PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: TRENDS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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SUMMARY

For more than six decades, Public Administration and Development has witnessed the way practitioners’ and scholars’ understanding of public administration for development has evolved. This issue has the objective of reviewing the general trends and knowledge gaps and pinpointing new research topics. Several key aspects of public administration for development were discussed in the ‘Symposium on Public Administration for Development: Trends and the Way Forward’. It was held at Fudan University in Shanghai in May–June 2014 to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the journal. This opening essay captures the global trends, setting out its implications for the search into alternative models of public administration and development, particularly reflecting on Asia. The forthcoming Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations will pose major challenges as the public administrations are ill-prepared to deal with it. The seven essays themselves engage in key areas of unfinished businesses in setting a research agenda for debates in the future. The authors present a comprehensive, state of the art in their domains of expertise. In doing so, they cover a wide range of topics that are relevant for practitioners, students and scholars interested in public administration in both transitional and developing countries. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of public administration in support of governance institutions is essential to steer society on its chosen development path. It is one of the main organisational pillars for delivering an ever widening range of public services and goods to an ever multiplying and diverse citizenry in a changing complex environment with new challenges ahead. With the Post-2015 Development Agenda on the table, there is a need for greater effectiveness in public administration as well as more democratic institutional mechanisms in practice at the different levels in order to bring about a more sustainable development. Nevertheless, many of the public policies, organisations and institutions still operate in the old paradigms. Change is required to create the capacity effectively to deliver what societies expect from the public sector. Moreover, institutions at the national and sub-national level need to interact with other and often new stakeholders (e.g. minorities, immigrants) to make management and administration work more inclusively and efficiently.

Over the past decades, Public Administration and Development (PAD) has reported on and examined a number of institutional innovations at the local, national and global level to improve public administration. We need to understand how those innovations come about in order to tackle the current and future challenges in creating (where absent or not fully developed) effective, efficient, accountable and transparent public administrations. Thus, we brought to Fudan University in Shanghai (China) from 30th May to 1st June 2014 some of the best scholars in their fields to reflect upon the state of the art in their domain of expertise. The objective of the symposium was to analyse...
the general trends in public administration worldwide, some of the best practices across the range and to share and exchange lessons with China.

In the last decades, China has achieved considerable results in certain areas of development, and its public administration has played a key role in this process. The economy has increased several-fold, and poverty has been reduced significantly—although in many areas it remains at absolute levels, along with India (Sumner, 2012). However, China’s public administration still faces multiple development challenges such as corruption, inequality and environmental unsustainability. There is also a great demand for more power to local governments and civil society, building human resources capabilities in public administration, strengthening partnerships with non-governmental sectors (e.g. PPPs) and effectiveness in aid and investments in other countries (China is now one of the leading investors in developing countries). A key concern on the part of many Chinese officials and academics is with how, using the best available knowledge and experience, better to make improvements in public administration to keep the unprecedented benefits of economic development and now deliver environmental quality, social security and equity. Thus, the symposium was also an attempt to map the global trends and define the knowledge gaps for the remarkable challenges China faces ahead.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Trends may be discerned by analysing the recurring content of key international journals and general practice. Common recurring topics among articles in PAD include the following: (a) the on-going search for public private partnerships in service delivery; (b) the unrelenting stress on performance management—the output orientation; (c) the initial rebuilding of war torn states, ongoing as more countries and regions fall apart; (d) poverty mitigation, especially in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and Middle Income Countries (MICs); (e) the role of local government therein still elusive (e.g. Africa); and (f) the continued fashion for technocratic solutions (e.g., use of information and communication technology, ICT or IT) while a return to basics is largely ignored.

In the last decades, the understanding of the roles of public administration in and for development has evolved as scholars seek to apply new lenses to often changing practice. Firstly, the traditional analyses of public administration and management tended to focus on organisations and processes (e.g. the Weberian model or internal organisational design) in the past. These have moved on to broader discussions and analyses under the rubric of governance. It became apparent that it was also important to think of the public policy process beyond the traditional confines of state bureaucracies and to examine the role of civil society and partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors. This has huge implications on how we think about the role of the state and the best way to improve it for societies.

