1. Globalization, global governance and public administration

Laurence J. O’Toole, Jr.

This chapter explores connections between theory, scholarship and practice in the field of public administration, and examines the global contexts in which practitioners operate. Public administration has long focused on national organizations and structures to the detriment of developing theory and practice concerning globalized entities; the field needs to further develop empirics-driven, multileveled-modeling theories that will help those in the field more effectively study public administration in a contextualized environment with the ultimate goal of better understanding burgeoning hypotheses as well as subsequent practical effects.

To address these interconnected concerns, I want to first point to some shortcomings in the theory, but also explore some opportunities and pressing research topics that can energize public administration and lead to both theoretical advance and practical understanding.

There is myriad public administration theory and research, but by far the key units of analysis are typically agencies – public organizations as part of a state apparatus or a subnational jurisdiction – their managers and, sometimes, frontline workers. Many, probably most, new programs operate through networked inter-organizational forms. This recognition has helped catalyze considerable interest in networks, collaboration, partnerships and other facets of successful organizations. This pattern is appropriate and encouraging, even though there remain some problems with the associated literature, which does not go nearly far enough in exploring such concerns.

Almost all the empirical studies of networked governance in the public administration literature are confined within the territorial limits of individual nation-states, or narrower. Largely ignored are the thousands of cases involving international organizations, transnational, functionally specific governance arrangements and assorted other forms. As a point of evidence, the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory is a first-rate research outlet; its citation impact factor is the highest of any public administration journal in the world. In the 23 current volumes
of published work, a total of 66 studies have been conducted in which empirical research on the relationship between public management and performance is explored; of these studies, a grand total of one includes partial treatment of the issue within an international organization. The rest of these studies focus on one or more countries – usually one country, and predominantly either the US or UK – or at the subnational level. We know far too little, and need to know so much more, about patterns of globalizing public administration; in particular, we need good theory – theory that can help explain what works and what doesn’t – when public administration operates across national lines.

Those in the field need to further consider the subject of theory as it relates to such studies and international relationships. Given the sparse empirical work being done in the field on institutional arrangements, or concerning the managerial challenges of globalizing public administration, we have at our disposal little solid theory to guide us in understanding and explaining the globalizing administrative patterns and managerial efforts that have developed, let alone understanding how these patterns and efforts shape outputs and outcomes.

There is, of course, a set of theoretical ideas and insights about networks. But, as I have already briefly implied herein, we need better theory on this subject as well – both connected to the phenomena that represent globalizing developments and also otherwise. Moreover, we have the beginnings of theory about public management and performance, another subject pertinent to a globalizing public administration, but theoretical contributions to the latter topic – specifically within public administration – need to start with the realization that the theory has to be anchored in the empirics of what has actually developed to date. More specifically, these empirics include the interesting combination of state systems supporting, or involved with, transnational regimes. Public administration is undeniably present within state-organized bureaucracies, but these organizations are also linked to, influenced by, and influencing regimes of globalizing governance. For example, consider the many instances of transnational, functionally specific regimes in virtually all areas of public policy.

These forms of multilateral decision making exhibit distinctive patterns involving governments, intergovernmental bodies, and a variety of international intergovernmental organizations. Nonstate actors or transnational bodies [including] multinational corporations, international nongovernmental organizations . . . [and] professional associations participate actively, as do national, regional, and local government actors . . . [This] global expanse has become a highly complex, mixed-actor system. (O’Toole and Hanf, 2002, p. 160)
In many respects, these regimes do not resemble the state-crafted bureaucratic systems to which they are partially attached. For instance, the permanent staffs of transnational regimes are often tiny, and the extent to which such systems’ secretariats ‘manage’ the overall streams of action is an interesting question, with varying answers. It is certainly clear that ‘public administration,’ in and through such smaller bodies, operates differently than through large state agencies. Yet such arrangements are layered onto state-centric systems in patterns of mutual influence. Furthermore, such arrangements can both constrain state action and facilitate it. The ways in which those in public administration theoretically model and frame such complex, multilevel systems for the purposes of understanding their public administration is a significant challenge for the field. Given such theoretical challenges, what major research questions should scholars concerned with public administration in a global context address? There are many answers to this question, with the following exploration offering but a few.

