

Toward a Review of Research and Knowledge in Philippine Public Administration

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A review of what has been attempted to be known and what has been known about Philippine Public Administration can be put in a framework of thirty years of research, worthwhile questions, and preliminary hypotheses. At the College of Public Administration, public policy and program administration have provided a link between line and staff subject matters, and between the focus on governmental administration and the concern with national development problems and processes. Worthwhile questions on Philippine Public Administration range from the policy-prescription type to administration-oriented prescriptive category. Seven "hypotheses" or initial guesses about the thrusts of Public Administration research in the Philippines and tentative assessments of its accomplishments provide a comprehensive summary of the state of the "science."

Introduction

This article represents both an ambitious project and a modest effort. It attempts to provide a framework for reviewing scholarly research and knowledge about Philippine public administration during the last three decades. It does not actually review the extant literature. Any references or allusions made are for the most part to the institutional and individual works of the faculty, staff, and some of the students or graduates of the College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines (CPA-UP). Even so, most of the views expressed in this paper are those of the author. Needless to say, neither the College nor the author claims any

monopoly of research, let alone knowledge, of public administration in the Philippines.¹

What will be done here is to lay the basis for determining what has been tried to find out and what has been known about public administration, in the Philippine context and according to the author's own lights. First, there will be a brisk descriptive outline of Public Administration as a field of study. Like other disciplines, this field has had its share of definitional problems, boundary disputes, and identity crises, and it will not be pre-

¹ Established in 1952 as the Institute of Public Administration, the CPA had a good headstart in the Philippines and the Asian region. Many other schools or programs of Public Administration have since been set up in public and private universities in the Philippines and the region.

In 1957, the Institute started publishing the *Philippine Journal for Public Administration*, a quarterly with international authorship and circulation. Some professional management journals of comparable quality have recently appeared in the Philippines.

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tended that this article can give the last word on the issues involved.² Second, there will be an effort to identify some of the questions that seem to be worth raising and answering in this field, and to characterize the utility and quality of the questions posed and answers given. Third, there will be some preliminary hypotheses on the research effort that has been made and the knowledge that has been gained so far.

Public Administration: An Expanding Field

In general, Public Administration is concerned with the systematic study and improvement of government capacity and practice in forming policies, making decisions, implementing them, and securing the desired results. The study is focused on the decision-making and implementing functions of the executive branch and its agencies, including local governments. A spinoff from Political Science, Public Administration has, however, ranged far and wide in terms of the dimensions of government that it has examined and the other disciplines from which it has drawn perspectives and methods. Thus, it has ranged over the political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances, aspects, and effects of government management and policy. Within the executive branch, Public Administration has retained its "traditional" focus on such "staff" functions as planning, organization

and methods (O & M), and fiscal administration (budgeting, accounting, etc.). At the same time, it has devoted attention to "line" functions of formulating, implementing, and operating substantive programs and projects. Indeed, in recent years, Public Administration has increasingly given focal attention and institutional locus (particularly in American schools) to the processes and analysis of public policy as well as management. At the CPA, where public policy and program administration has been instituted as a major specialization area, this area of study has provided a conceptual link between line and staff subject matters, and between the focus on governmental administration and the concern with problems and processes of national development.

Public Administration is both a professional and scholarly discipline. One can make a career of it as a government-based practitioner, as a university-based researcher or teacher, and/or as an intermediary, a consultant. Just how much of a specialization it can be is a disputable matter. The generalist school considers practice in this field as an "art" learned mostly on the job, but it is believed to be an art that can be improved and professionalized through training, education (particularly at the graduate level), and scientific study. This was, at any rate, one assumption for the establishment of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1952. The concern of the Public Administration with practical improvement, together with the premium placed on experience, skills, and techniques in administrative problem-solving, has cast it in the mold of professional schools as distinguished from basic-discipline departments in the University. Nonetheless, like the basic social sciences, Pub-

²Such problems are often discussed in the context of the "New Public Administration" movement in the U.S. Some feel that Filipino Public Administrationists do not identify with the American version of the discipline's identity crises; but see Jose D. Soberano, "A General Definitional Theory of Public Administration," 21 July 1981 (mimeo.).

lic Administration assumes that its object of inquiry is amenable to scientific methods, i.e., to explicit theory, empirical research, and logical and even quantitative analysis, although its students can probably do less (if any) experimental work and must grapple more with the normative and dynamic elements of administration and politics.

