

THE DOMAIN OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

Public Administration as a discipline is traditionally associated with the domain of the public sector and the executive duties of government. Various developments during the past decades have had a marked effect on the delimitation of the public sector and the role of governmental institutions in serving society. Partnerships between public institutions and so-called private bodies, non-governmental organisations and other entities necessitate a re-evaluation of the area of study of Public Administration. This article is intended to introduce a debate on the determination of the domain of Public Administration in a contemporary state in which the government and private sectors have to co-operate to satisfy the complex needs of society. Thus attention has to be devoted not only to the traditional activities associated with administration and management, but also acknowledging the need for governance in rendering services to society.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally the study of Public Administration concerned the administrative activities concerned with the governing and the administrative requirements to give effect to governmental policies. The contemporary state has developed to such an extent that the area of study of the Discipline needs to be reconsidered. It has to be established whether Public Administration could indeed claim to have an exclusive domain and whether the *public sector* still could be identified unambiguously. It seems as though scholars of Public Administration should reconsider the area of study and even commence discussions with related disciplines in an effort to enhance the knowledge base of the Discipline and to improve the quality and service rendering to society by employees with a sound ethical base and properly trained in the art and science of administration, management and governance.

ROOTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the development of the science of Public Administration four generations can be distinguished according to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* viz: one pre-generation and three actual generations.

The pre-generation

The pre-generation includes thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle and Machiavelli. Until the birth of the national state, the emphasis concerning society lay principally in moral and political issues, and on the organisation of the public administration. The operation of this administration was a less urgent problem. From the 16th century, the national state was the reigning model of the administrative organisation in Western Europe. These states needed an organisation for the implementation of law and order and for setting up a defensive structure. The need for expert civil servants, with knowledge about, administration and the military organisation, grew.

In the 18th century the need for administrative expertise in West European countries grew even further. Therefore the king of Prussia established professorates in Cameralism, an economic and social school of thought to reform society. A well known professor of Cameralism was Prof. J.H.G. Justi, who linked Cameralism and the idea of natural law with each other, but the leading Public Administration scholar at that time was Christian Wolff, who could be considered as a major contributor to the writings on the modern science of Public Administration.

The first generation

Lorenz von Stein, since 1855 professor in Vienna, is considered the founder of the science of Public Administration in Europe. In the time of Von Stein the science of Public Administration was considered to be a form of administrative law. It should already be clear that even at that stage Public Administration was linked to the actions of the state (although the functions of the national state was not finalised during this period). His opinions were innovative in several respects:

- He considered the science of Public Administration a melting pot of several disciplines. In the opinion of Von Stein the science of Public Administration was an integrating science.
- According to Von Stein the science of Public Administration was an interaction between theory and practice. He considered the science of Public Administration as the theory but that practice had to form the base.
- Von Stein thought that the science of Public Administration should strive to adopt a scientific method.

In the United States Woodrow Wilson was the first to consider the science of Public Administration as an area of study. Wilson was more influential to the science of Public

Administration than Von Stein, primarily due to an article Wilson wrote in the *Political Science Quarterly* in 1887 in which he argued in favour of four concepts:

- separation between politics and the public administration;
- consideration of the government from a commercial perspective;
- comparative analysis between political and private organisations and political schemes; and
- reaching effective management by training civil servants and assess their quality.

Most scholars of Public Administration are familiar with the article by Woodrow Wilson entitled *The study of Administration* which was published in June 1887 in the *Political Science Quarterly* (2, 1997-222) and is generally considered as the origin of the study of Public Administration. This source is one of the most quoted sources in articles, dissertations and theses on the Discipline. Wilson argued that "... the field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics."... (T)he object of administrative study is to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of empirical experiment and set them upon foundations laid deep in stable principle" (*Ibid.*). He also made it clear that the study of administration should be clearly distinguished from the study of politics. He acknowledges a science of administration for America must be principles which have democratic policy very much at heart. And to suit American habit, all general theories must, as theories, keep modestly in the background, not in open argument only, but even in our minds – lest opinions satisfactory only to the standards of the library should be dogmatically used as if they must be quite as satisfactory to the standards of practical politics as well." (*Ibid.*)

From this brief and somewhat cursory overview of the crux of Wilson's introduction of the study of administration it is already clear that the Discipline concerned the executive actions of government. The deduction could also be made that Public Administration (as the Discipline became known) had a limited focus i.e. on the administrative duties of the state as an organ responsible for the orderly conduct of public affairs. The roots of Public Administration are often solely ascribed to the abovementioned article by Wilson. However, it will be argued that Wilson's article was indeed not the first reference to the study of the administrative responsibilities of the state.

