The Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Trans-disciplinary Nature of Public Administration

A Methodological Challenge?

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ABSTRACT

Problems facing administrative systems are increasingly becoming rather complex and a discipline known to focus on understanding how administrative systems of government function and preparing people to work in such systems to promote efficiency and effectiveness has to face the complexity challenge. The discipline of Public Administration (PA) must be in position to produce graduates who have the right skills, attitudes, competencies and capacities to navigate the complex environment in which service delivery is currently based. This challenge touches on a significant question, that is, whether knowledge from a single discipline can produce the right people. Some authors have previously accused PA of not being fit to be a discipline because of its 'promiscuous' nature as it borrows from many other disciplines to build its knowledge base. Such an accusation is likely to remain because problems of government today cannot be solved by people–civil servants and politicians with one disciplinary focus. It is for this reason that this article examines whether PA ought to be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary (MIT).

INTRODUCTION

There is a claim in the literature that Public Administration (PA) as a *discipline or field of study* did not exist until 1887. Advocates of such a discourse attribute the founding of PA as a separate field of study/discipline to Woodrow Wilson's famous article, "*The Study of Administration*" published in 1887 (Uwizeyimana 2011:85). Wilson's article outlined a number of notions and demonstrated his passion to establish PA as a field of study independent of and distinguishable from politics (Uwizeyimana 2013:165). The politic-administration dichotomy was later to shape the discipline of PA in what is regarded as the first paradigm (1887–1926) (Uwizeyimana 2013:165). Today, PA as a discipline is facing a new challenge: to determine whether it is, or is not a "Multidisciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity, *or a* Transdisciplinarity" (MIT) discipline. The approach used in this article is essentially qualitative based on a robust theoretical analysis of the existing body of literature (printed and electronic) in order to attempt to answer the following questions: Does PA's "MIT" mean it has failed to take its rightful place among qualifiers' disciplines, *inter alia*, the Social Sciences, Sociology and/or Management disciplines such as Economics, Development Studies, Information Management, Business Management, Communication, Politics and Law etc.? Does it mean that scholars of PA need to acquire knowledge of other fields of study in order to complement PA and to perform administrative tasks/functions that could not be accomplished without multiple skills and knowledge? Or does MIT mean PA has become a "no man's discipline" that anyone from any other discipline is able to make a "professional career" (in the form of professorship or admission to post-graduate degrees) without receiving formal instruction in PA's founding theories? What should PA's MIT mean in order to protect "Wilson's legacy" from being turned into an obsolete discipline (or field of study) to the point where it is becoming increasingly difficult to convince future generations that PA is still a field of study worth pursuing at learning institutions? How can PA co-exist with other disciplines without existing in the first place?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Accordingly, as Uwizeyimana and Maphunye (2014:90–91) put it, "Many definitions of the term 'PA' have been advanced by past and current scholars, and clearly there seems to be strong disagreement of what constitutes PA and its historic origins and there seems to be disagreements on the future of PA in the domain of PA. A careful analysis of classical and contemporary literature seems to point to two important things. One, there exists Public Administration (with capital initials P and

A) and public administration (in lower case) (Coetzee 2012:30). Previous research such as that conducted by Uwizeyimana and Maphunye (2014:90) suggests that: "Public administration denotes the activities performed by government (i.e., the phrase in lower case) while "Public Administration" with capital P and A implies the discipline itself". Thus PA is about "how governments are governed" (Coetzee 2012:83) and the study of PA focuses on "what public administration practitioners (the people working in the public sector) do on day-to-day basis" (Coetzee 2012:83). Coetzee's (2012:30) study concluded that, "While the advent of 'public administration' as an activity is as old as humanity, as a discipline it is often associated with the publication of Woodrow Wilson's renowned 1887 essay on the subject" (see also Auriacombe 1999:57).

Currently, PA as a discipline is facing new scholarly challenges (Kwaku-Ohemeng 2014:469). These challenges range from questioning whether PA is a discipline to the questions of whether it is, or is not a MIT (SAAPAM 2015:1). Like2do.com (Internet Source) reports that "while disciplines in and of themselves are more or less focused practices, scholarly approaches such as multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and crossdisciplinarity, which integrate aspects from multiple disciplines, therefore addressing any problems that may arise from narrow concentration within specialised fields is often the greatest challenge". This is where the challenge of PA lies. Choi and Pak (2006:351) demonstrate that while "the terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary are increasingly used in the literature… they are ambiguously defined and interchangeably used" thereby creating confusion of what they really mean or should mean when applied to a specific context like that of PA. They require some understanding before their application can be debated in this article.

Intensive "literature review based on dictionaries, and Google and MEDLINE (1982–2006) searches" done by Choi and Pak in 2006 concluded that the term "Multidisciplinarity" *as used in any field and circumstances means* drawing "on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within their boundaries" (Choi and Pak 2006:351). Another common word for "multidisciplinary" is "additive" (Choi and Pak 2006:351). A Thesaurus search shows the term "additive" to mean a "substance added to something in small quantities to improve or preserve it" or something "produced by addition". Multidisciplinarity which is also called poly-disciplinary means joint use of multiple separate disciplines to create one composite discipline out of them (Gasper 2003:2). In the PA debate, the term "multidisciplinarity" denotes that for public administration scholars to understand the problems in their domain, knowledge from other disciplines is helpful. To understand the poor delivery of public services, for example, the behaviour and attitudes of public officials towards their jobs is increasingly

becoming an important explanatory variable and psychology as a discipline will help the PA scholar understand why public administrators may behave in a way contrary to public service norms.

According to IGI Global (n.d.:1)… the term "multidisciplinarity" refers to "cooperation of experts from different scientific disciplines". In multidisciplinarity, "researchers from two or more disciplines work together on a common problem, but without altering their disciplinary approaches or developing a common conceptual framework" (IGI Global n.d.:1). If this framework of thinking is accepted then one can argue that a particular task, project etc. can require skills from multiple disciplines (multidisciplinarity) in order to be successfully completed, thus making the completion of the task or the project to be multidisciplinary, not the people working on the task or project. The Stony Brook State University of New York (n.d. 1) defines the term "Multidisciplinary Studies (MTD)" as a "program which allows a student who is interested in more than one field of study to design an individual major by drawing on courses from two or three subject areas" (Stony Brook State University of New York, n.d.:1). According to this university, "The MTD major leads to a B.A. degree, and is a program of the College of Arts and Sciences" and the "teaching team of this program are drawn from people who are specialists in these different subject areas" (Stony Brook State University of New York n.d.:1). These definitions present us with the following scenarios:

- A multidisciplinary discipline is a discipline that is made up of multiple (than one) disciplines;
- A multidisciplinary programme is a programme that draws on more than one discipline;
- A multidisciplinary task or project is the one that requires cooperation between, and skills from specialists who belong to different disciplines;
- A multidisciplinary person is a person who specialises in more than one discipline.

