

Theories for research in Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

Theory underpins social science endeavours by providing the philosophical assumptions on the following aspects: aspects that constitute social reality (ontology); is accepted as valid evidence of that reality (epistemology); the means to investigate the context (methodology); and the manner in which evidence is gathered (methods). Both positivists and interpretivists generally concur that theory occupies a central role in scientific inquiry into the social world. In disciplines of applied social science such as Public Administration, research generally fosters the transition from theory to practice. In this respect, theory underlies the designs, methods, and findings of the research process.

The purpose of this article was to identify and categorise theories for the analysis of key domains in Public Administration as a field of study. A further aim entailed contributing to the discourse on scientific rigour of Public Administration research in general, and postgraduate studies in particular. For these purposes, desktop research and an extensive literature survey were utilised.

INTRODUCTION

The construction of theories is a major goal of the sciences. Scientific observations generally are guided by pre-existing theories and only become “scientific” through continual experimental testing (Tomic 2010:714). Fisher (1978:37) contends that it is only possible to understand the scientific theories of a given discipline until that discipline develops a substantial body of knowledge in the form of empirical generalisations and underlying principles. In the absence of well-articulated theories, neither qualitative nor quantitative research data have real significance. Research findings thus

have little scientific sense when presented outside the context of a particular theory or of certain theories in combination. For scholars in Public Administration, it is thus important to build a constant corpus of knowledge of this emerging and applied discipline within the social sciences. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that there is multiple theories applicable to analyse phenomena of a particular domain.

Public Administration as an interdisciplinary entails the convergence of organisational theory, social theory, political theory and related studies. In this regard, Pollitt (2010:292) maintains that Public Administration “suffers from multiple personality disorder”. It focuses in general on the meaning, structures and functions of the public-sector domain in all its forms. Public Administration is thus characterised by diversity and finds its origin in various theoretical schools of thought, which Golembiewski (1977) refers to as a “family of miniparadigms”. From a theoretical perspective, Public Administration recounts historical foundations for the study of government as well as epistemological matters associated with public service as a profession and an academic field. Research in this field is generally complicated by the fact that governance-related phenomena are complex and require multiple dimensions, approaches, models and theories to analyse them. As interdisciplinary, Public Governance can probably best be described as a multi-dimensional field of study involving various research traditions and approaches focusing on governmental, political, economic, technological, legal, social, and cultural systems.

The primary purpose of this article is to pinpoint and categorise relevant theories for the study of key domains in the field of Public Administration. The secondary purpose is contributing towards improving the scientific rigour of research within Public Administration in general, and postgraduate studies (i.e. Master’s and doctoral research) in particular. This is done by reflecting on the significance of incorporating theory into research designs, methods, and findings. Furthermore, the article intends to underscore the importance of theory development (i.e. grounded theory) to enhance the maturity level of Public Administration’s corpus of knowledge. For these purposes, desktop research and an extensive literature survey were used. Although the author fully recognises the paradigmatic developments of Public Administration as study domain (e.g. postmodernism, managerialism and governance), the term “Public Administration” is used in this article. It should thus be regarded as an umbrella term that includes recent trends and developments in the field.

THE CONCEPT OF “THEORY”

The concept of “theory” originates from the Greek *theoria*, meaning “contemplation” or “speculation” (Bell and Bryman 2011:34). It is generally a systematic and formalised



expression of previous observations, and is predictive, logical and testable. In principle, scientific theories typically are tentative, and subject to corrections or inclusion in a wider theoretical structure (Bell 2005:26). The basic functions of theory are thus to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena in a variety of contexts.

Theory generally consists of philosophical assumptions, which can be classified in terms of the following categories: epistemology (questions of knowledge), ontology (questions of existence), and axiology (questions of values) (Littlejohn and Foss 2005:18). Epistemological questions deal with the way in which phenomena are explained, whilst ontological underpinnings of a theory refer to what the researcher believes is real and considers to exist. Based on a person's ontology, knowledge is created by constructing such an individual's own reality (i.e. constructivism) (Littlejohn and Foss 2005:19).