The second generation

The discussion about the separation between politics and the public administration as argued by Wilson continued to play an important role up to 1945. Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick integrated the ideas of earlier theorists like Henri Fayol into a comprehensive theory of administration. Gulick and Urwick believed that the thoughts of Fayol offered a systematic treatment of management, which was unique at that time. They believed that this could be applied as well for the management of companies as for administrative sciences related to the public sector. They did not want to separate the two disciplines, but believed a single Science of Administration, which exceeds the borders between the private and the public sector, could exist. Later on the Science of Administration focussed

primarily on governmental organisations. The reasoning of the Science of Administration was largely borrowed from the fourteen principles of organisation of Fayol. Other authors developed different approaches to delimitate the area of study, but will not be discussed as the focus of this discussion is on the area of study.

The third generation

After 1945 the third generation arose which questioned the ideas of Wilson and the second generation. Initially the distinction between politics and the public administration was strongly relativised by the third generation, but the discussion would continue. Because of various political scandals Public Administration as a science had to detach itself from politics. This allowed the Discipline to establish itself as an independent Discipline with an own body of knowledge.

Public administration as an academic discipline

The academic field is often considered to have evolved in the United States. In Europe, notably England and Germany under the influence of Max Weber, it started as a separate scholarly field in the 1890s, but it was first taught in Continental universities in the 1720s according to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*.

A few Public Administration theorists advocate a bright line differentiation of the professional field from related academic disciplines like Political Science and Sociology. In general, the interdisciplinary nature of Public Administration is acknowledged. Although Public Administration theory is not the focus of this discussion it is merely mentioned as it proves that it is the domain where discussions of the meaning and purpose of government, bureaucracy, budgets, governance, and public affairs take place. In recent years, public administration theory has occasionally connoted a heavy orientation toward critical theory and post modern philosophical notions of *government*, *governance*, and *power*, but many Public Administration scholars support a classical definition of the term which gives weight to constitutionality, service, bureaucratic forms of organisation, and hierarchical government. It will be pointed out later in the discussion that the time has arrived to reconsider the domain of the area of study as a result of the current roles and functions of the contemporary state.

George Langrod published a rather insignificantly titled book: *Some current problems of administration in France today* (1961). The title of the book is rather misleading and does not indicate the valuable contents concerning the roots of administrative studies in Europe in the eighteenth century. The statement is inter alia quoted by the Swiss writer Herbert Luethy that the secret of the continuity of French history lies in its Public Administration and not in any particular farsightedness on the part of her rulers and statesmen. (1961. 1). Cases are even quoted of *overinspectors* of Public Administration appointed in 1247. Later under Napoleon's rule préfets embodied the concept of "...Public Administration as a continuous task to be carried on by a group of civil servants subordinate to the head of State, forming a hierarchical pyramid of monocratic administrative offices..." (*Ibid.* 2).

This system has been embedded in French system the principle of an anonymous and politically neutral body of administrative officers who personify the state. (*Loc. cit.*) Any discussion on Public Administration in France would be incomplete if reference to the Conseil d'Etat is omitted. This body could be considered as the cornerstone of French administration and one of the earliest bodies to be involved in the training of civil servants through the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* and the establishment of an elite corps of civil servants with a sense of belonging to the civil service thus creating an *esprit de corps*. The Council also controlled, *ex post*, the legality of all administrative acts which affect the rights and interests of individuals (*Ibid.* 9). Indeed Langrod even argues that the science of Public Administration is the result of the Council's influence (*Loc. cit.*) although the Discipline was not taught prior to the nineteenth century. (*Ibid.* 76) The further development of Public Administration in France is not discussed in detail. The brief overview is provided to emphasise the issue that the study of Public Administration was focussed on the activities of the state as identified during the period referred to.

