

Advances in Contemporary Public Administration

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The main objective of this paper is to explore the advances in both Public Administration (a field of study) and public administration (a practice). This paper is divided into three major parts. The first part shows some evidence of the lingering influence of logical empiricism and Kuhn's idea of scientific revolutions in Public Administration. The following part sets forth the multiple criteria for making a judgement whether there are some advances in the field of Public Administration and in the practice of public administration. Based upon these criteria, the paper shows that there are some advances in both Public Administration and public administration.

1. The lingering effects of logical empiricism and Kuhn's idea of scientific revolutions in Public Administration

Logical empiricism and Kuhn's (1962) idea of scientific revolutions still have lingering effects on Public Administration. Recently, some academics have argued that Public Administration has not advanced because of inadequate research support. For instance, Garson and Overman (1983) reviewed public management research, as a subset of Public Administration, for the years 1981-1982 and concluded that the research was fragmented, noncumulative, and underfunded. In another example, McCurdy and Clearly (1984) analyzed abstracts from Public Administration doctoral dissertations published in the "Dissertation Abstracts International" for 1981. They found that most of the dissertations neither dealt with significant issues nor were conducted in a way that produced findings in which one could have much confidence. For them, the low quality of dissertations was a result of a lack of methodological progress. They considered that the state of dissertation research very likely reflected the state of research in Public Administration as a whole. Scholars in Public Administration could not conclusively show that Public Administration had lent itself to systematic inquiry. The purpose of research in Public Administration was not

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sufficiently directed towards theory building or proposition testing. As an additional example, Perry and Kraemer (1986) reviewed the research methodologies of Public Administration Review articles from 1975 to 1984. They found that recent Public Administration research: 1) has been predominantly applied, 2) has not been cumulative, and 3) has lacked adequate institutional support. Both considered that during the past three decades, Public Administration had made little progress. In their view, the state of Public Administration during the past three decades was similar to what Mosher (1956) wrote 30 years ago as follows:

The field has not channeled its research efforts; its scope of interest seems unlimited; it has not developed a rigorous methodology; it has been pretty blase about definitions; it has not agreed on any paradigms or theorems or theoretical systems; it has not settled on any stylized jargon or symbols; with a very few experimental exceptions, the field has not been modeled or mathematized into an "adminimetrics" (Mosher 1956, 176).

Coincidentally, in 1983, Perry and Kraemer edited the book, "Public Management: Public and Private Perspectives." In their book, they proposed public management as a new major paradigm of Public Administration. Years later, Perry and Kraemer, with some other scholars, have claimed that public management has increasingly contributed to Public Administration (Perry and Kraemer 1983; Garson and Overman 1981, 1982, 1983; Elmore 1986; Rainey 1983, 1990; and Bozeman 1993). In their point of view, Public Administration will gain significant progress if education and research are focused on the public management paradigm.

In sum, two questions need to be answered. First, do the advances in the field of Public Administration rely on logical empiricism and Kuhn's scientific revolutions? Second, is there any progress in the field of Public Administration and practice in public administration?

2. Advances in Public Administration

There are several criteria for justifying the progress of the disciplines of social science. For instance, in their book, "Advances in the Social Sciences, 1900-1980," Deutsch, Markovits, and Platt (1986, 373-420) employed two criteria for recognizing major advances in social sciences. First, the advance had to be something that led to new discoveries or created the possibility of doing something that had not been done before. Second, the progress had to be something that produced a substantial impact leading on to further knowledge.

In addition, they noted that many advances in social science had a substantial impact on the subsequent development of several social sciences and on social practice as well. In their view, advances should be in one of these three aspects: 1) theory development, 2) methodology development, and 3) discovery of new findings. Important advances in social sciences typically combine theory development, method development, and discovery of substantive results. Deutsch, Markovits, and Platt found that most advances in social science have at least two of these three aspects and often have all of them. Only a few advances in social science were limited to theory alone.

