The Fifth Paradigm of Public Administration?
Public Organizational Theory as a Possible Solution To the Perennial Big Questions of Public Administration

Andy Spears
Ph.D. Student
Tennessee State University

Dr. Rodney Stanley
Assistant Professor of Public Administration
Tennessee State University

Abstract

This paper addresses the current “big questions” debate in public administration and proposes an appropriate placement for organization theory in the discourse of the discipline. Major scholars in organization theory are analyzed in terms of their relationship to the big questions. Public administration is discussed as a confused discipline, but a discipline nonetheless, and organization theory finds its place as the foundation for discussion and examination of public administration’s “big questions.”
Introduction

Almost thirty years ago Nicolas Henry (1973) discussed public administrations various attempts at establishing a paradigm. The famous “Five Paradigms of Public Administration” has since sparked much debate over establishing an acceptable paradigm for the study and practice of public administration (Henry, 1973). Since the publication of Henry’s famous article very little progress has been made as to what we actually are: an academic discipline, sub-field of a large discipline such as political science or what (Henry, 1990)? Assuming that Henry was right in suggesting that public administration’s “travail through the future” (Henry, 1990) has ended in the consensus that:

- Paradigm One: The Politics/Administration Dichotomy
- Paradigm Two: The Principles of Public Administration
- Paradigm Three: Public Administration as Political Science
- Paradigm Four: Public Administration as Administrative Management
- Paradigm Five: Public Administration as Public Administration?

were all deficient attempts at successfully establishing an identity for public administration, leaving our field of inquiry in an “intellectual crisis” (Ostrom, 1989). In an attempt to establish an identity for public administration, scholars have endorsed searching the literature focused on organizational theory as the foundation of public administration (Behn, 1995)(Daneke, 1990). Behn, for instance, suggests that public organization theory deals with the nature of the public firm. For Behn, understanding the nature of the public organization is essential if public administration is going to answer its big questions. Daneke, on the other hand, indicates that paradigmatic progress is essential for establishing an identity of public administration. He advocates the use of advanced systems theory for his paradigmatic choice in public administration, again suggesting that public organization theory has dealt with this issue. The purpose of this discourse is to propose a possible paradigm by examining the various theories and paradigms offered by public organizational theory as a foundation for public administration. We intend to demonstrate that the vast majority of literature pertaining to the public organization possesses the
necessary criteria for establishing the Fifth and final Paradigm for public administration. Public
administration has been plagued with scholars calling theories paradigms, assisting in the perpetual
existence of an identity crisis for our discipline. Without a recognized paradigm, public administration
lacks an identity that is essential for advancing the discipline and practice of public administration. We
conclude by stating that the focus of public administration on the nature of the public organization,
while simultaneously advocating a shift in what constitutes credible research is necessary for this new
paradigm. The new paradigm we propose utilizes the promotion of public organization efficacy as the
essential value for this new identity for public administration.

A Review of the Literature

The field of public administration currently finds itself struggling to answer its “big questions.”
Perhaps more precisely, the field needs to clearly define some “big questions” and then set about to
answer them (Behn, 1995). Some have even questioned whether public administration is a separate
discipline or field, or whether it is simply a sub-discipline of political science. Neumann (1995) believes
public administration is its own discipline, but also tells us he believes the discipline lacks an
understanding of what its big questions should be – or even how to define those questions. Other
scholars such as Behn (1995) spend considerable time discussing the hard sciences such as physics and
astronomy and points out some of the big questions asked by scholars in those fields. Behn (1995) goes
on to say if public administration wishes to be considered a serious discipline, it must ponder its own big
questions. For Behn (1995) the big questions focus on the issue of public management. What questions
must public managers ask in order to understand their work and complete it effectively? Behn (1995)
proposes three questions focused on micromanagement, motivation, and measurement. In setting about
to answer these questions, public administration will find its direction and justify itself as a true
discipline. Behn (1995) recognizes his three questions are not the only questions public administration
should answer. But, he argues the discipline needs to start somewhere if it is to truly be considered a discipline. In offering a starting point for the discussion of big questions, Behn (1995) sets off an ongoing debate about the state of the field, a debate realized in subsequent articles and no doubt addressed by public administration scholars across the country.