Although Wilson is considered as the father of the study of Public Administration, he only re-invented the science that had been developed much earlier in Europe. In fact the science of Public Administration could be found in the work of the German and Austrian *Cameralists* of the sixteenth century. (*Ibid.* 72). The studies were partly scientific and partly descriptive and involved politics, governing, statistics and accounting. The further developments in Europe are not alluded to as the intention was merely to highlight the fact that Public Administration as a discipline is much older than the popularly held view that it only commenced with Woodrow Wilson's article that was published in 1887. It also underscores the argument that Public Administration concerned the activities related to the functions for which the state accepted responsibility. Again it must be stated that these functions were pure state functions performed by institutions under the direct control of the state irrespective of the fact that in the nineteenth century Germany as an example could be classified as a police state (*Ibid.* 76).

A variety of authors played important roles in the development of Public Administration e.g. Frank J. Goodnow, 1893; L.D. White, 1926; J.F. Pfiffner & R. Presthus, 1935; L. Gulick & L. Urwick, 1937; A. Lepawsky, 1949; and H.A. Simon, D.W. Smithburg & V.A. Thompson, 1950 to quote a few of the well known contributors to the early stages in the development of the Discipline. The reason why the American origin is more widely known than the European roots is because the study of the pure form of Public Administration in Europe faded in favour of the study of Administrative Law. The latter has a much wider application in European countries than is the case in the Anglo-Saxon countries, but contributed to the lack of reference in most sources on the earlier developments of the Discipline in European countries.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 1950S-1980S

It should be noted that even as early as 1945, after the Second World War, changes appeared in the nature of the activities of the public sector with the involvement of the state in economic matters as quoted by Langrod (*Ibid.* 13). Later in the second part of the

twentieth century government started playing a role even in business through regulating inter alia manufactured products, working conditions and in social matters through welfare services. These changes did not alter the essence of the public sector and the responsibilities of government regarding service delivery remained largely intact. During the decades following the initial changing role of the state, government departments remained the main custodians of service delivery and the state assumed responsibility for the growing diversity of services required by an urbanising society.

As far as governmental institutions are concerned, the Weberian hierarchical model applied in most public institutions. This model ensured that public employees kept to the habitual rules and regulations and thus ensured that policies are being executed as envisaged by the governing structures (Marais 1991. 221). Thus the persistence of the bureaucratic model remains in operation, not necessarily due to its academic correctness, but to its usefulness to persons who consider themselves secure within the prescriptions of the particular model (*Loc. cit.*). The bureaucratic model proposed by Weber is not quoted to prove that it was indeed the most appropriate for the twentieth century public service. It merely serves to illustrate the point that during the era of expanded public services, it was still possible to utilise strictly defined hierarchical lines, unambiguous lines of authority and adhere to rigidly prescribed organisational structures.

The nature of the public sector and the relative stability of most Western states and even the different French, German, Italian, Dutch and British colonies in Africa could rely on the policy guidelines of the colonial powers. Appointed officials were simply required to give effect to instructions originating in the colonial capitals and to obey the strict hierarchical structures. This had an effect on the study of Public Administration as well as thorough knowledge of procedures, and organisations were paramount in the preparation of public employees. This may be the reason, why the emphasis in Public Administration curricula was placed on the operational activities of public institutions. Public Administration is indeed an academic discipline as well as a practice. The development of the Discipline and the practice need not always follow the same course and often do not take place at the same tempo or have the same degree of impact (Hanekom, 1987. 37). However, it should be noted that if it is accepted that Public Administration concerns the study of the administrative requirements to render services, the study should be synchronised with any developments in the practice. It could thus be observed that the study of Public administration in the mid twentieth century and even in the earlier part of the later decades of the twentieth century could continue on the same basis, i.e. focussing on the administrative issues of public institutions.

