

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH ... A SOUTH AFRICAN MASQUERADE*

Jacobus S. Wessels

Department of Public Administration and Development Studies
University of South Africa (Unisa)

ABSTRACT

This article attends the South African masquerade of scientific contributions to Public Administration, trying to distinguish contributions with true scientific spirit from ones with no scientific spirit. As these distinctive characteristics do not seem to be so obvious, this article tries to identify some of these characteristics and apply them as a password to identify the true scientific spirit behind the masks. As the author has realised that these characteristics are only of limited assistance in distinguishing the guests who deserved to be there from those who had sneaked in by virtue of their convincing masks, he starts using what Polanyi calls his skill of "tasting like a connoisseur". This allows him to "taste" the conversations of co-guests and to draw a boundary between the tastes of the conversations of those with a true scientific spirit and those with very convincing masks.

INTRODUCTION

Scientific research is commonly viewed as a social practice or process which involves researchers belonging to various organisations, groups or institutions. Researchers, being part of the academic community of a specific field of knowledge, such as Public Administration, disseminate their research results usually as papers at scientific conferences and as articles (read: *masks*) in scientific publications such as books, monographs and journals (read: *masquerades*). In scientific journals, in particular, peer group evaluation plays a decisive role in accepting the research results as part of the scientific discourse in a specific academic subject.

In the South African context, the author shares Pauw's (1996:66) concern about the possibility of a research publication, such as a reviewed article, having the visible charac-

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teristics expected of scientific work – to be rational, systematic and objective – without being part of science. In other words, the article being a mask hiding a contribution that is not supposed to qualify for the 'masquerade' of scientific contributions. The implication of this is that an investigation can be done by means of a scientific method (e.g. surveys) and reported in a reviewed journal, without making a contribution to the body of scientific knowledge. Such an investigation might end up in a mask masquerading as science and gaining access to the prestigious *masquerade* of scientific contributions. Moreover, it may even be rewarded for attending this masquerade by means of a government subsidy.

The purpose of this article is to attend the South African masquerade of scientific contributions to Public Administration, lifting some of the masks with scientific features and revealing some of the hidden faces. In order to distinguish contributions with true scientific spirit from ones with no scientific spirit, it is necessary to ask, "What characteristics distinguish scientific inquiry from other types of investigation?" (Losee 1980:2). These distinctive characteristics do not seem to be so obvious. This article will try to identify some of these characteristics and apply them as a password to identify the true scientific spirit behind the masks.

METHODOLOGY

A review of Public Administration literature on research and research methodology reveals that since the 1980s various scholars have tried to assess research contributions in Public Administration. In this regard, the article focuses mainly on a series of articles published in the *Public Administration Review* from 1984 to 2001 on research in Public Administration, as well as a few other contributions to this discourse. Most of the authors developed and applied assessment criteria for evaluating dissertations or articles. However, not all the criteria were the same. Before going further, this article proposes a set of assessment criteria, developed from an analysis of the literature reviewed, which I believe are appropriate for identifying research contributions with true scientific spirit.

South African researchers in Public Administration publish their results mainly in three local refereed Public Administration journals. Two of these, namely *Politeia* and *(The South African) Journal of Public Administration*, are accredited by the Department of Education for subsidy purposes. The latter is the official journal of the professional *South African Association of Public Administration and Management* (SAAPAM). For the purposes of this article, research articles in these two journals (*Politeia* and *Journal of Public Administration*) have been analysed from 2000 to 2002 to provide a baseline for evaluating the scientific spirit of the contributions. As *Politeia* is a journal for both Political Sciences and Public Administration, only the Public Administration articles were evaluated.

EVALUATION OF SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Nearly two decades ago McCurdy and Cleary (1984) asked the question, "Why can't we resolve the research issue in Public Administration?" This question started a debate in a series of articles in the *Public Administration Review* and other journals leading to critical statements such as the following:

- Scholars ... have a difficult time coming to grips with the nature of research and its role in the field (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:49).
- Public administration research is engaged in little theory testing (Houston & Delevan 1990:678).
- Public administration showed both low conformity to mainstream research and low quality (Adams & White 1994:575).
- Methods ... are often not justified by context... They are imposed in an arbitrary fashion without regard to what would be just or lawful (Bell 1994:325).
- The current mean methodological level of journals in the field is significantly lower than in every other social science (Gill & Meier 1999:193).
- The field must continue to examine its research methodologies, and its subject matter, if we are to further improve the quality of doctoral research (Cleary 2000:454).
- Weaknesses appear to limit the value of the knowledge base that public administration researchers have developed (Streib, Slotkin & Rivera 2001:522).

