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Robert Cameron

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The State of Public Administration as an Academic Field in South Africa

ROBERT CAMERON*

ABSTRACT This article is an overview of the state of scholarship in South African Public Administration. It begins by looking at the state of Public Administration research internationally. This is followed by an analysis of the literature on the state of the field in South Africa which focuses on empirical studies undertaken of the quality of articles both in local Public Administration journals and PhDs in the field. The findings of these studies were that Public Administration research in South Africa in respect of both journal articles and doctoral theses is of a low quality. The article suggests that Politikon along with the South African Political Science community needs to cultivate closer links with those in the Public Administration community who are interested in doing critical research on public bureaucracies.

Introduction

Public Administration as an academic discipline has historically been part of Political Science. For example Public Administration was one of the founding components of the American Political Science Association (APSA). In its early years many of the Presidents of the APSA were from Public Administration. However in the United States of America (USA), like many developed countries, Public Administration slowly began to drift away from Political Science and created separate departments.

In South Africa a similar trend developed. Some Public Administration departments were originally programmes within Political Science departments which subsequently broke away to form separate departments often in Commerce and Management faculties as opposed to Arts or Social Science faculties in which they were traditionally housed. These new departments were often called Public Management or derivatives thereof. Also, new Public Administration departments were established at Bantustan (ethnic) institutions to train civil servants for future employment in apartheid-based public-sector structures.

Despite the fact there are areas of common interest between Political Science and Public Administration such as political-administrative relationships and ethics/corruption there is very little cross-fertilisation between these two disciplines in South Africa. For the most part academics in these two fields are in different departments and faculties, belong to different professional associations,

publish in different journals and attend different local and international conferences.

This article is an overview of the state of scholarship in South African Public Administration. It first looks at the state of Public Administration scholarship internationally. It is followed by an overview of the literature on South African Public Administration research. The major focus of this article is on two empirical studies that were carried out on the state of Public Administration research in South Africa. First, there was the study by Cameron and McLaverty (2008) on articles in the two main South African Public Administration journals, the *Journal of Public Administration (JOPA)* and *Administratio Publica (AP)*. Second, there was the analysis by Cameron and Milne (2010) of Public Administration doctorates in South Africa between 1994 and 2007. Both of these studies used content analysis as methodology. There is also an overview of other empirical studies carried out on the quality of South African Public Administration research. Finally the article looks at how the Political Science community has largely ignored Public Administration and suggests that *Politikon* should get more involved in Public Administration research.

Public Administration theory

Frederick Taylor published his *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911. He analysed work processes on the shop floor. His purpose was to move towards scientific principles of business management resting upon clearly defined laws, rules and principles. He conducted a careful study of individual work activity in order to discover the ‘one best way’ of performing. His view of science lacked the rigour and sophistication of the definition used in natural and social sciences. It provided the basis for the careful examination of work processes and the systematic organisation of the data, but it hardly constituted a broad theoretical understanding of organisations (Denhardt 2004).

Gulick (1937) embraced scientific management and applied it to Public Administration. He introduced the acronym, POSDCORB, which represented the main principles of government, namely:

- planning,
- organising,
- staffing,
- directing,
- coordinating,
- reporting and
- budgeting.

Simon made a devastating critique on these principles of Public Administration which he argued were in fact just proverbs. He demonstrated that there was nothing scientific about POSDCORB. The principles of Public Administration were contradictory and had little ability to be generalised as theory (Frederickson et al. 2012).

The rejection of POSDCORB led to the most famous Public Administration debate of all time between Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo in the pages of the *American Political Science Review* in 1952. Harman (1989) states that this was a showdown of the two main protagonists of Public Administration. It is a debate that is still as relevant today as it was 60 years ago (Raadschelders and Lee 2011).

Both these authors rejected the scientific management approach of Taylor and the POSDCORB of Gunlicks but they had radically divergent views about the theoretical direction that Public Administration should take.

Simon (1952) called for the adoption of scientific principles that could be used for the study of Public Administration. He stated that the acquisition of knowledge about Public Administration should be based on fact: empirically derived, measured and verified. Values had no place in the study of Public Administration. He urged academics to take as their primary unit of analysis the decisions that administrators made. Decisions could be studied scientifically in terms of their effects as well as the processes for making them. It could lead to value-free inquiries and be morally neutral, uncorrupted by normative preferences of the people involved.

