TOWARD A NEW ASPA: BUILDING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE CAPACITY THROUGH NETWORKED PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

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ABSTRACT. This paper: (1) explains why professional associations are vital to building global governance capacity, (2) explores how the shift from hierarchies to networks for organizing human activity applies to organizations, information and communications technologies (ICT), governance and professional associations, and (3) suggests some shifts in vision, programs and governance that might help the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) network more effectively with other professional associations to build global governance capacity.

INTRODUCTION

Professional associations for public administrators are essential in building global governance capacity because global connectedness increases the need for building public management capacity, and because professional associations provide essential member services that increase individual and organizational competence. Professional associations like ASPA are particularly important in this respect because, given that their membership includes both academicians and practicing public administrators, they can connect the four essential elements of effective public management (theory, research, practice and teaching).

Major shifts in how we perceive organizations and measure organizational effectiveness, information and communications technology (ICT) and governance have worked together to reinforce

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the idea that networks are the most effective way to organize human activity. In the past, hierarchies were the standard method of organizing human activity because classical management theory developed around bureaucratic hierarchies, available technologies for receiving, processing and interpreting information reinforced the relationship between hierarchical design and centralized policy-making, and classical public administration equated centralized control with legal and political authority. None of these assumptions about organizations and their environments is as valid today as it was a half century ago. This includes professional associations like ASPA.

To make ASPA more effective as a networked professional association under these circumstances, ASPA leaders must continue to focus on ASPA’s traditional role as the premier generalist organization for US public administrators, and at the same time make basic conceptual shifts: expanding ASPA’s vision from government to governance, and widening ASPA’s vision from US to global public administration. These will help ASPA leaders be more receptive to ideas from international and corporate colleagues about how best to support public administration and public service. Also, focusing on big global development issues like poverty, social equity, economic justice, environmental sustainability, and public service ethics can re-energize US ASPA members by re-connecting them with the reasons why professionalizing public administration and public service were so important to developing administrative capacity in the US two generations ago (Klingner, 2004b). By accepting that change is a process rather than a goal and by continuing to move in this direction, ASPA leaders can take the concrete steps in programming and governance needed to make this happen.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN BUILDING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

Professional associations for public administrators are essential in building global governance capacity because (a) global connectedness increases the need for building public management capacity, (b) professional associations provide essential member services that increase individual and organizational competence, and (c) professional associations like ASPA connect the four essential elements of effective public management (theory, research, practice
and teaching) because their membership includes both academicians and practicing public administrators.

Building Public Management Capacity

The world is smaller and more interconnected due to many intersecting trends and conditions – communication and transportation; economics; war, terrorism, violence, and ethnic conflict; environmental pollution, natural disasters, epidemics, and climate change; and global migrations (Keohane & Nye, 2000). Throughout the world governments are pressured to make good policy decisions and use scarce resources effectively (Dilulio, Garvey & Kettl, 1993; Ingraham, Joyce & Donahue, 2003). Government capacity is arguably the most obvious factor affecting perceptions of governance (Klingner, Nalbandian & Romzek, 2002). In developing countries lacking a strong culture of autonomous government or indigenous markets (Klingner & Pallavicini Campos, 2002), global markets tend to dominate or even undercut (Friedman, 2000) national economic and political systems.

Providing Member Services that Build Competence

The key function of all professional associations is to provide their members with benefits beyond those available to them as individuals at a reasonable price. These include professional training and certification, technical assistance to organizations, professional publications, conferences, networking, policy advocacy and internet-based services. To do this, they must counteract the current belief by many young people that because all available information can be obtained for free on the web, professional associations are a waste of time and money.

