Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge on Reforming Public Administration: Some Changing Mechanisms

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This paper is about organising knowledge on the functioning of the public sector. This knowledge is not contained within a single discipline but within many empirical disciplines ranging from law, economics, management, and political science to sociology, psychology, and the like. This knowledge is clustered and scientifically organised in the field of Public Administration (PA). This paper is also relevant for knowledge about the content of policies, in which case knowledge provided by the field of PA must be added to specific knowledge of the relevant policy field, for example, education, health, security, agriculture, and so on.

Keywords: public administration, research, public sector, administrative science

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1. Introduction[**]

Increasingly, knowledge is becoming a driver of our economies and societies and a pivot in a reforming economies and societies. To make this happen, it is necessary to manage knowledge and organise its production and use. Information is necessary but not sufficient to become knowledge. Knowledge is necessary but not sufficient to become accepted and useful evidence for guiding, controlling, and evaluating changing economies and societies. Grounded policies in the public sector need to be *evidence* based. This implies that information and data need to be transformed into knowledge of context, causal mechanisms, and relevant variables (Pollitt, 2013; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), which can be used to develop these grounded policies to reform societies and economies.

This paper is about organising knowledge on the functioning of the public sector. This knowledge is not contained within a single discipline but within many empirical disciplines ranging from law, economics, management, and political science to sociology, psychology, and the like. This knowledge is clustered and scientifically organised in the field of public administration (PA). This paper is also relevant for knowledge about the content of policies, in which case knowledge provided by the field of PA needs to be added to specific knowledge of the relevant policy field, for example, education, health, security, agriculture, and so on.

To make the field of PA fit for purpose, i.e., to develop grounded and evidence-based reform policies for a functional public sector in the future, there is a need to reflect thoroughly on how to organise supply, demand, and the match of supply and demand, not just with regard to data and information, but also useful knowledge. To do this, it is necessary to study the shifting mechanisms of PA knowledge supply, demand, and their match (or mismatch). This chapter discusses some of these changing mechanisms.

2. Shifting Mechanisms of PA Knowledge Supply

In analysing the changing and shifting mechanisms of PA knowledge supply, it should be noted that existing actors have changed and new actors are present and emerging.

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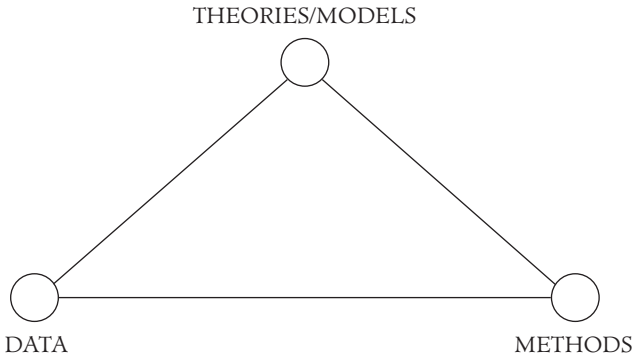
Within universities the shifting structures and practices of knowledge organisation are substantial and significant. Three models, which have turned into stages, could be defined in producing knowledge within universities. The first stage, predominant until the 1950s, is the *Lehrstuhl* or "Chair", which is connected to a single *Ordinarius*, who relies on his (women have been exceptions) "personal" library, which is in his office or even home. In some cases, the *Lehrstuhl* has a personal assistant, whose only job is to support the *Lehrstuhl*, and a personal secretary. The type of output (if any) constitutes of monographs, mostly in national languages.

The second model organises the production of knowledge by a "team of researchers" with a team leader: a professor with a research portfolio. This model originates from the natural sciences and their laboratories. The increased infrastructure consists not only of a library but also of survey instruments with large datasets (primary or secondary), case study databases, or labs with some experimental research possibilities. The team consists of people with a complementary set of competencies and logistical support, while the output turns into articles co-authored by the team members and into chapters in books. At many universities additional organisations have been created to translate, transfer, and disseminate knowledge into applications fit for purpose and use. These spin-off structures, sometimes in the form of companies, are developed to channel a marketised supply of knowledge.