As another example, Dryzek (1986, 302-4) applied three different concepts of progress, i.e., global, internal, and lateral progress, to justify the progress of political science. In his view, global progress is the progress of a discipline, whereas internal progress means the progress inside a paradigm within a discipline. Lateral progress refers to a capacity to cope with a contingency. Lateral progress exists only if there are several potentially useful paradigms.

For Kuhn (1962) and some scholars, progress in natural science occurs when the most internally progressive paradigm is chosen from a collection of competing paradigms (Dryzek 1986). Kuhn argued that the progress from non-science to science occurs with the articulation and enforcement of a paradigm. Once a paradigm is established, internal progress within the paradigm can be clear and unambiguous. Scientists simply solve the puzzles that persistently refuse to act according to the established paradigm. Kuhn did not make clear how his theory could be applied when paradigms are becoming competing (Bernstein 1983, 58). However Lakatos (1970) and Laudan (1977) helped specify clear and general criteria for choosing among rival paradigms. For both Lakatos and Laudan, rational choice consists of deciding which of a collection of competing paradigms is the most progressive internally. Lakatos and Laudan are alike in the view that progress in a discipline exists to the extent that rational choice among paradigms occurs.

Since social science and natural science are different, it is impossible to apply the idea of a scientific revolution to justify the progress of social science (Dryzek 1986,304). The history of natural science is amenable to a reconstruction that eliminates external influence (Lakatos 1971), whereas social science is subject to social forces "external" to the disciplinary community. Social science involves problems that are socially and truly different from natural science. The rationality of any choice among rival paradigms in social science must then be contingent upon time, place, and a given set of socio-political factors. Consequently, a condition of having simultaneously competing paradigms should not be characterized as immaturity of the discipline. In this view, the progress of political

science [Public Administration] should be defined as its ability to cope with contingent social problems (Dryzek 1986, 316). The advance in political science [Public Administration] requires a tolerance of diversity, not its suppression. Although tenacity by adherence to some paradigms is generally commendable, too much tenacity might lead to irrational discrimination against both the resurgence of old paradigms and the onset of new paradigms.

Based upon the criteria employed by Dryzek (1986) and Deutsch, Markovits, and Platt (1986), this paper will illustrate that there are some advances in both Public Administration and public administration. The criteria used for justifying their progress are: 1) an ability to cope with contingent social problems, 2) theory development, 3) methodology development, and 4) improvement of practice.

2.1 The ability of Public Administration to cope with contingent social problems

Perry and Kraemer (1983), Garson and Overman (1983), Elmore (1986), and Rainey (1990) attempt to apply the idea of scientific revolutions to the development of Public Administration. They intend to shift Public Administration from a preparadigm stage to a normal science stage. In their view, one paradigm should come to dominate and displace all the others. For them, Public Administration should progress in a linear or cumulative development, moving on to the next more advanced level of knowledge. Since Public Administration is social science, its progress should be specified in terms of lateral progress or an ability to cope with contingent social problems. Public Administration needs simultaneously multiple paradigms to deal with many aspects of social problems.

At present, Public Administration consists of several competing paradigms: 1) bureaucratic politics, 2) implementation, 3) economic theories, 4) public bureaucracy, and 5) public management (Kettl 1992). Some characteristics of these paradigms are similar, while others are different. The similarity among these paradigms is that these paradigms tend to ask shared questions closely related to each other: How can we design organizational structures that produce the desired results efficiently? How can we create incentives for bureaucrats to do the same? How can we make good decisions within bureaucracies and gauge the results of those decisions? How can we shape administrative behavior? How can that behavior be made accountable to politically responsible officials? Importantly, how can we mobilize the public sector to solve social problems? (Kettl 1992, 27).

Despite the similarity, the differences among these paradigms can be observed. Public management has sought to discover how to make administration more effective. Unlike public management, the other four paradigms have been far more concerned about the risks of administrative power and have sought to contain it (Kettl 1992, 26). Overall,

public management focuses on the organization, while implementation, by contrast, concentrates on policy outcomes. Bureaucratic politics, economic theories, and public bureaucracies seek linkages between the bureaucracy and the wider political environment. It can be observed that each paradigm has its own virtue of dealing with an important problem that the other paradigms might ignore.

