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Encountering design-oriented public management

You’re a master’s student, taking a degree related to public policy and government. Along with your fellow classmates, you’re shopping for a good elective course. You meet with your academic adviser to discuss what elective to take. You mention four possibilities: three courses in specific policy areas, as well as a higher-level quantitative methods course. The adviser agrees that every one of the electives you’re considering would be absolutely fine. You are then asked whether you have considered one of the electives that isn’t on your list. The adviser swivels around to tap two words on the keyboard.

One click later the screen shows the course listing the adviser has in mind. It’s Public Management: A Strategic Approach. You ask what the adviser knows about it. “Not a lot, but previous students say that it helped them with job interviews, and it then helped them gain a reputation as a great hire.” After glancing back at the adviser’s screen, you write down the course code that hadn’t been on your screen.

As you leave the building, you use your smartphone to log into the university’s course catalogue and search for the course. The entry on course content says:

The course provides a management dimension to the study of public administration and public program planning. The course focuses on using purposive theories of directing, planning, coordinating and controlling – plus design-precedents from case studies – to devise jointly-enabling mechanisms to tackle challenges in performing the management function in public programs and organizations. Through class discussions and case assignments, the course expands professional knowledge, improves professional abilities (e.g., sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization), and strengthens professional competence. It also develops an ability to reverse-engineer public programs and organizations so that planning can benefit from experience. The course also considers the past and future of public management as a professional discipline.

You click on the link to the university’s on-line learning system and search for PA 419. You begin to scroll through the icons and links for Week 1, noticing the course introductory video. You click on the link. As the video is loading, you get a WhatsApp message telling you that your new classmates are waiting for you at M4767-BARZELAY_9781788119092_t.indd 1
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the student center café. By then the video has loaded, but you pause it and head for the café.

Moments later, you spot your classmates at a table toward the back. Mercifully, there’s no line to order coffee. You tell the barista you want an espresso. As you sit down, Alicia, Bob, Carmen, Dimitrios, and Eva (from China) are comparing their shopping-lists for elective courses. After picking up the conversation, you tell them you’ve just been looking at a course on public management. Bob says he hadn’t seen that listing. You say that you heard about it from your adviser.

Carmen pulls up the course description on her smartphone screen, while you tell her that the adviser remarked that past students felt it was good for their careers. Alicia asks what skills you will get from the course. You say you’re not sure, but that the course description says it improves professional abilities and strengthens professional competence. Carmen reads out the list of professional abilities: sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization. Alicia looks skeptical. Those are skills? Bob says you need to be good at these things as a professional in organizations: after all, you can’t solve problems without sense-making and designing. Eva says you can’t justify decisions without argumentation. Dimitrios says that dramatization may not be a skill, but it’s key to the art of leadership. You say that maybe these issues are explained in the course introductory video, which you point to on your screen. Carmen suggests talking about this again after you all have had a chance to check it out.

Unpacking the narrative opener

Let’s take a moment to understand and appreciate this short, initial encounter with Public Management as a Design-Oriented Professional Discipline. The chapter opens with a narrative. Why? Research about rhetoric and communication has shown that people tend to be more receptive to ideas presented narratively, than to ideas presented argumentatively. This bit of knowledge supports a design principle for writing and public speaking: if the reader isn’t ready to be receptive to an argument, then authors and speakers should preface arguments with material presented in story form.

The story you read earlier begins with its characters deciding what courses to take as part of their degree. As a consequence, public management makes its first appearance as a course, which might be unexpected. Is there a reason? A correct guess is that students are among the book’s intended readers and, further, that the author imagines students won’t immediately care whether public management is a professional discipline. Why introduce the chapter specifically with the scenario of course selection? The communication principle involved is to anchor the meaning of abstract ideas in their experientially-familiar likenesses. Such likenesses are sometimes called “concrete” analogues. They aren’t actually concrete: but that’s a simple way to highlight that they can be understood without mastering an abstractly-worded code. It won’t be hard for readers to imagine what it would be like to consider taking such a course. In combination, these reasons lead to the conclusion that the text is suitably designed to trigger
the audience’s interest in the character of public management, at least as a matter of momentary interest.

**An invitation for studying public management**

Your wi-fi connection is good. You click on the arrow icon to re-start the video. A slide comes up with the title: “Encountering Public Management.” The professor’s voice comes across, but he is not seen. He makes some introductory remarks, and then starts to dig into substance.