What are the essential characteristics of a contribution with a "true scientific spirit", or a true scientific contribution? A review of the literature indicated that two main types of studies have been done to determine the quality of research in Public Administration. The first type focused on Public Administration dissertation research at selected institutions in the United States of America (McCurdy & Cleary 1984; White 1986; Stallings 1986; Bailey 1992; Cleary 1992; Adams & White 1994; Brewer, Douglas, Facer II, & O'Toole Jr 1999; Felbinger, Holzer & White 1999; Cleary 2000). The second assessed articles published mainly in the *Public Administration Review* (Perry & Kraemer 1986; Stallings & Ferris 1988; Houston & Delevan 1990; Box 1992; Gill & Meier 1999; Rodgers & Rodgers 2000; Streib, Slotkin & Rivera 2001).

A careful reading of these articles shows that the researchers tried to measure scientific contributions, such as dissertations and reviewed articles, in order to establish their value. In other words, they applied various criteria to measure the scientific quality of these contributions (dissertations or articles).



Dissertation research

The titles of the articles on doctorate and dissertation research in *Public Administration* indicate that the researchers focused on issues such as

- the advancement of the knowledge base of Public Administration (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; White 1986:227; Cleary 1992:55),
- attention to the core problems in the field of Public Administration (Stallings 1986:235),
- the rigorous application of the most suitable methods (Baily 1992:48; Adams & White 1994:565-566),
- the development of productive research scholars (Brewer *et al* 1999:373), and
- the quality of dissertation research (Felbinger *et al* 1999:459; Cleary 2000:446).

Articles published in the *Public Administration Review*

The titles of the articles on research methodology published in the *Public Administration Review* indicate that the researchers focused mainly on

- the general quality of Public Administration research (Box 1992:63; Streib *et al* 2001: 515);
- methodologies for Public Administration research (Perry & Kraemer 1986:215; Gill & Meier 2000:157);
- the nature of empirical research (Houston & Delevan 1990:674); and
- the boundaries of Public Administration (Rodgers & Rodgers 2000:435).

An analysis of the discourse on dissertation research in *Public Administration* revealed special emphasis on issues such as the advancement of the knowledge base of Public Administration as well as attention to core problems in the field. The same emphasis was not found in the discourse on *Public Administration Review* articles. Both discourses discuss issues such as the quality of research and the methods applied. The various authors developed different sets of criteria for assessing dissertation research and scientific articles.

A review of the various articles assessing *dissertation research* indicated that the scientific quality of contributions was evaluated on the following criteria:

- purpose (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; White 1986:227; Stallings 1986:235-239; Cleary 1992:56; Cleary 2000:447)
- validity, rigorous research design (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; White 1986: 227; Cleary 1992:56; Cleary 2000:447)
- theoretical or conceptual framework (Adams & White 1994:566)
- obvious flaws (Adams & White 1994:566)
- impact: the testing of theory or theoretical relevance (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; White 1986: 227; Cleary 1992:56; Adams & White 1994:566; Cleary 2000:447)
- impact: causal relationships (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; White 1986: 227; Cleary 1992:56; Cleary 2000:447)
- hypothesis testing (White 1986:227)
- case study methodology (Baily 1992:51)
- importance: topic; what questions are central in the field (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; Baily 1992:48; Cleary 1992:56; Adams & White 1994:566; Cleary 2000:447)
- importance: cutting edge (McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50)
- practical relevance (Adams & White 1994:568)
- development of new questions or creation of new experiences (Cleary 1992:56; Cleary 2000:447)
- overall quality (Adams & White 1994:568)
- length (Adams & White 1994:568)
- domestic or foreign programme(s) (Adams & White 1994:568)
- mainstream social science research (Adams & White 1994:568)
- general type of dissertation (theoretical; empirical; historical; operations) (Adams & White 1994:568)
- research methods and techniques:

- qualitative (including action research) (Adams & White 1994:570)
- quantitative (Adams & White 1994:570).