It should also be stated clearly that in the context of the functions and powers of the state in the 1960s –1980s the moral principles that formed the basis for the existence and the survival of the state were considered to be rather sacred although intangible. Therefore, they were difficult to identify and explain (Cloete, 1979. 91). However, these principles had to serve as guidelines for the conduct of public office bearers and appointed officials performing their respective functions. These principles also were an inheritance of the culture from which a particular society developed and which formed the basis of the ruling party and public officials. It was in this framework that public administration was

considered to be a universal phenomenon that could be based on a simplistic universal value system. As far as Africa is concerned, the advent of the independence of the former colonies proved that public administration is influenced by complex political, social and physical factors. It also highlighted the need for a reconsideration of the study of the Discipline. This slowly became a major factor in the debate on the delimitation of the area of study of Public Administration.

THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

There is minor tradition according to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* that holds that the more specific term public management refers to ordinary, routine or typical management concerns, but in the context of achieving public good. Others see public management as a new, economically driven perspective on the operation of government. This latter view is often termed *new public management* by its advocates and can be seen as a reform attempt aimed at reemphasizing the professional nature of the field versus its academic, moral or disciplinary characteristics.

In the 1980s a debate was introduced in South Africa on the question of whether management should be included in the study of Public Administration. The debate, in South Africa, developed in a so-called North- South issue. Prof J.J.N. Cloete argued that management mainly concerned the management of private enterprises and is used to refer to the functions performed to create and run a private undertaking whose goal is to make a profit (Cloete, 1984. 37). Various arguments were put forward to approve that management is more or less limited to the private sector. The emphasis is on improving efficiency to obtain and increase profit. The dominant value factor which shapes the behaviour of employees in private enterprises is profit that had to be maximised i.e. the highest production at the least cost. Thus, it was argued that the emphasis in management was on the application of techniques e.g. work study, management by objectives, programme budgeting and operations research.

The debate on management or rather public management focussed on the complexity of the public sector. It was argued that the introduction of management into the public sector would oversimplify the nature of the activities of the public sector. This approach would, it was suggested, be insufficient to obtain effective and efficient public administration. Thus, a number of universities in South Africa retained Public Administration as the core of the curricula and used the traditional approach to the contents of the study. The view was held that efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector are determined by the conduct and attitude of the functionaries performing their respective duties. Lethargy and immobility are caused by the attitude and performance of individuals and not by the introduction of management in the public sector (Cloete, 1984. 41).

Schwella, as the strongest proponent for the introduction of management, represented the views from the South. He mooted the concept of Public Management. An article entitled: "Public Administration or Public Management – another perspective or why not Public Administration and Public Management" appeared in *SAIPA Journal of Public Administration* (20 (1), March 1985). In this article the author argued in favour of

the (re)introduction of the terminology into the academic literature as in international literature. In South African Public Administration literature this represented a major shift in the approach to the study of the Discipline. Public sector matters formerly studied in the Discipline of Public Administration should thus be studied within the paradigm of Public Management, it was contended. It is important to note the debate of the 1970s and well into the 1980s as it opened new avenues for the study in Public Administration with the inclusion or rather the acknowledgement of managerial concepts.

The particular debate resulted in some kind of truce. The Northern universities included management in their curricula and the Southern universities endured the existence of Public Administration. The importance of the debate is to be found in the introduction of new terminology into the Discipline. What is even more important is the fact that the area of study was broadened and concepts from the so-called private sector were utilised to the benefit of the core Discipline. It enriched the Discipline and contributed to the improvement of the quality of the public service by exposing employees to new theories and practices formerly considered to be the sole domain of business management. It also paved the way for the acknowledgement of different ways to render services to society than merely through formal hierarchical structures.