Secondly, there was an almost exclusive focus in public administration improvement on the efficiency per se of the public sector or delivery of public services, which was one of the main pillars of the New Public Management. This has been replaced to a large extent by a new overriding concern with accountability and responsiveness. Fashions come and go. In the same vein, governments, activists and donors have made relentless efforts to design initiatives to crack down on corruption and make public officials more responsive.

Debate continues over the link between accountability and efficiency — sometimes in connection with notions of the ‘developmental state’. Some argue that in the public sector, processes for accountability may require more resources. At the same time, cost-conscious approaches have often their own costs. Under the New Public Management through the introduction of market-based values in public administration such as the idea of public officials as utility maximising agents, there has sometimes been an undermining of trust in the public sector where underlying values of public service to all are seen to be compromised. How to restore public trust and reinstate ethical values in governments, on the part of public employees and other public organisations will remain a challenge to the future.

Thirdly, as many developing (especially ex-colonial) countries built up their independent national bureaucracies, they also had to create different kinds of local governments or authorities. Decentralisation was demanded by both domestic constituencies as well as by donors. It became a buzzword in 1980s and for many a ‘panacea’ for delivering public services and bringing democracy. However, the initial optimism of the benefits and potential results of decentralisation waned, and there has been a wave of recentralization in the last decades. The debate on ‘Top-down versus Bottom-up’ shifted to ‘Top-down plus Bottom-up’. We now know that any decentralisation...
processes still need a role for the central authority to make local entities effective and accountable with a framework of common standards.

Fourthly, the role of aid and international cooperation and the aid landscapes have changed significantly in the last decades. On the one hand, as aid flew to newly established and other developing countries, some countries became aid-dependent and had to rely heavily on aid for running their public budgets. Many argue against the traditional aid models and ask for more ‘aid ownership’, or even that aid does more hurt than help in some instances (Phillips, 2013). Some rapidly developing countries, such as China, have never relied on aid. On the other hand, the appearance of new donors, like the BRICS development bank (the New Development Bank–NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the financial crises in the rich countries, has led to demands for reforms in the traditional bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. Thus, coordination of aid efforts at the international and domestic levels and the design and governance of aid agencies have emerged as crucial issues to make aid an effective means for promoting development.

Fifthly, the emergence of new global issues, such as climate change and human rights, has introduced new challenges into public administration. Many of the drivers of decision-making are now global and require melding with domestic interests (Pinto and Puppim de Oliveira, 2008). There are different degrees of ‘decoupling’ between the networks in the international-national-local levels, particularly those working on the ground and those coming from the top (Puppim de Oliveira, 2014). State-based responses to those issues require broad consensus among countries, which is difficult. It also requires domestic public administration entities to be permeable and responsive to international issues, as appropriate.

Sixthly, Western-dominated models of public administration and governance have been questioned with some developed countries facing a declining in the quality of public services and increasing debt. Furthermore, some of the erstwhile developed countries have themselves been facing severe accountability crises—for example in UK over national integrity vis-a-vis Scotland remaining in the Union and UK itself leaving the European Union (EU). Relatively successful countries in some development areas, such as China and Singapore regarding rapid economic development, have appeared as possible alternative models of public administration and governance. We have always tended to learn about development paths from the so-called developed countries, but rarely the other way around. As one of the symposium attendees has written: ‘Asian countries have grown stronger by selectively learning Western lessons; Western countries could reinforce the performance of their planning and policymaking processes in the future by looking eastwards and drawing inspiration from them while acknowledging vital differences’ (de Jong, 2012). China nevertheless retains a public administration in which the latter is firmly subordinated to the Party at all level; a model that may not be replicable in other countries.