Waldo (1952) argued that Simon and his followers unjustifiably sought to place large segments of social life upon a scientific basis. Administrative studies were distinctively pragmatic often drawing knowledge from common experience. He staked that administration is generally suffused with questions of value. He staked an ontological claim on Public Administration as a democratic theory. He stated that if administration is indeed the core of modern government, then a theory of democracy in the twentieth century must embrace administration. He made a case for democracy for the core value of Public Administration. He argued that the principal argument against the development of a democratic theory is the belief that 'efficiency is a value-neutral concept' (Ricucci 2010, for a summary of the debate).

In many ways this debate still rages today in both the USA and Europe between the behaviouralists and non-behaviouralists. To what extent this debate has pervaded Public Administration in South Africa will be discussed later in the article.

The state of Public Administration research internationally

Various international studies, mainly American, regarding the general state of research have included work by Box (1994), Hummel (1991), White (1986) and White and Adams (1994). There have also been a few British studies, including Greenwood and Eiggins (1995) and Elcock (2004), which have all come to the same conclusion, namely that there is a poor state of research in the field of Public Administration.

Journal articles

There have been a number of USA studies looking at the quality of research in Public Administration journals (Houston and Delevan 1990; McNabb 2002;

Perry and Kramer 1986; Raadschelders and Lee 2011; Stallings and Ferris 1988). Most of these studies have concluded that research in Public Administration is in a weak state. There has been little theory development and testing, insufficient quantitative methodologies and too much emphasis on the practical problems faced by public administrators.

Perry and Kramer (1986) conducted a study to assess the state of research methodology in Public Administration. They did this by analysing the contents of the American *Public Administration Review* (PAR) during the period 1975–1984. They found that nearly three-quarters of the articles focused on problem delineation or variable identification, while less than a quarter dealt with theoretical relationships among variables. They found that the purpose of research was problem-oriented, which limits the development and the testing of empirical theory. At their initial stages of research most articles were involved in identifying problems and variables for future studies. Perry and Kramer imply that most research exists at a ‘superficial’ and simple level, whereby a descriptive stance is adopted rather than the generation of new theories or hypotheses.

Stallings and Ferris’s (1988) study verified that research in the PAR was still confined to its preliminary stages with little evidence of theory-testing or causal analysis. There was an infrequent use of advanced and sophisticated research methodology.

Houston and Delevan (1990) set up a study to extend the knowledge on Public Administration research to six journals other than PAR. Once again, the previous findings were verified. The authors concluded that not only does the field of Public Administration lack a broad theoretical framework/paradigm to guide and inspire scholars but also that research is engaged in little theory-testing.

This is also a problem in developing countries. Gulrajani and Moloney (2012) undertook an empirical study looking at 10 journals representing key publications for third-world administration. The authors showed that administrative research published in leading international publications has become a small-scale, disparate, descriptive, qualitative/empirical non-comparative affair dominated by researchers from the global North which limits the ability to build a cumulative body of social science research. The articles are mostly descriptive and little theory-testing. They have not developed explanatory theories or even worked towards such theories that can account for changing properties and problems in administration. They also point out that there is a danger that with such a low usage of quantitative methods, research on administration in the developing countries may be suffering from some amount of ‘barefoot empiricism’.

Doctoral research

Doctoral research is an aspect of the larger debate in Public Administration concerning the state of research in the field. A number of US studies have assessed the state of the research conducted at the doctorate level. This includes the work by Adams and White (1994), McCurdy and Cleary (1984), White (1986), Cleary

(1994) and Stallings (1994). The general conclusion of these studies was that doctoral research was of a poor quality.

The study by McCurdy and Cleary (1984) formed the foundation of the international debate regarding the state of doctoral research. Fifty-eight per cent of the doctorates attempted to test a theory. Twenty-one per cent of the doctorates appeared to have no purpose at all—they only described an existing process. The study found that 15% of the doctorates were orientated towards practice and 58% did not test a theory or a causal proposition.

The findings of White's study (1994) were also similar to McCurdy and Cleary, namely that doctoral research in Public Administration was of a poor quality. Only 39% of the dissertations showed any testing of theory. Approximately half of the dissertations did not make use of mainstream social science research methodology and therefore were not classed as having contributed to the development of knowledge in the field of Public Administration.

Cleary (1994) reapplied the methods and criteria of his joint 1984 study with McCurdy in their 1984 study to a new dataset of doctorates in 1990. The study found that there had been limited improvement only in the overall quality of research at the doctorate level in Public Administration.

