
Guest editorial: Historical trends and emerging issues in public management education

Guest editorial

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1. The evolution of continuing public management education

The question of how to recruit and educate those who work in the service of the state as leaders and managers, to enhance dedication, relevant and state-of-the-art competencies and the right ethical habitus, is an ancient one (Rutgers, 1997). It was debated by Plato, Aristotle and Seneca in the Greco-Roman era more than two millennia ago, was organized in the classical Chinese mandarin system around 600 AD and was later emulated in other East Asian countries such as Japan and Korea (Kim, 2017). The question has been a core issue in public administration since its establishment as an academic field at the end of the 19th century (Weber, 1968; Wilson, 1887; Wren and Bedeian, 2020).

Issues concerning public management education (PME) are related to the properties of the public sector to be managed, and these properties changed dramatically, though with large variations, across the globe in the 20th century (Hansen *et al.*, 2020; Tanzi and Schuknecht, 2000).

These changes were characterized by a move from relatively small states, as indicated by the level of public spending, around 1,900 primarily responsible for security (military and police) and with small welfare expenses to much larger welfare states with substantially expanded responsibilities at the end of the century providing, besides security, education, healthcare services, social security and redistribution of welfare between generations and social groups.

The post-war decades from the 1950s to 1980s in particular saw a rapid expansion of the welfare state. The trend was global, but it was especially strong in more wealthy economies and especially in Northern Europe. For instance, the small Scandinavian states – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – expanded government spending from 10, 14 and 17% of national gross domestic product (GDP) in 1951 to 56, 49 and 44% of GDP in 1980, respectively (see Table 1). Larger wealthy economies like the US, Germany and Japan expanded government spending from 13%, 30 and 17% in 1951 to 34%, 48 and 33% of GDP in 1980, respectively (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, 2018). Large, recently independent and less wealthy countries like India and Indonesia expanded government spending from 6 to 17% in 1951 to 17 and 22% of GDP in 1980, respectively (see Table 1).

The public sector expansion trend has been less pronounced since 1980. The overall trend is that it has continued or stagnated, but in most cases, it has not been reversed. Among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the general government expenditure averaged 40.8% of GDP in 2019, and among 27 of the 36 OECD countries, government expenditures were between 35 and 50% of GDP. For instance, in 2019, general government expenditure was 41% of GDP in the UK and 38% of GDP in the USA (OECD, 2021).

The point in presenting these statistics is to show that the public sector, although with important differences between countries, expanded enormously in the post-war decades in most countries, and there was thus a need for another type of management in public administration to cope with this much larger public sector responsible for, among other things, a major part of two of the most rapidly expanding industries in the world: education and healthcare. There was, in other words, a need to substitute old public administration (OPA) with something new. At first, this new shift, from traditional administration to New Public Management (NPM), inspired a stronger focus on markets, performance and results-based



management. Later a shift to a post NPM period, or New Public Governance, has been observed in some countries in which public managers focus to a greater extent on creating public value in networks through digitization and collaboration across organizational boundaries (Christensen and Laegreid, 2010; Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006; Hansen *et al.*, 2020; Torfing *et al.*, 2020).

The NPM movement of the 1980 and 1990s is often presented narrowly as a largely unsuccessful, neoliberal attempt to roll the state back (Hood and Dixon, 2016), but in a broader perspective, it was also, to many reformers in many countries, an attempt to reform the welfare state in order to preserve the best parts of it by making it more efficient and responsive to citizen's needs (Hansen *et al.*, 2020; Hirschman, 1991). NPM included several new governance models (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006; Hood, 1991) including competition, privatization and performance management, but it also included a new and more prominent role for public managers.

1.1 The rise of continuing public management education

Thus, NPM facilitated a new focus on PME across the globe (Ellwood, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2014). In many countries, continuing PME has become an expanding industry with heavy involvement by universities, university colleges and private consultancy companies (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002).

Education programs such as master's in public administration (MPA), master's in public management (MPM), master's in public governance (MPG) and master's in public policy (MPP) are provided in several countries (Van Wart *et al.*, 2014).

At present, public sectors experience several divergent developments. For instance, in most advanced economies, demographic changes pressure public expenses which combined with a lowering workforce decrease the level of financial resources. This implies that new and different approaches within care and education must be developed requiring, in some situations, quite fundamental organizational changes.