Finally, the traditional concept of development in which economic growth and social wellbeing go hand-in-hand has been increasingly questioned in some studies (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Sustainable development, which also includes the social and environmental dimensions at the core of development, is the new paradigm. The forthcoming Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations will pose major challenges to be achieved as the public administrations are ill prepared to deal with it (Glemarec and Puppim de Oliveira, 2012).

Consequently, there is growing interest in the search for alternative models for both development and public administration. The major trends may highlight a key concern of the next years: the applicability of models to specific contexts, so we can ‘transfer’ and adapt models and knowledge from one context to another (both W–E as well as E–W). The interest in alternative development models increased, following further discrediting of free market capitalist model of development by the near collapse of the Western economies and by creating an uncertain future with the dangers of global environmental change. Countries are looking for their own or alternative models. An example is the growing interest in the Gross National Happiness of Bhutan (O’Flynn and Blackman, 2009).

HOT TOPICS IN CHINA AND ASIA

The discussions on public administration and development in Asia, and China in particular, follow some of the main trends we observe globally. The vast variation among Asian countries makes it difficult to generalise a model
of Asian public administration and trends (Moon and Ingraham, 1998). Nonetheless, Asia is under-researched compared with its size and diversity (Ko, 2013). Scholars and practitioners are increasingly focusing their efforts on understanding better the unique features of Asian public administration (Haque and Ko, 2013). As a diverse and rapid developing continent, it can offer some important lessons for other contexts. Moreover, Asian countries face common development issues and challenges that may push forward mutual learning and even coordinated actions. Three of these main issues are briefly discussed here.

Public ethics and integrity
Asian countries have wide experiences along many political, economic and cultural lines. For quite a few Asian countries that built representative democracy after the World War II, good governance was not well developed. Non-transparent government operations, a traditional culture of favouritism and ineffective law enforcement systems all contributed to corruption and government inefficiency. Distrust of citizens in government and formal rules further damaged the external accountability of the public sector. The economic miracle in East and Southeast Asia has provided strong impetus to modernise the bureaucracy to transform the economic progress in quality of life for its citizens and accountable governments. A fundamental dilemma is that the Asian Developmental State model embraces a central role of the state, whose deep engagement in profit-making activities may damage publicness and undermine integrity. Besides improved anti-corruption efforts of individual countries (Gong, 2011), international efforts and cooperation have emerged. For example, the APEC Network of Anti-Corruption Authorities and Law Enforcement Agencies was established in late 2014.

Government–civil society links
Civil autonomy has been an imported concept for Asian countries. The burgeoning Asian economy, increasing domestic and international population mobility, vast change of family and social structures and new social media and communication brought in unprecedented societal complexity and diversity. Need for social services exploded. Citizens also view a strong role of nongovernmental organisations to handle community issues, promote justice and democracy and cope with many emerging social issues and problems. Governments have been increasingly willingly and adept to engage non-profits in delivering a wide range of public, social, human and community services through formal and informal ways (Jing and Chen, 2012). A further step for Asian countries is appropriately to introduce non-profit actors into public governance networks. While political trust over non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has been growing, a critical administration issue is how to reform existing social regulation regimes that can shift their focus from restriction to accountability. New types of government–NGO partnerships are possible if NGOs themselves are more resourceful, transparent and well governed.

Financial stability and regulation
The 1997 East Asian Financial Crisis left an indelible memory in countries of the region about how volatile and risky the international financial market can generate. That crisis also delayed the steps of countries like China to open their financial markets. The recent 2008 Global Economic Crisis again tested governments’ capacities to respond to crisis by comprehensively employing fiscal, financial and industrial policies, and countries like China passed through this latest crisis almost unhurt. While China may not be able to sustain high growth in the future, systematic financial risks and opportunism in the region may increase. It has become a common task for Asian economies to improve their domestic financial health and to prevent predatory international financial speculations.