Popescu (2013:438) traces the term "transdisciplinarity" to the early 1970s when Jean Piaget, a Swiss clinical psychologist "first introduced the concept at the *interdisciplinarity – Teaching and Research Problems in Universities Conference* held in 1970". There is a view that "Since transdisciplinarity seems to have been developed out of multi- and inter-disciplinarity"; then the intention of PA should be "to generate an integrative view of the world and knowledge in order to understand and solve complex problems" (Van Dijk 2013:7). This is because the term "*transdisciplinarity" means "multiple disciplinary teamwork*" (Choi and Pak 2006:351). A Thesaurus search shows the term "holistic" which applies to "transdisciplinarity" suggests "all-inclusive,

rounded, full, complete, general, universal, whole" (Choi and Pak 2006:351). As Choi and Pak (2006:351) argue, "the objectives of *transdisciplinarity* disciplinary approaches are to resolve real world complex problems, through providing different perspectives on problems". Thus, in line with Piaget (1972:144) who defines "transdisciplinarity, as a superior stage of the interdisciplinary relationships, a stage to imply a total knowledge system without borders established among disciplines"; "Transdisciplinarity", "integrates the natural, social and health sciences in order to create comprehensive research questions, to develop consensus … definitions and guidelines, and to provide comprehensive … services" (Choi and Pak 2006:351). Thus, unlike multidisciplinarity which relates to the tasks that require the integration of different skills and expertise held by different people who know a lot about a particular subject, transdisciplinarity is about the individual's ability to master or know a lot about more than one subject or field of study.

Transdisciplinarity in PA is important because the real complex nature of managing public affairs demands this multiple approach framework. As Van der Waldt (2012:92–93) argues, the governance concept which seems to dominate in the naming of different BPA programmes listed in Table 2 "is a product of transdisciplinarity" in which "Public Administration and Political Science are considered as its primary contributing disciplines". "If PA was transdisciplinary, then PA graduates, experts, scholars and practitioners would integrate knowledge from PA and knowledge from secondary disciplines such as Economics, Sociology, Law, Management Sciences, Development Studies" and many others (Van Dijk 2013:10). Van Dijk (2013:10) concludes her argument by stating the obvious that "The trans-disciplinary approach to teaching emphasises that no one discipline is more important or more valuable than another" and that the different subjects that are combined in the PA programme at different universities are complementary.

A review of literature shows that the terms "Transdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity" discussed above differ from the term *"interdisciplinarity"*. The prefix, "inter" is defined by Tshikwatamba (2008:748) as meaning "among and others". According to Hanyane (2008:415), this clarification of the prefix "inter" helps to understand the meaning of the whole MIT concept because it enables any reader to distinguish between interdisciplinary and "multidisciplinary" and one would add the concept of "transdisciplinarity". In Thikhwatamba's (2008:749–765) article: *"Critical and inter-disciplinary analysis of the selected criticisms levelled against Public Administration"* and Kanyane's (2008) article: *"Critic of the article by Dr N.E. Tshikwatamba"*, the concept "interdisciplinarity" as applied in the PA discipline implies that instead of being multi- or trans-disciplinary, "PA is one among many other disciplines" (Tshikwatamba 2008:749; Hanyane 2008:414–417). The foregoing debate is important, but fails to convincingly answer

the following question: Does PA involve all the three elements in its endeavour to understand the challenges of managing public affairs?

Public Administration and the three elements of MIT

According to Choi and Pak (2006:351) the three terms "MIT" broadly suggest "teamwork which requires the involvement of multiple disciplines to varying degrees on the same continuum". The involvement of multiple disciplines is often required on "varying degrees on the same continuum" ranging from total to minimal requirement of multiple disciplines hence the more general term "multiple disciplinary" can be used to mirror what "Lorenz von Stein in 1855, a German professor from Vienna" who regarded PA as "an integrated Science" said that "viewing it just as administrative laws was a restrictive definition" (Lorenz von Stein 1855, in Management Study Guide (MSG) (MSG n.d.:1). The political nature of PA, as Appleby (1945) argues, makes it important to rely on multiple disciplines. That government is by nature a "blatantly political enterprise" in the sense that "every public employee hired, each one demoted, transferred, or discharged, every efficiency rating, every assignment of responsibility and each change in administrative structure, is always politically charged" (Appleby 1945 and Shafritz, Hyde and Parkes 2004:135 in Uwizeyimana, 2012:88) makes the case for multidisplinarity obvious. The "administrative structure, is itself always politically charged" and PA officials work in a "blatantly political enterprise" and the fact that "Government … is politics" (Uwizeyimana 2012:88, citing Appleby 1945, Brower 2006:2, and Shafritz *et al.* 2004:135) drives the point further in favour of a multidisciplinary approach. In an increasingly complex environment in which government operates, multiple teams are needed. The coordination of public officials' efforts, expertise and activities is needed in order to deal with the complex nature of citizens' demands and service delivery. This is so, although as Choi and Pak (2006:351) aptly put it, "while multiple disciplinary teamwork is appropriate for complex problems, it is not always necessary in every single project" (Choi and Pak 2006:351).

In addition, because no single discipline is an island, there is a need to recognise the influence of disciplines among and between themselves. This is generally referred to as "interdisciplinarity" as opposed to multidisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity. The interdisciplinarity of PA was arguably first supported by Tshikwatamba (2008, cited in Hanyane 2008:415) who argues that, "PA is not a multidisciplinary field [the term field here used as discipline], but an interdisciplinary field of study which is linked to other disciplines". In his critical engagement of Tshikwatamba's article, Hanyane (2008:415) also advances the argument that "Public Administration is "interdisciplinary" as opposed to "multidisciplinary" which means it is a discipline between and among many

other disciplines and is "closely linked to them"" (Hanyane 2008:415). Both Hanyane (2008:415) and Tshikwatamba (2008) argue that the "interdisciplinarity" of PA is based on the role PA scholars should and must necessarily play in helping practitioners to find solutions for problems affecting communities (i.e., run government better) in order to keep the PA discipline as a relevant field of study for future generations.