Adams and White (1994) conducted a study regarding the quality of doctorate research in relation to five other comparable academic fields. This study indicated that doctorates in Public Administration showed low-quality research and limited conformity to mainstream research methodology compared to the other four disciplines. Comparatively, Public Administration showed the highest percentage of research concerned with practice, namely 22%.

History of the academic field of Public Administration in South Africa

Some Public Administration departments including the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch were originally programmes within Political Science departments. They subsequently broke away to form separate departments often in Commerce and Management faculties as opposed to Arts or Social Science faculties in which they were traditionally housed. The academic field of Public Administration was historically taught at Afrikaans-speaking and ethnically based universities in South Africa. Traditionally, English-speaking universities did not offer majors in Public Administration, with the exception of the University of Cape Town.

Prior to the early 1990s the predominant academic framework was that of the generic administrative processes approach of Cloete (1967, 1981), which focused predominately on the internal work processes of government departments. The administrative processes were reduced to six generic functions only, namely policy-making, organising, financing, personnel administration, work methods and procedures, and control and rendering of accounts. It is argued that the narrowly focused administrative processes approach (he later changed them to administrative functions) led the discipline into an intellectual cul-de-sac. Although there was nothing inherently racist in this approach, it was guilty of

ignoring the political, economic and social context within which public administration was practised. It was a technicist approach that did not engage with the apartheid logic (Fitzgerald 1990; Picard 2005). It was in fact a variant of scientific management.

Rowland (1986) argued that this entrenchment of the generic administrative process led to a stagnation of Public Administration thought. Marais (1988) stated that the narrowly defined administrative approach could not be a theory of Public Administration, it was already outdated long before it was introduced in South Africa and that it introduced the discredited politics–administration dichotomy and consequently lost touch with values.

The administrative processes approach was challenged by a number of younger academics most notably Fitzgerald and Schwella in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fitzgerald (1990) argued that Cloete’s administrative processes approach is a variant of Gulick’s POSDCORB approach. Gulick was primarily interested in efficient management and was criticised for paying little attention to issues such as democratic responsibility (Denhardt 2004; Waldo 1984).

Schwella (1990) criticised the administrative processes approach for three reasons. First, it was accused of being reductionist: reducing public administration to the generic administrative process. Second, it was criticised for reification: elevating the generic administrative approach to the status of reality. The third critique was that of lack of relevance: it did not reflect the serious problems of governance and administration in South Africa (also see; Groenewald 1992; Schwella 1999). The discipline was also accused of being largely atheoretical (Mokgoro 1992).

Hubbell (1992, 13) explored the question of where South African Public Administration as an academic field had been and in what theoretical direction it was heading. His study entailed a qualitative assessment of the *JOPA*, from 1986 to 1990. He concluded that the majority of articles analysed fell within what could be termed a functionalist perspective, lacking any critical analysis.

Democratisation and Mount Grace

The 1990s saw major political changes in South Africa. Political organisations, most notably the African National Congress, were unbanned by the F. W. de Klerk administration. The National Party government committed itself to negotiating a new constitution with all political parties.

It was in this context that the South African New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI) arose. McLennan (2007) states that the NPAI comprised a loose network of universities, technikons, NGOs, practitioners and individual public servants in the field of public and development management. In reality, academics and activists predominated. Its major focus was on the professional development of public and development practices for the newly democratic and transformed Public Administration (Cloete 2008).

One of the major initiatives of the NPAI was the Mount Grace Consultation, held in November 1991. A number of South African academics were invited.

The consensus of the delegates was that Public Administration as a discipline, a profession and a practice should be moved decisively away from the apartheid paradigm.

The resolutions of Mount Grace included that the current theory, teaching and practice of Public Administration is in crisis in that:

- It is too descriptive: lacking sufficient analytical, explanatory and predictive techniques.
- It is reductionist: restricting and reifying Public Administration to one view of the administrative processes only.
- It ignores the other dimensions of and approaches to government.
- It is fragmentary: largely arbitrary boundaries exist within Public Administration and between Public Administration and Development Administration.
- It suffers from racial and gender imbalances historically associated with apartheid.