This course is on public management. As public management doesn’t have a uniformly standard meaning that everyone shares, you need to be told what public management means specifically in this course. Public management is a professional practice. Generally speaking, a professional practice is what professional practitioners are engaged in when they are creating or improving a phenomenon that exists for reasons of intent. Take architecture: it’s what architects are engaged in when they are creating or improving buildings for shelter or other purposes. Take engineering: it’s what engineers are engaged in when they are creating or improving machines to be used in households and offices, to make products, or to make other machines. So, what is public management? It’s what professional practitioners are engaged in, when they are creating or improving public organizations.

That statement is so expansive that it needs to be unpacked. In this course, a public organization is not a list of kinds of attributes, such as a government agency’s legal powers, organizational roles, program responsibilities, and budgets. A public organization is viewed more abstractly and functionally, as a mechanism for effectuating intent. Accordingly, “public organizations” is not a classification category, but is rather a kind of mechanism-intent phenomena.

Mechanism-intent phenomena is a new term, coined for the purposes of this course. However, it’s not a new idea. Aristotle had some things to say about this idea, which he contrasted with naturally occurring biological phenomena, as some philosophers have recently discussed. The main precedent for the idea of mechanism-intent phenomena goes back to Herbert Simon’s *Sciences of the Artificial*. His book was mainly concerned with a broad category of mechanism-intent phenomena: artificial systems, such as machines and buildings.

In this course, the main precedent for thinking about public organizations as a kind of mechanism-intent phenomena is a widely known book by Mark H. Moore, entitled, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Moore worked out an elaborate argument about public organizations, in which one thesis was that their intent is to create public value. Creating public value is a short-hand phrase for effectuating the realization of collective political aspirations through public programs, while limiting restrictions on individual liberties. Another direction for his theorizing of public organizations is that they create public value by delivering public programs, and by doing other things (including management) that enable program delivery.

The idea that public organizations are a kind of mechanism-intent phenomena is very broad. The reason for breadth is to connect public management with
centuries and even millennia-old theorizing about practical questions that lie between institutional design and behavioral choice. A bridge to such theorizing is Herbert Simon’s *Sciences of the Artificial*. As mentioned, the kinds of mechanism-intent phenomena on which Simon focused were artificial systems, like machines, buildings, and software programs. A second bridge to such theorizing is Fayol’s *Industrial and General Administration*. The kind of mechanism-intent phenomena on which Fayol focused was enterprises. In this course, public organizations are seen as a special case of enterprises.

This course theorizes public organizations as effectuating intent through the performance of enterprise-functions. This idea comes from Fayol, who theorized enterprises much like Aristotle theorized kinds of organisms. Organisms need to perform functions like respiration and circulation: if they do so inadequately, they will become sick, or even die. Enterprises need to perform enterprise-functions: if they do so inadequately, then they will be less able to effectuate enterprise-intent, and even fail entirely.

The list of enterprise-functions in Fayol’s theory was a series of nouns: in alphabetical order they were accounting, commercial, finance, management, security, and technical. Fayol went into detail about the enterprise-function of management, by defining its constitutive functions as a series of verbs: in alphabetical order, they were (famously) coordinating, controlling, directing, and planning. Each plays a role in performing the enterprise-function of management.

Fayol’s theory of enterprises as a kind of mechanism-intent phenomena is one side of a coin: the other side is that he theorizes enterprises along mechanism-intent lines. That is, enterprises are a kind of mechanism-intent phenomena because Fayol theorized enterprises along mechanism-intent lines. In this course, public organizations are theorized along mechanism-intent lines.

Under the mechanism-intent theorizing of enterprises, functions are said to be performed by mechanism-like phenomena. Mechanism-like phenomena are for performing enterprise functions. Given that, the question is what do mechanism-like phenomena consist in. In this course, mechanism-like phenomena are for performing enterprise functions and they consist in context-dependent, non-deterministic scenario-processes.

The idea that scenario-processes perform enterprise functions may not sound familiar, but it couldn’t be more conventional: after all, decision-making in organizations has been theorized as a context-dependent, non-deterministic scenario-process since at least the 1950s. And the idea that enterprise-functions – especially management – are performed by decision-making remains entirely current.