Finally, the symposium pointed to a number of interesting public policy challenges in China. The collection of essays in PAD Special Issue (Collins and Chan, 2009) had already underscored China’s state governance capacity-building challenges in key systemic areas: budgeting, performance management, audit and state enterprise reform as well as specific public policy issue areas, such as land and security, local administrative and governance reform. The Chinese state also faces many governance challenges with unwelcomed recent extras such as natural disasters and climate change/air pollution. Moreover, while China has experienced phenomenal growth, it has also had to balance the benefits among regions, development areas and population strata/groups. A paradox arises in which
China seeks to regulate its rapid economic development while at the same time reforming the state itself to tackle those challenges.

Since 2013, China, its Government and the Party have taken a number of bold initiatives. Firstly, as growth slows and government esteem drops, major campaigns are underway to tackle both corruption and public waste. There have been high-profile arrests. An agreement is in place with Australia to declare and repatriate ill-gotten gains. And there are moves for better separation of local judiciary and local party/government. Secondly, in 2013, Party meetings launched a long-term governance capacity-building programme. Thirdly, the long-term economic strategy is now to balance growth with more equity. There has been unrest for some time as a result of land-grabbing at local levels, and government security expenditure has rocketed overall. There are also the beginnings of internal police reform alongside ongoing cross-border police cooperation to halt money laundering. Fourthly, due to serious redundancy of domestic industrial investments and capacities, China faces an urgent task to export its capital in forms like overseas infrastructure building. The establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank signals the change of China towards a major international supplier of capital and infrastructure.

REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT: WAYS FORWARD

Thus, the symposium was a unique opportunity to reflect on the knowledge gaps and current challenges for public administration having modernising China in the background. Since 1949, through largely empirical research, PAD\(^1\) has witnessed profound changes in the practice of public management and administration for development at local, regional, national and international levels. As we have seen in the pages of the journal, the initial scope of building state capabilities in new decolonized or decolonizing countries to deliver public services, infrastructure, stability and security with limited resources evolved to include other dimensions of public institutions such accountability and responsiveness (e.g. transparency, regulation, participation and civil society links). It is undeniable that we know now much more about building state capabilities than before. However, the main questions of the contemporary discussions on public administration and development have remained the same over the decades, and they include the following:

- What are the goals of development and roles of governments in the development process?
- What public bureaucracies do or are supposed to do? How they should function? Why they function well? (or badly)
- How can we make them change to perform better?
- What are the most effective or efficient ways to deliver some public policies? How policies should be delivered? To whom and by whom?
- What are the roles of international organisations in building public institutions for development?

Nevertheless, even though we have made some advances globally, there is still a huge state capacity deficit in traditional areas of public administration (e.g. education and budget) in many developing countries. Moreover, we are witnessing a deficit in other areas, as many developing societies cope with unprecedented public policy challenges such as environmental degradation including climate change, human rights abuses, health emergencies (e.g. Ebola, AIDS and SARS), equity and equality including gender, natural disasters, ageing social security in ageing societies, rural out-migration and urban sprawl, mass immigration and emigration, managing change in multietnic contexts, peace and security and public service ethics and trust.

Public Administration and Development has addressed some of these topics through previous Special Issues in both country and sectoral or cross-cutting public policy areas. It has examined Development Paradigms Post Rio + 20 (Glemarec and Puppim de Oliveira, 2012), Rebuilding War Torn States (Brinkerhoff, 2005), Public Policy for Pensions

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\(^{1}\)PAD was established as the Journal of African Administration (1949–1961) of the then British Colonial Office, and had successive associations with the British Ministry of Development, Royal Institute of Public Administration and Commonwealth Association of Public Administration as the Journal of Administration Overseas (1962–1980) to its current incarnation as an independent international journal.
Reform (Collins et al., 2014), Governance and Poverty (Collins et al., 2012), Civic Engagement in the Public Policy Process (Lee and Thynne, 2011), Non State Service Delivery (Batley, 2006), Integrity Management (Collins et al., 2012), Government-Non Profit Relations (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2002) and Metropolitan Governance (Stren and Cameron, 2005), among others. It has in the pipeline a special issue on Police Reform, underscoring the increasing importance of security.