The resolutions also called for the following:

- More rigorous scientific analysis, explanation and prediction of governmental and administrative phenomena supplementing their mere description are necessary;
- An open and critical debate on explanatory models for this purpose should be encouraged;
- An explicit developmental focus instead of a control and regulation one must be established. This should include rationalisation between Public Administration and Development Administration;
- Proactive and useful international networks had to be developed (McLennan and Fitzgerald 1992, 23–24).

The Minnowbrook conference served as an inspiration for Mount Grace (Fitzgerald 1995). Minnowbrook was a conference that was held by young USA Public Administration scholars in 1968. It was a response to the perception that Public Administration was irrelevant and out of touch with critical issues and problems such as the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnamese war. It served to re-energise the field (Frederickson 1980).

While reference was made to theory, the Mount Grace resolutions did not distinguish between theory and practice. The major emphasis of Mount Grace was on changing practice. As Picard (2005, 200) points out, much of the discussion at Mount Grace focused on strategies for professional education and training. Unlike Minnowbrook, there was little emphasis on the development of academic scholarship (Cameron and Milne 2009).

There were other differences as well. There was little reference to efficiency in Minnowbrook. Efficiency was not regarded as being value-free. Drawing on Waldo, it was regarded as a political claim because administration is political (Frederickson and Smith 2003, 47). On the other hand, efficiency was taken as given and strongly promoted at Mount Grace and was included in the resolutions as one of the values to be promoted.

The growth of the Public Administration discipline in South Africa

It has been argued that Mount Grace was a decisive attack on Public Administration orthodoxy in South Africa and many Schools and Departments of Public Administration drew spiritual inspiration from this conference (Cameron 2008). As with the aftermath of Minnowbrook, Mount Grace saw the growth of the academic discipline of Public Administration. There was a mushrooming of schools and programmes. The disciplines of Public Administration and Development merged (e.g. at the universities of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch, Fort Hare and Western Cape) and Public Management and Governance principles were included in curricula (e.g. at the universities of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Western Cape and Johannesburg (Cloete 2008, 35). As with Minnowbrook there was a strong view that Public Administration had to unshackle itself from second-class citizenship in Political Science departments and create its own separate identity.¹

There are different interpretations of Mount Grace's influence on research. Cloete (2008, 35–36) stated that the Mount Grace principles have had an electrifying impact on the academic research community in the country. He argued that research publications started to move away from a regurgitation of conceptual and theoretical classical models and approaches to government and an exclusive focus on the improvement of internal process efficiencies, towards new approaches. He does qualify this by stating that research is too qualitative and descriptive and not methodologically rigorous and analytical enough in the approaches envisaged by both Mount Grace discussions.

This article takes the view that Mount Grace appears to have had little impact on the development of academic scholarship. Thus come out the findings of major empirical studies conducted on Public Administration research projects in recent years.

Empirical studies into the state of Public Administration

A National Research Foundation (NRF) funded study analysed the state of the academic discipline in Public Administration in South Africa (Cameron 2008; Cameron and McLaverty 2008; Cameron and Milne 2010).

There were two main components to this study:

- (1) An analysis was undertaken of the two main South African Public Administration journals, the *JPA* and *AP*, from 1994 to 2006, to establish the state of academic research in the field;
- (2) An investigation was conducted into the quality of doctorates in the field of Public Administration in South Africa from 1994 to 2007.

Methodology/data collection

When this research commenced, there had been no prior empirical studies on the state of Public Administration research in South Africa. One drew on American

studies for the source of methodological inspiration, namely content analysis, which was used for both components of this NRF study. Content analysis can be described as the quantitative component of document analysis, involving compartmentalising the written material into researcher-selected units or categories (Babbie et al. 2001; McNabb 2002). It is primarily a research technique for analysing text (Bowen and Bowen 2008). Measurement and interpretation of these categories make explanatory and critical analysis of the data possible, for example using statistics. Traditionally, interpretation of the data gathered through this process was limited to quantitative analysis but from the early 1970s this strict quantitative/qualitative distinction seemed too rigid and unwarranted amongst researchers. The main advantage of the content analysis is that it gives the researchers a structured method to quantify the contents of a qualitative text in a simple clear format. The main disadvantage is that there is a built-in bias of isolating pieces of information from their context (McNabb 2002).

For the journal study, an analysis was undertaken of the two main South African Public Administration journals, *JOPA* and *AP* from 1994 to 2006 to establish the state of academic research in the field. A database of 383 articles was compiled, consisting of 278 articles from *JOPA* and 105 from *AP*.

