become a growing area of public interest and academic research. Marvin King’s conception of governance is largely biased towards the private sector’s corporate governance dynamics.

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) makes reference to governance, both political and corporate governance. Barrett (in Koma 2009:456) observes that the development of corporate governance has influenced the analysis of political governance. Well-known scholars in the field have supported the notion of the stakeholder’s business whereby the board is not only responsible to the firm’s shareholders but to all those who have a stake in the firm, from the employees, consumers, suppliers and society at large (Wixley & Everingham 2002:1-2). In the corporate approach to political governance, the emphasis rests on increasing accountability and greater participation. In 1992 the King Committee on Corporate Governance was formed in South Africa, in line with international thinking, and considered corporate governance from a South African perspective (Dekker 2002:1-3). This Report marked the institutionalisation of corporate governance in South Africa, and also aimed to promote corporate governance in South Africa, and establish recommended standards of conduct for boards and directors of listed companies, banks and state-owned enterprises and stressed the need for companies to become a responsible part of the societies in which they operate.

At the University of Johannesburg, the Department of Public Governance and Management officially began in 2006 after being part of the Department of Political Studies. According to Auriacombe (2012) the reason for this was “to provide autonomy and disciplinary integrity to each discipline and also to accommodate the Bachelor of Administration that was merged from Vista University [which is now defunct] into a separate department”. On the question of why they are called the Department of Public Governance and Management and not Public Administration and Management, Auriacombe (2012) motivated that “in terms of an academic paradigm, Public Administration is outdated”. Another reason according to her that led to them choosing that name for their department is because the “King reports emphasises good governance and corporate governance mechanisms and not public administration processes” (Auriacombe 2012).
Despite all the motivation that Auriacombe put forward, their curricula still teach their students Public Administration and Management, blended with Politics and they are doing that despite the fact that Auriacombe so fervently states that “as an academic paradigm Public Administration is outdated”. Should they therefore not have been called the Department of Public Administration and Management instead or should they not have re-curriculated their qualifications? Also adding to the confusion is the fact that as mentioned above, Auriacombe (2012) states that as a department they had to break away from Political Studies “to provide autonomy and disciplinary integrity to each discipline …”, yet when one looks at the table of content and goes through the content of two of their first year modules, Introduction to governance institutions, structural landscape and operations (PMG1A1); and Introduction to regional and local governance institutions and functions (PMG1B), it could effortlessly be mistaken for any module to be taught in Politics as well.

To this the question is whether the University of Johannesburg is shifting the focus back to the famous essay of Woodrow Wilson? Does it also smash the politics-administration dichotomy in the name of governance, considering the names given to these modules and also their content? Another important question is what exactly does Auriacombe mean by ‘paradigm’ when in her thought-provoking statement she said that “Public Administration as an academic paradigm is outdated”? Because as mentioned previously in this article, Public Administration is the scientific study of public administration and a paradigm “is something that scientists of a discipline agree upon and that guides their research” (Vyas-Doorgapersad 2011:237). Or as Kuhn (1970) puts it “a paradigm turns out to be essential to the development of a science”. Or as Botes (1988:17) states, “when a paradigm is discovered, all scientific efforts are directed towards the development of that paradigm”. It is evident from the above conceptions of a paradigm that it informs science. An adoption of the designation Public Governance and Management at the University of Johannesburg appears to be largely ideological adventurism rather than a genuine pursuit for science.

Hanyane (2012) concurs. He contends that what happened at the University of Johannesburg can be called the paralysis of Public Administration. It is the researcher’s opinion that the same confusion that exists now between Public Administration and governance also existed between Public Administration and Management in South African public administration scholarship. According to Pauw (1999:9-11), giving new names for the subject, such as ‘Public Management’ and ‘Public Administration and Management’, added certain value positions, and certain directions for university curricula. Pauw goes further and states that J.J.N. Cloete was also of the opinion that in South Africa, the teaching and training of public managers should become the same as that for private business managers.
(Cloete, in Pauw, 1999:1). According to Pauw, Cloete specifically influenced the Afrikaans-speaking academics and students of Public Administration. It is the researcher’s view that the confusion is good because it strengthens the future of the discipline. When Auriacombe (2012) in her explanation also mentions that the King Reports emphasise good governance and corporate governance mechanisms and not public administration processes, did she thus mean that Public Administration as a science to be taught in their department should be replaced by governance just because the famous Professor Mervyn King, (then Judge Mervyn King) emphasises good corporate governance processes and not public administration processes? Did they take into account that the same principles as proposed by the King Reports are also enshrined in Chapter 10, section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108, 1996?