Over time scholars developed classifications or levels of theories. Below, a brief summary are provided of the respective levels. These levels should be seen as a continuum ranging from the simplest ones to the more sophisticated, complex levels of theory. According to Grover and Glazier (1986:233–235), Grinnell (1993:94), and O'Leary (2013:45), the following levels of theory can be distinguished:

- *substantive theory*: a set of propositions, which furnish an explanation for an applied area of inquiry;
- *formal theory*. a set of propositions, which furnish an explanation for a formal or conceptual area of inquiry, that is, a discipline;
- *generalisations*: typically more data connected than grand theory or paradigms;
- *grand theory*: a set of theories or generalisations that transcend the borders of disciplines to explain relationships among phenomena;
- *paradigm*: a framework of basic assumptions with which perceptions are evaluated and relationships (and values) are delineated and applied to a discipline or profession; and
- *world view*: an individual's accepted knowledge, including values and assumptions, which provide a "filter" for the perception of phenomena.

Popper (1963:246) furthermore draws a distinction between strong, "thick" theories and weak, "thin" theories. Staats (1991:908) in turn distinguishes "framework" theory from "interlevel" or "interfield" theory. Framework theory is generally used when the detailed treatment of knowledge elements is not possible. The aim of framework theory is to develop a set of basic principles and extend them to selected (sampled) problems (phenomena) through the range of the different fields of the mentioned theory's purview. Interlevel or interfield theory in turn aims to construct "bridging" theories in order to connect separated problem areas or fields.

Theory can be regarded as the philosophical dimension of a phenomenon, while an approach refers to the concrete methods and techniques applied to reach a certain objective. The theory of a subject will, therefore, determine which approach a researcher will pursue. Generally, approaches are categorised in terms of three main groups, namely normatism, empiricism and behaviourism. These groups can be used as tools to analyse a phenomenon. In the case of Public Administration, twelve approaches generally are applied (Gladden 1966:20; Shafritz and Hyde 1997:3; Mautner 2000:166; Rosenbloom and Kravchuk 2002:5). These approaches are:

- politics/administration dichotomy;
- historical;
- institutional (bureaucratic);
- behavioural systems;
- public policy;
- business management (managerialism);
- comprehensive;
- conventional;
- political and political economy;
- structural functional;
- generic administrative; and
- legal.

These approaches in turn guide the development of theory in the respective subfields of the discipline.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEORY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The general purpose of science is to expand knowledge through the discovery of facts. Theory building in this regard can be seen as the main instrument by which researchers strive to achieve this purpose (Kelly 2010:286). Science is built on existing knowledge and can be grouped into two broad categories, namely *natural* and *social* sciences (Bryman 2012:4).

Theory, science and research have a complex interrelationship. Both theory and research form part of the scientific method, a process by which knowledge is acquired, corrected and integrated into a totality of verifiable knowledge. Theories generate hypotheses that can be proven or disproven by research, the results of which may enhance the theory. The results of research may also call a theory into question, causing



it to be rejected or revised. According to Mullins (1973:34), Polkinghorne (1983:14), and Zanetti (1997:147), a theory can be regarded as “scientific” if it is tentative, correctable and dynamic, allowing for changes when new data are discovered, rather than asserting absolute certainty. Furthermore, the particular theory should be the most parsimonious explanation of a phenomenon.

An investigation by Wessels (2008) and Cameron (2013) on the scientific rigour of Public Administration research in South Africa, illustrate that more than two-thirds of the studies in the review used theory to inform a study. From these, 17.9% of the theories were applied; 3.6% were tested, and only 9.4% involved building new theory. These findings underscore the importance of more thorough application, testing and building of theories to advance knowledge production in the applicable field. This is critical to take the field forward, build its maturity as a discipline, and ensure its relevance, not only in practice, but also in terms of scholarly efforts.

Utilising theory in research design and methodology

According to Moore (1991:2), theory is basic to practices of knowledge construction and knowledge production. Theory generally underpins research designs since it provides understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this regard, theory functions as a mental model attempting to explain how aspects of social reality work.