For the doctorate study a database of 116 doctorates was developed through which to analyse the state of the research. The basis of the database was an online search of the NRF online Nexus database system for current and completed South African doctorates. Abstracts were also created from university websites that contained copies of doctorates as well as in-print form interlibrary loans. A 10% sample of completed theses was also examined. The search was limited to a 14-year time frame, from 1994 to 2007.

The major variables that were used were research focus and research methodology which are discussed below.

Research methodology

This variable reflected general methods and approaches of enquiry used in Public Administration research (Perry and Kramer 1986). It was designed to answer the question: 'what methodologies are employed to conduct Public Administration research?' This was addressed by examining the research designs, unit of analysis, quantitative techniques if any and the data that were collected. Three sub-variables were created to reflect these different methods, namely desktop, qualitative and quantitative.

Quantitative research involves the use of numbers. It involves statistical steps and experiments to identify relationships between variables (McNabb 2002, 21–22). It includes experimental research, such as treatment and control groups, and quasi-experimental research, such as correlational, time series and longitudinal studies (Johnson 2002, 43). It also includes descriptive statistics, surveys and regression analysis, and statistical modelling.

Qualitative research embraced a number of divergent methodologies. Ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, hermeneutics, grounded theory and action

science are examples of qualitative research (McNabb 2002, 277). Johnson (2002, 118) says that qualitative data analysis is used for data collected in a semi-structured way, such as analyses of written documents and focus-group transcripts.

An article or thesis was classified as secondary² if the study consisted primarily of secondary research, that is, if it did not contribute to new knowledge in the field. This category was designed to incorporate those articles where information was obtained from journals, books and existing databases. It presumes that no (or insignificant) new research was undertaken, whether of the quantitative or qualitative variety.

Research focus

This variable is designed to answer the question: 'is the research being conducted oriented more towards theory generation (needs of academics) or more towards practical problem-solving (needs of the practitioners)?' (McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kramer 1986). There is an international concern that Public Administration is focusing too much on practice and needs to place greater emphasis on developing theory (Frederickson and Smith 2003). This is also of particular relevance in the South African context where there is concern that Public Administration is focused too much on 'nuts and bolts' at the expense of theory (Cameron 2008).

Articles and doctorates were classified as being theory orientated if the research explicitly strengthened or weakened theory or established conditions that would indicate that the theory is applicable (McCurdy and Cleary 1984, 50). If, however, the article or doctorate focused on the practical needs of practitioners it was classified as being practice-oriented.

The two studies each had an extra different variable which will be discussed in the respective sections.

Study No. 1: an assessment of journal articles: 1994–2006

The Cameron and McLaverty study (2008) on journal articles argued that academics in the field of Public Administration in South Africa focused primarily on practice-oriented applied research and were not enhancing knowledge development. There had not been the same development of a cumulative and meaningful knowledge base in the discipline that there has been in the other Social Sciences. Theory development is weak.

This study found that 67.3% of the articles in *JPA* and 79% in *AP* could be classified as secondary research where no original research was conducted nor was there any contribution to new knowledge (Figures 1 and 2). In some cases, the research methods and approaches (if any) were not evident in the research articles. When research has been empirical in nature, the data demonstrate that there is a definite preference towards the use of qualitative rather than quantitative research methods. In *JPA* 22.3% of the research articles made use of qualitative approaches compared with 13.3% in *AP*. There was little use of quantitative methods in either *JPA* (10.4%) or *AP* (7.7%) articles.

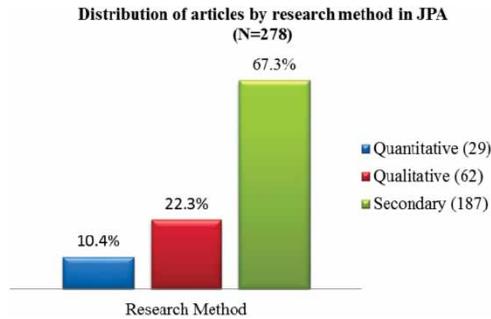


Figure 1. Distribution of Articles According to the Research Method in *JPA* ($N = 278$).