The 1990s brought some new debates to the fore with the introduction of the concept of New Public Management. The first deliberations on this so-called new paradigm took place in 1991. It set the scene for a critical, but constructive review of the results of the epic transformation of South Africa into a fully democratic state. The crux of the debate is contained in the *Mount Grace Papers: The New Public Administration Initiative and the Mount Grace Consultation*. The New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI) was considered to be a process, an initiative, a concept and a commitment to change. It was proposed that the Initiative captured the spirit of transition in South Africa and served as the potential for the future. (Mc Lennan & FitzGerald. s.a.. 5). It was an attempt to develop in a practical and feasible manner, the capacity of institutions to train a future civil service. The NPAI was also supposed to influence the formation of a responsive civil service by contributing to the public debate and processes that could have an influence on the new South Africa. Thus it was acknowledged that major changes were envisaged for South Africa, not only in the political arena, but also in the approaches to and the delivering of services by the governmental institutions.

The NPAI required the reconsideration of the study of Public Administration. It proposed the extension of the areas of interest to civic organisations, non-governmental organisations and community organisations. (*Ibid.* 6-7). The questions posed included whether a *new mode of doing* was required to meet the needs of the new demands by the newly liberated society. The Initiative was a clear call to reconsider not only the extent of the study of Public Administration and also introduced a debate for a paradigm shift in the study of the Discipline. It was argued that the traditional descriptive approach to the study emphasising processes and procedures should be changed to a value-oriented public management approach. The attention in the study of the Discipline and in the public administrative practices should thus be on the importance of the implementation of policies and social programmes to cater for the needs of the newly demarcated

and fully integrated society. (*Ibid.* 8). The deliberations indicated that the study of the Discipline should emphasise rigorous scientific analysis, explanation and prediction; be socially and professionally relevant; and be development oriented. It also highlighted the need to reconsider the extent and nature of the services for which the state has to accept responsibility. It should be obvious that in the early 1990s academics entered the debate on the teaching of Public Administration with a view to improving the quality of the role the state could play in society. This implied that it became necessary to review the paradigm of Public Administration. It already paved the way for an effort to ensure that the domain of the Discipline will be relevant and strengthen the link between the academic discipline and the practice.

In 2000 the Mount Grace discourse was continued through the publication of the debates of the second conference on the NPAA. (2000). The debate attempted to re-evaluate the Discipline within the context of experiences since 1991 in both the academic field and the public sector. It was *inter alia* envisaged that participants should question whether paradigmatic debates by academics were worthwhile and made any contribution in the applied fields of the study (Schwella.2000. 33). The deliberations focussed on the South African context of the study; the current realities of the challenges facing the country and consequently also the Discipline. The deliberations also considered the diverse factors affecting the newly established democratic state and the need for a re-commitment to sustainable and resilient policies for public sector functioning and *service delivery*. (*Ibid.* 35). It is particularly the latter italicized part that is of importance in the discussion on the domain of Public administration. The phrase referred to gave an indication that academics were aware of the changes taking place in the South African public sector and that the rendering of services should be considered in the study of Public Administration and Management.

The arguments during the *Mount Grace II* deliberations demanded of academics to think about the Discipline; to reconsider the training needs of the public officials and to avoid falling into the trap of the finite needs fallacy; the competition for scarce resource opportunities fallacy; the one best way fallacy the unidisciplinary fallacy, and the orthodox fallacy. (*Ibid.* 38). The deliberations need not be summarised or repeated. However, the conference is of importance in the discussion on the domain of the area of study as it was a clarion call for academics to critically assess their contributions to the development of public service adhering to particular community values, but intent on providing efficient and effective services to meet the changing needs of society.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

It may seem as though the discussion up to this point mainly concerned a historical overview of the development of the study of Public Administration and Management as well as the practice of administrative functions. However it was important to note the developments to be able to comprehend the effects of the current extent of the state's activities and its relationship with the so-called private sector. The following will serve as examples to illustrate the complexity of the environment within which the studies of Public Administration and Management have to be undertaken.