Decision-making isn’t the only kind of mechanism-like phenomena within enterprises. No less important is a kind of scenario-process that eventuates in decision alternatives: Herbert Simon referred to this form of scenario-processes as designing. Designing is about creating solutions, while decision-making is about choosing a solution to go with. The scenario-process of designing has a sufficiently different profile from that of decision-making that it’s important to insist upon the distinction. Accordingly, scenario-processes in mechanism-
intent theorizing of enterprises and public organizations are two-fold, at least: decision-making and designing.

Thus, in this course, performing the enterprise functions of public organizations effectuates public value creation (i.e., the intent of public organizations), while their mechanism-like scenario-processes include both decision-making and designing. This sort of mechanism-intent theorizing of public organizations takes the best of Fayol, Moore, and Simon – and consolidates it into one coherent approach.

I will now talk through this course itself as a mechanism-intent phenomenon. The slide you are now viewing presents a high-level representation of this course. I call this high-level representation a “conceptual design”: that is a term from the field of engineering design for a diagram that is clear about functions and intent, and that suggests the shape of the technical systems that perform the functions, but doesn’t go into their specifics.⁹

![Figure 1.1 The conceptual design of the course](image)

A simple way to read the conceptual design diagram is this: the course will effectuate your being better at professional practice in public organizations in the future as compared with the past. It will do so, above all, by strengthening your professional competence. The course will strengthen your professional competence by both expanding your professional knowledge and improving your professional abilities. I’ll now go into details.

Regarding intent, the idea is that the course will effectuate your being better at professional practice in public organizations. Professional practice is for performing enterprise-functions, not least the management function, with its constitutive functions of directing, planning, coordinating, and controlling. In relation to Simon’s implied mechanism-intent theory of enterprises, professional practice is for bringing design-projects – with their constitutive scenario-processes of designing and decision-making – to fruition. Thus, the intent of
the course is to effectuate your being better at contributing to design-projects, as well as in otherwise performing the management function within public organizations.

The main function of the course is to strengthen your professional competence. Professional competence is a capacity to act in ways that effectuate your professional intent: under this idea, you and your actions are mechanism-like phenomena situated in some locale within a public organization, during some interval of time. Professional competence is partly the capacity to act within a design-project, furthering the scenario-process of designing as well as that of decision-making. Professional competence is also partly the capacity to institute design-projects within a public organization.

In the course’s conceptual design, your professional competence is strengthened, in part, by improving your professional abilities. This course seeks to improve four kinds of professional abilities: sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization.

In this course’s conceptual design, your professional abilities are improved, in part, by assessing simulated experience in the light of theories of people and practices. Sense-making is theorized in psychology and cognitive science. Designing is theorized in the interdisciplinary field of design studies. Argumentation is theorized in philosophy, linguistics, and rhetoric. Dramatization is theorized in sociology and anthropology. The implication is that learning about theories of sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization is constitutive of “expanding your professional ability.”

Let me now explain the direct relation between “expanding professional knowledge” and “strengthening professional competence,” according to the conceptual design of this course. The idea is that there’s more to professional competence in public management than exercising the capacities of sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization. It takes an ability to make use of theories that consider public organizations to be purposeful phenomena (such as Mark Moore’s), as well as the ability to be enlightened by – and utilize – mechanism-intent analysis of specific public organizations and their design-projects, as they have transpired in the past. Otherwise, professional practice might be masterful in form, but lacking in substance.

There’s more that can be said about the course’s conceptual design, but I’m conscious of the limitation on concentration when receiving information in this aural and video format. Let me make some general points rather than to add detail. First, you’ll probably sense that this course has something in common with a normal management course. There’s an emphasis on “skills,” if you consider sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization to be skills. There’s an emphasis on professional practice. There’s an emphasis on performing the management function within enterprises. In these respects, the course reflects a tradition of management education, historically associated with Harvard Business School.

Second, you’ll probably sense that this course isn’t your normal management course. There’s an emphasis on furthering design-projects within enterprises. There’s an emphasis on the professional ability of designing. There’s an emphasis
on being enlightened by, and using, mechanism-intent analysis of specific public organizations and their design-projects, as they have transpired in the past. In these respects, the course reflects a different approach to management education, one that grew up inside what was historically known as the modern management school, dating back to the 1950s, and that was advocated by Herbert Simon when he was a professor in the Carnegie Institute of Technology’s Graduate School of Industrial Administration.\textsuperscript{11} The course similarly reflects the design-oriented approach to professional practice that was later advocated by Herbert Simon in his book, \textit{Sciences of the Artificial}. Thus, the conceptual design of this course is infused with an explicit, fully developed synthesis between two traditions of management education, one known, the other not so much. I call this synthesis a design-oriented approach to the professional practice of public management.

