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Structuring, Integrating and Innovating: The Training Mode of Master of Public Administration (MPA)—Based on the Example of Chongqing

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Abstract

Master of Public Administration (MPA) is a specialized degree especially for governments and non-governmental public sectors to train high-level, high quality, professional public administration talents. This paper analyses the background of the training mode of MPA and determines the implication and consisting factors, and concludes the current situation of the training mode of MPA. Through the SWOT analysis of samples in universities in Chongqing, it confirms the major factors and interaction pattern and constructs the SPAC systematic framework. Then it analysis the systematic mode and dynamic innovation of MPA and verifies the feasibility of them based on the example of Southwest University.

Key words: MPA; Training Mode; Structure of Mode; Systematic Integration; Dynamic Innovation

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With the transformation of the economic development pattern and deep-going reform of society in China, we are in serious need of high-level, inter-disciplinary, application-oriented talents who are accustomed to the current situation. More than 100 years ago, public management came into existence as a subject in the transformation era in American—the progressive era, which contributed greatly to the recover from the bad aftermath of high speed economic growth. Because of which, the training and building of public management talents team is critical for China’s transformation of economic developing methods and functions of government and boosting society’s harmonious development. The degree of MPA emerged in that situation and is becoming increasingly important in high-level talents training.

INTRODUCTION

Master of Public Administration (MPA) is an application-oriented degree rather than an academic one, which trains leaders and administrators who work in public administration field, master the theory of public administration and modern public policy, skillfully use modern administration techniques and methods to plan and make strategies. The academic degrees committee of the state council released “Announcement of launching the pilot project of MPA” and stated the purposes of MPA: Training high-level application-oriented talents who work in public administration, public management, research and analysis of public policy field, training expert managers and policy analysts with knowledge of modern management and public policy, modern techniques and certain political field for Chinese government and non-governmental public sector. Therefore, training high-level, inter-disciplinary talents in public administration is the ultimate goal of the MPA education and the important strategic safeguard of China’s modernization construction.

In practice, MPA has problems like the theory is

divorced from practice, putting too much emphasis on academic area but not on practical area and difficulty to meet the actual demand of public management. The current training modes of MPA are as follow: (a) Academic Mode. Not being able to emphasis the application-oriented training purpose, and no clear distinction from and basically similar to the training modes and methods of academic degree. (b) Twin Tutorial System. This mode has not reasonable arrangement of tutors, and lack of professional tutors and concepts, lots of flaws of ability structure, so lags behind the current situation greatly. (c) Simplified Mode. The mode emphasizes the soft factors of knowledge structure, learning method and curriculum setting. In contrast, the hardware, such as case study room, reading room, teaching material and sample's data base which are required can't meet the demand, which affect the teaching outcome negatively. (d) Extensive Mode. Owing to lack of accurate training concept, coherent standards and good management, it cannot bring about enough practicality or applicability. The education quality of these flawed traditional training modes of MPA doesn't match the current request of high-level and application-oriented talents. Therefore, it is high time that the education departments put considerable emphasis on building an effective training mode in order to fulfill the training purpose of MPA and provide high-level expert talents to the governments and non-governmental public sectors.

1. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATION EXPLORATION

1.1 Background Analysis

With the advent of the economic integration and globalization and the era of knowledge economy, the public sectors have caused a wave of reform. Profound changes have taken place about the theory and practice of public management at home and abroad. China is "the deepwater area" in the midst of the social change and transformation, and produces a variety of practical problems in the process of the administrative system reform and transformation of the economic development pattern. The new situation of government functions transformation and the change of the economic development pattern and social transformation, requires us to strengthen theoretical research, knowledge innovation of public management and public administration training so as to meet the needs of practice of social development in China in the transitional period, which put forward higher requirements for public sector's management capacity, specifically the training standards for cultivating professional talents of MPA education.

MPA degree is specifically designed for the governments and the public sectors to develop high quality talents for management decisions. In the West, it is

more than 80 years old and a formation of comprehensive education system, but in China, the MPA education is a new educational system which was introduced and transplanted in the late 1990 of the 20th century from the Western. Consequently, it is still in the exploratory stage.