Before accepting or rejecting the debate on whether PA is, or is not an "MIT" discipline in which future generations should be encouraged to study, one has to determine whether it is a discipline in the first place. Otherwise, how can PA be at the centre of the MIT discourse if it does not exist as a field of study in the first place? In order to fill this gap, the following paragraphs of this article proceed by analysing claims put forward by those who support or reject the ideas based on PA's disciplinarity.

IS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION A DISCIPLINE AMONG OTHER DISCIPLINES OR NOT?

The quest for determining whether PA is an MIT cannot be settled without settling the debate on whether PA is a discipline or not. The term "disciplinarity" seems not to be found in generally known dictionaries, but it is most probably a derivative of the term "discipline". The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary defines the terms "discipline " in many ways but the one which is closer to the topic of this article is "a branch of knowledge, typically one studied in higher education" (*Merriam Webster Dictionary* n.d.:1). Questioning PA's "disciplinarity" is a direct denial that PA fits well in this definition. Wikipedia internet Source (2015:1) helps us resolve and understand whether PA is a discipline or not based on the fact that for a field to be called a discipline, fundamental features must be present. These features include: that a discipline must be a focused study in one academic field or profession; that that "discipline incorporates expertise, people, projects, communities, challenges, studies, inquiry, and research areas that are strongly associated with a given discipline. Individuals associated with such academic disciplines referred to as experts or specialists must be present" (Basheka and Byamugisha 2015:84).

The challenge is not to dispute whether PA does have each of these features, like experts. There are people and a community of experts that espouse the ideals of PA. The problem is that each specialist in PA is usually a specialist in one (or a number) of the many other fields such as financial management, human resource management, politics etc. or not. That is, any person can become a specialist in PA without having studied PA. In addition, while the discipline of PA has its challenges, conducts research studies to address those challenges and it has areas of scope in which it operates–government

and its interface with the citizens in a principal-agency relationship, nothing stops any other person specialising in any other field to conduct research on any issue from a perspective of their own specialisation. For example, a Medical Doctor can produce research on a public health issue and a Civil Engineer can produce research on public housing or public infrastructure.

The main challenge of PA's disciplinarity is, however, found in PA scholarship circles. The first problem from a scholastic point of view is that challenging PA's disciplinarity amounts to challenging Woodrow Wilson's assertion that PA is a distinct discipline which should be the concern of those responsible for policy implementation (policy implementers) as opposed to politicians (policy-makers) (Wilson 1887:28–29; Goodnow 1900:17–26). Other authors who support the disciplinarity status of PA include; Du Toit *et al.* (2016:17) who argue that, "Public Administration and Management originated as an academic discipline after it was practiced as an activity". According to Du Toit *et al;* "Public Administration as a discipline (PA) is the result of the observation made by academics and scholars in the field of public administration (pa) and management" (Du Toit *et al.* 2016:17). It is on the basis of scholars' observations that PA became "possible to classify and categorise particular facts, values and phenomena in order to give course content to the subject Public Administration" which is currently being taught in academic institutions across the world (Du Toit *et al.* 2016:17). However, Du Toit *et al.* (2016:17) argue that "there has been a paradigm shift away from political science as the locus, to management as the focal point of the subject discipline of Public Administration". In making this statement, these authors want to drive home the point that "Public Administration has been studied as an independent discipline which emphasises the locus of the discipline since the second half of the 1950s" (Du Toit *et al.* 2016:17).

To emphasise their argument that PA is no longer part and parcel of politics, Du Toit and Van der Waltd (1999:63) argue that "many academics have discarded the name Public Administration and substituted it with Public Management from 1970s" in order to accommodate the changing environment in which PA is currently practised. Du Toit *et al*'s (2016:17) argument seems to confirm an earlier argument by Hanyane (2008:415) and Tshikwatamba (2008:749) who stated that the adoption of Public Management instead of PA does not take away the fact that PA remains a discipline of study in its own right. But how can PA become an independent discipline, separate from all other disciplines when all evidence points to the fact that its study programmes include many other topics and fields of studies? Those who support PA's disciplinarity argue that PA has evolved over many years starting in the 1880s, and that it has continued to refine itself from its inception to this day. They also argue that there exist many schools, departments and units of PA which provide degrees and other forms of

qualification in the field of study. They also argue that PA is an independent discipline which has been influenced by other disciplines and that these disciplines have been influenced by PA in the process.

ATTEMPT TO DEVELOP A PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DISCIPLINE: A TRAJECTORY – 1880 TO DATE

The attempt to develop PA into a discipline which is distinct from Politics and any other related fields is a result of a long and well established process that took place over a 100-year period (1880s-2017) and appears to have involved many stages. These stages are summarised in a well-researched article entitled, '*The changing global public administration and its theoretical and practical implications for Africa*' published by Uwizeyimana and Maphunye in 2014. In this article, the authors argue that Wilson's article outlines a number of notions and demonstrates his passion to establish PA as a field of study independent and distinguishable from politics (Coetzee 2012:30). The period 1887–1926 which is referred to by Basu (2009:1) as the "politics-administration dichotomy era" is often considered the time PA as an academic discipline was born (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:90–92). This discourse is captured in Wilson's well-known "Politics-Public Administration dichotomy" slogan (Uwizeyimana 2013:1). However, while it appears that the fight for the soul of PA as a field of study initiated by Woodrow Wilson in 1887, was vigorously fought through the different stages depicted in Table 1, and to a certain extent, won the acclaim of scholars who came and left before us; literature has demonstrated that Woodrow Wilson's proposition of Politic-administration dichotomy could not have been practically possible in his own time and therefore that there is no way this dichotomy can be realised in the 21st century (Uwizeyimana 2013:165).