In many countries, the present situation has also increased the debate on post-NPM initiatives and the possible implications of, for instance, turning public organizations from NPM towards NPG priorities. It is however not an easy task to implement a new paradigm and develop new ways of organizing and collaboration with various groups of citizens. More often different paradigms of governance coexist and create tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes to public managers (Torfing *et al.*, 2020). These tensions between different managerial models and values are not new to public administration (Rosenbloom, 1983), but it illustrate the level of complexity, which public managers often experience in their daily practice.

Due to increased organizational complexity and organizational changes, management education has gained increasing interest in recent years at several levels: societal, political, organizational and individual (Armstrong and Fukami, 2009; Bouckaert, 2008; Van Wart *et al.*, 2014).

	DNK	NOR	SWE	USA	DEU	JPN	GBR	IND	IDN
1951*	10	14	17	13	30	17	29	6	17
1980*	53	46	41	34	48	33	48	17	22
2007*	51	41	49	35	44	33	44	26	19
2021*	51	48	50	42	51	43	45	30	18

Note(s): *IMF: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/exp@FPP/USA/JPN/GBR/SWE/IND/DNK/NOR/IDN/DEU>

Table 1.
Post-war government
expenditure as
percentage of GDP in
selected countries

Thus today, the approach towards PME has changed dramatically, as continuing PME is emphasized as increasingly important for the continuous development of the public sector.

2. Basic properties of the public management education literature

The literature on PME is not extensive, but the number of publications has increased in recent years. A search on the subject in the SCOPUS database March 2023 showed 336 documents published between 1926 and 2023, of whom 333 has been published since 1974 and 84 published since 2019 [1].

Of the 84 documents published since 2019, half of them (42 documents) was published in two North American journals specializing in PME: *Teaching public administration* (published in its current version since 2012) and *Journal of Public Affairs Education* (published under its current name since 1998).

The 336 publications are largely from the Anglo-American (182 publications from USA and UK), the European (71 publications) and to a lesser extent the Asian context (52 publications). Research publications about PME in Africa (12 publications) and Latin America (10 publications) are very few, especially when the number of people living in these countries are considered. Publications about PME in large countries like India (1) and Indonesia (0) are (almost) entirely absent from the SCOPUS database.

Publications from USA, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK are the most influential as indicated by the number of citations to publications from these countries.

Thus, the subjects and themes predominant in the research literature on PME, at least in the SCOPUS database analysed here, tend to be biased towards the Anglo-American and European context.

3. Predominant issues in public management education (PME)

What are the predominant issues in the PME literature?

Empirically, our method to answer the question is twofold. First, we focused on the subjects and themes from some of the most cited publications in our sample of 336 articles on PME [2]. Second, we focused on subjects and themes predominant in the more recent publications published since 2019.

Conceptually, an approach inspired by evaluation research is used (Scriven, 1991; Vedung, 1997), which suggests that all interventions, including education, are characterized by some basic issues:

- (1) The purpose issue: What is the overall purpose of continuing PME?
- (2) The organization issue: How is continuing PME organized and delivered?
- (3) The content issue: What subjects are taught in continuing PME programs?
- (4) The method issue: What methods are used in teaching continuing PME?
- (5) The impact issue: How is knowledge from continuing PME transferred to organizational practice?
- (6) The adaptation and learning issue: How is continuing PME adapted to the changing challenges of public management practice?
- (7) The context issue: What are the similarities and differences between PME systems in different countries?

Due to the scope of the article, the approach here is illustrative rather than all-encompassing and show some of the predominant issues related to each question. Since our subject is

continuing PME, that has been our primary focus, but that is related to the basic education of public managers, and most of the literature does not make the distinction.

1. The purpose issue: What is the overall purpose of continuing PME?

Continuing PME is a part of larger civil service systems that can be described as “mediating institutions that mobilise human resources in the service of the affairs of the state in a given territory” (Morgan and Perry, 1988; van der Meer, 2011). Thus, the overall purpose of PME may be described as to mobilize human resources in the service of the state, to enhance dedication, relevant and state of the art competencies and the right ethical habitus. The more specific meaning of purpose however varies across contexts and over time.