It is quite clear that there is no possibility of creating a so-called unified paradigm of Public Administration. A diversity of rival paradigms exists and will continue to exist although misunderstanding and useless disputes will continue. Since Public Administration has to deal with complex social problems, it needs to employ several potentially useful paradigms. All current paradigms help Public Administration increase the capacity of the field for solving social problems. According to Kettl (1992, 27), the integration of these paradigms is difficult both pragmatically and theoretically because each paradigm has taken great pains to separate itself from the others. Although integration among these paradigms undoubtedly would bear much fruit, the search for common normative or educational grounds is likely to be contentious. Consequently, the progress of Public Administration has to be understood in terms of lateral progress instead of global progress.

2.2 Theory development in Public Administration

The advance in Public Administration is thought of in terms of its capacity for dealing with contingent social problems; therefore, Public Administration needs to employ multiple paradigms. Its theoretical development has to be contributed to by a broad range of perspectives. In Denhardt's words,

Public administration theory is contributed to by social scientists engaged in specific research projects and seeking to contribute to theory, but also by a small group of scholars who identify themselves as public administration theorists (Denhardt 1990, 43).

Denhardt (1990) reviewed literature in the major Public Administration journals from 1980 to 1985 and books in the field published in the 1980s. He found two important matters: 1) the diversity of topics in Public Administration theory, and 2) the shift in the approach to Public Administration theory. Among the diversity of topics in Public Administration theory, traditional concerns of Public Administration still exist, e.g., the role of public organizations in the government process. The new concerns are the ethics of public service, the interest in interorganizational networks, development of new epistemological alternatives to positivism, and economic models of bureaucratic behavior. In Denhardt's

view, Public Administration theory draws both its most serious limitation and its greatest strength from this diversity. On the one hand, the diversity of Public Administration theory often means that the field lacks a sense of identity. On the other hand, it implies that there are a large number of contributions to Public Administration theory development.

In addition, Denhardt (1990, 53-56) employed a subjective-objective perspective and a political-organizational perspective in classifying books in Public Administration theory published during the 1980s. He found that the focus in Public Administration theory had shifted from objectivist to subjectivist thought. Denhardt (1990, 63) pointed out that theoretical issues that once were considered as out of the mainstream in the last decade are now very much in the mainstream.

In sum, two substantial points can be drawn from the work by Denhardt. First, Public Administration still relies heavily on other disciplines in social science. Second, there has been a shift toward more subjectivist perspectives in Public Administration theory. The more subjectivist view in Public Administration theory offers a promise of advancement in the field.

2.3 Methodology development in Public Administration

Before the late 1980s, Public Administration had been blocked in its advance because it could not properly apply logical empiricism in the field. At that time, logical empiricism had strongly dominated in social science until about 1965 (Diesing 1991, 3). Diesing wrote:

Its [logical empiricism] basic definitions and distinctions were regarded as self-evident, and anyone who questioned them was contemptuously ignored as simply not a philosopher of science. After about 1958, it was increasingly on the defensive against newer movements, and by 1970 all the innovation was occurring in the newer movements. By 1980 it had almost completely disappeared from philosophy of science convention programs in the United States (Diesing 1991, 3).

After the decline of logical empiricism, many scholars in Public Administration sought to outline epistemological alternatives to logical empiricism (Denhardt 1990, 48). Recently, McCurdy and Cleary (1984) and White (1986) have discussed various epistemological alternatives in Public Administration. McCurdy and Cleary (1984) suggested that Public Administration needs to have its own methodologies and research designs for advancing its knowledge. In their view, research and theory development in Public Administration should adhere to "generally accepted social science methods." They suggested that the following six criteria should be employed to justify the quality of research

and theory development in the field of Public Administration: 1) purpose, 2) validity, 3) the testing of theory, 4) causal relationship, 5) topic, 6) cutting edge (McCurdy, and Cleary 1984, 50).