A comprehensive body of literature has shown that Wilson's suggestion would be "easier said than done given that public administration operates in a largely political environment and given …the constant and insistent demands which 'politics' makes on administration…" (Wamalwa 1986:59). Table 1 suggests that the "Public Administration theory, as introduced by Woodrow Wilson's publication in 1887, was replaced by New Public Management (NPM) from the 1970s – 1990s" and that "NPM itself was replaced by the concept of Governance" and "Good governance from 1990s–2014" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:90), now E-Governance and fast moving to embrace the requirements of the 4th Industrial Revolution. Literature shows that the challenge to the existence of PA as a discipline among other fields was the hallmark of the period of Heterodoxy or Conceptual challenge of the 1938s-1950s (Stage 3 in Table 1). It was also the hallmark

Table 1: Stages of development of Public Administration

Stages	Period	Description	Main characteristics	
Stage 1	1887–1926	Politics-administration dichotomy	• "Woodrow Wilson writing, 1887 • Goodnow's *Politics and Administration*, 1900 • Leonard White's *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*, 1926 (Lynn 2001:144; Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:94)	
Stage 2	1927–1937	Scientific Management (and Principles of administration)	• "Orthodoxy in Public Administration and a drive towards efficiency • Gulick and Urwick importation of Fredrick N. Taylor's theories of 'scientific management' and Henri Fayol's 'theories of business administration' in the public sector–through the famous POSDCORB" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye, 2014:94).	OLD/TRADITIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Stage 3	1938–1950	Period of heterodoxy (or Conceptual challenge)	• "Challenge of both the politics-administration dichotomy and scientific management. • Hawthorne experiments (1920 to 1932) and • More emphasis on human relations" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:94)	
Stage 4	1950s–1970s	The New Public Administration (NPA)	• "Identity Crisis • Rejection of both the principles of administration and the politics-administration dichotomy. • Simon's 'Administrative Behavior' and Robert Dahl's essay on 'The Science of Public Administration: three Problems', 1940s (Georgiou, 2014:156). • Widening the scope of the Public Administration by relating it to other subjects such as psychology, sociology, economics and political science" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye, 2014:94)	
Stage 5	1970s–1990s	The New Public Management (NPM)	• "Focus on Managerialism, • Introduction of various forms of privatisation, • Greater involvement of the private sector institutions in the management of public institutions and provision of public goods and services, • Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) especially in Africa" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:94).	NPM

Stages	Period	Description	Main characteristics	
Stage 6	1990s to date (2017)	Governance period	• "Improvement of administrative and civil services • strengthening of parliamentary oversight • promotion of participatory decision-making • adoption of judicial reforms" (Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:94)	GOVERNANCE/GOOD GOVERNANCE
Stage 7	2017–onwards	E-governance and 4th Industrial Revolution	• Government services increasingly provided via electronic means (such as Computers, Mobile Phones etc.). The 4th Industrial Revolution is driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and Cyber-Physical systems (CPS) such as robots and drones etc. (Xing and Marwala 2017:11).	E-governance and 4th Industrial Revolution

Source: Table adapted by Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:94 on the basis of arguments presented by Coetzee 2012; Basheka 2012; Basu 2009; and Xing and Marwala 2017.

of the Identity Crisis (of NPA) of the period ranging from 1950 to the 1970s (Stage 4) described above. The main difference between the two periods is that while the former rejected outright the existence of PA as a discipline among the others, the latter had some advocates who suggested its close relationship with Political Sciences. PA's development stages and the main characteristics of each stage are well summarised in Table 1.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S DISCIPLINARITY BASED ON MANY SCHOOLS, DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS WHICH PROVIDE DEGREES AND OTHER FORMS OF QUALIFICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF STUDY

Wood (2009:27) cites Frank Batten Sr., the man said to be "one of the University of Virginia's most loyal supporters" who argues about the "urgent need to develop a new generation of entrepreneurial leaders who can bring about transformational change". According to Batten;

"Talented public leaders are not only needed"…, but it is also "critical to get young people excited about the responsibilities and opportunities of public service in all its manifestations" (Batten 2009 in Wood 2009:27). "The earlier in their careers that exceptional students begin to think of themselves as future public leaders who can promote a better society, the greater the likelihood they will become such leaders" (Batten 2007 in Wood 2007:1).

Batten said this on 12 April 2007 after giving US$100 million to create the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia (Wood 2007:1). In reinforcing Batten's argument, John T. Casteen, the University of Virginia's President also said that the establishment of the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia and the gift from Batten, "intended to cultivate future generations of leaders dedicated to the common good, will both preserve our democratic traditions and inspire the next generation and those that come after to live up to the vision that gave this place its first breath" (Casteen 2007, in Wood 2007:1).

Based on Wood's (2009) and Batten's (2007) short discussion, it is clear that the teaching of PA and related subjects is acknowledged in society and that private individuals and governments are willing to support the building of schools and institutions of learning for current and future generations, but, how can one encourage current and future generations to study PA while the very "disciplinarity" of PA is constantly questioned? This is why "Most, though not all, authors currently subscribe to the view that in as much as the practice of public administration is now fully integrated into the operational requirements of many countries' public sectors, PA as a subject in universities and colleges [in South Africa and globally] can similarly be viewed as a distinct discipline in the same way that economics, history, psychology, political science, sociology, law, philosophy etc. are accepted as disciplines" (Peters and Pierre 2003:7).

However, not all authors and scholars subscribe to this view because according to Cameron and Milne (2009:383), "as late as 1968, the time of the Minnowbrook 1, PA was still perceived by those who attended it as a subfield of Political Sciences in many Universities" (Cameron and Milne 2009:383). Is it possible that the view that PA was and currently remains a subfield of Political Sciences which was held by participants of the Minnowbrook 1 was a result of the fact that "Most of those who participated in the Minnowbrook 1 were [not scholars of PA but] Political Scientists" (Cameron and Milne 2009:383) or because indeed PA has never been able to break away from its Political Science mother like a child who cannot be weaned? In fact, can we dismiss the criticism of those who question the "disciplinarity" of PA such as the Political Scientists who participated in the Minnowbrook 1 simply because of them being scholars in other disciplines who found a home in the PA scholarship? Let us examine PA's development trajectory in order to assess whether it exists as a free standing discipline like all other disciplines or not.

The challenges of PA's "disciplinarity" could be construed from claims that PA "is a function of optimising co-existence [with any] other fields of study/disciplines]" yet, at the same time, that it is not a field of study because the question of PA being "a disciplinary pursuit remain unanswered" (South African Association of Public Administration and Management – SAAPAM 2015:1).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S DISCIPLINARITY BASED ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S PROGRAMME AND CURRICULUM MIX

Currently, the challenge of PA extends from questioning (or outright rejection) of the PA "disciplinarity" to issues of MIT.