These orientations and assumptions characterize the kinds of knowledge required in Public Administration. One should first acknowledge the possibility that much of the knowledge may have taken the form of skills, insights, and inchoate theorizing gained by practitioners from experience, applied to particular situations, and embodied in straight-forward documents without any reference to a body of more general literature. But such pieces of information may be perishable and non-transferable, unless recorded and interpreted by the researcher as part of a more explicit and accessible fund of knowledge. At its best, knowledge in Public Administration is or should be useful for a variety of purposes. As perhaps in other disciplines, it must inform our understanding of classes and interrelationships of policy and administrative phenomena through appropriate description and explanation of trends, events, or behaviors, the conditions under which they obtain, and the variable relations involved. Such understanding must be based on the interpretative framework of theory or, if one likes, "the informing grace of ideology." In turn, it must provide the basis and contain the critical elements needed for evaluating the relative weights, concomitants, and consequences of administrative events or actions. Furthermore, knowledge in Public Administration must be sufficiently cumulative to enable one to

predict such consequences and to prescribe action to enable the subject to control or influence the course and outcomes of events. The crucial tasks of evaluation and prescription require a clear conception of the elements of values and purposes (as well as an eye on motives and means) as independent variables, criteria of judgment, or objective functions. The difficulties of these tasks are accentuated by the various roles which the student of Public Administration may play as researcher, critic, or advocate.

The burdens of enhancing understanding and improving public administration have been growing with the increasing concern with the relations between government and society as well as with the internal intricacies of policy and management. One is no longer satisfied (as one may have been at one time) with trying to understand society and nation as an environmental influence on government but also as the "dependent variable" affected by government for good or ill. The essential problematique of making government policy and administration more rational, in the sense of making deliberate choices among alternative ends and means -- and, in some sense, successfully implementing its choices -- has remained. But the tasks of scholarly understanding and practical improvement have been vastly enlarged and complicated, not only because of such a shift in standpoint, but also because of changes in the object of inquiry. The goals, scale, and complexity of government have grown, and along with them the scope and diversity of the norms, objectives, and organizational forms prescribed for administrative practice and policy. Narrower notions of organizational simplicity, administrative efficiency, and cost-saving economy, for example, have given ground to broader con-

cepts of institutional sophistication, technical proficiency, organizational productivity and effectiveness, public benefit, and social equity. At the same time, the simpler virtues remain nagging challenges. The demand for probity as well as competence in government is still there, and there is still much to be said for reducing bureaucratic size and red tape, simplifying the complex, and institutionalizing good practices. For the moment, however, Public Administration has been impressed with the amazing expansion of its field.

**Public Administration Research:
Purposes and Issues**

What are some of the questions worth asking in this field? In the next section is a list of questions, many of which have been asked in different

forms and varying degrees in Public Administration. The corresponding purposes or functions of inquiry and some hopefully representative kinds of issues and variables are listed with each question. These categories are probably not exhaustive nor are they mutually exclusive. The list begins with a policy-prescription type of question and ends with an administration-oriented kind prescriptive question. It includes a question entailing explanation in terms primarily of policy purposes, technical reasons, and political or bureaucratic motives, and another question entailing explanation that stresses administrative causes or factors. It may be logical to begin with the policy-prescription question, but this has not been necessarily the order followed by scholarship in Public Administration.