In White's (1986) view, both McCurdy and Cleary are logical empiricists. Both of them came to believe that "The social sciences differ in degree and not in kind from the more well-established natural sciences" (Bernstein 1976, xiii). For them, "the best way to achieve scientific success is to emulate the logic and methodology of the natural sciences" (Bernstein 1976, xiii). White (1986,15) supported his critique by three lines of evidence. First, McCurdy and Cleary kept to the criteria of validity, testability, and causality. Second, they called for testing of ideas generated by description and critiques. Third, they appealed to Kerlinger's (1973) "Foundations of Behavioral Research" to identify the criteria for quality research in the behavioral sciences (McCurdy and Cleary 1984, 55, note 10). As was already known, logical empiricism had been questioned over its use in the study of social science. Recently, several postempiricist philosophers of science have identified different epistemological alternatives to surrogate logical empiricism (Churchman 1971; Rescher 1977; Forester 1989; Grunbaum 1984; Habermas 1973; Fuller 1988; Dryzek 1982; Mitroff 1974; Mitroff and Kilmann 1978; and McCloskey 1988). In White's view, these alternatives are broader in perspective than logical empiricism. However, White accepted that the logic of positive research is still useful for Public Administration on some occasions.

In White's view, two other epistemological alternatives are also useful for research and theory development in Public Administration, i.e., hermeneutics and critical theory. In fact, White (1986,15) asserted that these two epistemologies had been employed in Public Administration for more than 80 years. In sum, White outlined three types of epistemological alternative for Public Administration: 1) positive research, 2) interpretive research and 3) critical research.

Positive research relies on the logical empiricism that has had a pervasive influence on the logic and methodology of the natural and social sciences (Diesing 1991, chap 1; see also Kolakowski 1968; Bernstein 1976, Part I; Fay 1976, Chap. 1). Positive research aims at controlling natural and social events. Based upon this type of epistemology, theory building requires the development of a collection of related and testable laws that state causal relationships among dependent and independent variables. Methodologies employed in the logic of positive research are the deductive nomological and inductive statistical models of explanation and prediction (Diesing 1991, 21). These two models offer explanations and make predictions possible. If events can be predicted, conditions can be changed to make something happen or to prevent something from happening.

Interpretive research relies upon the philosophy of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the analytical philosophy of language (Diesing 1991, Chap. 5; see also Howard 1982). Basically, interpretation “deals with clarifying the meaning of a text” (Diesing 1991, 105). In Public Administration, interpretation helps all those who are involved in the social situations understand the situations. Particularly, interpretation helps understand the meanings that actors attach to their social situations, to their own actions, and to the actions of others. The advantage of interpretation is that it can be used in incorporation with other philosophies of science such as logical empiricism and pragmatism (Diesing 1991, 138-45). For instance, since 1965, Apel and Habermas have combined interpretation with logical empiricism to formulate such a new model, emancipation (Diesing 1991, 139). As Apel and Habermas described it:

Logical empiricism... is appropriate to any science or method whose implicit goal is to find causal or statistical laws that enable us to control something. Prediction and deductive explanation are corollaries of control. Hermeneutics [interpretation] is appropriate in any science whose implicit goal is to improve communication and mutual understanding; a corollary goal is to facilitate joint action, or in general living together. Then there is a third kind of science typified by psychoanalysis; its goal is emancipatory. Emancipation is achieved through self-knowledge of the causes that decide one's consciousness and behavior. This science includes both causal or statistical laws and interpretative techniques that reveal the hidden operation of the causes (Habermas 1971, appendix, cited in Diesing 1991, 139-40).