The following criteria were used to assess the quality of *articles* published in scientific journals:

- topic (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Stallings & Ferris 1988:583)
- level of government emphasised (Stallings & Ferris 1988:583; Streib *et al* 2001:518)
- source of research support (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Stallings & Ferris 1988:584; Houston & Delevan 1990:677)
- researcher characteristic (academic/practitioner) (Stallings & Ferris 1988:584)
- research approach/stage/purpose (conceptual, relation, evaluation)(Stallings & Ferris 1988:587; Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Houston & Delevan 1990:677)
- research design (Houston & Delevan 1990:678)
- research methodology/data-collection methods (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Streib *et al* 2001:521)
- method of empirical analysis (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225)
- statistical techniques (Houston & Delevan 1990:677)
- focus on theory/model/hypothesis building/extending/modifying (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Box 1992:66)
- focus on practices/practical issues/trends/ideas/problems discussion/illustration/ resolution (Perry & Kraemer 1986:225; Box 1992:66; Streib *et al* 2001:518).

A REVISED SET OF CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF ARTICLES

A comparison between the two lists of criteria above showed an overlapping of criteria. In order to develop a set of criteria which could identify research with a true scientific spirit, the core of the above criteria that overlapped and added elements from recent literature on knowledge and methodology have been used. The result of this process can be summarised as follows:

- Is the topic (a) central to the knowledge base of the field, or (b) on the cutting edge of the existing knowledge base?
- Does it have a research purpose? In other words, does it intend to (a) explore, (b) describe, (c) explain, (d) produce knowledge and empower (see Wessels 1999:414), (e) understand (see De Beer 1999:442-446), or (f) reflect (see Pauw 1999:464-473)?
- Does the study have a research design? Is it (a) an empirical (using primary data; analysing existing data), or (b) a non-empirical (philosophical analysis/conceptual analysis/theory building/literature reviews) study (see Perry & Kraemer 1986:223-225)?
- What is the impact of the study? Does it (a) strengthen or weaken an existing theory or establish conditions under which the theory operates (see McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50; Perry & Kraemer 1986:225), (b) test an hypothesis or develop or test a model (see White 1986:227), (c) determine causal relationships, (d) improve the practical relevance of research or (e) develop new questions or create new experiences?

It is argued that there are various ways of applying these criteria. The procedure followed by most of the researchers was to apply all the criteria in the set they used at once and equally to a sample of dissertations or articles. Using this approach, then, Cleary (1992:58) could say, "In 1990, the average number of criteria met was three. In addition, in 1981, no dissertation met all six criteria, and only 19 (13.4%) met at least four...". An evaluation like this might indicate the quality of the research, but does not tell the reader whether the contribution has the spirit of science. The reason for this is that this approach treats all criteria equally. In my view, this approach is inadequate for identifying contributions that do not deserve to be called "scientific contributions".

It is contended that these criteria lie on different levels. Some criteria determine whether an article contributes to the knowledge base of the subject field of scientific knowledge while others evaluate the quality of that contribution. The criteria which determine whether an article qualifies as a contribution to the body of subject knowledge are of a more fundamental nature than the other.

The criterion of *topic*

The author agrees with McCurdy and Cleary (1984), Baily (1992), Cleary (1992, 2000) and Adams and White (1994) on the importance of dissertations and articles to address topics central to or on the cutting edge of the field. However, the author prefers not to use Perry and Kraemer's (1986:225) detailed list of topics because the purpose of this cri-

terion is not to determine which sub-topics are the most popular with researchers, but to establish whether a legitimate Public Administration topic has been researched at all, irrespective of the sub-topics.

It is argued that this criterion should be applied first. It makes sense to first establish whether an article at least pretends to contribute to the subject, before assessing the quality of the contribution. In his evaluation of doctoral dissertations, Cleary (2000:451) remarks that a "surprisingly small number of dissertations are written on topics considered 'important' to the field of public administration, under the definition used in this research". Does it make sense to apply the other assessment criteria to a contribution that at first sight does not qualify to be part of this masquerade of contributions to the knowledge base of the subject?