Because of our economic system, political system, science and technology and education as well as cultural development, are different from the Western countries, so the MPA education has its own characteristics in China. Xie Tingliang and Sun Duoyong (2006) considered that the features of MPA education were public, applied and interdisciplinary. They summary MPA education in areas such as these three properties from the public administration discipline, curriculum and training targets. The most obvious feature of MPA education is practice-oriented degree education. In the level of postgraduate education in China, the school and academic community uphold the values for a long time: postgraduates are the main force of academic research, knowledge and innovation, and their main tasks are to engage in theoretical research and contribution for the study area. Academic postgraduate in the day of social development, their professional skills and abilities requirements can no longer meet the needs of social development, so that a large number of postgraduates work hard to find countermeasures. Professional degree appears in order to make up for the missing. Practicality is the most fundamental different characteristic between professional postgraduate and academic postgraduate. Professional postgraduate education cultivates the specific occupation with high-level technical and management ability. With the accelerated development of the society, layered structure, diversity of interests, and issues related to public management features present a great many significant challenges for public administration, which request public managers to have more perspective ways of thinking and scientific skills to determine the issue and tackle the problem effectively. The complexity of social issues must be resolved in handling the public research methods with multiple perspectives, which thanks to mutual penetration from the multidisciplinary study on the basic theory and method. Thus, Multidisciplinary integration is inherent requirement of MPA education. Comprehensive is another important feature of MPA training. Commonality is the most essential characteristic of MPA degree education because MPA students mainly come from the governments and public sectors, and the nature of their work determines that their concerns focus on the overall interests, benefits realization and regulation's functions.

1.2 Implication Exploration

With regard to the connotation of training mode, Professor Dong Zefang (2010) believes that training mode of postgraduate refers to theoretical model and operating model under the guidance of education and training philosophy according to the needs of society, and it is

made up of a number of elements with some typical features, and is relatively stable. Its elements include training concepts, training subject, training objectives or culture conditions and evaluation. Based on MPA's age requirements and training objectives, we can define the connotation of training mode: according to the growth pattern of high-level talents cultivating mode and the community's demand for high quality and professional public managers, training mode is a combination form of the fundamental link and operation mode between training subject and cultivation process to achieve the training objectives under the guidance of some theories and ideologies of public administration and education. It is a dynamic process, and an ordered system of mutual restraint and linkages between the fundamental factors on cultivating quality. Its constituent elements are mainly training objectives, training mode and curriculum system, procedures, management systems and quality evaluations. Training mode of MPA is to answer two basic questions, that is, "what kind of training" and "how to train".

2. THE SITUATION AND PROBLEM OF MPA TRAINING MODE

2.1 The Situation of the Training Mode of MPA

The professional agent of MPA was approved by the State Council in 1999, and the first time to recruit students from whole country in 2001. After more than 10 years development, MPA education in China has made a great achievement. From the view of training scale, the development scale of MPA expands unceasingly. There are 24 cultivate colleges officially started admissions in 2001. Currently, the colleges that can train MPA already reached 100, and rank the third among the professional degree training colleges, which are distributed in 29 provinces, municipalities or autonomous regions. The average recruitment of students scale annual is about 6851 in China, and has a tendency to increase year by year. The education mode of MPA has already been the main paradigm to train the civil servants on-the-job at all levels. From the view of training mode, MPA training shows a trend of diversification, take learning style as the sample, there are full-time form and bases form. For nonlocal students, some colleges and universities concentrates teaching in the holiday and self-study or online learning at ordinary times. For local students, they take use of weekends or nights to teach. Training methods and forms have multiple characteristics. In addition to the college directly training, there are also a variety of cooperation modes. One is the training cooperation agreement with local governments, and makes the Colleges and universities as the government civil servants training base. Another is local government or relevant training institutions cooperate with colleges and universities to

set up training units in other place. Due to the different learning and training ways, the educational length of schooling is also difference. Most of them are 2.5 years to 3 years, but some colleges and universities use flexible length.

2.2 The Problems of the Training Mode of MPA

With the MPA education developing rapidly and make a big achievement in country, we must fully realize that there are some problems since the influence of various factors and restrictions.