Critical research relies on phenomenology and critical social theory (Zaner 1970; Geuss 1981, 61). As Dunn describes it:

[A critical theory involves] the concurrent application of multiple metascientific perspectives. These perspectives are sociological, axiothetic, synchronic, and diachronic, in addition to the critical perspective. Multiple metascientific perspectives may be applied to problems of theory construction in spheres of the process, products, organization, and marketing of research on public organization, and marketing of public organization will further enable us to penetrate themes, theories, and premises (Dunn 1976, 54).

The logic of critical research is a self-reflection. It is an ability to reflect upon one's own thoughts and actions in relation to an object, a person, or a social situation. The self-reflective relationship is the basis for making assessments of fact and value. It helps recognize

that things are not what they appear to be and should be understood differently. It also helps recognize that things are not as they ought to be and should be changed for the good of those involved. Critical judgements can be made, if one knows these relationships and knows what one thinks or feels about something.

In sum, after the decline of logical empiricism, Public Administration has advanced in its theory of knowledge. It includes more epistemological alternatives in its field. As illustrated in this paper, three methodologies have been employed as the methods for research and theory building in Public Administration. The three methodologies are positive, interpretive, and critical research.

2.4 Improvement of practice in public administration

Is there any improvement of practice in public administration? The answer may be "yes" or "no" because there is evidence supporting both opposite answers. On the one hand, some evidence shows that there is no improvement of practice in public administration. The National Academy of Public Administration - NAPA (1986) reports that federal government administrators, responsible for programs involving hundreds of millions of dollars, often have to go through elaborate processes of obtaining approval. They have to send their staff members to a brief training program or to obtain minor facilities or equipment. Therefore, the NAPA calls for revitalization of federal management by relieving federal administrators of petty entanglements and constraints.

Warwick (1975), an expert, argues that many politicians and politically appointed executives adhere to the traditional administrative notions. They believe that sound management requires a strict hierarchy of accountability in government agencies, strict accounting and control, elaborate reporting requirements, and tightly specified procedures. Politicians and politically appointed executives worry that the absence of chains of command and hierarchical arrangement means disorganization. This practice conflicts sharply with contemporary public administration theory.

On the other hand, several scholars have argued and presented some evidence to show that there is an improvement of practice in public administration. Several scholars illustrate that public bureaucracies perform better than is commonly acknowledged (Doig and Hargrove 1987; Down and Larkey 1986; Goodsell 1985; Milward and Rainey 1983; Tierney 1988). Some show successful innovations and policies in public bureaucracies (Osborne 1990; Poister 1988; Schwartz 1983). Many of these authors point out the evidence of excellent performance by many government organizations and officials.

In my opinion, this contradictory evidence results from the different levels of analysis.

On the whole, public administration is likely to lack improvement in practice, whereas improvement can be observed at the level of public agencies.

3. Conclusion

This paper explores the advances in both Public Administration and public administration. It employs four criteria: the ability to cope with contingent social problems, theory development, methodology development, and improvement of practice, in justifying their progress.

At present, Public Administration consists of five major competing paradigms. Each of them has its own virtue of dealing with an important problem that the others might ignore. The existence of multiple paradigms helps Public Administration increase its capacity to cope with contingent social problems. Based on this criterion, undoubtedly, Public Administration has significantly progressed.

Theory development in Public Administration is characterized by its heavy reliance on other social sciences and the shift of its focus toward a more subjectivist perspective. More subjectivist prospects in Public Administration theory hold forth promise of the advance of theoretical development.

After the decline of logical positivism in social science, modes of inquiry in Public Administration have been expanded. At present, three major types of epistemologies are employed in Public Administration, i.e., positive, interpretive, and critical approaches.

Improvement of practice in public administration is controversial. On the whole, public administration seems to lack improvement in practice, whereas improvement can be seen at public agency level.

In summary, the answer to the questions posed in the first part of the paper is as follows. First, the advance in Public Administration should be characterized in terms of its ability to solve complex social problems instead of as a scientific revolution. Second, by using multiple criteria as mentioned earlier, apparently both Public Administration and public administration do show some advance.

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