Labour legislation

The *Public Service Act*, 1994 (Proclamation 103 of 1994) was the first legislation passed under the newly elected democratic government since it assumed authority in April 1994. Although the Act was not passed by Parliament, but issued as a proclamation by the President, it has the same power as any legislation passed by Parliament. This Act serves as the foundations for matters relating to the Public Service. The Act, as the short title indicates, regulates *inter alia* the organisation as staff matters of government departments; their appointments and transfer; termination of service; and obligations, rights and privileges. Section 2 of the Act *inter alia* states that it applies to or are in respect of "... officers and employees whether they are employed within the Republic, and in respect of persons who were employed in the public service or who are to be employed in the public service". Thus this Act could clearly be classified as applicable to the traditional area of study of the Discipline of Public Administration. However, this is not the only legislation that regulates labour matters of officers and employees in the Public Service. Various other pieces of legislation have been passed that apply to the public service as well.

The *Labour Relations Act*, 1995 (Act 66 of 1995) provides for a variety of labour related matters, e.g. rights of trade unions; collective bargaining; and gives effect to public international law obligations of the Republic relating to labour relations. This Act applies to both the private and the public sectors. The *Basic Conditions of Employment Act*, 1997 (Act 75 of 1997) gives effect to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, by establishing and making provision for the regulation of basic conditions of employment and also gives effect to the Republic's obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation. This Act includes the Public Service (with specific exceptions), but applies to the private sector as well (cf section 3). In a similar fashion the *Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act*, 2000 (Act 4 of 2000) gives effect to the constitutional requirements regarding the prevention and prohibition of unfair discrimination and harassment; and promotes equality by eliminating unfair discrimination.

The extensive list of labour legislative measures passed since 1994 are not discussed. The essence of the matter is that the labour legislation passed since 1994 apply to both the public and the private sectors. The legislation can, thus, no longer be viewed as the exclusive domain of the Discipline. Scholars of Public Administration are also no longer the sole custodians of the knowledge relating to labour matters applicable to officers and employees in the Public Service. The examples quoted prove the argument that the domain of Public Administration is no longer clearly delineated as it was during the earlier stages in the development of the Discipline

Information related legislation

Prior to 1994 the governmental institutions in South Africa were dominated by the code for secrecy and confidentiality of information related to various policies and practices. The governmental institutions were not obliged to make information freely available and extensive legislative measures and other policies governed the availability of information

concerning the public sector. In 2000 two significant acts were passed that changed the face of the public sector regarding its operation.

The *Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000* (Act 2 of 2000) was passed to give effect to the constitutional right of access to any information that is held by the state or by a person that is required for the exercise or protection of any right. The *Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000* (Act 3 of 2000) was related to the first mentioned Act. The latter Act gives effect to the right to administrative action that is lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair and to the right to written reasons for administrative action as required in section 33 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*. The two acts are mentioned simply to illustrate the issue that the public sector is indeed now *public* and can no longer claim to the right not to make information available or to justify its actions. This also confirms the argument that the public sector should be considered as part of the total South African realm as far as study is concerned and that other disciplines could make valuable contributions to the area that was considered to be the domain of scholars of Public Administration.

Municipal legislation

Section 76 of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* (Act 32 of 2000) provides for different mechanisms municipalities have at their disposal for rendering services to the municipal community. These mechanisms include inter alia:

- an internal mechanism which may be a department or other administrative unit within its administration ;or a business unit devised by the municipality;
- an external mechanism by entering into a service agreement with a municipal entity, another municipality or an organ of state;
- a community based organisation or other non-governmental organisation; or
- any other institution, entity or person legally competent to operate a business activity.

The *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* (Act 56 of 2003) contains in chapter 10 a similar provision as chapter 6 of the *Public Finance Management Act, 1999* (Act 1 of 1999) concerning the utilisation of public entities for the delivery of public services. Sections 84 and 85 of the municipal legislation provide for the governance of public entities. These acts clearly illustrate the point that the so-called public sector now has become involved in matters originally the domain of the private sector.

GOVERNANCE

The concept of governance has entered the literature of Public Administration in the late 1980s. There was, unfortunately, no clear definition attached to the term (*cf.* Naidoo, 2004.104). Without going into the detail of the confusion caused from a scientific point of view the meaning attached by the United Nations will be used, viz that governance is a comprehensive concept referring to the combined effort of political and public institutions in conjunction with the private sector (including non-governmental

organisations) in providing services to society. Governance is thus an indication of a significant new development in the practice of public administration, and by implication also in the Discipline.