In addition, the current composition and content of PA programmes that are taught at academic institutions across the globe points to the contrary. For example, in terms of the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), "An undergraduate Bachelors' Degree in Public Administration (BPA Course Code: SAQA-62151) is a three-year degree at many universities in South Africa. The BPA falls into 'Field 003: Commerce, Business and Management Studies'" (SAQA n.d.:1). The Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) (n.d.:1), one of South Africa's institutions of higher learning describes "the Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA)" programme as "an undergraduate programme which focuses on principles and practices of public administration and management in the public sector" (MANCOSA n.d.:1). The programme in the BPA degree at MANCOSA "has the primary purpose of providing a well-rounded, broad education that equips students with the knowledge base and methodology principles that enable them to enter the labour market" (MANCOSA n.d.:1). At the end of the BPA programme, according to MANCOSA (n.d.:1), the holders of the BPA degree are expected "to function effectively and efficiently in public service organisations". In order for the candidates registered for this programme to achieve this objective, students are given the opportunity to "examine local systems of governments" (i.e., systems of governments) (MANCOSA n.d.:1). According to MANCOSA (n.d.:1), "This includes an understanding of the types of local government and their constitutional relations with intermediate and central government" (Structure, functioning and intergovernmental relations) (MANCOSA n.d.:1). It also "examines public policy issues and priorities (i.e. public policy-making, analysis, implementation, evaluation etc." (MANCOSA n.d.:1).

The fact that PA programmes include a number of subjects from different disciplines is in line with Adebayo and Baker's (1974:42) argument that "the teaching of PA requires other social sciences in respect of scope, methods and contributions they make". Adebayo

and Baker's (1974) views are well captured in Auriacombe's (2015:5) introduction to the University of Johannesburg's (UJ) Study Guides (also known as UJ General Learning Guides) where she argues that "students and scholars of PA must bear in mind that PA (and its other names such as Public Management and Public Governance) is a member subject of Management and Social Sciences, and should thus never be studied in isolation" (Auriacombe 2015). Literature shows that "PA gets on well with other subjects including, but not limited to, Politics, Economics, Development Studies, Information Management, Business Management, Communication, etc." (Auriacombe 2015:5). But, how can PA get on well with these subjects without borrowing or even including their contents in the PA programme mix? The answer to this question was provided by van Dijk (2013:7) who argues that "The content of the Public Administration/Public Management modules are generic in nature and include modules in Public Policy, Public Human Resource Management, Public Financial Management, Organisational Analysis, Control, Monitoring and Evaluation, Local Government and the foundations of Public Administration and/or Public Management".

The problem with van Dijk's (2013:7) argument is, however, that after demonstrating how PA is a composite of many other modules or subjects, she contradicts herself by stating that "the current focus and locus of Public Administration, whether called Public Administration, Public Management or both, is interdisciplinary with a specific emphasis on management skills". Taking into account van Dijk's (2013:7) argument that "The content of the Public Administration/Public Management modules are generic in nature and include modules in Public Policy, Public Human Resource Management, Public Financial Management, Organisational Analysis, Control, Monitoring and Evaluation, Local Government and the foundations of Public Administration and/or Public Management" and the definitions of the terms MIT provided in this article, it would be logical to conclude that PA programmes in their current forms are more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary.

Table 2 presents a comparative sketch of a BPA degree at some selected universities.

The existence of programmes offering courses which lead to a qualification in PA in these (and other) schools across the globe would suggest PA is a fully-fledged discipline; but based on the subject composition of PA programmes described in the above sections and Table 2, it would be very difficult to provide a scholarly convincing argument that demonstrates how PA has been or will ever be an independent discipline which is totally removed from all other disciplines. Therefore, while PA is considered to be an independent discipline it does not deny or diminish the fact that it has been and remains closely related to many, if not all, other disciplines in the social or natural sciences.

The analysis of the following "12 organising fields" adopted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) shows that the multidisciplinarity of PA could also be

Table 2: The BPA degree programme at some selected universities

MANCOSA: BPA Programme	Education Portal/Study.com: BPA Programme	University of Johannesburg: Bachelor of PMG Programme	Southern New Hampshire University: B.A. in P A Programme	Ashford University's Bachelor of Arts in PA Programme	Texas State University: BPA Programme	Fort Hare University: B Admin Programme
Description						
Public Administration	Public policy	Introduction to governance and the institutional landscape	College composition	Urban management	Metropolitan Politics (WI)	Public Administration
End User Computing	Public Organizations	Service Delivery	Public Speaking	Budgeting and finance	Urban Geography	Political Science
Business Mathematics	Human resource management	Decision-making and accountability	Introduction to information technology	Political science	Community and Regional Planning (WI)	Economics
Economics 1B	Social ethics	Policy analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Western civilization	Intergovernmental issues	Plus 12 electives from other specified fields of study	Human Resource Management
Business Communication	Urban planning and management	Financial and asset management in public organisations	Modern art	Public policy development		
Financial Accounting	Fundraising for non-profits	Human resource management in public organisations	Introduction to ethics			
Local Government	Emergency management	Institutions of regional and local governance	American art			
Public Law		Public Participation	Sustainable communities			
Public Sector Economics		Integrated governance	Disaster recovery and response			
Introduction to Politics		Global governance	Public administration			
Ethics in the Public Sector		Introduction to governance and the institutional landscape:	Public administration ethics and theory			
Research in the Public Sector		Service delivery	Sociology of social problems			
Public Sector Budgeting		Decision-making and accountability				
Politics	Public Administration	Public Management	Public Administration	Public Administration	Public Administration	Public Administration
Public Policy	Political Science	Municipal Management	Political Science	Political Science	Economics	Economics
Philosophy	Economics Industrial	Organisational Psychology	Industrial Psychology	Business	Human Resource Management	Business Management
Economics	Psychology Management	Political Science	Economics	Management Economics	Local Government	Industrial Psychology
			Public Administration			Accounting
						Statistics

demonstrated through the following SAQA approved organising fields and their sub-fields (see Table 3) which are not necessarily listed in Coetzee's diagram. While the SAQA approved degrees qualifiers demonstrate that PA is one of the 12 organising fields, the fact that PA is a composite of many other subfields strengthens the argument of PA's multidisciplinarity while weakening the PA's interdisciplinarity argument. For example, according to Meyer (1999:42–44):

> "The SAQA adopted 12 organising fields. Each of the organising fields has a National Standard Body (NSB) as a way of dividing into focus areas the work that needed to be done. The 12 organising fields were in turn divided into a number of sub-fields which can be combined to generate an acceptable combination of subjects that lead to a qualification".