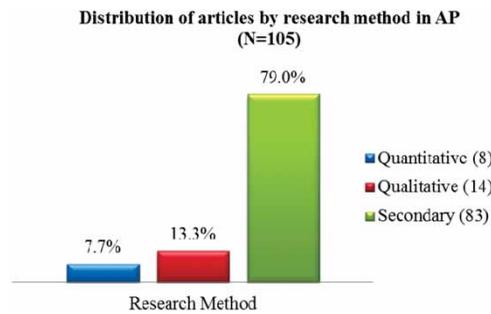


Figure 2. Distribution of Articles According to the Research Method in *JPA* ($N = 105$).

The majority of research articles published are geared more towards practical problem-solving (needs of the practitioners) than theory generation (academic needs—see Figures 3 and 4). In *JPA*, 86% of the articles are practice-oriented articles while *AP*'s figure is 88.6%. Furthermore there is a correlation between articles that were classified as secondary, on one hand, and practice-oriented, on the other.

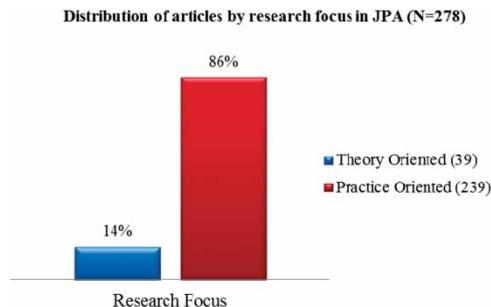


Figure 3. Distribution of Articles According to the Research focus in *JPA* ($N = 278$).

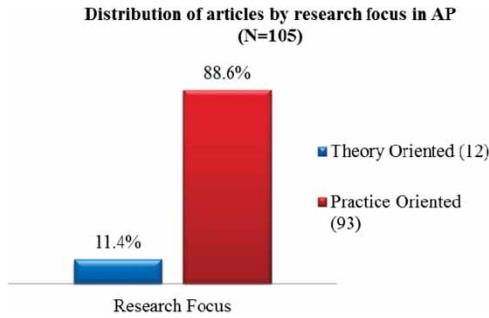


Figure 4. Distribution of Articles According to the Research Focus in AP (N = 105).

Research cumulateness implies that the researcher has engaged with the important debates within their particular area of study and built on or extended that knowledge.

More than 60% of articles in both journals are not cumulative: the figures are 74.8% for JPA and 64.8% for AP (Figures 5 and 6). Thus, in 13 years, only 25.2% (JPA) and 35.2% (AP) of articles were cumulative in nature, suggesting

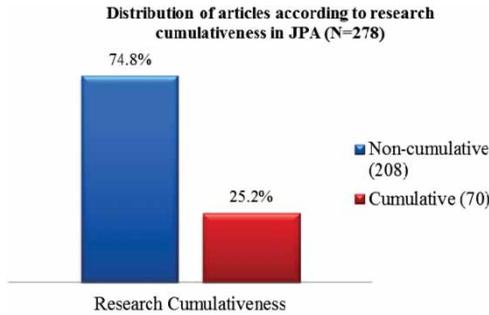


Figure 5. Distribution of Articles According to the Research Cumulateness in JPA (N = 278).

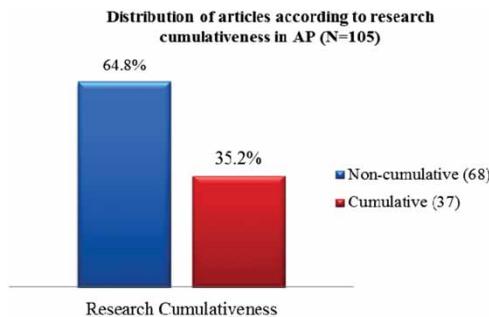


Figure 6. Distribution of Articles According to the Research Cumulateness in AP (N = 105).

that the majority of articles do not engage with the necessary literature in order to build on existing debates in Public Administration.

The article concluded that there has been little theory development in South African Public Administration. There has also not been the development of a cumulative and meaningful knowledge base in the discipline.

These findings suggested that Public Administration research in South Africa is in a parlous state. There appeared to be a low level of conceptualisation in the field, perhaps one step removed from practitioners 'day-to-day' discourse.

Study No. 2: a critical analysis of Public Administration doctorates in South Africa 1994–2007

Cameron and Milne (2010) undertook an analysis of Public Administration doctorates in South Africa between 1994 and 2007. Four main analytical variables were used namely the type of methodology used, research focus and significant contribution to knowledge.

Figure 7 illustrates that 62.1% of doctorates are classified as secondary research. This means that only 37.9% of doctorates are doing primary research which is both disturbing and not contributing to systematic knowledge within the field.