The first problem is that the positioning is not clear, and lack of effective system and standard specifications. Training targets and ways are inaccurate setting that lead to unclear positioning of MPA training and recruit students difficultly because MPA fails to accurately understanding the training policy. The second problem is that the development of social environment is incomplete. Due to lack of clear regulation and plan on the MPA training, social recognition of professional degree is reduced greatly. Now the employment situation is serious, lead to the social environment of the MPA becoming worse and worse. The third is that the practical applicability is not outstanding. Due to the MPA is still in the exploratory stage in China, Colleges and social institutions have limited experiences and can't fully adapt to the appropriate MPA education mode. For these reasons, the arrangement for curriculum is not perfect, and the course teaching and practice can't organically unify together.

2.3 The SWOT Analysis of MPA Training Mode About Chongqing's Universities

After years of practice, the education of MPA has formed a certain scale gradually. But competitive increasingly in today, the Development of MPA education still leaves much to be desired. This paper takes the examples of the universities in Chongqing, analyses the development of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats so as to provide ideas for developing the MPA education better.

(a) Strength. First of all, the universities in Chongqing have a good advantage in brand resources. There are two comprehensive universities directly under the ministry of education of China in Chongqing. Chongqing University is the key construction university of "985 project", and Southwest University is the key construction university of "211 project". Beyond that, Southwest University is a multidisciplinary coordinated development university that is built by the ministry of education of China and the Chongqing government, and is one of the earliest established colleges and universities of political science and law in China. Secondly, the universities in Chongqing have a good advantage in educational resources. Southwest University, Chongqing University and other universities' have good hardware facilities that may provide a powerful hardware support for MPA education. Finally, the universities have a large number of discipline

leaders, academic backbones, experts, professors, so the faculty and discipline are both powerful.

(b) Weakness. On the one hand, the market consciousness is weak and admissions way is single. On the management of MPA education, the recruiting methods take the traditional model which is single national exam admission, have not lined with the situation of market competition. The overall marketing ways and methods of the professional degree education are relatively homogeneous and single. On the other hand, lack of the innovation system and mechanism. Chongqing's universities are too insufficient in competition to innovate. Some kinds of systems and projects are imitating other universities, and does not have own characteristics. Besides that, lack of contact with society result in many scientific research projects don't really serve society universities directly. The conversion rate of scientific research achievements is lower, at the same time there are a lot of social problems because they can't get the result of strong practicability.

(c) Opportunity. First, the attention extent to the professional degree education from the national level increase gradually. Chongqing universities respond the nation called to develop the professional degree education positively, and develop high-level talents for national and local economic and social. Second, professional degree education's development space is unusually large. Professional degree education is accompanied with high-level talents who have engaged in public affairs, public administration and public policy research and analysis, at the same time, it is the government and non-governmental public organizations' staff.

(d) Threat. First of all, universities' competition is heating up. There are a large number of universities in China, so the competition is fierce and cruel. Under the condition of market economy, the development trend of competition tends to be more and more strength of brand-name colleges and universities. It makes the famous colleges and universities are stronger than others, and let the competitors far behind. However, the high strength competition for Chongqing university is not only a crisis, but also a good chance. Secondly, the employment pressure results in some professional's develop crisis. Because the continual expansion of university enrollment, the college students get a job difficultly, which will directly affect the teaching quality and students quality, and so on, then lead the development crisis.

3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRAINING MODE

Based on the SWOT analysis of the Master of Public Administration in the colleges and universities of Chongqing, we can identify the key elements of MPA degree educational mode and construct the "S-P-

A-C" systematic framework: Subject Orientation, Problem Orientation, Action Orientation, and Capability Orientation, totally 4 modes, as shown in Figure 1.