While Behn (1995) addresses big questions related to the public management issues, Neumann (1995) challenges the field to go a couple steps further. Neumann says public administration has yet to find its big questions, and when it does, those questions will address the nature of the public organization. Neumann (1995) agrees with Behn (1995) that big questions need to address the fundamental nature of a discipline. His problem with Behn (1995) stems from what he sees as Behn’s (1995) placing questions before the discipline that do not address the fundamental nature of public administration. According to Neumann (1995), true big questions in the sciences “reflect the human philosophical need to understand the nature and origins of the universe in which we live” (p. 410). Therefore, true big questions in public administration should focus on the nature of the public organization.

Neumann (1995) does not entirely reject Behn’s (1995) big questions. In fact, he indicates Behn (1995) has put forward questions worthy of consideration. However, Neumann (1995) takes his argument to the next level, or in his words, two levels higher than Behn (1995). In proposing guiding questions for public administration, Neumann (1995) offers these three:

What is the nature of an organization? Of a “public” organization?

How is the public organization related to its environment?

What does it mean to manage or to administer the public organization?
Neumann (1995) says these questions address basic organization theory. By placing his questions in the realm of organization theory, Neumann (1995) implicitly argues for the use of organization theory as the foundation for inquiry of public administration.

Like Neumann (1995), Kirlin (1995) addresses the inadequacies of Behn’s (1995) big questions. However, Kirlin (1995) chooses to focus on the issue of public administration in a democracy and offers seven questions he believes should be answered in that context. Kirlin (1995) develops his seven questions around four criteria. The criteria include “(a) achieving a democratic polity; (b) rising to the societal level, even in terms of values also important at the level of individual public organizations; (c) confronting the complexity of instruments of collective action; and (d) encouraging more effective social learning” (Kirlin, 1995, p. 417). Kirlin’s (1995) argument tells us we should focus away from public management in seeking our big questions and look toward the role of the public organization in a democracy. While Kirlin’s (1995) position does not explicitly say we should address the nature of public organizations as Neumann (1995) proposes, Kirlin’s (1995) seven big questions seem to primarily focus on the nature of public organizations in a democracy. Kirlin’s (1995) questions are:

- What are the instruments of collective action that remain responsible to both democratically elected officials and to core societal values?
- What are the roles of nongovernmental forms of collective action in society, and how can desired roles be protected and nurtured?
- What are the appropriate tradeoffs between governmental structures based on function (which commonly eases organizational tasks) and geography (which eases citizenship, political leadership, and societal learning)?
- How shall tensions between national and local political arenas be resolved?
- What decisions shall be “isolated” from the normal processes of politics so that some other rationale can be applied?
- What balance shall be struck among neutral competence, representativeness, and leadership?
- How can processes of societal learning be improved, including knowledge of choices available, of consequences of alternatives, and of how to achieve desired goals, most importantly, the nurturing and development of a democratic polity?
In establishing his big questions and formulating his criteria for evaluating those questions, Kirlin (1995) seems to be advocating couching public administration and its guiding questions in the realm of political science or sociology. Still, the fundamental elements of many of his questions deal with issues of organization theory. Issues such as structure, function, geography, competence, leadership, and learning all deal with questions addressed by organization theory. For Kirlin (1995), public administrations big questions may be guided by the over-arching disciplines of political science or sociology, but the foundation for answering those questions seems to rest in organization theory.


- Do we seek to educate our students with respect to theory or practice?
- Do we prepare students for their first jobs or for those to which they might aspire later?
- What are the appropriate delivery mechanisms for MPA courses and curricula?
- What personal commitments do we make as public administration educators?