Disqualifying contributions on the grounds of this particular criterion is not so easy though. The definition of "central importance to the field" and "on the cutting edge of the field" seems to be crucial in applying this criterion. According to Cleary (2000:448), the importance of a topic is "reflected by the amount of attention given to the topic or its focal theme in current leading textbooks in public administration". This definition does not make it easier for the evaluator, especially in the changes in the field as far as South Africa is concerned. However, this criterion can be regarded as fundamental.

From the literature on the subject, it is clear that the formulation of clinical definitions on these two sub-criteria is more than challenging. In this regard, Polanyi's (1958) reference to *connoisseurship* is of assistance. A lack of clinical definitions fundamental to the criterion of topic, then, forces the researcher to apply his or her "skill of testing and tasting" which has been transmitted from "master to apprentice" (Polanyi 1958:54-55). However, not all researchers have acquired the skill of *connoisseurship*. The fact is, a decision should be made on an article's topic whether by applying some 'objective' definition as part of the criteria, or by *connoisseurship*.

In the context of Public Administration, it makes no sense to apply the other criteria to a contribution that does not attempt to make a contribution to the subject field. At the same time, passing this first test (of at least pretending to make a contribution to the existing subject knowledge) does not automatically qualify an article to be regarded as science.

The criterion of *purpose*

If an article does have a topic of central importance to or on the cutting edge of the knowledge base of the field, the next step should be to determine the *purpose* of the research. The three most common purposes in social research are exploration, description and explanation (Babbie & Mouton 2001:79). Public Administration is more than just a traditional social science, therefore research in the field could also have other pur-

poses, such as empowering traditional research subjects through participation action research (see Wessels 1999:414), gaining insight into or understanding (clarifying) meaning (see De Beer 1999:442-446) and reflecting on concepts (see Pauw 1999:464-473). The criterion of *purpose* would thus ask whether the researcher wanted to (a) explore, (b) describe, (c) explain, (d) describe, explain and empower, (e) understand, or (f) reflect on? Most, if not all candidate's research contributions have a purpose. Those that do not should be disqualified from further evaluation. How can one construct a research design, for example, if there is no purpose directing the design? Articles that pass the test of the criterion of *purpose* do not necessarily contain true scientific spirit. Further criteria need to be applied.

The criterion of *research design*

Irrespective of the purpose of an article, the only way to reach that purpose is through a valid and rigorous *design of the research* process. In other words, the researcher needs to draft a plan or blueprint of how he or she intends to collect, process, analyse and interpret the data or material (Babbie & Mouton 2001). McCurdy and Cleary (1984:50), White (1986:227), Cleary (1992:56; 2000:447) and Houston and Delevan (1990:678) underline the importance of a rigorous research design for dissertation research as well as scientific articles.

Babbie and Mouton's (2001:78) proposed classification of categories of research design can serve as an instrument to evaluate the research design of articles. According to them, research studies can be divided into two categories, namely empirical and non-empirical studies. Non-empirical research designs are usually used for philosophical analysis, conceptual analysis, theory building and literature reviews, and intended for interpretation and reflection. Babbie and Mouton make provision for two categories of empirical research designs, namely designs that use primary data, and ones that analyse existing data. Research designs using primary data (obtained through surveys, experiments, case studies, programme evaluation and ethnographic studies) are usually aimed at exploring, describing, explaining and even empowering. Research designs for analysing existing data or material can be divided into two categories, namely designs for text data (discourse analysis, content analysis, textual criticism, historical studies) and designs for numeric data (secondary data analysis, statistical modelling) (Babbie & Mouton 2001:78).

Although Babbie and Mouton (2001:78) consider research designs for text data, for example historical studies, as legitimate designs, scholars in Public Administration do not appear to share that view. McCurdy and Cleary (1984) do not include this design in their initial set of predominantly typical positivistic criteria. In his follow-up study, White (1986:228) reported that more "than half of the dissertations failed to meet more than two of the criteria. This can be explained in part by the presence of 20 theoretical disserta-

tions, 116 histories ..." Considering that 47% of the dissertations in White's (1986) study did not use research designs for primary empirical data (so-called mainstream research), it seems appropriate for White to conclude in his summary that "(n)onmainstream research can contribute to knowledge in public administration if it is guided by alternative methodological and philosophical frameworks".