Denhardt (2001, p. 526) suggest four big questions of PME, of whom the first two may be seen as related to purpose:

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

Farrell *et al.* (2022) use Denhardt’s big questions as a point of departure, but adds further questions related normatively to basic values of liberal democracy and science: virtues of democracy, fairness and social equity, importance of evidence in making decisions, balancing individualism and community and the importance of the political context (Farrell *et al.*, 2022, p. 124).

Such basic values are suggested in several publications in the PME literature and the overall impression of the PME literature is that the purpose issue is well covered. The literature may however benefit from being better conceptually related to broader attempts to describe the inventory of public service values (Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007; Perry and Hondeghem, 2008) and to attempts to formulate principles of good governance (Fukuyama, 2013; Rotberg, 2014; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

2. The organization problem: How is continuing PME organized and delivered?

How should the basic and continuing education and training of public managers be organized and delivered? Should the education and training be organized internally in each organization, department or sector like the tradition often has been in the military and police? Should it be organized and delivered by national higher education institutions? Or should it be organized and delivered by private contractors like consultancy firms competing on a market?

In the European and Anglo-American context, the main trend has been towards national higher education institutions organizing and delivering PME. Public management education became institutionalized as the subject of university degrees delivered by departments and schools in higher education during the 20th century.

In a recent primarily descriptive analysis (Perry and Mee, 2022), Perry and Mee, for instance, show how PME programs started slowly in the US in 1924 with the formation of Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, while the number of schools dedicated to public service education took off from the 1960s (Perry and Mee, 2022, pp. 19–20) and currently include 63 named entities in the US. They further analyse changes in the organization of PMEs and continuing PMEs in USA. They find that schools of public service “constitute the largest growth category of formal structure” across US universities in

terms of teaching PME. Most of the PME programs are housed in public institutions (71) while 12 are housed in private institutions across 37 states.

3. What subjects are taught in continuing PME programs?

The content of public management education tends to be a mix of law, economics and increasingly management and public policy/political science. There are however significant variations between national traditions.

In a couple of interesting quantitative analyses of the European context of PME (2003, 2015), Hajnal shows the presence of three distinct approaches distinguished by differences in the content of PME education: A legalistic tradition, a political science approach and a managerial approach. Several continental European countries are characterized by a broad and significant political science component in their curricula. The Nordic countries put a stronger emphasis on business administration, while most Southern European countries and several post-communist countries are distinguished by the predominance of law in program curricula. Hajnal's (2015) follow-up analysis indicates a trend away from law and towards more public policy and political science and more generic management.

From the American context, a suggestion by Ellwood indicates how a curriculum largely dominated by management and political science may look "... economic analysis, data analysis, communications skills, skills in dealing with people (macro- and micro-organizational behavior), and especially political analysis. These generic skills would then be supplemented by a series of functional courses—accounting, financial management, marketing, and operations. A strategy course would act as a capstone ..." (Ellwood, 2008). More recently, curriculum design has been the subject of several articles and a special issue on the subject (O'Neill, 2022).

In continuing PME, the choice of content may partly be decided by demand. For instance, in some of the most successful Danish master programs in public management, a number of courses covering subjects within management, political science and to some extent law is offered but only supplied if enough students apply for them (Bjørnholt and Hansen, 2015; Greve and Pedersen, 2017). Thus, the final content of such a master varies from student to student.

Increasingly international trends and accreditation institutions influence the content of continuing PME (Rosenbaum, 2014). While many PME programs may choose not to apply for accreditation as recent evidence indicates (Perry and Mee, 2022), their criteria for good practice are likely to have an indirect impact.

4. What methods are used in teaching continuing PME?

Traditional university teaching was and still to a large extent is characterized by professors giving lectures to students who listen and take notes. This stands in contrast to the recommendation from several meta-analyses recommending that PME should "be somewhat customized to the participant's current on-the-job realities" (Stage and Meier, 2022) as transfer between education and organizational context is thereby maximized.

In the endeavour of structuring PME, a distinction can be made between closed and open customization of PME (Stage and Meier, 2022). Closed customization refers to educational activities designed for a specific company or organization, whereas open customization covers generic educational activities having a strong focus on including situations, problems and challenges from the participants' organizational practice. The latter approach seems to hold a dominant position in the Scandinavian approach to PME. The profound interest in integrating organizational practice in continuing PME resembles the arguments against generic management education put forward by Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 2005, 2009), which might partly explain Mintzberg's strong influence and popularity in the Scandinavian context.