Uniting Theory, Research, Practice and Teaching

Public administration derives from a number of different academic disciplines and applies to a wide range of professional practice. Thus there is a constant need to integrate knowledge from these diverse disciplines and apply it relevantly to diverse fields (Klingner & Washington, 2000; Lynn, 1996). Most professional associations in fields related to public administration focus on improving practice. This includes: the American Management Association. Others focus on theory and research (including the
Association for Public Policy and Management [APPAM], the American Political Science Association [APSA] and the Association for Research in Non-Profit and Volunteer Associations [ARNOVA]). The National Association of Schools of Public Administration and Affairs (NASPAA) focuses on teaching. Many others are targeted to the needs of professionals in specific areas of practice: the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) for local government officials, the American Planning Association (APA) for city planners, and the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) for personnel directors.

The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) is unique in that it includes all these elements. This is important because of the integral and mutually supportive relationship among these factors. Theory drives research, which in turn produces results that improve practice. Teaching unites these three elements, leading to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts: an integrated view of public administration as art, science and practice.

ORGANIZING HUMAN ACTIVITY IN NETWORKS RATHER THAN HIERARCHIES

At one time, hierarchies were the standard method of organizing human activity, for a variety of reasons: (a) classical management theory developed around bureaucratic hierarchies, (b) available technologies for receiving, processing and interpreting information reinforced the relationship between hierarchical design and centralized policy-making, and (c) classical public administration equated centralized control with legal and political authority. None of these assumptions about organizations and their environments is as valid today as it was a half century ago. In their place, major shifts in how we perceive organizations and measure organizational effectiveness, information and communications technology (ICT) and governance have worked together to reinforce the idea that networks are the most effective way to organize human activity. This includes professional associations.

Networked Organizations

Classical organization theory was based on bureaucratic hierarchies as the most effective and efficient method of organizing human activity. There were many reasons: the industrial revolution, scientific management and military logistics during two world wars.
But the essential underlying belief was that organizational effectiveness defined from the perspective of a single focal organization, required centralized communication, decision-making, coordination and control (Rainey, 2003). Today, effectiveness is more likely to be defined around networked trans-organizational systems (Halley, 1994). The activities defined as boundary-spanning from the perspective of a single organization relating to its environment are more likely to be viewed as internal communication and information exchange from a network perspective. Effective public policy responses require coordinated flows of information, decision-making and program implementation within a network of organizations representing different levels of government (local, state, national and international) and different sectors (business, government and community based organizations) (Brudney, O'Toole & Rainey, 2000). It was the lack of network effectiveness as much as the lack of individual organizational effectiveness that led to ineffective responses to Hurricane Katrina (US Congress, 2006). In sum, the locus for evaluating effectiveness has shifted from the individual organization to the network; and the criteria for outcome evaluation has shifted from organizational effectiveness to network performance (Halley, 1997; Kettl & Fesler, 2005).

**Networked ICT**

Conceptually, ICT is the technical platform that enables a knowledge management system to function by enabling people to organizing and compile information. And if organizing people in shared spaces for knowledge creation helps in mass production of knowledge on the technical side, ICT can enable virtual creation of such spaces – a solution that is not tested sufficiently, but in theory, one that can revolutionize the process of knowledge creation. In government and business, the technological innovations with which organizations seek to succeed embody new knowledge. Databases build government capacity by providing easy access to necessary information and knowledge. To build capacity, a database must include not only relevant information but also a mechanism for making connections between disparate concepts and documents. Success in a knowledge-based society requires sophisticated approaches to gathering information, while at the same time enabling users to disseminate it on a real-time basis. Passive databases represent an early stage of ICT knowledge management applications.
Interactive, participative, and networked forms of ICT can be demand-driven and customer-centered, offering more opportunity for service enhancement through e-government (Klingner & Sabet, 2005).

This shift from hierarchical to networked ICT is linked to the shift from hierarchical to networked effectiveness by the debate between “best practices” and “smart practice” approaches to improving public management capacity in developing nations. “Best practice” connotes that sets of solutions may be applied from one context to another. Scholars have found numerous examples of cross-national policy problems where problems in one setting have effects on other nations (Geva-May, 2002) and to some extent, it is correct to assert that global New Public Management (NPM) reforms represent similar governmental responses to common factors such as financial stress and the international transfer of NPM concepts among rich and poor nations alike (Kettl, 1998; Klingner, 2000; Pollitt & Bouchaert, 2000). But while problems seem similar across nations, solutions effective in one context may not succeed in another (Jones & Kettl, 2003; Barzeley, 2001; 2003). Consequently, “smart practice” (Bardach, 2000, p. 72), based on the assumption that it is essential to take contextual variables into account, is more likely to enable us to make the adaptations to contingency required for effective policy implementation (Jones & Klingner, 2004).