DEVELOPING THEORIES OF CONTEXT TO UNDERSTAND PERFORMANCE AND EFFECT

One challenge involves explaining the variance in performance across many of these transnational arrangements. The literature seeking to explain the relationship between public management and public-program, or public-organizational, performance has been developing swiftly. But what about the overall performance of such regimes? What specific administrative variables are likely to matter? Likewise, performance itself has many aspects including efficiency, effectiveness, compliance, equity, responsiveness, transparency and democratic accountability, among others. In particular, those who study public administration should explore the ways by which the administration of such entities varies, and what differences these variations make in multiple aspects of performance.

A related point is that context, broadly speaking, likely affects the ways that public management can shape performance in such transnational arrangements. Generally speaking, we need a great deal of additional progress in developing theoretical notions, with associated hypotheses, about how we can expect various aspects of context – including political, environmental and internal aspects – to influence that relationship (see O’Toole and Meier, 2014). Comparative public administration is one part of the answer here. But, without getting into the false starts and limitations involved in the efforts to develop the specialty of comparative public administration, the challenges are immense, and the practical difficulties
of doing rigorous, theoretically oriented research are quite daunting. In short, we need to be developing a theory of context and the ways in which context affects the management-performance linkage, including within transnational cases.

Additionally, further questions persist concerning the models required to examine and understand multilayered, polycentric systems of governance. Not all such complex arrays are self-organizing, and not all are solely a product of state-established and mandated policy. In practice, many are complex blends; theories based in either of these simple assumptions are often problematic in understanding and explaining certain kinds of networked action. Thus, for instance, the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) approach initiated by Elinor Ostrom and colleagues, and applied to the governance of common-pool resources, has some, but only limited, applicability to many of the networked arrangements important to a globalizing public administration. IAD could eventually be useful more broadly, but it would have to be developed further, in a variety of ways.

**MULTILEVEL MODELING, AGENT-BASED MODELING AND OUTCOMES**

Those in the field must also consider what kinds of multilevel modeling make sense. Principal-agent models often do not seem particularly appropriate and give way to a number of questions. For example, who is the principal? What of game-theoretic models, particularly as elaborated via linked-game connections? Here, too, there are likely to be insights, but the partially mandated aspects of such systems are not well captured via game theory. Agent-based modeling may also offer some feasible ways of performing complex simulations. It is also important to keep in mind that we are often not talking about two-level systems. Rather, transnational arrangements ramify not only into nation-states, but into regional and local subnational systems as well. As such, causal arrows can point in all sorts of directions. For a proper understanding of public administration in a globalizing context, we need advances in complex, multilevel modeling to improve our ability to see the links between ‘the negotiating table and the shop floor’ (to use a phrase coined by a colleague; see Hanf, 1994), and all the parts in between.

Additionally, there is almost no incorporation in the international, English-language literature of public administration concerning the ideas and insights from scholars of international law. This omission is indicative of the larger near-omission, in the US literature in particular, of the
systematic study of law and its relationship to the operations of public administration; yet, globalizing developments are closely linked to the development of legal commitments. Indeed, ‘the law commits [even] subnational authorities to the international commitments of national authorities’ (O’Toole and Hanf, 2002, p. 166). So greater attention to international, legal commitments is additionally needed in the field of public administration.

PREPARING STUDENTS THROUGH COLLABORATION AND CONNECTION

Finally, we must consider how university public administrative programs can better equip students for professional careers in a globalizing context. Here I have three obvious suggestions. First, student exchanges and visits – digitally and/or in the flesh – in both (or all) directions make a great deal of sense. Many universities already encourage such collaboration within their programs, but exchanges could serve as valuable assets for students. Moreover, faculty involvement at universities, and with colleagues in other parts of the world, can be indirectly influential. Top-down, official university-to-university agreements that are not firmly anchored in the shared interests and motivation of the faculty are often problematic, however. Second, some careful exposure of public administration students to academic work in other specialties, including international relations, perhaps social network analysis, non-profit studies – including the study of international non-governmental organizations, or INGOs – and comparative public policy and management, could be particularly beneficial. Squeezing such themes into crowded curricula will be a non-trivial challenge. Finally, we should more regularly and systematically expose students to the insights of experienced, thoughtful practitioners who already work in positions and organizations deeply involved with globalizing developments. Some of this exposure can be done via internships, some through the use of lectures and through professorships of practice. Ultimately, however, we need a combination of these methods to adequately prepare students for successful careers in the field.

REFERENCES