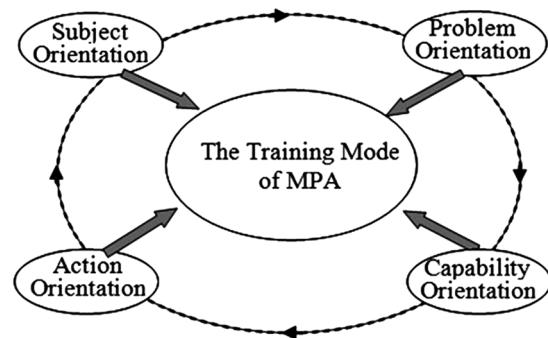


Figure 1
"S-P-A-C" System Framework

The training mode of MPA is not only the permutation, combination and the operation mode of training subjects and basic links, but also the ordered system of training objectives, methods, process elements that are related and restricted mutually and cannot be separated. The key elements which constitute the training model of MPA professional degrees include training objectives, training methods and curriculum system, training process. Training objectives determine the curriculum system and training methods, and training process depends on training methods. In turn, finding problems constantly in the training process is the basis of modifying training objectives, methods, curriculum system, which also provides practical evidence for the formation of training objectives and scheme.

3.1 Subject-oriented Mode

There are two steps need to follow in order to build a scientific training mode of MPA. Firstly, making clear orientation is very important. Professional degree training mode is different from the academic degree training mode. The former mode needs to be related closely to the occupation. MPA education emphasizes the main target of cultivating high quality and high level talents who engaged the management of social affairs. The MPA training model is subject-oriented so that the correlation between professional degree and occupation will be strengthened. At the same time, we need to strengthen professional learning. Professional knowledge of the subject differs from basic knowledge in frontier and applied fields. This is corresponding to the nature of MPA degree.

3.2 Capacity-oriented Mode

MPA training programme is based on professional needs. It focuses on developing capabilities of basic scientific research, applications and practices abilities. It also aimed at developing awareness and abilities of solving practical

problems. According to the professional degree training objectives, capacity-oriented development mode required MPA training to be targeted at cultivating practice ability and based on specific competencies framework to set the curriculum. Teaching methods need to consider ability primarily. As a result, it will become a side-by-side training mode in several ways. At the same time, it should focus on assessment, and the purpose and the standard of the assessment are to test students' relevant ability to be upgraded or not.

3.3 Problem-oriented Mode

Public management teaching is basically built around three core problems: what government do, why to do and how to do. Public management is a kind of course with high practice, requiring MPA training mode to be aimed at developing students' ability of solving practical problems. We should develop students' awareness of problem so as to find social problems from theory learning and social practice. On the other hand, theory learning just needs to briefly introduced courses of theory framework and then use teaching method to instruct students in finding problems, analyzing problems and solving problems from teaching process.

3.4 Action-oriented Mode

The most important characteristic of MPA education is extremely practical. It requires its cultivation mode not only to develop theoretical attainment, but also have a greater need to engage students in participating in life practices, which emphasizes the development of students' practical abilities. This requires not only the students' active participation, still need to train units in action. To ensure that students can understand the basic functions and operations of governments and public sectors, and accumulate practical experience, MPA training units should do something actively about it: strengthen the social links with social management departments and related departments, and provide a good practical platform for students.

4. SYSTEM INTEGRATION OF THE TRAINING MODE

Based on the above four kinds of oriented training mode, from two aspects of the longitudinal and horizontal elements for system integration, through the coupling of training mode, process and part, we conclude the interaction mechanism of the training mode, and the formation of "Pattern-Process-Part", that is the "3P" systematic integration mode, as shown in Figure 2.

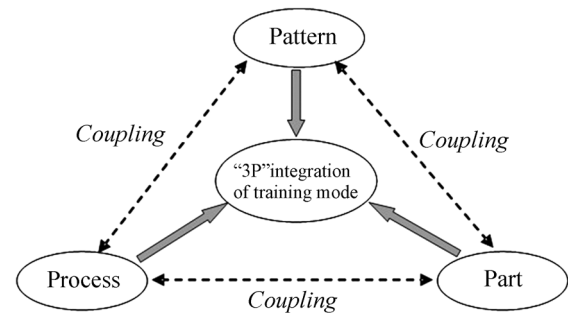


Figure 2
“3P” Systematic Integration Mode

Systematic integration is based on the system theory. In the 1940s, the system theory was put forward by biologists for the first time and later was widely applied in the field of humanities and social sciences. The biggest advantage of system theory is using models to study social problems, stressing that all phenomena, elements constitute a relationship network. Thus, the network is the system. All systems have common models, behaviors and characteristics, and interact with the external environment. The training mode of MPA is a complex system with numerous components, and the elements interact with each other.