The third model is a "network of teams of researchers". Because research programmes are becoming so complex and because specialisation is a feature of research activities as well, the need for a network of complementary research teams becomes essential. Figure 1 shows how research may be driven by three angles. There is data-driven research, based on extensive databases and focusing on data mining. The second type is methods-driven research, whose core and legitimacy lie in the research method itself, regardless of the data. The third type is theory- or model-driven research: a deductive and coherent way of pushing the boundaries of knowledge, based on conceptual models and paradigms. Obviously, there is a need to combine these three angles to make knowledge effective for use and fit for purpose. However, research is subject to competencies, size and capacity, and traditions. Teams may have a focus and an identity. To realise the integration of these three angles, it may be necessary to create a network of complementary teams.

Figure 1. *Three complementary angles for research*



Source: author

Not only have universities changed the nature of their knowledge-production function, but they have also lost their virtual monopoly of knowledge production. There is an increasing number of different actors in the field of producing PA-related data, information, knowledge, and evidence-based policies, such as think-tanks, consultants, research units within the public sector, lobbyists, and organisations of professionals.

The development of think-tanks started in 1916 in the USA with the Institute for Government Research, which later became the Brookings Institution. The number of think-tanks has grown significantly and some even have some do-tank features for training and education, with conferences and seminars, such as the UK-based Institute for Government. Some of these are private foundations, such as the *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, whilst others have clear ideological agendas, such as the American Enterprise Institute. Several consultants have their own academic support and embeddedness, for instance, the IBM (IBM Center for the Business of Government). Some consultants have a clear academic approach, e.g., the French evaluation consultancy Euréval, who have developed an evaluation manual commissioned by the European Commission.

Within the public sector, too, significant research capacity has been created to develop knowledge, not just with regard to specific policy fields, but the field of PA as well, such as research units within the Swedish public sector or the US Government Accountability Office (GAO). Obviously, national statistical institutes have increasingly been not only collecting data but generating research capacity to analyse, interpret, and develop knowledge for policies. In some cases, national schools have generated

research capacity and provided knowledge in the field of PA, such as the French *ENA* or the Italian *Scuola Nationale dell'Amministrazione*. There is also the professional advisory committee structure around the public sector, which in some cases has the capacity to deliver reports to the government, based on their own research.

Lobbyists, at least in some cases, have significant research departments to support their agenda. The number of lobbyists, members of a regulated profession, has increased significantly and they have tended to concentrate near decision-making centres, such as Brussels and Washington DC. Sometimes they take the format of a think-tank.

Finally, there are organisations of professionals, for instance, accountants and auditors (FEE, *Fédération des Experts Comptables Européens*), personnel managers, financial managers, and so on, who in some cases have some research capacity.

All these new actors have contributed to the supply of PA knowledge and feed the debate around PA, as well as around many policy fields.

As a consequence, the lost monopoly of universities has resulted in a shift on the supply side from a purely hierarchical model of supply regulation to a networked or even marketised structure of this supply. Supply is now responding to tenders to acquire research contracts. The increase in the number of suppliers has created competition for resources, people, and contracts. To cope with this situation, the supply side has reorganised itself and created consortia, partnerships, and virtual platforms, clearly increasing researcher mobility by creating alternative opportunities for PhDs in the field.

What are the implications of these shifts in supplying knowledge? In the interest of a well-equipped society and economy, it is necessary to have a rich variety of supply in order to address a range of problems. It is also necessary to have a decently organised supply side that can create synergies, specialise, create complementary capacity, and coordinate. Finally, the different types of supply also require a range of dissemination patterns and formats, from the very academic to more practical ones.