These questions focus not on the basic assumptions underlying the discipline, but on what methods educators use to disseminate knowledge about the discipline. Denhardt (2001) says the big questions have remained big because the discipline simply has not developed a framework for dealing with them. He proposes taking a holistic approach to public administration, and examining the questions in terms of their connections to one another rather than as distinct and separate issues. Denhardt (2001) argues that the failure to answer the big questions of public administration adequately
results from the pervasive view that there exists one “right” answer to each question. According to Denhardt (2001), public administration educators should reject this notion and give students both the theoretical background and practical experience to understand the underlying issues of the big questions – so they can answer them on their own.

In our view, the big questions discussed above seem to all relate in some degree to issues addressed in organization theory. Hatch (1997) frames her discussion of organizations and organization theory in the context of change. She asserts her belief that organizations, the people who make them up, and those who seek to understand them are constantly in a state of flux. In order to provide a means of understanding organizations, then, a given perspective must be sensitive to change. Hatch (1997) divides her discussion of the means of understanding organizations into three perspectives: modern, symbolic-interpretive, and postmodern. Initially, she sets out to explain how each of these perspectives provides a mechanism for learning about organizations. However, as the book progresses, she consistently discusses the symbolic-interpretive perspective and gives lighter treatment to the other two. For example, during her discussion of conflict theory, she mentions the tenets of Marxist and Neo-Marxist organization theory as well as those of feminism in the context of her discussion of postmodernism. Rather than giving conflict theory equal status as a “perspective”, Hatch (1997) simply ties it in with the emergence of postmodernism. Further, her treatment of postmodernism indicates the approach she takes to organization theory scholarship. By placing it last in the succession of perspectives discussed and by allocating considerably fewer pages to its discussion, Hatch (1997) relegates postmodernism to the status of an interesting, yet less useful perspective.

From the outset of her work, Hatch (1997) advocates the symbolic-interpretive perspective. She begins by telling us, “Any narrative depends upon the perspective and location of its author” (Hatch, 1997, p. vii.). By describing her work as narrative and discussing the importance of perspective, Hatch
(1997) clearly establishes her preferred perspective, that of symbolic-interpretivism. For the symbolic-interpretivist, language and perspective are everything. It is the language of organization that helps scholars understand its purpose and meaning. Symbols, space allocation, structure, all become important facets in the eyes of the symbolic-interpretive researcher. And, symbolic-interpretive scholars freely admit their scholarship is clouded by their own experience and the perspective they bring to the research. In setting out to tell us of her own perspective and background, Hatch (1997) admits to her symbolic-interpretive bent.

Hatch (1997) seems to be an advocate for the use of organization theory to understand public administration. Her work addresses organizations, both public and private, and indicates the treatment these organizations receive from the three perspectives she outlines. Hatch (1997) may most closely associate with Neumann (1995) in terms of big questions for public administration. Neumann (1995) argues that any big questions must deal with the nature of public organizations. Hatch (1997) seeks to provide a means for understanding the very nature of organizations, both public and private.

While Hatch (1997) focuses on understanding organizations through understanding change, Heffron (1989) looks to the political connection between organization theory and public organizations. Heffron (1989) presents a solid overview of the prevailing themes in organization theory, then places them in the context of public organizations. In the public organization, politics, both internally and externally, plays a key role in organizational effectiveness. For Heffron (1989) the key question is, “what is an effective organization” (p. 347). The answer depends on the evaluative approach taken by the researcher or observer. The one thing that cannot be denied about public organizations is that power and politics plays a significant role in determining organizational effectiveness, no matter how effectiveness is defined.
As Heffron (1989) focuses on the political connection in public organizations, her work would seem to fall most closely in line with that of Kirlin (1995) who discusses public administration as it relates to democracy. Kirlin (1995) offers four criteria and seven questions. Underlying all of this seems to be a fundamental need to understand the organization. By proposing a means of understanding organizations based on understanding the political connection, Heffron (1989) offers a means to get to the root of what Kirlin (1995) describes as the key criteria for understanding public administration.