According to Meyer (1999:43), SAQA has broadly used four criteria in deciding on these fields of studies. The division is intended to ensure:

- "That there is as much coherence and as little duplication as possible
- That important concerns around transformation and quality and taken into consideration
- That as far as possible the South African fields of study follow the divisions agreed to by other countries
- That the fields divisions reflect emerging trends and developments" (Meyer 1999:43–45).

SAQA's summary explains why most students registering for a PA degree programme often have other related sub-fields such as "Finance, Economics and Accounting, General Management, Human Resources, Marketing, Procurement, Office Administration, Public Administration, Project Management, and Public Relations" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62).

Public Administration in the family of other disciplines in the social and natural sciences

It can be argued that PA's ability to evolve over many years has ensured its continued existence as an independent discipline. Some authors such as Uwizeyimana and Maphunye (2014:91) have even questioned how "public administration as a school of thought" can go through all these stages over such a long time and still lack "its own body of knowledge which includes theories, terms and systematically researched frameworks which have informed its development trajectory". Authors such as Basu (2009:1) and Peters and Pierre (2003:7) observe that, "Over the years, a concerted attempt has

Table 3: List of organising fields and their sub-fields approved by SAQA

Organising fields	Sub-fields
NSB01: "Agriculture and Nature Conservation" (Blom 2011:62)	"Primary Agriculture - Secondary Agriculture - Nature Conservation - Forestry and Wood Technology - Horticulture" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB02: "Culture and Arts" (Blom 2011:62)	"Design studies - Visual Arts - Performing Arts - Cultural Studies - Music - Sport - Film, Television and Video" (Blom 2011:62)
NSB03: "Business, Commerce and Management" (Blom 2011:62)	"Finance, Economics and Accounting - General Management - Human Resources - Marketing - Procurement - Office Administration - Public Administration - Project Management - Public Relations" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB04: "Communication studies and language" (Blom 2011:62)	"Communication Studies - Information Studies - Language - Literature" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB05: "Education, Training and Development" (Blom 2011:62)	"Schooling - Higher Education and Training - Early Childhood Development - Adult Learning" (Blom 2011:62)
NSB06: "Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology" (Blom 2011:62)	"Engineering and Related Design - Manufacturing and Assembly - Fabrication and Extraction"(Blom 2011:62)

Organising fields	Sub-fields
NSB07: "Human and Social Studies" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Environmental Relations • General Social Science • Industrial and Organisational Governance and Human Resource Development • People or Human-Centred Development • Public Policy, Politics and Democratic Citizenship • Religious and Ethical Foundations of Society • Rural and Agrarian Studies • Traditions, History and Legacies • Urban and Regional Studies" (Blom 2011:62)
NSB08: "Law, Military Sciences and Security" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Safety in Society • Justice in Society • Sovereignty of State" (Blom 2011:62)
NSB09: "Health Sciences and Social Services" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Preventive Health • Promotive Health and Development Services • Curative Health • Rehabilitative Health/Services" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB10: "Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Mathematical Sciences • Physical Sciences • Life Sciences • Information Technology and Computer Sciences • Earth and Space Sciences • Environmental Sciences" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB11: "Services" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure • Transport, Operations and Logistics • Personal Care • Wholesale and Retail • Consumer Services" (Meyer, 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)
NSB12: "Physical Planning and Construction" (Blom 2011:62)	• "Physical Planning, Design and Management • Building Construction • Civil Engineering Construction • Electrical Infrastructure Construction" (Meyer 1999:43–45; Blom 2011:62)

Source: (Meyer 1999:43–45) and (Blom 2011:8, 62)

been made by numerous scholars to define its scope, terms, conceptual features including what is generally known as theories of public administration". Such theories of administration developed over many years starting with the Classical Theory of PA – which is based on Frederick Taylor's Theory of Scientific Management (1856–1915), the Theory

of Bureaucracy – which is based on Max Weber's ideal type of organisation (1864–1920) and many others (Mangahas 2004:1). It has to be acknowledged that while PA seems to have developed what can be viewed as own theories, most of PA's theoretical approaches have been borrowed from the private sector–thereby confirming the close relationship between management practices in the private sector and the public sector. There is no doubt, however, that because of the close relationship between PA and other disciplines, the possibility of such a qualification is not out of context especially when public infrastructure management is the sector under discussion.

Literature suggests that PA originated from "Mother Politics", but also that PA has borrowed a lot from other disciplines. Taylor's theories of "scientific management" and Fayol's "principles of administration" were developed from the private sector context. These private management principles were imported into the public sector by Lutther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick "through their famous POSDCORB acronym, which stands for steps in the administrative process, namely: Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting and Budgeting" (Gulick 1936:3, cited in Uwizeyimana and Maphunye 2014:92). It is crucial to observe here that even in the dichotomy debate by Wilson in his 1887 article; he had indicated that efficiency would be promoted in the running of government through the adoption of private sector styles of management. Moreover as Basheka (2012:40) reports, Leornard D. White's (1926) textbook on the principles of PA did not see any differences between public and private administration. He concluded that administration was administration wherever it was done (Basheka 2012:40).

In addition, a convincing argument about the relation between PA and many other fields and other disciplines in the social and natural sciences is well presented by Coetzee (2012:83) in his 2012 book entitled, *Public Administration: A South African Introductory Perspective.* His argument in this book is summarised in the chapter titled "*PA and some of the dominant social sciences*" which is also depicted in the following diagram.

Figure 1 shows that PA is closely related to social sciences. It can also be argued that the above diagram does not provide an exhaustive list of all the disciplines which are closely related to PA.