Each of the above types of research designs represents a vast collection of data-collection and interpretation methods and techniques. Rodgers and Rodgers (2000:441) concur, stating that research in the field of Public Administration "draws on the knowledge, methods approaches, and wisdom from a wide variety of disciplines". Unless researchers are adequately trained to skilfully apply these methods and techniques, sound and valid results (prerequisites for scientific knowledge) are not possible. Consequently, it is not strange that in the discourse on research in Public Administration, Perry and Kraemer (1986), Gill and Meier (1999), McCurdy and Cleary (1984) White (1986), Stallings and Ferris (1988), Houston and Delevan (1990) and Cleary (2000) place great emphasis on research methodology and techniques. It is doubtful whether an article, based on a research process using poor data-collection, processing, analysing and interpreting methods, could make any contribution to science and the knowledge field of Public Administration. Such an article would not comply with the criterion of rigorous research methodology and would be disqualified from evaluation by the next criterion.

The criterion of *impact*

The last criterion to measure the scientific spirit of an article is impact. In other words, what is the impact of a study on which an article is based? Does it

- strengthen or weaken an existing theory or establish conditions under which the theory operates (see McCurdy & Cleary 1984:50)?
- test a hypothesis or develop or test a model (see White 1986:227)?
- determine causal relationships?
- improve the practical relevance of research?
- develop new questions or create new experiences?

An evaluation according to these questions (sub-criteria) requires authors of articles to be explicit in the conclusions of their contributions about the impact of research. Due to the nature of Public Administration, there is a tension between the impact on the subject Public Administration (theory, hypothesis, model and causal relationships) and that on

the practice (practical relevance). With regard to dissertation research, Cleary (1992:55) observed that research tended "to have little impact on the development of the field of public administration". Box (1992:66) observed that "public administration is an applied field. Public administration research will be of little value to the field to the extent that ... it becomes divorced from the reality of practice..." Notwithstanding his observation in this regard, Box (1992:66) excluded articles focusing on professional practice (67% of his survey) from his analysis. In doing this, he followed the earlier examples of Perry and Kraemer (1986) and Stallings and Ferris (1988). The author agrees with the view of Streib, Slotkin and Rivera (2001:523) that there "is room in public administration journals for articles that will interest only academics, but we should also give some thought to how researchers can better serve the needs of practitioners".

An aspect that needs to be kept in mind when applying the criterion of impact in terms of the improvement of the practical relevance of research, is that articles evaluated in terms of this sub-criterion have already passed the test of the criterion of topic. In other words, it has already been established that the topic of the specific article is of central importance to or on the cutting edge of the field.

TRUE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT

A crucial question to be answered is whether an article that passes all the above criteria should automatically be regarded as containing the true scientific spirit. In other words, can one accept that, after passing the scrutiny of all the guards at the various entrance levels, the guest will, indeed, be at home at the masquerade? Might the attentive host not perhaps spot something insignificant in his masked guest's behaviour to indicate that the guest is actually an impostor carrying a very convincing mask?

Connoisseurship will again determine the final decision that the proof of the pudding is in the eating!

APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA TO SELECTED ARTICLES

For the purpose of applying the above criteria seventeen articles from the nine issues of *Politeia* and forty-nine articles from the twelve issues of the *Journal of Public Administration*, excluding editorials, viewpoints and book reviews have been selected. Table 1 presents a summary of the results of the assessment.