Morgan (1997) offers a discussion of organization theory through a series of metaphors. This approach represents a clear departure from the previous readings and an advocacy of the postmodern perspective. For Morgan (1997), each theory is viewed through the strengths and weaknesses it offers for understanding organizations. This approach represents the classical postmodern effort to extract the valuable aspects of a given theory and discard those that seem less relevant or useful. How do we determine if an organization is effective? According to Morgan (1997) “one best way” does not exist. But, we can take the useful portions of various perspectives, and while understanding their limitations, apply them to organizations to gain a better understanding of how those organizations work, or if they work at all.

In terms of big questions, Morgan (1997) may have something in common with Denhardt (2001) simply because both acknowledge the limitations of “one best way.” Further, Denhardt (2001) argues the educational framework we choose determines what we can know about public administration. Morgan (1997) would surely support Denhardt’s (2001) tenet that scholars should gain knowledge from a variety of perspectives in order to more completely and effectively understand public organizations.

Since Denhardt’s (2001) work on big questions surfaced in the discussion of Morgan (1997), it seems fitting that Denhardt’s (1981) work on organizations and individuals would follow in our parade of scholars. Organizations present individuals with a fundamental challenge to their individuality. The
typical organization is inflexible and oppressive, and not conducive to self-actualization (Denhardt, 1981). Denhardt’s (1981) arguments fall neatly into the classic arguments of conflict theory. Self-actualization provides the way out of all this evil oppression. When organizations recognize individuals as individuals and allow them to develop, a harmony may be created between the individual’s goals and organizational goals. Not surprisingly, Denhardt’s (1981) arguments fall in line with his (2001) discussion of the big questions. In discussing what public administration educators should teach, Denhardt (2001) continues to propose that the solution for understanding organizations and improving them rests with education.

Scott (2003) offers a new way of looking at organizations, through the lens of institutional theory. According to Scott (2003), all organizations can be understood as systems, and more specifically, as open systems. The environment, outside actors, and individuals who make up organizations all determine the organization’s effectiveness. An organization cannot escape outside influence, and thus, for Scott (2003) the environment proves very important. Organizations should not be examined simply based on their structure or function. Instead, a whole range of influences needs to be accounted for in order to gain a true understanding of any given organization.

As a big question, Scott (2003) seems to ask about the nature of organizations. However, unlike Neumann (1995), Scott (2003) does not suggest a formulaic approach to understanding the “one best way” to run an effective organization. Scott’s (2003) approach calls for understanding the wide variety of influences from a wide variety of sources that impact organizations.

From a modernist proscription, Jaffee (2001) offers what may be considered “neo-postmodernism.” Jaffee (2001) accepts the modernist premise that there exists “one best way” to achieve the effective organization. His argument rests on the fact that times have changed, and therefore, so must our organization theory. He outlines the ways technology has influenced the
organization and says other theories were useful in their time, but are now outdated. Claiming to be a postmodernist, Jaffee (2001) attacks the underlying assumptions of the other theories he mentions, particularly those of modernism. However, rather than reject those assumptions as irrelevant in the postmodern era, Jaffee (2001) argues that the fundamental questions of modernism still possess validity, they just need to be updated for the times.

Jaffee’s (2001) big question would seem to be what is the nature of the “new” organization? Following in Neumann’s (1995) footsteps, Jaffee (2001) asserts it is possible to answer this question. Further, he rejects Denhardt’s (2001 & 1981) belief that individuals need self-actualization. Instead, Jaffee (2001) asks, “How will organizations be able to extract this energy from human subjects who are able to reflect consciously on their roles and activities and who have the capacity to resist” (p. 288)? Jaffee (2001) seems to think the problem with the postmodern organization rests in its informed, enlightened, self-actualizing membership.

The politics school of organization theory, as discussed by Heffron (1989), challenges us to understand public organizations in terms of their political elements. What conflicts, relationships, and challenges are faced when people from different backgrounds with various goals come together in one organization with a supposedly common goal? In order to understand the organization, one must examine conflict. If we acknowledge that conflict is a necessary and inevitable element of organizational life, what can be learned from it? How we go about examining the conflicts inherent in the public organization will say a great deal about how we view both organization theory and public administration. For Heffron, there is no “one best way” for understanding organizations theory. However, looking at organizations as instruments of conflict and domination provides useful insight into the daily realities of organizational life. Too often, the oppressive role organizations play in the lives of the individual members receives scant attention in public organizational research. While accepting that
a variety of perspectives exist, viewing organizations through the lens of conflict can aid in overcoming the oppression of minorities typical of organizations following the rational model.