In summary:

Lesson 1: Need for requisite variety of production structure

Lesson 2: Need to coordinate production (e.g. network financing)

Lesson 3: Need to diversify dissemination according to supply type

3. Shifting Mechanisms of PA Knowledge Demand

The public sector has become complex. Because it is an instrument used to solve and anticipate and respond, its complexity needs to be at the same level as that of the environment to which it responds. To the extent that problems become *wicked* or *unsolvable*, the public sector needs to provide extra proof of its legitimacy. If it is unable to be part of the solution, the public sector becomes part of the perceived problems. Also, previously the public sector, as the representative of the state, was above all parties, whilst it is now increasingly becoming a partner to other actors and is no longer automatically above them. This affects the boundaries and interfaces of the public sector. Previously, it was clear what resided within and outside the public sector and this was supported by separate legal frameworks, at least in administrative law if not common law countries. Now, the public sector uses a lot of private sector law within the public sector. What is inside and what is outside has become less clear, and there is a permeable interface with the outside. Previously, stability allowed long-term visions where short-term ones fitted very well, whereas now the short term has become dominant, unpredictable, and heterogeneous, and no longer aligns very well with long-term issues.

As a consequence, the demand for PA knowledge has changed. In this context, the demand for adequate and fit-for-purpose knowledge becomes essential for its own purpose. The demand for PA knowledge has made a significant shift from stable and predictable questions to dynamic and unpredictable issues to solve; from internal demand to internal and external demand; from homogeneous, predictable, and long-term demand to heterogeneous, unpredictable, and short-term demand; and from one-dimensional to multidimensional demand.

This results in some lessons, namely, that it is essential for the public sector to know and be aware of the supply capacity and competencies to provide elements for solutions. It is also important, especially for smaller countries, to have a wide scope of supply and a critical mass. If expertise is missing, it should be possible to provide it through networks. The given demand features such as unpredictability, heterogeneity, short-termism, multidimensionality, and the like make diversified dissemination essential. Different supply should meet different demands. If the supply has changed to the extent that it does not find a natural way to meet demand and vice versa, there is a need for knowledge brokers.

In summary:

Lesson 4: Need to have a mapping capacity to screen existing and future demand (what do we want to know now and in the future?) and changing supply capacity (now and in the future: what capacity do we need?)

Lesson 5: Need to support a bigger critical mass of supply teams, and of networks of teams

Lesson 6: Need for diversified dissemination (internal executive, internal exhaustive, external target groups, external press, and others)

Lesson 7: Need to involve research brokers, to allow for contracting out of research modules, to build consortia of suppliers.

4. Shifting Mechanisms of Matching Supply and Demand

When mechanisms of supply and demand are shifting, it is to be expected that the mechanisms needed to match supply and demand will be doing so as well. In general terms, Table 1 shows that four situations are possible.

Situation 1 is one of absence of both supply and demand. This is a reality of unawareness and ignorance. In this situation something is happening but nobody knows what it is; however, they expect something to happen. This is the field of sudden accidents and crises, such as a tsunami, a terrorist attack, infectious disease, and the like.

Situations 2 and 3 are two zones of mismatches. There is supply but no demand, where researchers are making knowledge available but nobody is listening to an available audit, a critical study, or an evaluation of a policy. Conversely, there is clear demand but nobody is available to provide knowledge. This lack of supply could be a national or generalised lack of knowledge. OECD (2011) sometimes needs to conclude that some countries do not have statistics on issues about which many other countries are informed. Commissioned research also wants immediate answers, which could result in a temporary mismatch.

The fourth situation allows supply and demand to be matched. However, even in this situation there could be different degrees of matching knowledge. Demand always has a slight bias regarding the supply of knowledge, and researchers never have all the answers to the relevant questions and conclude that they need to do more research.

The purpose of this matrix is to develop an improvement strategy to move from situation 1, 2, or 3 to situation 4 and, within situation 4, to achieve a higher degree of matching supply to demand.

Table 1. *(Mis-)matching supply and demand of PA knowledge*

	No supply	Supply
No demand	1. Unawareness, ignorance	2. Mismatch zone 1
Demand	3. Mismatch zone 2	4. Degrees of matching

Source: Author

This brings us to the question of the driving force behind this match: supply and/or demand. Demand-driven supply is different from supply-driven demand. There is also the question of who is setting the agenda for whom: is practice (demand) setting the research agenda (supply), or are researchers (supply) anticipating and setting the agenda for reality (demand)?