Thus, this special issue comes to complement some of the previous debates PAD has been engaged. Many of the essays in this collection engage with unfinished business in dealing with old and new challenges. The authors made a general map of what we know, what we do not know and what we need to know in their areas of expertise, sometimes focusing on a specific aspect or case for more in-depth analyses.

Thynne and Peters (2015) argue that public action still and even more so matters in all countries. How it is organised now and in the future must exercise minds of policymakers within and beyond government. They suggest for these purposes, a widely applicable analytic lenses. Their key is balancing demand, public action and organised responses with the requirements of publicness and legitimacy as government and governance systems are reformed.

Gao (2015) addresses the enduring fashion for performance measure and management, especially as reforms have produced mixed results. There have been costs as well as gains and continued daunting challenge. Smoke (2015) for example addresses, after many decades of experimentation (often donor inspired), the search for effective approaches to decentralisation—which he argues is the most ubiquitous public score reform globally. Indeed, it has turned out to be the more complex and diverse than conventionally acknowledged. There is therefore a great need for more careful and strategic action tailored to each specific country over the range of categories.

Berman (2015) looks at the many human resources management (HRM) experiments and the ever illusive ‘human factor’ that often escapes performance management innovations. What has been the HRM contribution (often seen as capacity-building) to strengthening state institutions in development settings as seen through PAD over the years? He argues for a more comprehensive approach and a more strategic HRM. Thus, the latter is not only just a technical matter but one also requiring HRM leadership. It includes both elected officials as well as management, and indeed HRM management. It is the integrity of HRM processes which is at stake and their support at the political–administrative interface. Without all of these levels in concert, civil service professionalisation and the ascendency of the merit principle will never stick—despite all the donor push.

Guess and Ma (2015) look at public finance challenges and budget reforms as China’s growth slows down and more efficient resource use is required. In particular, they highlight the fiduciary risks inherent in Chinese public financial management and the application of assessment tools used internationally. Subnational rapidly increasing debt is especially problematic and puts welfare provision at risk—be it vis-a-vis unemployment, old age and poverty spending. They alert that subnational debts have not been properly quantified, despite the available tools internationally.

Regarding another fashionable topic, information and communication technology (ICT), Liu and Yuan (2015) argue that despite massive strides globally, new management approaches, governance structures and policy frameworks are still missing. For developing countries to successfully adopt ICT, systematic analyses need to be conducted to understand how interactions among stakeholders and ICTs are interrelated and co-create the information environment for good public administration and governance. Only when this relationship is clearly understood can innovative ICTs be seamlessly integrated into the governance structure.

Finally, Gulrajani (2015) undertakes a critique of ‘aid administration’ and addresses the issue of how donors can more effectively engage with governments in an era of supposed ‘partnership’ and new donor landscape. What has been the impact and value of traditional foreign aid? Today, there is major disquiet over the future of national public agencies and ministries responsible for aid. So what is the best structural configuration for organising and governing international development functions with donor countries? She concludes that looking beyond donor governance is not easy, in the sense of getting beyond many of the structural facades.

Collectively, these essays provide pointers on learning and paths to improvement in several areas of public administration. Yet there is the fact of great diversity and complexity and need for careful tailoring of actions and getting beyond structural facades.
And finally, there are the limits and illusiveness of technical solutions per se. PAD has always stressed the importance of a learning culture in public administration without determinisms and biases about the ‘right’ models or tools. Therefore, this special issue has the objective of delving into the ‘new’ and revisiting some of the ‘old’ topics to get new lessons. One of the great needs and lessons is a return to basics—accountability, state citizen relations and services for all in an era of fiscal scarcity and following earlier eras of privatisation and deregulation with growing new challenges. In this context, the task of capacity-building is never-ending, as said Confucius long ago (Confucius, 2008).

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