When you come to class, I’ll explain how this conceptual design is implemented by the course’s mechanism-like scenario-processes, to include reading, case discussions, and a very demanding individual project.

You ask Clara what she thinks. She says the course is more theoretical than she would have expected, but on the other hand, what is being discussed theoretically looks like it will be really practical. You say that this is certainly the way it looks.

Clara asks you whether you’re going to go to the first class. You say you’ll go if she will. She says that she’s shopping five courses, but will go along to this one, too.

\section*{Preparing to teach design-oriented public management}

A week before the first class session, the course professor, Marshall, walks into a small meeting room, joining Nora, Olivier, and Petra, who are already there. Marshall is a full professor who is approaching his twentieth year as a member of the public administration department. He has taught the course in many different ways over this period. Marshall, Nora, and Petra will co-teach, while Olivier will be the teaching assistant. Nora is a recently minted PhD in political science who has just joined the department as an assistant professor; she has no specific academic background in public administration or management. Olivier is a second-year doctoral student in the public administration department; he has not studied or taught public management before. Petra is new to her role as a senior lecturer-in-practice, having decided to take a two-year leave from government service. Their first faculty team meeting is about to begin.

After they all commented on the weather, Marshall stated the main purpose of the meeting is to formalize the faculty team’s role and activities, as well as to make sure everyone is on the same page going into the first session of the course. He hands out hard copies of the presentation slide titled “The conceptual design of the course,” saying that this is definitely one of those pages they should be on together.

Petra asks Marshall for some clarification about the intent of the course. Specifically, she asks why the intent of the course doesn’t include helping
students to get a job. Marshall says that he considers getting a job as the intent of a student’s degree program as a whole, rather than of this specific course. Petra follows up by asking: Marshall, don’t you think more students will take the course if you give them a good reason to believe that it will help them in getting the job they really want to be offered? Marshall says he agrees.

Marshall offers to share his “designer drawings” of the course, as contrasted with the “presentational drawings” that he has presented as “the conceptual design of the course.” After shuffling through some loose sheets of paper, he puts the diagram on the meeting table and begins to discuss it.

Marshall says that Petra’s asking whether the conceptual design of the course includes a commercial function. The performance of the commercial function will be adequate if students enroll. If students enroll, then the course can perform its technical function, whose constitutive functions are (a) expanding professional knowledge, (b) improving professional abilities, and (c) strengthening professional competence.

Petra asks Marshall whether he will tell students that the course will help them with getting offered the job they would like to have. Marshall indicates that he’ll now characterize the mechanism-like feature for implementing this part of the conceptual design of the course. He asks every student to form a pair with someone seated to their left or right. He then asks one of them to take on the role of a job interviewer and the other to take on that of a job interviewee. In the exercise, the interviewer says: “I see from your C.V. that you have taken a public management course in your degree program: how do you think it strengthens you as a candidate for this position?” The interviewee has to answer. I give them

Figure 1.2 The conceptual design of the course: lead teacher’s view
less than five minutes for this; then I ask them to reverse roles and do the exercise again. After the students have completed their exercise, I ask them what their “partner” in the exercise said that they found to be an especially good line – one that they might use in a true interview. Then I give them a template they can use in scripting their interview responses in the future. It’s presented early in the slide deck for the first session of the class. Here’s the slide:

Figure 1.3 Pitching the public management course to an interviewer

Marshall asks Petra what she thinks of the interview exercise as a mechanism for performing the course’s commercial function. Petra says that she could well imagine that the exercise would win over students who might be put off by the highly theoretical presentation in the course introductory video. An outcome should be for more students to decide to join the course.

Nora shifts slightly in her chair and then prefaces what she wants to ask by saying that she has been taking a compulsory course for new faculty on best practices for designing and evaluating courses. She’s planning to write up her experience with this course as part of satisfying the requirements of the new faculty course. Nora says she isn’t yet sure how she’d be able to do that. For one reason, the new faculty course instructor says that best practices include formalizing a whole cascade of learning objectives, from the overall course down to its elementary units, such as the individual class session, task, and reading assignment. Nora asks Marshall if the course design has been formalized in this way.