This results in two models of research policy (see Table 2a, b). In a supply-driven research policy there is an open call for any theme and researchers respond to this call by submitting their research projects proposals (Table 2a). In a demand-driven research policy, there is a guided and defined call with specific topics and themes. However, a classic research pattern could also be followed in this situation (as shown in Table 2a), whereas a real demand-driven research agenda starts with concrete problems and types of solutions that are needed for those that will have to implement it (as shown in Table 2b).

Table 2a. *Supply-driven research*

Research question	Research activities	Academic research output	Dissemination

Table 2b. *Demand-driven research*

Shared problem or challenge to be addressed	Involving "problem solving" stakeholders to detect demand for dissemination	Defining research output needed by stake-holders	Research questions to be addressed to produce this research output	Research activities	Research output with dissemination to pre-defined stake-holders

Source: Author

What lessons could one learn from this matching problem? In order to make sure that zones 1, 2 and 3 (Table 1) are as empty as possible, it is necessary to have a good mix of open and closed thematic calls. To push the match in zone 4, it is important to start with problem definitions where stakeholders are directly involved at the beginning and during the research activities, not just at the end of the research project. Because demand may be sudden and urgent and supply takes a long time to build, a long-term research investment strategy is necessary, including international networks to complement lack of capacity. There is also a clear need for sufficient academic knowledge within the public sector, including empathy for knowledge production. This type of profile could be called *pracademic*.

In summary:

Lesson 8: Need for a balance between open (supply-driven) and closed (demand-driven) calls

Lesson 9: Need to consider dissemination at the beginning, not at the end of the pipeline

Lesson 10: Need to invest in long-term national supply capacity within an international network of potential supply

Lesson 11: Need for pracademics to bridge supply and demand

5. Specific Complexities of Supply, Demand, and Dissemination of PA Knowledge

Four dimensions add to complexity: multiple disciplines, diversity of cultures and values, rigid path dependency, and changing public administrative realities. These four dimensions frame the future of supply and demand, and therefore of dissemination of research and teaching activities of public administration.

Keeping an eye simultaneously on the range of relevant disciplines should have an impact on the supply and demand of knowledge. It is essential to emphasize again the existence of economics, law, psychology, political science, history, anthropology, and other disciplines in the field of public administration. This also implies that methods such as surveys, experiments, and modelling need to be used more widely in PA. From a theoretical standpoint a whole range of grand theories, middle-range theories, and micro theories need to be explored, including models. The dynamics

of the rise and decline of paradigms, sometimes related to the rise and decline of a discipline within PA, also need to be taken into account. This may imply preparing Weber's Renaissance or developing a Neo-Weberian paradigm.

Many European countries, but also the US, are administrative law countries, not common law countries, which have had to absorb elements, instruments, and mechanisms of New Public Management. The travelling of these NPM ideas did not turn continental Europe into NPM countries because this was reserved for common law Anglo-Saxon countries, but these amended systems could be called Neo-Weberian systems. The development of these systems could be a distinct European agenda.

In general, PA historians have focused on how ideas and practices travelled (or did not travel) over space and time. This common law feature is related to disciplinary debate as well as to path dependency.

The second dimension discussed in this section refers to cultures and values. How should different cultures and values be taken into account? PA has been heavily Western-oriented, even heavily US-oriented. Emerging countries (BRICS, as well as others) will want to develop their own PA traditions, taking their cultures into account. Asian (Confucianism, Taoism), Arabic (Muslim), African, and Latin American PA should be taken into account. How does this affect research and teaching? How does this affect knowledge of public administration realities?

A recent controversy about "governance" has showcased this cultural component. According to Fukuyama, the Western concept of governance includes democracy, which is not the case in the Asian definition: it is possible to have good governance without democracy. The whole ambition of exporting the Western model to developing countries ignores the cultural diversity of PA and the range of values in different societies. To the extent that Western societies include greater variety and diversity of cultures and values, this must have an impact on the functioning of our public administrations and therefore on PA.

The third dimension refers to preparing knowledge about the futures of PA. This has an implication of causality, but also of teleology, which may be connected to ideology. What do logics of appropriateness look like? How do utopias appeal to public administrations and to public administration (what are the hidden values in our theories?) What is public administration in utopia/dystopia? And what is utopia/dystopia in public administration? Are we moving to new or post-democratic systems in the West, and what does this mean for public administration? This is about

values, politics, democracy, and citizenship versus the state and trust, which becomes the context of PA knowledge.