The point we are trying to make is that the various theories of the public firm, whether we are talking about the Classical model or Postmodern perspective of public organization theory, all public organizational theories promote the betterment of the public organization as a whole. Furthermore, found in the various theories of the public firm are multiple methods and mixed method approaches at conducting research for the betterment of the public organization.¹ This approach to the use of multiple methods and mixed method approaches of research stem from the various paradigms that direct knowledge and theory development in public organization theory (for our purposes) and for the social sciences in general. Now let’s return to the paradigmatic debate.

We feel that five dominant paradigms have directed knowledge and theory development in public organization theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 1995), despite the various attempts made by scholars at discrediting the opposing view (Popper, 1953; Kuhn, 1962; Daneke, 1990). In paradigmatic development three essential tenets are necessary: the ontological, epistemological and methodological arguments must be answered. The following table lists these paradigms and the three essential elements needed for paradigm construction.

**PARADIGMS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Ontology – realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. An apprehendable reality is assumed to exist, driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Multiple methods are defined as the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques in knowledge and theory development in public administration. Mixed method research techniques are defined as those attempts at combining both quantitative and qualitative components of a research design for knowledge and theory development. See Jick, 1979; Bednarz, 1985; Farrokh, 1987; Bernstein and Dyer, 1992; Johnson and Joslyn, 1995; Cole, 1996;
b. Epistemology - Duelist and objectivist  
   i. The investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be independent entities and the investigator studies the object without influencing it.

c. Methodology – Experimental and manipulative  
   i. Questions and hypotheses are stated in prepositional form and subjected to empirical tests to verify its validity and reliability.

*Postpositivism*  
  a. Ontology – Critical Realism  
     i. Reality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehendable because of basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomenon.  
     ii. Reality can never be perfectly known.

b. Epistemology – modified duelist/objectivist  
   ii. The replicability of existing data suggests probable truths.

c. Methodology – Modified experimental/manipulative

*Interpretivist*  
  a. Ontology – Relativism  
     i. Multiple realities exist based on individuals perception of the world.

b. Epistemology – transactional and subjectivist  
   i. The investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds.

c. Methodology – Hermeneutical and dialectical  
   i. Individual constructions can only be determined through interaction between and among investigators and respondents  
   ii. Hermeneutical techniques (one considers the whole in relation to its parts and vice versa)

*Conflict Theory*  
  a. Ontology – Historical Realism  
     i. Reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors and then crystallized into a series of structures that are assumed to be real.

b. Epistemology – Transactional and subjectivist
i. The investigator and investigated object are assumed to be linked
ii. Values of the investigator influences inquiry

c. Methodology – Dialogical and dialectical
   i. The transactional nature of inquiry requires a dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of the inquiry.
   ii. Uses history and subjugated knowledge to report suffering and conflict

Postmodernism

a. Ontology – Relativism & subjectivist
   i. The differences in social experiences can never be fully consumed, conquered or experienced

b. Epistomology - Transactional and subjectivist
   i. No absolute truths

c. Methodology – ones perception derived through spoken and unspoken language
   i. Cannot empirically test works from ones perspective
   ii. Emphasizes the use of cultural studies
   iii. Texts are seen as having a variety of potential meanings, none of which is the real meaning to be derived by some superior reader.
   iv. Interested in the variability of readers

Analysis

When the literature from public organization theory is reviewed the theoretical precepts driving these work(s) hangs from one of these five paradigms. In other words, the literature that exists identifying the essential elements of a public organization promotes various lenses on which one should view “a formal structure of the public’s will.” If we assume that all public organizations are created to promote the public’s will, and the public’s will is to promote one of the following values or a