A research design, according to Kerlinger (1986:279) and Phillips (in Cooper and Schindler 1998:130), can be seen as a blue print for the collection, measuring and analysis of data. According to Mitchell and Cody (1993:173), theory influences research designs, including decisions about possible research and the development of research questions. Theory furthermore informs methodology and has implications for the way in which data are analysed and interpreted. Research methodology is based on the particular design, qualitative, quantitative or mixed method. The nature of a study can be exploratory (e.g. what is going on?) and descriptive (e.g. why is it going on?). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:272), exploratory research is inductive in nature and aims to achieve a dense description of the phenomenon under enquiry. Descriptive research aims to describe events or situations and infers that the representation of participants’ realities should be described clearly.

Constructing theoretical frameworks

Sound research depends on applying the most appropriate theory to design theoretical, conceptual and analytical frameworks in order to study certain phenomena. Different theories are best suited to the diverse units of analysis, such as groups, behaviour, and

organisations. The choice of a suitable theory should begin by identifying the problem, research goal, and units of analysis.

Miles and Huberman (1994:18) describe a theoretical framework as a written or visual presentation that “explains either graphically, or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationship among them”. In qualitative research a theoretical framework generally emerges after a robust literature review was undertaken. This framework then increases in levels of sophistication as participants’ views and issues are gathered and analysed.

A theoretical framework generally forms the grounding platform from which constructs associated with the phenomenon under investigation can be studied (Littlejohn and Foss 2005:189). An example of such a meta-theoretical framework is outlined in Table 1. In this example, the researcher aims to investigate the significance of leadership

Table 1: Example of a theoretical framework

Worldview	Divine right		
Paradigm	Postmodern (New) Public Administration		
Grand theory	General Systems Theory		
Theoretical domains	Government	Services	Human resources (Behaviourism)
Subfields within the theoretical domains	Government systems and structures	Service delivery procedures	Political and administrative leadership
Concepts	Local government/ municipality	Front-office practices	Supervision, direction, mentoring, leading, guidance
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual State Theory • Principal-agent Theory • State Autonomy Theory • Local State Theory • Regulation Theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Institutional Theory • Theories on public accountability • Public Good Theory • Social Contract Theory • Decision Theory • Rational Choice Theory • Public Value Theory • Social Exchange Theory • Diffusion of Innovation Theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trait Theory • Contingency Theory • Situational Leadership Theory • Functional Theory • Managerial Grid Theory • Leader-member Exchange Theory • Transformational Theory • Behaviour Change Theory • Theory of Reasoned Action • Social Practice Theory

Source: Author

on efficient service delivery in a particular municipality. The theoretical domains are thus *government*, *services*, and *human resources*, each with its respective theories.

It should be noted that a complete theoretical framework will only emerge after a thorough literature review. Just as a research problem requires contextualisation and background information, a theory requires a framework to help understand its application on the topic under investigation.

THE (THEORETICAL) STATUS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH

As stated previously, the study of Public Administration entails a broad and often interdisciplinary field (*cf.* Raadschelders 1999:281) of enquiry. This field comprises the government and governance systems (e.g. regulatory, institutional and administrative), the particular social system (e.g. human dynamics in society), the political system (e.g. power dynamics in society), and the economic system (e.g. accumulation, production, distribution of wealth). Public Administration as a field of study reflects various research traditions and approaches. These background elements denote a philosophical and theoretical point of departure from which to conduct an inquiry into governance-related phenomena. As such, it provides a research focus and methodological strategy that informs the collection and the analysis of data.

Through traces of its classical origins in Western and Eastern cultures, Public Administration has evolved to cover a broad field of scientific inquiry. As interdisciplinary, it borrows heavily from adjacent or reference disciplines (*cf.* Van der Walldt 2016:213) such as sociology, political sciences, economics, and law. These are approaches and theories that scholars deem useful for the study of phenomena related to the public sector. Early scholars in various fields made significant contributions to theory development. These include authors such as Max Weber (*On bureaucracy*), Gulick (*POSTCORB*), Woodrow Wilson (*The study of administration*), Chester Barnard (*Functions of the executive*), Dwight Waldo (*The administrative state*), Lyndall Urwick (*Science of Administration Theory*), and Herbert A. Simon (*Administrative behaviour*). In a postmodern era, more contemporary scholars expanded the corpus of knowledge to include managerial and broader governance perspectives. These are scholars such as Bouckert, Bourgon, Frederickson, Hughes, Pollitt, Raadschelders, and Rutgers.