The fourth dimension is the interaction of public administration and PA itself, as a driver or a follower. How should the accumulation of knowledge in PA be organised? How should a research cycle around a theme be developed? How should comparative research and mission-driven teaching be strengthened? How should PA disciplines and their scientific approaches bridge the gap between themselves and public administration practices? To what extent is PA a driver of realities or is it simply following these realities?

6. Concluding Reflections and Some Lessons

To make the field of PA fit for purpose, i.e., to develop grounded and evidence-based reform policies for a functional public sector of the future, there is a need to reflect thoroughly on how to organise supply and demand and the match between these, not just with regard to data and information but useful knowledge as well. To do this, it is necessary to study the shifting mechanisms of PA knowledge supply, demand, and their match (or mismatch). This chapter has discussed some of these changing mechanisms and focused on four additional dimensions of complexity in the field of PA: multiple disciplines, diversity of cultures and values, path rigidity, and changing realities. A set of eleven "lessons" for stakeholders in the field of PA knowledge has been formulated.

Table 3. *Lessons for matching supply and demand of PA knowledge*

Lesson 1: Need for requisite variety of production structure
Lesson 2: Need to coordinate production (e.g. network financing)
Lesson 3: Need to diversify dissemination according to supply type
Lesson 4: Need to have a mapping capacity to screen existing and changing supply capacity
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Source: Author

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DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ON REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: SOME CHANGING MECHANISMS

Summary

This paper is about organising knowledge on the functioning of the public sector. This knowledge is not contained within a single discipline but within many empirical disciplines ranging from law, economics, management, and political science to sociology, psychology, and the like. This knowledge is clustered and scientifically organised in the field of Public Administration (PA). This paper is also relevant for knowledge about the content of policies, in which case knowledge provided by the field of PA must be added to specific knowledge of the relevant policy field, for example, education, health, security, agriculture, and so on. To make the field of PA fit for purpose, i.e., to develop grounded and evidence-based reform policies for a functional public sector of the future, there is a need to reflect thoroughly on how to organise supply and demand and the match between these, not just with regard to data and information but useful knowledge as well. To do this, it is necessary to study the shifting mechanisms of PA knowledge supply, demand, and their match (or mismatch). A set of eleven "lessons" for stakeholders in the field of PA knowledge has been formulated.

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DISEMINACIJA ZNANSTVENIH SPOZNAJA O REFORMAMA JAVNE UPRAVE: PROMJENE U MEHANIZMIMA

Sažetak

Rad se bavi sistematizacijom znanstvenih spoznaja o djelovanju javnog sektora. Ovom se temom ne bavi samo jedna disciplina, već su tome posvećena mnogobrojne discipline s empirijskim pristupom znanosti poput prava, ekonomije, menadžmenta, političkih znanosti, sociologije, psihologije i drugih srodnih disciplina, a ovom se temom sustavno bavi upravna znanost. U radu se također govori o spoznajama vezanima za sadržaj javnih politika, a u tom se slučaju znanja iz upravne znanosti nadograđuju specifičnim znanjima iz odgovarajućeg područja javnih politika poput, primjerice, obrazovanja, zdravstva, sigurnosnih pitanja, poljoprivrede i slično. Cilj je učiniti upravnu znanost svrhovitom te izgraditi reformsku politiku utemeljenu na znanstvenim činjenicama kako bi javni sektor budućnosti bio funkcionalan. Stoga je potrebno podrobno promisliti o tome kako organizirati i uskladiti ponudu i potražnju, kako podataka i informacija tako i korisnih spoznaja. To se može postići proučavanjem promjena u mehanizmima ponude i potražnje o spoznajama iz područja upravne znanosti te proučavanjem u kojoj su mjeri ti mehanizmi (ne)usklađeni. U radu je navedeno jedanaest preporuka dionicima u području spoznaja o upravnoj znanosti.

Ključne riječi: *javna uprava, znanstvena istraživanja, javni sektor, upravna znanost*