---

2 See Denzin and Lincoln (1998) for an indepth analysis of the five dominant paradigms in the social sciences.
3 Our definition of the public organization borrows elements from the writings of Waldo, (1955); Barnard, (1938); Selznick, (1948); and Weick (1979). See appendix for these literary works we consulted in establishing our definition of the public organization.
combination of: efficiency, effectiveness, equity, responsiveness and accountability in the public firm (Klinger and Nalbandian, 1995), it seems that what the public is demanding from this formal structure is organizational efficacy (Public organization efficacy is defined as efforts promoting efficiency, effectiveness, equity, responsiveness and accountability through various modes of research, for advancing knowledge and theory about the discipline and practice of public administration). Therefore, suggesting that the big question for public administration is: how do we promote efficacy in the public firm?

If public organizations are formal expressions of the public’s will, charged with the power to represent, formulate and implement public policy, how do we know if they are successfully meeting societal demands? In a democracy, one way of holding social organizations accountable to the public is through evaluation (Rossi and Freeman, 1993). We define evaluation as recognized procedures of data gathering and analysis used to measure the efficacy of the public organization (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Credible evaluation is viewed differently from the major camps (or paradigms) concerned with the application of appropriate research methods for knowledge and theory development in public administration. Unfortunately, the failure of an acceptable consensus between “empiricism” (Kuhn, 1962), and those advocating “perception” as credible research (Habermas, 1987), has hindered paradigmatic progress in public administration.

The literature in public organizational theory utilizes the methods of both statistics and perception in an effort to advance knowledge and theory in public administration (Scott, 2003). Organizational theorists have recognized that both “numbers and words” (Rossman and Wilson, 1985) have equally contributed to knowledge and theory development in public administration because numbers are useful in answering certain questions (what, are, when, etc.), while perceptions and words

---

4 We define evaluation as the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, or the combining of these techniques, in an effort to study the public organization.
answer those questions left unanswered by numbers (how and why) (Yin, 1995). Hence, public organizational theorists have recognized that both words and numbers are necessary in promoting the efficacy of the public firm.

The ultimate problem with public administrations attempt at achieving consensus on what paradigm should direct our discipline can be blamed on the failure of scholars to budge on the question of what constitutes credible research in public administration (White and Adams, 1995). Therefore, we are calling for a paradigm that recognizes the essential quality of both statistics and perceptions for knowledge and theory development in public administration because organization theory has exhibited its usefulness in explaining the theories of the public firm.

One essential criticism of advocating multiple methods and mixed method approaches for theory development is the issue of “crossing paradigms” to answer important questions regarding the public firm Greene and Caracelli, 1997). Critics will argue that the three essential components (ontological, epistemological, and methodological) of a paradigm are fundamentally in opposition to each other because of the questions in which they intend to address, and how they propose that these questions should be addressed. The nature of reality (the ontological argument), suggests that certain realities exist that we can ultimately know, but there are certain things we can never comprehend. It is up to the researcher to find this reality (epistemological argument) through recognized methods of theory development (methodological argument) that objectively or subjectively measure partial aspects of social phenomenon to determine this reality. In the researcher’s attempts at measuring partial aspects of social phenomenon, in explaining reality, they must choose between objective and subjective methods of data analysis (numbers or words), inevitably sealing their eternal fate as either a quantitative or qualitative researcher in public administration. If public administration can grasp the notion that both
numbers and words are credible sources of research, the essential elements for paradigmatic progress in public administration will be established.