Both the practice of public administration and the discipline Public Administration are in a state of flux. This situation is pointed out by eminent scholars such as Greenwood

and Eggins (1995), Rutgers (1998), and Lynn (2008). Their main argument is that practice is not supported adequately by basic and applied research anymore, mainly due to outdated theory (*cf.* Van der Waldt 2016:216). It seems that the applied, practical, and vocational foci that dominate research endeavours are dealt with at the expense of theory application and theory building.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to identify relevant theories, a number of bibliographic databases (Science direct, Taylor and Francis online, Google Scholar and Web of Science) were searched by using pre-determined keywords. Furthermore, online forums were scrutinised such as ResearchGate.com and the Postgraduate Forum (www.postgraduateforum.com/) as well as the data bases of the following international and national associations:

- American Society for Public Administration (www.aspanet.org/);
- Asian Association for Public Administration (www.aapa.asia/);
- Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (<https://www.capam.org/>);
- Institute of Public Administration (www.ipaa.org.au/);
- International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (www.iasia.ias-iisa.org/);
- International Institute of Administrative Sciences (www.ias-iisa.org/iasia/);
- International Public Policy Association (www.icpublicpolicy.org/);
- National Academy of Public Administration (www.napawash.org/);
- National Forum for Black Public Administrators (www.nfbpa.org/);
- The Global Standard in Public Service Education (www.naspaa.org/students/resources/journals.asp);
- The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (www.ipac.ca/); and
- South African Association of Public Administration and Management (www.saapam.co.za/).

This search resulted in the identification of a significant number (>350) of potentially relevant theories. Given the extensive number of theories, only those with a direct bearing on main Public Administration domains were reviewed further and eventually included in the table (Table 2). Consideration was given to the disciplinary bias regarding the application of these theories (e.g. public-sector related focus). Subsequently, a shortlist of theories was drawn up to cover the most important conceptual dimensions of the field of study.



Table 2, as main focus and contribution of this article, consist of four elements. Firstly, it lists the main study domains associated with research in Public Administration. These domains are identified based on the following material:

- a content analysis of topics of Master's and doctoral dissertations and theses;
- the categories of SAQA-registered unit standards for Public Administration and Management; and
- the most relevant themes of articles published in two prominent journals in South Africa, namely the *Journal of Public Administration* and *Administratio Publica*.

The listed domains are:

- Policy Analysis and Management;
- Development Management;
- Public Organisational Development and Management;
- Managing public service delivery;
- Financial Management and Procurement;
- Information, Knowledge, Communication and Technology Management;
- Public Management Ethics;
- Public Administration and Management history, theory and research;
- Disaster Studies; and
- Inter-government Relations.

For purposes of this article, Disaster management was excluded (mainly due to the general absence of modules in current PA curricula concerned specifically with disaster management) and was replaced with "Government and governance". This was done to include subdomains such as "local government", "co-operative governance", "goodness" results-based perspectives, "systems and structures" of government, and "global governance". Secondly, the table lists the potential major subdomains within the main domains, as provided above. Each of these is referred to as "unit of analysis" or "focus of study". Thirdly, the table identifies meta-approaches and key issues that researchers should consider when conducting research in this subdomain.

Lastly, Table 2 identifies grand and substantive theories which should be analysed for purposes of scientific inquiry, knowledge constructions, and the design of conceptual and analytical frameworks in the particular subdomain. In practical terms this implies that researchers at the various levels, including postgraduate candidates, should utilise these theories (and others not listed here) in their literature survey and theoretical orientation (typically chapters 2 and 3) to explore the constructs associated with their topic.

It should be noted that these lists are not mutually exclusive. In other words, meta-approaches and key issues as well as theories listed under “Government and governance” could also be useful in the domains of “Public Administration” and “Public policy”, and *vice versa*. Researchers are thus encouraged to perform desktop research to determine whether other theories listed under different domains (or not listed at all) may also be useful for their studies in these fields. It should be noted further that theories related to governance/public administrative issues flow from a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences. Disciplinary boundaries often simply serve to demarcate the types and contexts of issues in which scholars are interested and the methods through which these may be studied.