From the aspect of horizontal elements, the system is the integration of four kinds of training mode and teaching environment, team construction and teaching methods. Currently, MPA students are spending their spare time in doing course learning and thesis writing in working way, tuition fees are based mainly on personal burden, the cultivation of MPA professional degree education lacks institutional incentives and a good teaching environment.

The training mode oriented with professional issues, actions and capabilities helps the scientific research colleges and universities implement effective institutional incentive policy for MPA school, provide and create a good teaching environment for students. From the aspect of teachers' team construction, the training mode is to strengthen the faculty ability, improve teachers' professional accomplishment, while encourage teachers to go out of the campus for doing in-depth exercise in the social sector, get familiar with the public management practice, improve the practicality of teachers team, and accumulate rich experience in practical management experience.

The highlight of integration in teaching methods is the use of case teaching. Cases are the knowledge that based on the practical problems and used to help students better understand the theory learning. The use of cases is a way to help students know how to apply various theories in the simulation practice environment and improve their management skills, let students consult and analyze some problems faced by different types of the public sector and organization through a special way, this is a bridge

contacting with practice. Teachers can train and improve students' comprehensive capacity through the simulating environment.

From the aspect of longitudinal elements, the system is the coupling of four kinds of training mode and recruitment methods, course studying and thesis writing. Recruitment method of MPA is generally divided into written examination and interview, written examination tests the candidate's ability of applying professional knowledge in applied researches, the examination focuses on the practical ability, it requires candidates to analyze and solve actual problems with the integrated use of major or related theories, knowledge and methods, and the ability to undertake professional and practical work and management work independently.

In the course of learning, relative research should focus on practical problems and collective learning, so as to trainees have different directions in characteristics and profession. Experts in related fields should create professional practice cases in the field and carry out individual curriculum and professional learning. In view of the thesis writing of MPA focuses on the practical exploration of innovation, it requires the tutors to highlight the social, economic and practical value. Thesis writing must be based on practice or practical problems that need to be resolved urgently on the basis of investigation through data collection, rigorous argument, forming feasible outcomes, and bring benefits for the department of social practice.

5. DYNAMIC INNOVATION OF THE TRAINING MODE

MPA education mode is not a static and constant system, but a dynamic and continuously innovative system with all the elements interacting with each other. Through the coupling of training mode, longitudinal process and horizontal elements, under the vision of "3P" systematic integration mode, using the "Modularity Innovation" theory and establishing a dynamic matrix on training mode of "knowledge modularity, structure modularity, ability modularity" and three-dimensional culture system, as shown in Figure 3.

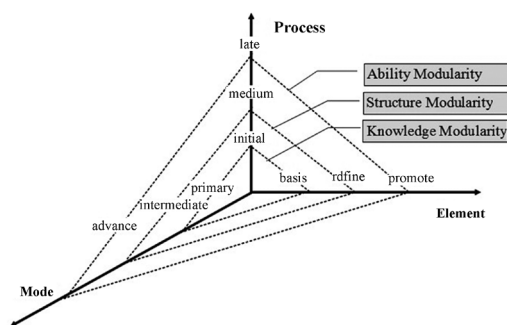


Figure 3
Dynamic Matrix of Modularity Innovation

Since the 1990s, with the globalization of knowledge and capital, the "modularity" wave of management ideas and methods have sprung up. Modularity is widely concerned as a new industrial organization and the way of resources integration. Chinese scholars see it as a new kind of research tools to solve the complex problems and introduced modular in China. Langlois (2002) argued that, modularization was a set of rules to manage complex things and divide complicated system into separate parts, there were structure communications inside each part through standard interface. As a new kind of education training mode, "modularity" training mode is to divide the training mode according to the different modules with different functions, they are independent each other, both modules have connection also. Modularity innovation is the innovation behavior in single internal module.