We recognize that research in the sub-fields of public administration (budgeting, human resources management and public policy) also recognize both numbers and words as methodological attempts at knowledge and theory development, but the “nature of the public organization” (Neumann, 1997, p. 410) makes organizational theory research much more than a theory of administrative management (Behn, 1995). From Behn’s perspective, it seems that public administration has veered little from Henry’s paradigm of public administration as public management. Although management and motivation are important aspects of the public firm, a theory about the nature of the organization supersedes theories related to the vital elements of administrative management such as those suggested by Behn. For instance, in Neumann’s question about the nature of the organization, the author suggests that organizations are formal expressions of the public’s will created for the purpose of representing society’s values. Assuming we are talking about public administration in America, public organizations are societal creations charged with the power to express the public’s will (those values found in American democracy) (Kirlin, 1997). Therefore, we view the administrative apparatus (budgeting, human resources management and public policy) of the public organization as secondary to the ultimate nature of the public organization: the representation, formulation and implementation of the public’s will.

To this point we have argued that the nature of the public organization, and the multiple methods of evaluation necessary for measuring the efficacy of the public firm, are essential components for establishing a paradigm in public administration. One final component that is necessary for paradigmatic progress in public administration is distinguishing the difference between a theory and a paradigm.
Denhardt claims that a paradigm “is an intellectual schema on which to hang theory” (Denhardt, 1992), suggesting that paradigms are personal views of the world that endorse certain types of knowledge and theory development. Paradigms assist us in framing questions and the methodological choices we use to measure our questions. Therefore, who is to say that one question is more important than another is promoting the efficacy of the public firm? Theories, on the other hand, “are partially interpreted calculi in which only the observation terms are directly interpreted” (Putnam, 1988). A theory is inadequate as a paradigmatic choice because it is a partial aspect of reality. We believe the various attempts at establishing a paradigm for public administration have been guilty of calling theories paradigms. Here is why.

Henry’s premise is that the field of public administration has witnessed several “paradigm shifts” (Kuhn, 1962), since Wilson (1887) and Goodnow’s (1914) first advocated the politics/administration dichotomy (although these scholars never coined this phrase). For Henry, the politics/administration dichotomy was formed as a result of various scholars establishing a consensus that politics was absent from administration. In turn, this separated public administration from politics, establishing itself as a distinct discipline premised on the Principles of Administration (POSDCORB)(Wilson, 1887; Goodnow, 1914; Taylor, 1919; Willoughby, 1927; Gulick and Urwick, 1937). Henry further assumes that when each paradigm was discredited it was replaced with a new paradigm (For instance, Simon’s principles of public administration challenged the politics/administration paradigm resulting in the development of duel paradigms: public administration as political science and public administration as administrative management). Finally after four attempts at establishing a paradigm, consensus was reached that no paradigm actually represents all the aspects of public administration, resulting in an identity crisis for public administration.
The problem with Henry’s paradigmatic development of public administration is that the five paradigms of public administration represent more of a theory than a real paradigm (if we use the previous definitions to make the distinction between the two terms). For example, does Henry ever address the ontological,, epistemological and methodological necessary for paradigmatic progress? We believe the paradigmatic questions were never answered by Henry. The closest attempt at addressing these paradigmatic concerns is offered by Gregory Daneke.

Daneke offers a possible paradigmatic solution for public administration by shifting the emphasis on empirical research to the “new perspectives” emerging in the social sciences. For Daneke, empirical models are inadequate for public administration because values are an important part of what our discipline is about. Statistical tests attempt to remove perceptions in an effort to establish a “science” of public administration (science defined as theory testing through objective research). Since objectivity is absent in public administration, empirical testing is inadequate for answering our major questions in public administration. Observation and perception are the methodological choices for knowledge and theory development in public administration, according to Daneke. Daneke points out that public administration is suffering from a lack of consensus over a paradigm because the field is split on the traditionalistic approach to knowledge and theory development, compared to his new perceptions of public administration. For Daneke, until consensus is achieved on the methodological choice for knowledge and theory development, public administration will retain its identity crises. Daneke invites scholars to view “advanced systems theory” as a possible paradigmatic choice for public administration, but recognizes the limitations of such a theory as a paradigm.