A Short List of Purposes and Issues

Purpose and Question	Issues/Variables
(1) Prescription: What should government do about social problems?	Choice of: objectives, priorities — Political stability, economic growth, social equity, environmental quality Roles — Leave to private sector; regulate; participate; take over a problem/program Means — Financing vs. direct administration; public enterprise vs. regular department; mixed strategies.
(2) Description: What has it done?	Problems, objectives, targets Resources mobilized — Taxes, public debt; non-governmental Organization — Existing or new; sectoral or integrated; leadership

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| | Implementation — Financial tools; control techniques; accomplishments |
| (3) Explanation: Why has it done what it has? | Purposes (see [1] above)
Other reasons given — Public goods, externalities; new organizational focus; technical innovation
Motives — Security, crises; group or institutional pressures; empire-building |
| (4) Evaluation: How well has it done? | Evaluation criteria, standards, and indicators — Personnel number, honesty, competence, morale; coordination; target-fulfillment; intended and unintended effects; size and incidence of costs and benefits
Methods of evaluation research and analysis
Organization and techniques for monitoring and evaluation |
| (5) Explanation: Why has it succeeded or failed? | Policy and organizational design vs. actual implementation
Leadership, organizational structure, management technology, substantive expertise, bureaucratic behavior
Resource constraints — Funds, manpower, physical
Social factors — Community preparedness (training), organization, participation
Exogenous variables — Prices, weather, etc. |
| (6) Prediction: Will it do better given certain conditions? | Kind of problem/objective — Commercial profit vs. social benefit; |

- easy social targets (e.g. family planning "acceptors") or hard cases
- Leadership type — Authoritarian, bureaucratic, technocratic, democratic
- Kind of organization — Centralized vs. decentralized, sectoral vs. integrated
- Resources — Funds and sources, number and quality of personnel, state of management technology
- Circumstances — "Political will", local power structure, community interest
- (7) Prescription: How can it do better?
- Better planning, information, communications
- Organizational design, personnel training, change in incentives
- Change in leadership, institutionalization or "routinization of charisma"
- Change in external circumstances

Public Administration Research: Thrusts and Assessments

What follows are some initial guesses about the thrusts of public Administration research and tentative assessments of its accomplishments so far against the previous list. These bold "hypotheses" are probably biased not only by the author's conception of the field and of the questions worth raising, but also by what has actually been accomplished.

First, it should be noted that a great deal of research has been done on a wide range of topics under the rubric of Public Administration in the Philippines. However, general assessments of the effort, its results, and its

contributions to knowledge have been few and far between. The last comprehensive survey within easy memory was done by Cariño in 1952.³ This has been occasionally supplemented by informal reviews of other research and related efforts, by discussions of the state of Public Administration in general (the so-called "New Public Administration" in the US in particular), and by the more systematic effort (but hard-to-understand writings) of Soberano to grapple with the definitional, ontological and grand-

³Ledivina V. Cariño, "To Advance Administrative Knowledge: Research in the College of Public Administration, 1952-1973," c. 1973 (mimeo).

theory issues around Public Administration.⁴

Second, as Cariño had begun to observe, scholarly research has tended to veer away from the internal processes of administration to the wider realm of political and socioeconomic development "out there" and, at least in more recent years, has concentrated on certain dimensions or areas of what is called "development administration" and policy. This trend may have been offset by the growth in the "service" or applied type of management studies, but a great deal of these works, along with some extension-related researches, have not been published or made generally accessible.

The interest in public policy processes was initially expressed in the case study research directed and case-book edited in 1963 by de Guzman.⁵ Since then, CPA researchers have looked more closely into health programs, population and family planning, food production, agrarian reform, rural development, housing and urban development, and a few other policy areas. While there has been concern with the ultimate outcomes and causes associated with the programs in these areas, however, efforts in the CPA have been focused primarily on the organizational and management dimensions rather than the substantive aspects of these policy areas. The CPA has only recently begun to directly address the content and consequences, as well as the structures

and processes, of policies, partly as a result of growing interest in methods of evaluation research and policy analysis. But the potential strength of Public Administration research may lie in staying close to or keeping sight of its home base while venturing out in frontier areas of policy and development.