Although not entirely alike, there were nevertheless noteworthy similarities in assessment findings in the two journals. A relatively high percentage of articles in both the journals (94% in *Politeia* and 78% in the *JPA*) proved to be of central importance to or on the cutting edge of the field. The assessment found that a total of 18,18% of the articles could

not be regarded as of central importance to the field. I believe that peer group evaluation as a gatekeeping mechanism plays an important role in keeping the percentage low. It is noteworthy that a considerable number of those articles in the *Journal of Public Administration* regarded as not having topics of central importance to the field were published in editions which were edited by a non-Public Administration scholar. The particular editor was evidently not a connoisseur! The articles on topics considered not of central importance to the field of Public Administration are not necessarily poor quality research. Some of them should be considered by journals of other subject fields. Their topics disqualify them from being considered Public Administration research. They may be a variation of what Rodgers and Rodgers (2000:435) call "undisciplined mongrels". The only difference is that they publish their research in neighbouring disciplines in Public Administration journals. Topics in the articles considered not of central importance to the field of (South African) Public Administration included the following:

- Urban restructuring through land development objectives in Pietersburg: an assessment
- Security management and leadership: an African renaissance perspective
- Foreign direct investment flows to developing countries: policy implications for South Africa
- The development of provincial interests in South Africa: implications for inter-governmental relations
- Perspectives on Web-based instructional technologies in teaching postgraduate programmes
- Assessing learning material for distance education: a case study
- Facilitating negotiations through electronic decision support software.

Table 1 Evaluation of South African articles on Public Administration (2000-2002)

| Criteria | Politeia (n=17) | | J of PA (n=49) | | Total |
|--|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | % |
| Research topic | | | | | |
| (a) Central importance | 15 | 88,24 | 35 | 71,43 | 75,76 |
| (b) Cutting edge | 1 | 5,88 | 3 | 6,12 | 6,06 |
| (c) Not important in or to field | 1 | 5,88 | 11 | 22,45 | 18,18 |
| Research purpose | | | | | |
| (a) to explore | 4 | 23,53 | 5 | 10,20 | 13,64 |
| (b) to describe | 9 | 52,94 | 21 | 42,86 | 45,45 |
| (c) to explain | 0 | 0,00 | 9 | 18,37 | 13,64 |
| (d) to ... empower | 0 | 0,00 | 0 | 0,00 | 0,00 |
| (e) to understand | 1 | 5,88 | 3 | 6,12 | 6,06 |
| (f) to reflect | 2 | 11,76 | 1 | 2,04 | 4,55 |
| Research design | | | | | |
| (a) empirical: primary data | 1 | 5,88 | 5 | 10,20 | 9,09 |
| (b) empirical: existing data | 13 | 76,47 | 29 | 59,18 | 63,64 |
| (c) non-empirical | 2 | 11,76 | 4 | 8,16 | 9,09 |
| Impact of study | | | | | |
| (a) strengthen/weaken theory | 1 | 5,88 | 6 | 12,24 | 10,61 |
| (b) test hypotheses/models | 1 | 5,88 | 4 | 8,16 | 7,58 |
| (c) causal relationships | 2 | 11,76 | 0 | 0,00 | 3,03 |
| (d) practical relevance | 11 | 64,71 | 26 | 53,06 | 56,06 |
| (e) new questions/experiences | 1 | 5,88 | 2 | 4,08 | 4,55 |
| True scientific spirit (the taste of a connoisseur) | 11 | 64,71 | 26 | 53,06 | 56,06 |

Several articles did not state their purpose explicitly in the abstract or the introduction, which necessitated searching for it in the articles. The most popular research purpose in both journals appeared to be descriptive. The assessment revealed that the purpose of 52,94% of the articles in *Politeia* and 42,86% articles in the *JPA* was to describe. Considering that 45,45% of all the articles in this study had a descriptive purpose, it is significant that only 9,09% were based on empirical research designs using primary data. In other words, most of the articles with a descriptive purpose used research designs

based on existing (mostly text) data. Where texts such as white papers (policy documents) and acts are the main data sources for researchers in Public Administration, it is disturbing that only 6% of the total number of articles included in this study, had a purpose of understanding meaning (interpretive).

Of the 56,06% articles with practical relevance, it is significant that not one was shown to have as purpose the empowerment of research subjects, as is the case when participatory action research methodologies are applied. With the relationship between purpose and research design in mind, one is tempted to ask whether researchers do not prefer a descriptive research purpose because the research design and research methodology needed are relatively simple and easy to manage.

Public Administration researchers in South Africa have shown a preference for research designs that make use of existing data (such as the literature, official publications and statistical data sets). This is illustrated by the results of the assessment indicating that 76,47% of the articles published in *Politeia* and 59,18% of those in *JPA* were based on research designs making an empirical study of existing data. The low percentage of non-empirical research designs correlates with the percentages of articles with the purpose of understanding meaning (interpretive) and conceptual, theoretical and philosophical reflection.