In this sense, attempting a comprehensive review of theories would not be possible within the scope of this article. Therefore, the author does not claim that this list is complete. Instead, it should be regarded as work in progress. The idea is that this table could provide valuable guidance to researchers in Public Administration, especially those involved in postgraduate studies. To assist analyses further, where possible, the originator(s) or designer(s) of the identified substantive (micro-) theory are included as well.

Table 2: Core theories for Public Administration research

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Theme 1: Government and governance		
Origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal state • Rule of law • Treaties of government • Network governance • Neo-liberal • Corporate governance • Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Cicero, Machiavelli Montesquieu, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau. • Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States (1933) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Force Theory • Evolutionary Theory • Divine Right Theory • Social Contract Theory • Conquest Theory • Coercion Theory of State Formation • Polinsky, AM: Public Enforcement Theory • Domhoff, GW: State Autonomy Theory • Jellinek, G (1900): General Theory of the State • Marxist Theory of the State • Theory of Liberal State • Bremer's Theory of Foundations of the Constitutional State • Islamic Government Theory • Constitutive Theory • Declaratory Theory • Moral Government Theory

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Goodness of governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes-/results-based; value-for-money • Basic human rights • Efficiency & effectiveness • Economy • Productivity • Performance • State stability • Law and order • Social well-being • Growth • Merit and spoil systems • NPM • Corporate Governance (King I-III etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moore, MH: Public Value Theory • Rothstein, B, Samanni, M & Teorell, J: Quality of Government Theory • Theories of Governance • Samuelson, PA: Public Good Theory • Korpi (1983); Huber & Stephens (2001): Power Resource Theory (PRT) • Grotius, H: Moral Government Theory • Grunig, J: Excellence Theory
Global governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems thinking • Strong/weak states • Imperialism • Core/periphery • Bretton-Wood institutions • United Nations • Washington Consensus • Treaty of Westphalia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Von Bertalanffy, L (1968): General Systems Theory • Wallerstein (1976): World Systems Theory • Prebisch (1960): Path-dependency Theory • Max Weber: Iron Cage Theory • World Government Theory • Game Theory • International Political Theory • Complexity Theory • International Relations Theory • Davis, G (1950): Theory of International Integration • One World Government Theory (Conspiracy Theory)
System of government/ state structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Osborne & Geabler (1992): Reinventing government • Corporatisation • Network Government • Whole-of-government • Third-party government • Collaboration • Comparative analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Von Bertalanffy, L (1968): General Systems Theory • Wallerstein (1976): World Systems Theory • Bureaucratic Politics Theory • Theory of Bureaucracy • Big Government Theory • Citizen-over-state theories of government size and growth • Mooney, Knox & Schacht (2007): Functionalist Theory • Callon, M; Latour, B: Actor Network Theory
Co-operative Governance and Intergovernmental Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems of Government • Statehood • Constitutional dispensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Systems Theory • Principal-Agency Theory • Social Exchange Theory • Saunders (1982): Dual State Theory • Public Institutional Theory • Organisation Theory

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional obligations • Statutory and regulatory framework • Functions • Role-players and stakeholders • Developmental mandate • Provincial oversight • Grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saunders (1982): Dual State Theory • Ross, S & Mitnick, B: Principal-agent Theory • Domhoff, GW: State Autonomy Theory • Goodwin, M: Regulation Theory • Duncan & Goodwin (1982): Theories of local planning and spatial development • Cockburn (1977): Local State Theory