A total of 20.7% of the doctorates made use of qualitative research methodologies and 17.2% were using quantitative research methodologies. The difference between qualitative and quantitative methodologies is small but the overall percentages of both categories are low. Overall these findings indicate that the research does not appear to be in line with the general requirements of a doctorate, namely, to make a significant contribution to new knowledge. This indicates a weak state of research in the discipline.

It is clear from the analysis that the primary research focus of doctorates over the last 14 years has been that of practice. Figure 8 illustrates that the majority of the completed doctorates could be classified as being primarily concerned with the needs of practitioners. More than 60% of completed doctorates are orientated towards practical problem-solving as opposed to being theoretically orientated. Only 17.2% could be classified as explicitly strengthening or weakening

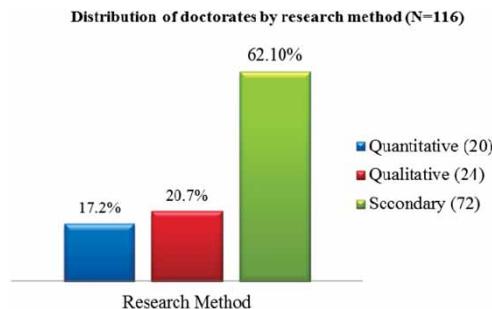


Figure 7. Research Methodology (N = 116).

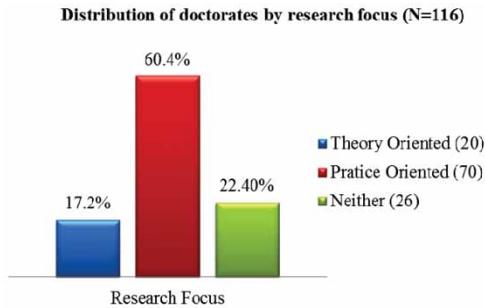


Figure 8. Research Focus ($N = 116$).

theory or establishing conditions that would indicate that the theory is applicable. Almost 22.4% of the doctorates could not be classified as being either practice or theory focused. This indicates that almost one quarter of those completing research at the doctorate level were not clear about their research question.

In light of Public Administration having both an academic and a practical focus it can be assumed that doctorate research in the field is supposed to contribute to meeting both the need for academic knowledge development and the practice (Wessels 2008, 97). It is clear from the analysis that there is a heavy slant towards practice perhaps at the expense of theory. There is a view in developing countries that theory is a luxury given the many service delivery problems that governments may face (Nakamura 2007). This author disagrees with this proposition—it is held that this anti-theoretical view is not conducive to the development of a body of scholarship in developing countries.

It is generally accepted that a doctoral thesis should ‘show signs of original and independent work which makes a significant contribution to existing knowledge based on the production of knowledge’ (Bailey 2001, 39). The Cameron and Milne study looked at selected Public Administration/Management university websites in South Africa where there was general consensus that contribution to knowledge is a major requirement for a doctorate.

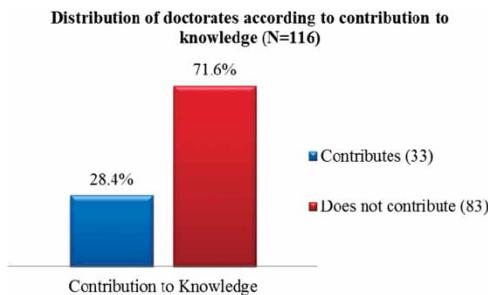


Figure 9. Significant Contribution to Knowledge ($N = 116$).

The results for this variable are evident in [Figure 9](#). Almost 71.6% of the completed doctorates under analysis do not contribute to the development of knowledge in the field. This is an indicator of the potential weak state of research in Public Administration at the doctorate level. Only 28.4% of the doctorates have met one of the basic requirements of doctoral research.

In conclusion there well may be pockets of excellence but there is a general weak standard of doctorates in Public Administration in South Africa.