Only 21% of the articles in both journals were aimed at improving on or refuting existing theories, testing hypotheses or models, or confirming any causal relationships between variables. Most of the articles (64,71% of the *Politeia* articles and 53,06% of the *JPA* articles) showed the practice orientation of Public Administration. Of all the articles passing the *topic* test, 68,52% were relevant to the practice of public administration.

IDENTIFYING TRUE SCIENCE BEHIND THE MASKS

This article opened with the crucial question of whether it is possible to distinguish articles with a true scientific spirit from ones that lack it. The literature review indicated various studies and discourses on the quality of research in Public Administration. Researchers have developed different sets of criteria for assessing dissertations and articles. Particular common values in the criteria applied by these researchers have been identified and combined together with additional criteria in a set that is believed will (and can) identify articles containing that true scientific spirit.

Disqualifying articles on their topics not being of central importance to the field was relatively easy. It is also possible to quite objectively identify the research purpose, research design and impact of each article. However, this study did not evaluate the quality of research design, data collection, processing and interpretation. It is thus not possible to use these criteria to make a statement about the technical quality of the research and

research results. I believe that one can use these criteria to identify articles with true scientific features.

A typical scientific article in Public Administration, then, would be one with a topic of central importance to or on the cutting edge of the field of Public Administration, a research purpose (explicit or implicit), a sound research design, and some theoretical or practical impact. At the end of the assessment, 94% of the *Politeia* articles and 78% of the *JPA* articles met this qualification.

However, after assessing each article in terms of all the above criteria, the author considered each one for a true scientific spirit. The research has taught one that clinical and objective criteria, such as the set compiled for this assessment, are not fully adequate for identifying articles that do have all the features of a scientific contribution, but still lack the true spirit of science.

Of the sixteen articles in *Politeia* that seemed to have all the features of a scientific contribution, using the intuition of a humble connoisseur, five that lacked the true spirit of science have been identified. Of the thirty-eight articles in the *JPA* that seemed to have all the features of a scientific contribution, twelve, according to my taste, lacked the true spirit of science. My decision in each case was based on one of the following reasons:

- The researcher went through all the correct motions, but did not add something new to the discourse. It was not always clear whether the researcher had taken note of any discourse through a thorough literature survey.
- The argumentation, although systematic and logic, was purely on the level of the practice of public administration without using any academic input or scientific insight to improve the practice. Again, the main reason for this seems to be an inadequate literature study preceding the research.
- A theoretical model had been used only to justify an article on the researcher's pet topic, without adding any value by the application of the framework.
- The researcher had merely made a systematic summary of government policy without any academic critique.
- The researcher did not say anything new about a topic such as 'efficiency and effectiveness in the public service'. The article was found to be a mere duplication of previous studies or a replication of common knowledge.
- The researcher presented a superficial case study on organisational mismanagement without saying anything new about the topic.

- The article was a superficial summary of existing literature on work ethic, without bringing new insights.
- The article reviewed a topic, such as equity, in a very elementary fashion without adding to the discourse.
- The article showed a lack of any theoretical input or scientific value added to the topic.

Most of the above failings or weaknesses originated from the authors' neglect of recent discourses and the existing knowledge base of the field. A systematic and thorough literature review on the research topic would have prevented a situation of articles carrying the mask of scientific features, but lacking the true spirit of science. Perhaps this is the reason why many researchers and authors of articles themselves have not developed a connoisseur's taste for science.

CONCLUSION

The author has attended the South African masquerade of scientific contributions to Public Administration. A list of criteria that helps one appreciate the masks of the various guests was formulated. At the same time, it was realised that the criteria would only be of limited assistance in distinguishing the guests who deserved to be there from those who had sneaked in by virtue of their convincing masks. The author then started using what Polanyi calls my skill of "tasting like a connoisseur". This allowed him to "taste" the conversations of his co-guests and to draw a boundary between the tastes of the conversations of those with a true scientific spirit, and those with very convincing masks. In so doing, the author realises that others will undoubtedly taste differently and draw the boundary somewhere else.

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