Marshall says that he never had to take a new faculty course, fortunately. Nevertheless, he recently had an experience working with a government-based school of public administration in South America, in order to transfer this course to their curriculum, and the staff there insisted that he comply with their rules that every course needs to have its learning objectives specified. Marshall said it wasn’t easy to comply at first, but it felt good when he had finished the task. He saw the value in being able to show others that the course is coherent, even when they didn’t know much about the content. He hadn’t done the same thing for the course they were going to teach, but he’d be willing to go there if it was important for Nora being able to complete her new faculty course.

Petra says that it would be really helpful for her to know what the learning objectives are, especially as she herself is going to have to learn the material in order to teach it.

Figure 1.3 Pitching the public management course to an interviewer

My public management course added a management dimension to my main area of specialization, and as a result, I am now better at gaining and using professional knowledge – about public management and problem-solving – in designing solutions to problems that arise in creating public value through public programs and public administration.
Marshall says that the learning objectives should be coherent with two things: one is the course’s conceptual design, and the other is the course’s embodiment design, which consists in an array of course features: lectures, videos, in-class exercises, case discussions, readings, project assignments, and essays. This discipline of mechanism-intent thinking means that learning objectives represent an understanding of feature-function relationships within the course. He says that a feature worth discussing is the job interview exercise.

Marshall then asks Petra what learning objectives she sees for the job interview exercise. Petra says that the exercise involves more than an interviewee speaking to an interviewer to advance an argument: it also involves non-verbal communication in a situation of face-to-face interaction. The learning objective is then to improve how you perform in front of an audience of sorts. Better stated, the learning objective is to improve how you plan what you’ll say and how you’ll perform what you’ve planned to say, or adjust it to surprises as they occur during the interaction. Petra says that she isn’t sure what to call this ability, or how to relate the objective to the course’s functions.

Marshall thanks Petra for her astute comment. He says that the learning objective she’s concerned with relates to the function of improving professional abilities, and that “dramatization” is the term used in the course to refer to the professional ability of planning what you’ll say and how you’ll perform what you planned to say. The term, and the theorization of social processes associated with it, comes from work by Erving Goffman, a noted sociological theorist. His most famous book was *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* Marshall mentions that last time he checked, that volume had achieved a citation count of 57,000.

Petra comments that she’s always taken a certain amount of pride in being able to make use of her personality to influence what happens during meetings—and that was part of her success as a practitioner. But she says she hadn’t heard the term “dramatization” before she viewed the video about the course. It’s nice to have a word for something that you’ve always felt was important, she tells Marshall.

Marshall then asks Olivier what learning objectives he sees for the course. Olivier answers by saying that he sees the course as teaching ideas about public management. What he specifically has in mind is the idea that professional practice in public organizations involves problem-solving, and problem-solving involves gaining and using professional knowledge. Olivier says he is not sure how to characterize the learning objective, as he is not sure how teaching ideas about public management relates to the conceptual design of the course.

Marshall says that these ideas are presented as professional knowledge. Professional knowledge includes explicit arguments about what public organizations are for, what they consist in, and how they work. Nora asks whether under this definition, professional knowledge consists in normative arguments, much as one finds in political or ethical philosophy. Marshall says that there’s no denying that professional knowledge involves normative claims. But such knowledge is not about institution forms or discrete decisions: they are about mechanism-intent phenomena. Marshall says he uses the term “purposive theories” to refer
to ideas about what public organizations are for, what they consist in, and how they work.

Olivier asks where he can read about this idea of purposive theorizing. Marshall says that he has just read the page proofs of a book by an academic friend of his, Michael Barzelay, where the idea is developed. Nora asks whether the book presents specific purposive theories of public organizations. Marshall says that Chapter 4 does that, where the specific works examined are Mark Moore’s *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* and John Bryson’s *Strategic Planning in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. For that matter, he adds, Chapter 4 examines works about design-projects and the professional activities of sense-making, designing, argumentation, and dramatization.

Marshall starts to smile broadly at this point. Nora, Olivier, and Petra gaze at him with surprised looks on their faces. Sensing their gaze, Marshall tells them about how the chapter is presented as an audio guide for a tour of a fictional museum called the Public Management Gallery. He intends to assign Chapter 4 to students on courses like the one they are co-teaching.