Although literature does not provide hard evidence to show how PA has influenced other disciplines, it is quite possible that other disciplines have also been influenced by PA over many years. This is possibly so because there is no single discipline, albeit Natural Science or Social Sciences, which exists or is practised outside the realm of PA. Many medical doctors practise PA in public hospital facilities where such facilities are governed and funded by the state/government or the private sector. Government

Figure 1: Public Administration in relation to other acknowledged principal disciplines of the dominant social sciences
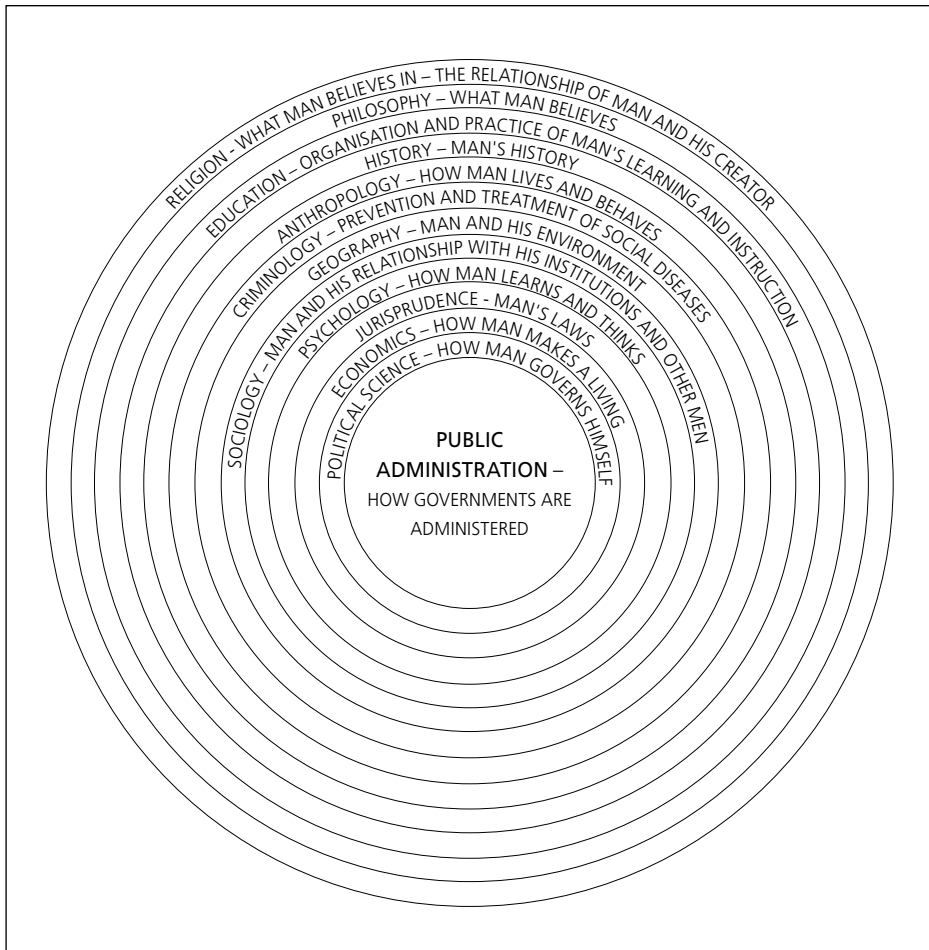
regulates the conduct of medical practitioners and the instruments they use and administrators ensure compliance. The drugs used by medical practitioners, the ethical codes of conduct, the supplies needed to conduct a simple or complex operation; will pass through the hands of public administrators, whether those administrators are inside the public health facility or operate from the external environment.

In almost all countries, a number of scientists such as engineers work in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) which are, to a certain degree, owned, funded and controlled by the state. Even those working in private enterprises are regulated by the public sector. According to Coetzee (2012:83), "Professional officials qualified in one or other of the natural sciences abound in the services of state departments and other public

institutions, especially in the research institutions and public corporations such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South African Synthetic Oil Limited (SASOL), and Armaments Corporation of South Africa (AMSCOR)", to name but a few (Coetzee 2012:83). "All of these sciences are practiced in the wide variety of fields that constitute the public sector" (Coetzee 2012:83).

All disciplines are governed by the country's Constitution and other public law and public policies which are generally made by people working in the PA sector (doing public administration, although they often use the service of private consultants). Thus, if we accept that PA is basically "the study of what public managers do on a day-to-day basis, that it focuses on the activities and functions that public officials perform nicely summarised in Luther Gullick's (POSDCORB) acronym; and that the purpose of PA is to render services to society on the basis of principles of effectiveness, efficiency, economy and democracy (3EsandD), and that PA focuses on public sector revenue and resource allocation and the ethical and professional conduct in favor of community needs" then it is possible to argue that people from other disciplines, irrespective of whether they are working in the public or private sector have been influenced by PA directly or in-directly. This is because the impact of PA cuts across different socio-economic sectors of life. In his 1887 essay, Wilson declared that "it is the object of administrative study to discover first, what government can properly and successfully do, and, secondary, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and the least possible cost either of money, time or energy" (Wilson 1887, cited in Auriacombe, 1999:57).

Role of Public Administration scholars in understanding and finding solutions for public problems

Based on the discussion in different sections of this article, it is clear that PA has bor-rowed and integrated the whole of POSDCORD as a public management technique, as exemplified by many books and journals on Public Administration/Management/governance literature, the application of the scientific management principles borrowed from the private sector based on a number of known scientific experiments such as Taylor's experiment with a shovel design and bricklayers motions (Costanzo 2014:2).

Authors like Tshikwatamba (2008) and Hanyane (2008) argue that the acronym POSDCORB does not constitute a theory in the public sector because it was not de-signed for the public sector in the first place; it has not been developed by scholars or practitioners of Public Administration and has not been subjected to scientific research rigour in the public sector. This assertion is correct especially when the forefathers of the PA discipline long recognised the need for synergy between the public and private sectors. In fact Learnard D. White's (1926) *Introduction to Public administration* clearly

states that administration was administration, irrespective of whether it is practised in the public or private sector. However, while PA had its foundation in management (the private sector if the NPM doctrines are to be applied), its natural home was political science which had administration as its core specialisation. Therefore, while "The study of Public Management and Governance must always be viewed in relation to these and other study programmes of Management and other disciplines in social sciences" (Auriacombe 2015:1), it remains important to base their application on scientific evidence produced through rigorous testing in order to determine their suitability and usefulness in the public sector and advancement of the discipline of PA.

In order to advance the discipline of PA the role of scholars of Public Administration should not be limited to testing theories borrowed from other fields/disciplines or sectors but to develop PA theories which are "scientifically tested, generalisable, valid and reliable" (Hanyane 2008:416) applicable in the public sectors in order to solve the day-to-day public administration challenges. PA scholars need to position themselves to the point where public administration practitioners need them and come to them for solutions.