Other empirical studies

There was another set of empirical studies on South African Public Administration research carried out by Wessels. This study ran concurrently with the Cameron et al.'s study. While Wessels used a different methodology to the Cameron et al.'s study, the results are largely the same. Wessels (2006) in a study of journal articles in the *JOPA* from 2000 to 2004 found that the majority of research articles are primarily practice-oriented with little emphasis on theoretical development. He concluded that the relatively low percentage of articles focusing on Public Administration methodology is an early indication of a possible bias towards practice application and a possible theory-less empiricism (1506). Wessels (2010) used two data sets, one based on a survey of research methods of completed South African doctoral theses in Public Administration from 2000 to 2005 and another based on a survey of articles published in three South African peer-reviewed journals from 2000 to 2005. He found that an association exists between the institutional affiliation of authors and the selection of research methods, while there is no association between research methods and research topic. He concluded that the selection of research methods by the authors was determined more by their institutional affiliation than the research topic. This study also confirmed the Cameron/McLavery and Cameron/Milne findings that South African Public Administration research is largely based on secondary research.

Conclusion

The empirical studies conducted by Cameron et al. have shown that the state of Public Administration research in South Africa with respect to both journal articles and doctoral theses is of a low quality. This was verified by the Wessels' studies. The classical Simon/Waldo debate has scarcely caused a ripple in South African Public Administration. Most of the research is neither quantitative in the Simonian tradition nor qualitative in the Waldonian tradition. Quantitative methods are sparsely used and while there is limited amount of Public Administration literature on democratic theory there is little recognition of Waldo, particularly his scathing attack on efficiency. The majority of the research is secondary and in many cases it is a variant of scientific management and PODSCORB.

There has also been little theory development in South African Public Administration. There appeared to be a low level of conceptualisation in the field. This problem-solving approach has limited the development and testing of empirical theory. The demands of capacity-building and training of public servants in the new South Africa have led to a number of opportunities for academics. A number of academics have undertaken extensive policy and consultancy work for government and served on government commissions. The advantage of this interaction is the ability to contribute to the solving of real-life problems. The disadvantage is that the opportunity costs have been at the expense of the development of high-quality research in the discipline. The South African Public Administration academic community post-1994 has been fixated on providing 'hand-on' skills to public servants at the expense of developing a unique and indigenous body of Public Administration scholarship (Cameron 2008).

There are perhaps a few mitigating factors that need to be taken into account.

First, while content analysis is largely quantitative it also has a subjective component to it in that researchers have a certain amount of discretion how to evaluate articles/theses. There is always the temptation to be overcritical when rating the quality of an article/thesis.

Second, while the results are disappointing, it needs to be noted that the state of Public Administration internationally, while better than South Africa, is hardly exemplary either. The USA studies also raised concerns about the quality of Public Administration. The study of articles in journals reflecting publications in developing countries came to the same conclusion as the South African study, namely that articles are mostly descriptive, have little theory-testing and show a low-level usage of quantitative research methods.

Third, conversations with mainstream political scientists in South Africa indicate that many of the problems identified in this article such as lack of theory development apply equally to their field. This is an interesting observation although to my knowledge no such empirical study has been undertaken of South African Political Science. It would be interesting to see what the results of such a study would be.

The Political Science discipline in South Africa is not exempt from criticism either. Generally they have very little interest in Public Administration-related issues and have largely abdicated the field of Public Administration to the technicians. There are very few articles in *Politikon* which have contributed to the analysis or the normative understanding of public bureaucracies. There are also no Public Administration panels at SAAPS conferences.³

Finally, *Politikon*, along with the South African Political Science community, needs to cultivate closer links with those in the Public Administration community who are interested in intellectual engagement about public bureaucracies. They can take a leaf out of the book of International Political Science Associations in this regard. For example at its annual conference, the ASPA makes the annual John Gaus Award which recognises a lifetime of exemplary scholarship in the joint traditions of Political Science and Public Administration. Furthermore, one of the heavyweight panels of the International Political Science Association is

the Structure and Organisation of Government panel which is in effect the academic study of Public Administration. There is also space for *Politikon* to pay greater attention to Public Administration-related issues in the journal.

Notes

*Department of Political Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa. Email: robert.cameron@uct.ac.za

1. A number of Public Administration and Management departments started off as being part of Political Science departments but, as far as can be established, it is only the University of Cape Town where Public Administration is still part of a Political Studies department.
2. In the Cameron/McLavery article the term desktop research was largely used as a synonym for secondary research. This term caused a certain amount of debate; so in the Cameron/Milne article the term 'desktop' was substituted with that of 'secondary'.
3. SAAPS has established a Public Policy panel, a field which has some links with Public Administration. However Public Policy is largely a multi-disciplinary field which does not focus on core Public Administration structure and functioning issues.

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R. CAMERON

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