Theme 2: Public Administration and Management

Paradigmatic perspectives (classical to postmodern)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three main branches of theory: Classical Public Administration, New Public Management Theory, and Postmodern Public Administration Theory • Approaches: i.e. administration/politics dichotomy • OECD: Modernising government • Minnebrooks Conferences • (also see <i>Government – origin</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of Luther Gulick: general principles of administration • Theories of Mary Parker Follett • Theories of Henry Fayol • Theories of Chester Barnard • Theories of Herbert A Simon: Administrative Behaviour Theory • Theories of Dwight Waldo • Theories of Woodrow Wilson: Administration/politics dichotomy • Theories of Max Weber: Bureaucratic Theory • Theories of Frederick W Taylor: Scientific management • Theories of Lyndall Urwick: Science of Administration Theory • Theories of Rensis Likert: 4 Systems of Management • Theories of Chris Argyris: Fusion process theory of management • Mayo & Roethlisberger (1927): Human Relations Theory of Public Administration • Theories of political control of bureaucracy • Theories of bureaucratic politics • Public Institutional Theory • Raadschelders: Public Administration as interdisciplinary study • Frederickson, HG: New Public Administration Theory • Bouckert, G & Pollitt, C: Public Management Reform Theory • Hughes; Peters & Guy: Public Management Theory
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Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Public Administration Teaching & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum design Qualification and educational programmes Skills development SAQA & NQF Vocational/practice dichotomy Blended/mix-mode teaching Teaching technology Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills Multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity Approaches: pedagogy, didactic, androgogy, experiential, directive, supportive, facilitating Connectivism (digital learning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piagetian: Learning Theory Bruner: Constructivism Watson, JB: Behaviourism Vroom (1964): Expectancy Theory Classical Gestalt Theory Tolman: Sign Learning Theory Active Learning Theory Kirkpatrick: Learning and Training Evaluation Theory (Four-level) Bandura: Social Learning Theory Argyris, C: Double-Loop Learning Deep Profound and Surface Learning Theory Learning as Transformation Theory Cognitivist Theory Feedback and Reinforcement Theory Staff Development Theory Adult Learning Theory Continuum Theory
Research (knowledge construction and production, and theory development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Epistemology Ontology Phenomenology Theism Interpretivism Constructivism Paradigms Grand, interlevel and interfield theories Scientific principles Positivism (logic) Empiricism Reductionism Induction & deduction Logic (argumentation) Disciplines Multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity A-priori knowledge Hermeneutics Qualitative, quantitative, mixed method research Approaches i.e. historical, legal, institutional, behavioural systems, political, structural functional, public policy, political economy, and managerial approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grounded Theory Critical Theory Feminist Theory Social Sciences Theory Interpretive Theory
Public Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functions Applications Skills Techniques and Tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managerialism Business-like Market-based Network Rationalisation Reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taylor, F; Gilbreth, F: Scientific Management Theory Gulick, L & Urwick, L (1937): Principles of management Koontz, H & O'Donnell, C (1964): Principles of management Drucker, P (1954): Management Practice Theory Theories of Public Management Classical to modern management approaches and theories

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Theme 3: Public organisations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational development • Management • Structure and design • Bureaucracy • Hierarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural-functionalism • Mechanistic and organic systems • Cybernetics • Learning organisation • Departmentalisation 	<p>Classical Organisation Theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor (1916): Principles of scientific management • Gullick (1937): Papers on the science of administration • Gullick & Urwick (1937): Theory of departmentalisation • Weber (1946): Bureaucracy • Simon (1946): Proverbs of administration • Fayol (1949): General principles of management <p>Neoclassical Organisation Theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merton (1957): Social theory and social structure • March, J G & Simon, H A (1958): Organisations • Barnard (1966): The functions of the executive • Katz, D & Kahn, R L (1966); Hirokawa, R Y (1979): Organisation Communication Theory <p>Modern Structural Organisation Theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burns & Stalker (1961): The management of innovation • Blau & Scott (1962): Formal organisations • Walker and Lorch (1968): Organisational choice: Product versus function • Mintzberg (1979): The Structure of organisations • Jaques (1990): In praise of hierarchy • Adaptive Structuration Theory • Cooley, Mead and Goffman: Organisation culture, climate <p>General:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal-agent Theory • Theory of bureaucracy • Public Institutional Theory • Contingency Theory • Public Institutional Theory • Mechanistic and Organic Systems Theory • Albert, S A & Whetten, D A; Cheney and Christensen: Organisational Identity Theory • Cox, T & Blake, S: Theory of prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, ethnocentrism • Grunig, J: Excellence Theory