The requirement for academics in any particular field to contribute significantly to the sustainability of the field is not about the quantity of papers published in that particular field (Wessels 2010:542). It is instead about the quality of the academic contributions one's research makes on the existing body of knowledge (Wessels 2010:542). This quality is not limited to sound methodological approaches used to collect data or the correct interpretation of the data that leads to the findings of the research (Wessels 2010:542). In addition, in order to become relevant and useful, PA scholars must fight against what CODESRIA refers to as the **"**Flight from theorisation" syndrome (Institute of African Studies: Columbia University 2015:1)**.**

Theorisation is defined by Farlex (n.d.:1) as "the production or use of theories" to explain natural or supernatural phenomena and both require "deep thinking" on the part of the producer or the user. A "theory" is defined as "a coherent group of tested general propositions, commonly regarded [by scholars and their students, but also everyone else who knows and understands the theory] as correct, that can be used as principles of explanation and prediction for a class of phenomena" (Farlex n.d.:1). A good published work should, in addition to sound research methods add value to the theoretical understanding or "theorisation" of phenomena dominating the field at different stages.

In his analysis of the *Institutional Affiliation and the selection of research methods: A South African perspective*, Wessels (2010:542) argued that PA researchers have often been criticised for not being able to live up to practitioners' expectations. That is,

they have not been able to achieve their long-term objectives, namely "to be problem solvers" (Wessels 2010:542) and as a result, "Practitioners regard the research by Public Administration scholars from time to time as useless" (Wessels 2010:533, citing Bolton and Stolcis, 2003:44), "irrelevant" (Wessels 2010:533) "or not related to the issues which are central and directly relevant to the policy debate" (Edwards 2005:68). The authors argue that, "Even when the chosen research topic seems to be somehow closely related to the government's needs for knowledge" the knowledge generated by PA researchers in general, and South African PA researchers in particular, seems to be "always miles away from practitioners' day-to-day discourse" (Cameron and McLaverty 2008:91). "The South African PA scholars' failure to achieve this objective is also observed at the African continent level as argued in the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)". CODESRIA is a "Pan-African research organisation established in 1973 and headquartered in Dakar, Senegal, with the broad goal of promoting the [research] work of African and Diaspora social scientists" (CODESRIA 2015:1). According to CODESRIA (2015:1):

> *"While the goal of increasing the quantity of work produced by African social scientists seems to have been mostly met, the key challenge today is one of quality. There is a global division of labour in knowledge production in which Africans are often confined to empirical work while the higher order work of 'theory building' and 'meaning making' are still dominated by scholars from outside of the continent" (CODESRIA 2015:1).*

According to CODESRIA (2015:1), the biggest problem is that, "Work by African scholars is still too often confined to empirical analysis or disciplined by borrowed theoretical frameworks from scholars from elsewhere with little effort to take steps to build innovative theoretical frameworks on the empirical work done. This has meant that African scholars are making only limited contributions to global understandings of processes and structures on the continent" considered to be theirs (Institute of African Studies: Columbia University 2015:1). There is therefore a need for PA scholars to become problem solvers and experts in their discipline in general, and for African scholars in particular to strive to produce theoretically-based useful research. This is because, while theorising remains something foreign among most African scholars, it has been a means of making sense of phenomena and forms part of everyday life everywhere in the world, especially in developed countries. Therefore, the importance of theorising in the search for a solution to Africa's PA problems cannot be overstated. As some, such as Schurink (2010:421) and Llewelyn (2007:374) put it, theories are what *"impose cohesion and stability"*. *"*So whenever life is ambiguous (which it is most of the time!)" (Schurink 2010:421) especially in Africa, PA scholars should *"*work at confronting this ambiguity through theorising" (Llewelyn 2007:374). In order to achieve the "goal of

producing empirically grounded and theoretically innovative work that will constitute original contributions to their field of work and to the understanding of Africa in the world", scholars of African descent (including the diaspora) have to "undertake sustained work over multiple years on a project of their choice" (CODESRIA 2015:1). This is the kind of research you find in other fields such as Medicine, Sociology, Psychology, Politics, Economics and many others which have been able to establish themselves and to produce theories that help practitioners to understand what is going on in the world at different time periods and in different geographical areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this article was to determine whether PA is, or is not a MIT discipline. These concepts have been first defined and the relationship between PA and these three elements of MIT have been discussed. The analysis in this article shows that PA has evolved over many years starting from the time of Woodrow Wilson in the 1880s, it has continued to refine itself from its inception and continues to evolve today and is likely to continue to evolve in the future in order to adapt to the changing environment in which public administration (pa) is practised and the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of public demands. Among the factors used by scholars to determine the PA disciplinarity and multidisciplinarity are the existence of many schools, departments and units of PA which provide degrees and other forms of qualification in the field of study and the fact that PA has been influenced by other disciplines. The mix and combination of subjects that constitute PA programmes leaves no doubt that PA is neither an interdisciplinarity, *nor a* transdisciplinarity but a multidisciplinarity discipline. A glimpse of the BPA degree programme at some selected national and international universities and the list of organising fields and their sub-fields approved by SAQA in South Africa also demonstrate how PA is a multidisciplinary discipline. In fact, while it has not been possible to find evidence of how these disciplines have been influenced by PA in the process, there is no profession (whether public or private) which is immune to public laws.

Therefore, instead of focusing all their energy on questioning the disciplinarity of PA, PA scholars need to acquire knowledge of other fields of study in order to complement PA and to perform administrative tasks/functions that could not be accomplished without multiple skills and knowledge, or seek cooperation from specialists from other fields if the task at hand requires certain levels of such cooperation.

However, the survival and continued relevance of the PA discipline is dependent on PA scholars' intellectual abilities to test existing theories such as those borrowed from other disciplines and the private sector in order to determine their practical application,

suitability and usefulness in the public sector and advancement of the discipline of PA, to do research on a continuous basis in order to develop theories that explain the phenomenon in the African context. It is only by doing this that PA scholars will be able to help public administration practitioners find practical solutions for problems that affect the public. Thus 'MIT' means overcoming the "flight for theorisation" in order to protect "Wilson's legacy" from being turned into an obsolete discipline (or field of study) whose scholars are always accused of being useless and out of touch with the current challenges facing public administration practitioners on a day-to-day basis. In order to achieve this objective, the authors recommend that PA scholars need to engage in ground-breaking research which will result in theory-building and meaning-making around the different phenomena that challenge public administration practitioners.

NOTE

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