The problem with Daneke’s depiction of a paradigm is his emphasis on new perceptions as the methodological choice for knowledge and theory development in public administration. Daneke suggests that advanced systems theory is a rigorous collection of various types of social data on various
social units in the public organization gathered and tested for determining the best way to improve their efficacy. For Daneke, the public organization is as small as a public organization or as large as a polity (this is the ontological question for Daneke). The epistemological question for Daneke is the problem (what reality exists that we can know?). For Daneke, it is through experience and observation, or the paradigmatic choice of interpretivism. Daneke is critical of the positivist paradigm because he feels that statistical modeling fails to answer important questions in public administration. Hence, we feel that Daneke’s argument is flawed because there are some questions that are better answered by statistics than observation. Therefore, we view Daneke’s advanced systems theory as another attempt in public administration to call a theory a paradigm. However, we give Daneke credit for establishing the notion of turning to organization theory as a possible paradigmatic stance for public administration because of the definition he provides for this theory of the firm.

If we use Daneke’s argument that advanced systems theory is primarily concerned with improving the function of the public firm, while simultaneously offering aid to decision makers on how to make the right choices. Then can we not say that Daneke is simply proposing that we conduct research in public administration for the promotion of efficacy in the public firm? The issue of public organization efficacy is found in other theories of the public organization as well. When the literature is reviewed several theories of the public firm emerge. The following is a list of those theories:

- Classical Organization Theory
- Neoclassical Organization Theory
- Modern Structural Organization Theory
- Open & Closed Systems Theory
- Organizational Culture, Conflict, Chaos and Contingency Theory
- Postmodernism and the Information Age
- Human Relations School of Thought
- Individual Behavioral and Motivation
- Leadership and Power
Organizational Change and Development

These theories of the public firm, in various forms, all promote the efficacy of the public organization. In an effort to promote public organization efficacy various methods of research were conducted about the firm. Therefore, if Daneke is concerned with efficacy, as well as the various other theories of the firm, isn’t the big question then: how to best promote efficacy in the public organization?

To answer this question one must borrow elements from the five dominant paradigms in the social sciences. If efficacy is assumed to incorporate the values of efficiency, effectiveness, equity, accountability and responsiveness, the function of scholars and practitioners in promoting efficacy is to find the one best mix (balancing the values according to the needs of the public firm) of these values for the particular firm at hand. The proper balance of values will be determined through the use of various evaluation techniques measuring what the firm has deemed necessary for the promotion of efficacy. In other words, if the firm is concerned with efficiency, the proper evaluation techniques will be empirical in nature. If the firm is concerned primarily with responsiveness, the evaluation technique may incorporate more qualitative components into its evaluation process, shifting the paradigm to postpositivism. Public firms concerned with human behavior may choose strictly qualitative processes of evaluation because determining organizational efficacy is case sensitive. Again, shifting their paradigm to interpretivism. It is up to those evaluating the research to accept the outcomes as contributions to the promotion of the efficacy of the public firm. The acceptance of these outcomes will be contingent on the reviewers understanding that certain questions of efficacy are best answered by numbers while other questions are best served by words! Once the practice of evaluating knowledge and theory development on the question(s) addressing the promotion of public organization efficacy are established throughout the field of public administration, consensus on a paradigmatic stance in public
administration will be achieved, erasing the identity crisis that has hindered public administrations

travail towards the future!

Conclusion

Paradigmatic progress has been hindered in public administration because public administration has failed to answer its big questions. We offered a potential starting point for paradigmatic progress in public administration: organization theory redefined to mean public organization efficacy. We redefine organizational theory as public organization efficacy first, because of the nature of the public organization, and second due to the research methods utilized by scholars to generate knowledge about the public firm. If scholars and practitioners would recognize the utility of both numbers and words in the advancement of knowledge about the public firm, a foundation for building a paradigm could be established. We believe various examples from public organizational theory have provided us with this foundation. We suggest that once scholars recognize the merit of knowledge and theory development as the promotion of public organization efficacy, by accepting that certain questions are best served by numbers while others are better addressed by words, a paradigm for public administration will be formed. Once consensus is achieved in viewing research from this lens, the identity crisis that has plagued our discipline for decades will then be replaced with a paradigm for directing knowledge and theory development in public administration.
References


Henry, Niculius. (1973)