In the study of Public Administration, scholars have to acknowledge the presence of so-called private sector phenomena e.g. stakeholder interest; shareholders; risks; and client preferences. This is particularly obvious in the municipal sphere of service rendering through public-private partnerships and public entities as provided for in the relevant municipal legislation. The *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* and the *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* contain dedicated chapters on the new concept of governance relating to the extended area of operation of the public sector. These references prove that public administration is moving into new operational areas. Therefore there is a clear need to reconsider what the field of study of the Discipline should be.

During the year 2000 the *Board of Directors* appointed a commission of Enquiry under Judge King on the ethical guidelines that should be adhered to in the corporate sector. The King II Report was published in 2002. The contents of the Report may seem to be irrelevant, but Judge King made one particularly significant recommendation relevant to this discussion. The proposed *Business Judgement Rule* determines that a board of directors could not be held accountable for a decision that transpires to be wrong, but at the time of the decision was based on the available facts; was unbiased; and was *bona fide*. This rule implies that should a decision be made without considering the relevant facts; was biased; and *mala fides*, the Board could be held accountable (King, 2004. 71). King recommended that this rule should be applicable to all organs of state (*cf.* section 239, *Constitution, 1996*).

The significance of this Business Judgement Rule becomes obvious when the decision making practices of a municipal council is considered. It implies that councillors could personally be held accountable for decisions that turn out to be detrimental to a particular community if a decision was taken without considering all the facts; was biased; and *mala fides*. This is a novel concept in the public sector and exemplifies the merging of the traditional two clearly demarcated sectors each operating under rather different sets of ethical guidelines and decision-making rules.

Governance in contemporary society has created a further need to reconsider the implications of the decision-making processes. The King Report could be cited as a major deviation from the traditional concept of public sector decision-makers not being accountable for decisions taken as a result of the political values attached to the facts in coming to particular conclusions.

A SYNTHESIS

The discussion is an attempt to elicit debate on the domain of Public Administration. Some historical developments have been cited to indicate that scholars of the Discipline as well as practioners of public administration and management have to take stock of:

- the area of operation of the so-called public sector

- the dividing line between public sector and private sector
- the implication of the practice of governance on the operations of employees and political office-bearers on their respective areas of operation
- the field of study of the Discipline of Public Administration.

No final answer to the issues raised above is possible at this stage. However, it could be argued that the Discipline is not under threat. Nicholas Henry's classification of developments in the discipline (1995) remains valid. The Discipline is in another phase of its existence. The debate on the locus is no longer an important issue. Public Administration has established itself as a Discipline in its own right. It remains an eclectic science and borrows theories and concepts from other related disciplines e.g. Business Management, Political Science and Psychology. The stage in its development concerns the issue of its focus according to Henry.

It should be noted that one phenomenon distinguishes the Discipline from related disciplines such as Business Management i.e. the political environment of public administration and management. Practitioners of management and administration and scholars of the Discipline have to recognise this unique factor. The comfort zone of exclusivity must be relinquished. Especially scholars of the Discipline have to find a synthesis between two traditionally separate disciplines, without negating the core area of study i.e. the governmentally determined actions to promote the wellbeing of society.

CONCLUSION

The article traced the origins of the Discipline of Public Administration. It was argued that the Discipline has proven its existence. It has also proven that since its origin it was willing to accommodate the developments required as a result of the changing needs of the state and the concomitant needs of society. Scholars should enter the debate on what constitutes the domain of the public sector and thus also what should be added to the theoretical framework of the Discipline to ensure its continued relevance to the study of the administrative and managerial requirements to decide on governmental intervention and giving effect to such policy decisions.

It should, however, be stated clearly that one core issue distinguishes Public Administration from other related disciplines and that is the political milieu within which its operational activities are performed. All administrative and managerial issues that form the study of Public Administration and Management are dominated by public policy ultimately the final domain of the political authority concerned. Thus although there is a need to reconsider the domain of the Discipline, the political environment puts it into a category of exclusivity.

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