At this point, Petra looks conspicuously at her watch and then at the clock in the room. She tells Marshall that she will need to get to another meeting soon. Marshall proposes that they go around the room to list issues that the teaching team should take up together in their subsequent meetings, or issues they might want to just talk about informally when the opportunity arises, or to make any other comment. Let’s go in alphabetical order.

Nora says that she’s aware that the course includes case studies; she wants to know if there’s any relation between case studies in this course and case study research that she has done in political science. Marshall says that issue is crucial for the course. He points out that Barzelay’s book discusses the relation between case study research in social science and case study research in public management, considered as a Design-Oriented professional discipline, in Chapters 6 and 7.

Olivier says that he’s curious about this idea that public management is a professional discipline. Marshall just mentioned it, and the term put in an appearance in the diagram on the conceptual design of the course, in the lower right-hand corner. Marshall says that the idea of a professional discipline is developed throughout Barzelay’s book. Indeed, the title is *Public Management as a Design-Oriented Professional Discipline*. He thinks Olivier will be especially interested in the final chapter, entitled, “Designed, not copied: the making of public management as a design-oriented professional discipline,” as well as in the extensive glossary at the back.

Petra asks Marshall if she, too, could get a look at Barzelay’s book, as it ought to get her started on the right foot. Marshall said he’d send her the proofs as soon as he gets back to his office.

**Meeting the author at the book launch**

You’ve made yourself comfortable in your seat at the launch event for *Public Management as a Design-Oriented Professional Discipline*. You’re seated next to Michael Barzelay - 9781788119108

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Carmen and Eva. You notice that Marshall, Nora, Olivier, and Petra have front row seats. Two figures take their places on stage. One adjusts the microphone and scans the audience. The murmur in the auditorium subsides. The host begins the session:

**Host:** Welcome to the Academy Theatre, Professor Barzelay. Congratulations on your new book. Thank you for agreeing to speaking at this event.

**Barzelay:** Happy to be here, thanks for inviting me.

**Host:** I’d like to begin by asking you some questions about the faculty meeting scene in Chapter 1 of your book.

**Barzelay:** That’s perfectly fine, please go ahead.

**Host:** As I watched the scene unfold, I wondered whether you might identify with a particular character portrayed in it?

**Barzelay:** Yes, indeed. The one whose given name begins with the letter M and ends with L. As you get to know Marshall – what he cares about, how he thinks, and how he dialogues with Nora, Olivier and Petra – you’ll get to know me, at least as I know myself.

**Host:** I imagine then that the faculty meeting scene is modeled on actual experience. Are Nora, Olivier, and Petra modeled on actual people?

**Barzelay:** You know, the ideas in this book have been developing for quite a while, longer than I would like to believe. As these ideas developed, I worked closely with assistant professors, doctoral students, and practitioners. What’s important about the characters of Nora, Olivier, and Petra is that they represent the roles that need to become part of the professional discipline of public management. We need to bring in talented young academics from social science disciplines like political science; we need to invest in developing doctoral students in fields like public administration and management; and we need to transform some number of practitioners into outstanding practitioner-academics (or what’s called pracademics).

**Host:** At the end of the meeting, Olivier picks up on your idea that public management is a professional discipline. What prompted you to think about this idea?

**Barzelay:** Imagine the following scene. You’re an associate professor, going through your tenure review. You’re asked to meet with the Dean. You sit down, not exactly at ease. In the course of the discussion, the Dean says that he has a hard time understanding what public management is. It’s not a substantive area of public policy. It’s not a social science discipline. It’s taught in the core curriculum, alongside some other courses like statistics. So the way he has resolved his doubt is to view public management as a methodology.

**Host:** You’ve made up this scene, no?

**Barzelay:** No, that “conversation” truly happened. Specifically, in 1994 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

**Host:** Were there any other influences?

**Barzelay:** In 1996, during my first year at LSE, Larry Lynn published a much-expected book entitled *Public Management as Art, Science, and Profession.* I read Lynn’s concluding chapter as contending that public management is a
professional discipline, with practice being craft-like, and with both scholarship and research being important to the education of professional practitioners. That line made sense to me, and I filed it away in my mind.