Knowledge modularity refers to the initial pattern, basis element and primary mode based on the basic knowledge. It is the primary stage of modularization innovation, also the foundation of dynamic innovation training mode. Turn learned knowledge into a network structure and in this network structure, students choose, absorb, digest and innovate the accepted knowledge, to form a cycle of knowledge. In the process of circulation, the knowledge gained by the students and the external environment, is shared between other students. This is a process of knowledge inner-turning of students.

Structure modularity refers to the modules that divide one of the professional courses into several relatively independent modules according to certain classification method, and all modules are combined into a system according to certain form. Therefore, this innovation system is in the medium-term process, intermediate mode and has refined elements. The advantages of the modular structure are: do good to build the knowledge structure of different disciplines, realize the MPA multidisciplinary integrated teaching mode. A module that is composed of one or more subjects' content and relatively independent and interconnected, can integrate different disciplines together and constitute a knowledge structure system, and realize the comprehensive training of knowledge, skills, and quality.

Ability modularity refers to that, around the training goal, aiming at professional characteristics, according to the students' professional knowledge, setting up a corresponding professional ability training module. To improve the students' professional and scientific literacy, the modular sets up pattern of practical ability development and vocational quality education and ability training. Thus the universities should spare no effort to speed up the module constructing, such as knowledge module, basic skills development module and professional ability module for students, and truly meet the needs of high-quality personnel training through a variety of modular setting. Ability modularity is based on knowledge modularity and structure modularity, is the advanced stage of dynamic innovation mode.

6. CASE STUDIES OF THE TRAINING MODE

Taking the MPA training of Southwest University for example, we can inspect integration of training mode system and modular innovation matrix from the MPA training program, thesis writing, and so on.

Training objectives of MPA in Southwest University are high-level, application-oriented talents for government departments and non-governmental public organizations. There are specific requirements and quality standards in

the training objectives, recruit objects, curriculum, training methods and the knowledge structure, ability structure and other aspects. Its enrolment target is mainly to obtain staff who has more than four years of actual work experience in the government and non-government public agency after acquiring bachelor's degree. Enrolment patterns take the national authorized entrance exams with unified proposition and admission standards. Teaching methods include lectures, seminars, simulation training, case studies and social surveys and other forms. The MPA cultivation of Southwest University is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
The MPA Cultivation of Southwest University

The cultivation program of MPA at Southwest University	
Cultivation goal	Develop high-level and application-oriented talents for government departments and non-government public institutions
Application object	The staff has four-year practical work experience, obtained Bachelor Degrees and worked for government departments or non-government public institutions
Cultivation method	Mainly for on-the-job learning
Admissions way	Preliminary examination (foreign language, national authorized exams, unified proposition, and unified admission standards) +reexamination
Teaching method	Lectures, seminars, simulation training, case studies and social investigation and other ways

From the MPA training program of Southwest University, we can see that the training objectives highlight professional orientation, action orientation and application orientation, while don't highlight capabilities oriented and problem oriented training objectives and methods. In the training mode, most students of employment-based learning are working staff, who cannot guarantee enough time and effort to learn the theoretical knowledge of the system, which will reduce the effective implementation of the training mode. The teaching methods are more classroom teaching methods than case studies and social surveys, which is also contrary to the action-orientation mode, and cannot be conducive to the ability of modularity innovation.

In the MPA training programs of Southwest University, requirements for dissertation are under the practice which is closely aligned with government departments and non-government public sector management, and use public management disciplines and related disciplines theory, knowledge, methods analysis to solve practical problems in public administration. Thematic papers can take the form of research results, some high level research reports or case analysis report. From Figure 2, the ability to solve practical problems takes a larger proportion of the evaluation system, which shows the MPA training program of Southwest University can reflect competency-oriented, professional orientated, problem-oriented and action-oriented systematic integration training mode based on the practice in writing papers.

CONCLUSION

From the case analysis of Southwest University, it can be

found that "S-P-A-C" systematic training mode, which focuses on professional orientation, problem-orientation, action-orientation and capacity-orientation, is applicable and feasible. Training units should choose training mode in line with their own actual conditions. Nowadays, market competition is so drastic, with constantly updated knowledge and information, MPA training mode should also promote its innovation and upgrading continually in line with the changing of social environment.

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