Could what is happening at the University of Johannesburg’s Department of Public Governance and Management not be what Maserumule (2010:78) calls *ipsedixism*? In his article published in the *Journal of Public Administration* titled, *The Impact of Ipsydixism on Public Administration scholarship*, Maserumule (2010:78-80) defines *ipsedixism* to be “he himself said it, so it ought to be”. Academic *ipsedixitism*, according to Maserumule (2010:80), is about “scholarship fixation to a particular dominant intellectual paradigm simply because Professor X is its proponent”. He goes further to state that *ipse dixit* “refers to an unsupported or dogmatic assertion or statement usually said by a person of standing and that the acceptance of such assertion or statement as part of the epistemology is determined solely on the basis of one’s authority, glamour, prestige, rank or popularity” (Maserumule, 2010). Frederickson (2005:300) refers to almost the same trend when he states that, “one must be cautious of the activities of those academics called concept entrepreneurs” because according to him they will ‘promote the use of certain terms or concepts in a way that will further their careers and reputations but not necessarily the subject’. If what is happening at the University of Johannesburg’s Department of Public Governance and Management indeed has to do with the phenomenon of academic *ipsedixism*, or ‘concept entrepreneurism’, it will be a serious challenge for the discipline and for Public Administration scholars in an effort to guarantee continuous and sustained contribution to the growth or generation of knowledge that the country needs in order to achieve its goals and objectives, including the clarification of concepts in an attempt to ensure their correct and proper application.

The researcher concurs with Rhodes (2000:3-5), that governance is a “power word, a dominant descriptor, and the current preference of academic tastemakers...”, and that therefore there has been a rush to change the names of departments and institutions. One of South Africa’s own government departments fell prey to that. The previous Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) in 2009...
changed its name to Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA). That is despite the fact that their “business” is still the same and also the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108, 1996, only makes reference to public administration and also in Chapter 3 only talks about Co-operative Government. The motive for the change in name is not clear, but the assumption is that it was done because it was ‘chic’ to do so. Could the department not have been named Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs instead? Or is it that to them also, governance is regarded as synonymous with public administration? It continues to create more confusion about the meaning of the governance phenomenon especially because in South Africa the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) is still there. Also the previous South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) in 2008 changed their name to Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA), because their focus is mainly on training public servants in the interest of better service delivery for all South Africans. It is therefore the researcher’s view that governance is burdened with political, philosophical and ideological contestations.

CONCLUSION

As a field of study and as a practice, public administration has been influenced by many approaches and paradigms, all of them aimed at improving the functioning, effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions for better service delivery. In future, if the discourse on governance were to open new opportunities for resolving the current crisis of livelihood and governability anywhere, it seems necessary to move away from standard blueprints of governance that are applicable everywhere, and towards encouraging the creativity and originality of people in real social settings; away from the ‘technification’ of institutional reform and towards a more open debate on the needs and change in specific institutions and programmes; away from the preference for analysing institutional reform and towards a more clear recognition of the interrelatedness between the three spheres of government. In essence, whichever concept is chosen, there is a moral obligation to try to work out what the practical consequences of the concept would be. It is true that public administration is very important in the lives of people and that Public Administration theorists can hardly stand aloof from public administration in some sterile and neutral position outside society. Therefore the researcher poses the following questions: Are Public Administration academics failing to put together a science that can solve societal problems, for example fraud, corruption and nepotism? Is it true that academics are failing practitioners because Public Administration is failing to give answers? In conclusion, it is the researcher’s opinion that Public Administration is in a state of “constructivism”, based on the fact that we all conceive of the external reality somewhat differently based on our unique physical and social experiences with the world and our beliefs about them.
REFERENCES

Auriacombe, C. 2012. University of Johannesburg. Department of Public Governance and Management. *Head of Department*. E-mail (8 February 2012). at christella@uj.ac.za


Hanyane, B. 2012. University of South Africa – Senior Lecturer, Personal interview. University of South Africa, Pretoria. 28 February 2012.


*Louw holds a BSoc Sci degree in Psychology (University of Pretoria) which she completed in 2003, as well as a BA Honours degree in Public Management and Administration (University of Pretoria) which she completed in 2004. She is currently studying towards an MAdmin Degree at UNISA. Her focus is on the concept of governance in Public Administration. Louw is currently employed as a Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration and Management at UNISA. She joined the department in June 2005. She was previously employed at the South Cape College Head Office in George as a Human Resource Management Officer. louwv@unisa.ac.za