**Host:** What brought it out of the file?

**Barzelay:** It became relevant again when I started to teach public management to students on an MPA program and in a MSc degree in our Management Department. For a while I presented public management as a form of professional practice. I tied that idea back to Simon's idea that all professional practitioners are problem-solvers and that every professional practitioner brings specialist domain knowledge into the problem-solving process. So, what does that mean for public management? First, it means problem-solving concerns the future of particular public programs and public institutions. Second, it means that public management practice also involves bringing specialist (domain) knowledge about *management* into problem-solving about public programs and public institutions. This framing of public management seemed to go over well with both students and practitioners.

**Host:** So how did you get from “professional practice” to “professional discipline”?

**Barzelay:** I got there as I finally settled on the title and chapter composition of my book, *Public Management as a Design-Oriented Professional Discipline*.

**Host:** That’s the book on-sale here, right outside the theater hall, ladies and gentlemen.

**Barzelay:** I decided that the book had to reach academics – they had to be viewed as the primary audience, in that they would have to endorse the book for students ever to come across it. For academics, it's important to be able to present a “line” about what this field’s character is, in my view. The language of professional discipline is meant to fill this need.

**Host:** A few minutes ago you mentioned that you had filed away in your mind your positive reaction to Larry Lynn’s argument that public management is a professional discipline. Does that mean your idea about public management is the same as, or very closely similar to, the one Lynn presented in his 1996 book?

**Barzelay:** I agree with his book that it is important to take a line on public management. I agree that public management is best labeled as a professional discipline, for many of the same reasons as Lynn’s book puts forth. However, I have many reservations about Lynn’s overall argument about public management. For one, Lynn’s book defines the subject matter of public management too broadly, as performing the executive function in government. I think that broad definition hardly distinguishes public management from all of public administration. For another, the idea of professional practice is underdeveloped. Without an acceptably developed idea of professional practice, you don’t have all the makings of an idea of a professional discipline.

**Host:** Do you have a way to summarize your view of public management as a professional discipline?

**Barzelay:** I do have a diagram that presents an overall conceptual design of public management as a design-oriented professional discipline, if we could project it on the screen.
Host: Go ahead, now.

Barzelay: The main precedent for this diagram is the results chain framework used routinely in presenting program plans to funders and other stakeholders. The results chain framework should be familiar to everyone here – in any case, the underlying ideas are part of ordinary systems thinking, you know, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. I’ve simplified the standard representation by omitting outputs. Let me take you through it.

Host: Please do.

Barzelay: Well, the diagram as a whole represents the professional discipline of public management. It consists in two collections of activities, labeled as enterprises. One is about developing the discipline, the other is about teaching and learning. Both enterprises are designed to accomplish outcomes. The intended outcome of the discipline-development enterprise is an expanding community of faculty who tackle opportunities and challenges to develop public management as a professional discipline. The intended outcome of the teaching and learning enterprise is an expanding community of professional practitioners who tackle opportunities and challenges through true design-focused public management practice, thereby effectuating public value creation.

Host: I’m conscious that we are bumping up against the end of our allotted time. Perhaps you could just say a few words about your book before we wrap up.

Barzelay: Yes, thank you for the opportunity. I think its intent ought to be broadly clear by now: it’s to effectuate the discipline-development enterprise, more than the teaching and learning one, but that’s not excluded. I hope the book will enable field-identity development, faculty development, and professional knowledge development. In relation to the teaching and learning enterprise, I think it can be used by faculty in developing curriculum for courses. It can be used by students in expanding their professional knowledge, particularly in giving a broad perspective on that matter. Overall, the book is meant to effectuate public management becoming “great” as a field – finally, perhaps.

Host: I’m sure we would all like to receive a detailed preview of all the chapters of
this book, but unfortunately we don’t have time today. Thank you very much for the interview. (Turning to speak to the audience.) Colleagues and friends, I think what you have gotten out of today’s session is a feel for why the book has been written and how it might relate to your own concerns. You know what it is for. It’s clearly designed to effectuate public management’s discipline-development enterprise and to enable its teaching and learning enterprise. Whether it has either effect is up to you. Thank you for joining us today.

NOTES

1 Tilly (2006).
3 Heath and Heath (2008).
4 Among many works that view government agencies in terms of such empirical attributes, see Wilson (1989).
5 Ariew and Perlman (2002).
11 Augier and March (2011).
12 Goffman (1959).