In their review, Stage and Meier (2022) describes that PME's are often designed according to three elements (1) theories (2) cases and (3) relationships. The three elements vary in different programs; however, the teacher's sensitivity in combining the three in an ever-changing teaching context seems to be a cornerstone in the endeavour of offering PME with high impact.

The above-mentioned characteristics of PME may support why problem-based learning as pedagogical approach in PME seems to hold a strong potential in facilitating managers' learning processes. Anja Thomassens article in this special issue show some of the advantages and challenges with problem-based learning. It stands out that integration of examples from organizational practice could be combined with active involvement via inquiry and reflective thinking, potentially leading to the development of self-reflexivity.

5. How is knowledge from continuing PME transferred to organizational practice?

Since PME programs has been growing and societal investments in them has increased, the issue of their impact, relevance and utility for the practice of public management has gained increasing importance.

Not much research, however, seems to have been done on this issue, as indicated by Peter Sørensen's review of the literature in this special issue. Notable exceptions are Sørensen's own work (Sørensen *et al.*, 2022) as well as an interesting analysis of the pre-entry and post-entry personal values, job motivations, sector perceptions and career preferences of MPA students in Asia (van der Wal, 2017).

6. How is continuing PME adapted to the changing challenges of public management practice?

PME takes place in a national and international context that changes. A basic issue is to what extent and how PME program should learn from and adapt to such a changing context and to what extent PME programs has a choice if they want to stay relevant. Several recent articles discuss these issues (Oldfield, 2017; Wessels, 2022), and two of the papers in this special issue discuss the adaptation to a changing market in Indonesia and the change from old public administration to NPM in India.

Historically, the evolution of PME programmes may – at least for many European countries (Hajnal, 2003, 2015; Hansen, 2013) – be plausibly described as changes from a legalistic rule-based approach to an economic and managerial approach, to a more political and democratic approach, and to a hybrid or mix of all these trends. The political economy approach applied here suggest that these changes where responses to changing societal conditions.

The NPM reform wave which started in the 1980s is still important and strong in many countries and has influenced the PME agenda, Both by increasing the scope of PME and by changing the form and content of PME.

The fiscal austerity wave after the financial crises in the late 2000s put downsizing and other forms of economic adaptation high on the agenda and in some countries also had negative impact on the economy of many MPE programs (Oldfield, 2017).

More recent issues are to what extent and how the digitization trend, that currently changes the practice of public administration all over the globe, should be incorporated in PME.

Another issue is related to sustainability and climate change. Should such a megatrend be incorporated in PME? And if yes – how should it be done?

7. What are the similarities and differences between PME systems in different countries?

While PME still is and traditionally has been embedded in the nation state and notions of nation building, it is also increasingly influenced by transnational and sometimes global

trends in world society (Meyer *et al.*, 1997). For instance, international organizations like the UN (Rosenbaum, 2014), the World Bank (Grindle, 2013) and OECD (OECD, 2021) analyse national public management systems and encourage and support specific trends towards what they claim to be better management and better management education. Thus, a comparative approach to both public management research and PME is increasingly relevant (Jreisat, 2005).

The dimensions in the seven-issue approach suggested here could be analysed separately or combined when comparing PME across countries. In a recent interesting comparative analysis, El-Taliawi and colleagues analyse public policy education in the global south (El-Taliawi *et al.*, 2021) comparing 46 public policy schools on various dimensions including degree offerings, institutional establishment and status, and mission. They find that “. . . contrary to pre-held assumptions, the majority of emerging policy schools are not replicating Western models, but rather creating unique prototypes that speak to their local and regional character . . .” (El-Taliawi *et al.*, 2021, p. 388).

4. The contributions of the special issue

The *seven-issue approach* used to discuss predominant issues in the PME literature show that the contributions of the special issues relate to important gaps in the literature.

The first contribution in this special issue is by Peter Sørensen, *The Effects of Continuing Public Sector Management Education: a Systematic Literature Review*. As mentioned above, Sørensen’s contribution is related to *the impact issue*.