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Theme 4: Human Resource Management		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Skills and competencies • Supervision • Team building • Recruitment, selection, induction, and placement • Grievance and discipline • Career development • Performance appraisals • Remuneration and compensation • Talent management • Training and development • Labour relations, collective bargaining, and conflict resolution • Equal employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviouralism • Industrial Revolution: “worker-as-machine” metaphor • Organisational culture • Organisational climate • Human motivation • Team dynamics • Group conflict • Personnel and staff • Line and support functions • Human resources • Strategic human resource management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maslow (1943): Hierarchy of needs: Motivation Theory • Elton Mayo, Kurt Lewin, Raymond Miles: Human Relations Theory • Herzberg: Motivation-hygiene Theory • Douglas McGregor: Theory X and Y • Skinner: Behaviourism • Vroom (1964): Expectancy Theory • Rensis Likert: Participative Decision-making Theory • Hargreaves, A & Dawe, R: Path of Professional Development Theory • John Baird (1977); BW Tuchman’s Model of Groups Theory • Cohen and Bailey (1997); Drexler, A, Sibbet, D and Forrester, R (2009): Team Performance Theory • Jablin, FM (2001); Kramer MW (2010): Anticipatory Socialization Theory • Saks, AM and Gruman, JA (2012): Socialization Resources Theory • Adams, J S: Equity Theory • Jablin F M (2001): Disengagement Theory • Janis, L (1983): Groupthink Theory • Berko, R, Wolvin, A & Wolvin, D (2012): Team Conflict Theory • Wanous J P (1980): Self-Selection Theory • McGuire, W J (1961): Inoculation Theory • Phillips, J M (1998): Realistic Job Preview Theory • Jablin, F M (1984); Klein, H J & Polin, B (2012): Assimilating Theory • Contingency Theory
Public leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality • Political leadership • Administrative leadership • Leadership approaches and skills • Organisational culture • Group dynamics • Societal values, norms and traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zaleznik, A (1977): Trait Theory • Fiedler, F: Contingency Theory • Hersey, P & Blanchard, K: Situational Leadership Theory • Chester Barnard: Functional Theory • Blake, R & Mouton, J: Managerial Grid Theory • Graen, G: Leader-member Exchange Theory • Burn, J M: Transformational Theory
Theme 5: Public service delivery		
Systems, procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPM • Customer • Outsourcing • PPPs • Commercialisation • Privatisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samuelson, P A: Public Good Theory • Maslow’s Hierarchy of human needs: Motivation Theory • Social Equity Theory

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Processes improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative service delivery Programme evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Institutional Theory Theories on public accountability Behaviour Change Theory Theory of Reasoned Action Social Practice Theory Diffusion of Innovation Theory Continuum Theory Ajzen (1985): Theory of Planned Behaviour Reckwitz (2002): Social Practice Theory Ryan & Gross (1943): Diffusion of Innovation Theory
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normative, public sector values Professional and ethical standards Good governance Administrative fairness and reasonableness Service liability Responsiveness and accountability Transparency and openness <i>Batho Pele</i> principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Samuelson, P A: Public Good Theory Social Contract Theory Decision Theory Homans (1961): Rational Choice Theory Public Value Theory Public Choice Theory Social Exchange Theory
Theme 6: Public ethics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corruption Maladministration Nepotism Public sector values Public ethos Professionalism Conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normative, public sector values Professional and ethical standards Good governance Administrative fairness and reasonableness Service liability Responsiveness and accountability Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicomachean ethics (classic) Samuelson, P A: Public Good Theory Social Contract Theory Moral Government Theory Sidgwick, H: Meta-ethical Theory Munroe <i>et al.</i> (2007): Theory of Planned Behaviour
Theme 7: Technology in Public Administration		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and communication technology e-Governance e-Democracy e-Decision-making Big Data Knowledge Management Management information systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital-era governance Early-adopters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diffusion of Innovation Theory Critical Mass theory Knowledge Gap Theory Muted Group Theory Ryan & Gross (1943): Diffusion of Innovation Theory Callon, M, Latour, B: Actor Network Theory
Theme 8: Development Management		
Social transformation/ change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalism Socialism Marxism Max Weber: <i>Protestant Ethic</i> Liberalism Bretton-Wood Institutions UNDP Sustainable Development Goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chaos, Complexity & Non-linear Theory Game Theory Stewardship Theory Growth and Catch-up Theories Underdevelopment Theory Modernisation Human development