Third, research in Public Administration has tended to be more of the descriptive kind than the theoretical kind. A great deal of empirical information has been accumulated without the benefit of explicit and rigorous statements of basic assumptions, propositions or hypotheses that would enable one to test and interpret research findings and conclusions. This is not to say that no theoretical or at least conceptual work has been done at all. Much has been done on such issues as coordination, integration, and (to some extent) "corporatism," administrative capability, decentralization and regionalization, service delivery and accessibility, citizen participation, and local autonomy (the earlier and institutional version of "self-reliance").

Fourth, however, there has been little effort to make an inventory of empirical findings and refine concepts, to take stock of the generalizations that could be made, and to build theory upon their basis as well as on the general literature. Although a review of the literature is as much a stock requirement in Public Administration as in other disciplines, it is rare to find more than casual references to previous findings or thinking in the works of its scholars (except probably the thesis writers). This may imply excessive empiricism, bad theorizing if any at all, or plain laziness on our part.

Fifth, while the strong applied-research orientation and experience

⁴ Soberano, *op. cit.* Professor Soberano has produced tomes of manuscripts about the discipline, but they are intellectually inaccessible to most.

⁵ Raul P. de Guzman (ed.), *Patterns in Decision-Making: Case Studies in Philippine Administration* (Manila: College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines, 1963).

with management studies have gotten researchers used to making prescriptions, the confidence in this task may still be limited along with the ability to explain and the only-recent ventures into systematic evaluation research. Another deficiency noted in previous years and probably still around lies in the ability to predict with confidence the consequences of recommendations. For example, while there is conviction about the values of various forms of administrative decentralization, one is not sure whether it will really work (or even happen) under a centralized political system. To take another example: The notions of and empirical findings on administrative capability and its constituent elements sufficiently to predict just what or which combinations will realize it in practice, and under which circumstances have not been refined. Similarly, to what extent would structural change, personnel training or education, changes in incentives, and equipment with modern management tools — separately or in combination — help improve an agency's performance and effectiveness?

Sixth, some confidence in specific areas, such as the adverse consequences of complex and poorly structured organization and of bureaucratic misbehavior, has been built up. Some much-needed research by de Guzman, Cariño, Alfiler, and others has been done on the latter, and more systematically than probably ever before, despite the constraints on such an inquiry.⁶ But the practical testing

of its findings and recommendations is another matter. It is risky enough to recommend structural changes that blink graft and corruption away, but Public Administrationists can be more persuasive here because some of the problems seem obvious by professional norms (questions of costs and the less immediate consequences of structural change do remain, however).

Seventh, there is a strong corrective for the shortcomings of research in Public Administration. This is the self-consciousness about research methodology, which seems to be growing in sophistication not only in terms of data-collection strategy but also in conceptual and analytical design. The interest in evaluation research and policy analysis should lead to develop more rigorous theory, inventory of previous findings, and sharpen hypotheses before launching the survey or otherwise getting the data. This may also revive interest in comparative methods — which is kept alive by "development administration" and participation in international work. At the moment, the case study method, which used to be largely of the narrative, situational kind, may do service for more analytical inquiries of a quantitative as well as qualitative nature.

The last hypothesis is a concluding and saving one. The author could be wrong about the previous guesses, especially the more serious allegations. Hypotheses must be refutable, and it is hoped that the less flattering ones presented here would turn out to be wrong on closer review of literature. But hypotheses must also be reasonable, and it is hoped that the above are and would remain that way despite the author's mistakes. Such mistakes may be endemic in a broad and complex field with poorly defined boundaries like Public Administration,

⁶See Ledivina V. Cariño and Raul P. de Guzman, "Negative Bureaucratic Behavior in the Philippines: The Final Report of the IDRC Philippine Team," August 1978 (mimeo). This was the integrating report of a series, which included contributions by Ma. Concepcion P. Alfiler, Victoria A. Bautista, Leonor M. Briones, Jose N. Endriga, and Rizalino C. Viñeza.

and in a context like the Philippines where the widening scope of government over society has made those boundaries fuzzy. The uniqueness of government institutions is another essential constraint on the ability to know, although local and internation-

al comparisons may provide us a quasi-experimental framework. With more frequent efforts at assessment and integration of what has come to be known, however, one may be better able to refine ideas and overcome some of these constraints.