In this article, Peter Sørensen has reviewed previous research on the effects of continuing public sector management education, masters’ programs MPA, MPM and MPG, by systematizing existing knowledge, identify gaps in the literature in addition to pointing out need for future research. The review reveals a limited number of papers documenting the effects of the education programs. Most papers regard the individual level effects, very few the organizational level and a few more the professional level. Given the low number of studies on the organizational and professional level, these are suggested to be most relevant for future research.

In the next article by Anja Overgaard Thomassen, *Developing public managers’ self-reflective capacity through continuing management education*, the aim is to explore how public managers’ problem-solving capacity develops during a personal development module program. Thus, Thomassen’s article contributes to *the method part of the seven-issue approach*.

Especially, the integration of problem-based learning and inquiry of personal managerial puzzlements is scrutinized. The study reveals that managers become better a problem-solving – as they integrate self-reflective processes in daily managerial practice. Regarding design and methodology, the study is inspired by Brinkmann’s (Brinkmann, 2012) approach to inquiry of everyday life materials and the personal development module approach seems to facilitate managers’ awareness of the underlying assumptions influencing their daily managerial practice. This new insight increases the managers’ potential ways of problem-solving and capacity to self-reflection, which appears to improve the managers’ capacity in handling complex organizational issues. Thereby, the article exemplifies and adds to the Dewey (1933) approach to reflective thinking in problem-based learning.

India and Indonesia are rare contexts in the international PME literature and the contributions by Prakash Nisha from India and Pranakusuma Sudhana and colleagues from Indonesia are important contributions to fill the important research gap related to *the context issue* in the seven-issue approach.

Pranakusuma Sudhana *et al.*’s article, *Explaining the Low Enrolment Intention at International Universities in Indonesia: A Serial Mediation Study*, is about the unsuccessful

relationship between brand awareness of prominent international universities operating in Indonesia and enrolment intention. In terms of our seven-issue approach, the paper is clearly related to *the adaptation and learning issue*. The article is based on quantitative data methodological approach, i.e. questionnaire among 132 prospective student respondents, and where it has been used partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique for data analysis purposes. The results reveal that the awareness of international education brands must be subsequently perceived as congruent with the prospective students' self-image, in terms of resource sufficiency before developing enrolment intention by forming the desired brand attitude. The article thus has practical implications, since it adds theoretical and managerial knowledge regarding branding and marketing in higher education. The article is in many respects a pioneering work that examines branding as a phenomenon in the international university landscape in Indonesia.

In terms of our seven-issue approach, *the adaptation and learning issues* are also the primary focus in Prakash Nisha's paper, which is the last article in this special issue to Prakash Nisha: *Role of Management Education in Adapting the Indian Public Sector to Market-based Economic Reforms*. This article focusses on management education provided to public sector officers in India in the wake of NPM reforms. The reforms exposed the public sector enterprises to competitive market forces, raising the need to develop market-thinking, privatization and a competitive logic among managers in public sector enterprises. The study follows a thematic approach based on unstructured interviews of senior executives of Indian public sector enterprises covering oil and gas, aeronautical, power and transportation sectors. This study adds value to the limited literature available on the management education of public servants in India. In doing so, the study brings out (1) various models of management education provided to public servants across industries, (2) provide evidence on the extent of NPM implementation, (3) identify barriers for transitioning the learnings from the management courses to the workplace and (4) suggest changes for improving effectiveness of NPM implementation. Among other things, the article reveals challenges with introducing market thinking in public enterprises, which is already characterized by a hierarchical management logic. The study will be of significance to policymakers in designing management education programs for public sector employees.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the research literature on PME and training suggests that the expansion of PME is related to the expansion of the public sector in the 20th century and especially in the decades after Second World War. The literature is predominantly from the Anglo-American and European context, while contributions from Africa – South Africa is a notable exception – and Latin America are rare.

The discussions and themes characterizing the PME literature can be usefully summarized as related to seven basic issues: Purpose, organization, content, method, impact, adaptation and context issues. The articles in the special issue cover primarily the latter four issues. Several gaps in the literature are suggested – especially research from other contexts than the Anglo-American and European context.

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Notes

1. 16 March 2023 to be exact – The search terms were “public management education” OR “Teaching Public Administration” OR “Master in Public Administration” OR “Master in Public Management” OR “Public Administration education”.
2. In fact, the most cited publication was excluded since the subject was research methodology (Ybema *et al.*, 2009).

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