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
Developmental state/ developmental local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City resilience • Adaptation • Urbanisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stewardship Theory
Ecological/enviromental (protection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Development Goals • International treaties, protocols and conventions • Climate change • Ecological approach • Entropy • Green Economics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stewardship Theory • Environmental Theories
Theme 9: Public policy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design • Implementation • Analysis • Statutory & regulatory framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative law • Constitutional dispensation • Public good • Well-being • Societal values and norms • Political dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lippmann (1922): Public Opinion Theory • McCombs & Shaw (1986): Agenda-Setting Theory • Mass-elite Theory • Tankard <i>et al.</i> (1991): Framing and Priming Theory • Social Contract Theory • Contingency Theory • Public Value Theory • Public Choice Theory • Rational Choice Theory • Whitney & Becker (1982): Gate-keeping Theory • Public Good Theory • Democratic Theory • Jowett, Jowett & O'Donnell (2012): Propaganda Theory • Public Persuasion Theory • Political Systems Theory • Game Theory • Social Exchange Theory • Dependency Theory • Dialogic Communication Theory • Knowledge Gap Theory • Group Theory • Social Interaction Theory • Muted Group Theory • Spiral of Silence Theory • Expectancy Value Theory • Social Penetration Theory • Political Systems Theory • Principal-Agency theory • Organisation Theory

Unit of analysis/ focus of study	Meta-approach/key issues	Grand and substantive theories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local democracy/ Public participation in policy-making Constitutional and statutory obligations Ward Committee System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principles of good governance Transparency Democratic dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Herodotus: Classical Democratic Theory Pateman, C; Mosca; Michaels; Dahl, R: Modern Democratic Theory Davies; Elazar, D: Participatory Democratic Theory Follet; Dewey: Social Reform Theory Lippman; Schumpeter; Mill, JS: Citizenship and Public Service Theory Gate-keeping Theory Agenda Setting Theory Social Exchange Theory Media Richness Theory Medium Theory Dependency Theory Argumentation Theory Expectancy Value Theory Social Penetration Theory Dialogic Communication Theory Cognitive Dissonance Theory Priming and Framing Hypodermic Needle Theory Cultivation Theory
Theme 10: Financial Management and Supply Chain Management		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement Budgeting Allocation Distribution Revenue generation and collection Auditing and accounting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keynesian economics Smith: Wealth of nations Weber: <i>Protestant ethic</i> Karl Marx: <i>Das Capital/ Communist Manifesto</i> Wildavsky: <i>Budgeting as political instrument</i> Welfare versus prosperity/market-driven economic approaches Fiscal and monetary policy approaches Stabilisation Economic growth/wealth creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Value Theory Stewardship Theory Public Choice Theory Economic Theory Theories on public accountability Decision Theory Agent Theory Rational Choice Theory Human Capital Theory Contingency Theory Scientific Management Theory

CONCLUSION

Science is by definition cumulative, involving periods of paradigm shifts that occur when current theories fail to explain certain phenomena. In applied social sciences the application of existing theories to address a problem should generate new knowledge as a form of theory-testing research. Research projects should thus test existing theories, and build new or improved theories. Endeavours of Public Administration research such as postgraduate studies, should develop, test, and advance theory. As such, it should have well-articulated and sound theoretical foundations.



It was the basic premise of this article that the research community in public sector settings are in dire need of more scientific rigor in the developing of theory. In this respect, the main contribution of the article is a detailed list of meta-approaches as well as grand and substantive theories to guide scholarly analyses of public sector-related study domains. Postgraduate studies should start off with robust literature surveys on these potential theories, and continue to construct sound theoretical frameworks. Such frameworks in turn should inform research design and methodological decisions. It is recommended strongly that more basic research should be focused on to foster the scientific rigour of research practices and to build the corpus of knowledge for the discipline.

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