Networked Governance

Two generations ago, supporting public administration and public service in the US meant professionalizing government agencies and civil servants. While this is still true, public administration has become increasingly state and local rather than federal; and it is much more likely to involve cooperative and competitive service delivery among public agencies, NGOs and private businesses. Although many public administrators are more comfortable with the traditional authority, interaction, accountability and ethical relationships defined by government than with the nebulous social interactions implied by governance, sovereign and hierarchical government has been transformed into networked governance (Fountain, 2001; Cooper, 2003; Peters, 2001). The role of government is to “steer, not row” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

At one level, current US foreign policy conflicts can be seen as a global example of the underlying tension among all three of these
shifts (Klingner, 2006c). Should global development be defined by the success of individual nations or by a global approach to issues defined globally? Are hierarchical systems of collecting and evaluating national security information superior to the Internet? Are stability and peace best achieved by the unilateral action of a dominant and sovereign world power or by networked governance? Is success most likely to be achieved by the application of uniform American values and techniques (“best practices”) or by more adaptive, contextual and contingent-based “smart practices?” The current Iraqi debacle indicates, at least in hindsight, the reasons for the shift from hierarchies to networks.

**Networked Professional Associations**

These precepts apply to those professional associations involved with building global governance capacity, both in terms of what they do together and how they do it. These aspects are inter-related.

In terms of what they do, it is important to keep in mind that building government capacity means different things in developed and developing countries. In developed countries, capacity-building usually means maintaining government’s ability to coordinate policy, gather information, deliver services through multiple (often nongovernmental) partners, and replace hierarchical bureaucracies with more flexible mechanisms for managing indirect government. In developing countries, it probably means establishing government’s ability to deliver basic public services through core administrative functions like budgeting, human resource management and program evaluation while at the same time focusing on the more fundamental changes necessary for effective political systems (Kettl, 1997; Klingner & Pallavicini Campos, 2002).

It is clear that international development has evolved over the past fifty years from relatively simplistic and patronizing efforts to develop less-developed countries by transplanting Western technology (including administrative systems and processes) to a more complex and interactive global network (Keohane & Nye, 2000; Kahler & Lake, 2003). This transformation also applies to our understanding of innovation diffusion and adoption (IDA), organizational learning (OL) and knowledge management (KM). IDA describes the process by which new products, values, policies or processes move from one context to another. If viewed purposively,
this spread can be described as both OL and KM (Sabet & Klingner, 1993). Within the overall context of development administration and program implementation, endogenous adoption of exogenous innovations is best viewed as a complex process of technology transfer, organizational learning and knowledge management. Because these are heavily influenced by contextual variables, this is an indigenous process rather than one of transfer and absorption. It is best viewed as some “smart practice” guidelines rather than as a uniform toolkit. Diffusion and adoption of “smart practice” innovations in governance, public policy and public administration depend on a clear understanding of the mechanisms involved in technology transfer, and the contextual variables that affect successful implementation.

If we apply these lessons to how professional associations should work together to build government capacity, we conclude that this is best done through formal or informal networks that share information and activities. To use an old expression, they should think locally and act globally to improve research, theory, practice and teaching toward the reciprocal transfer of “smart practice” innovations in a manner that is effective, efficient and sustainable. Significant scientific advances often occur in the interstices between disciplines. End users often determine the scope and direction of innovation diffusion and adoption. In the same way, valuable innovations in building public administrative capacity often occur through the interactions of researchers, practitioners and teachers working together across sectors, countries and fields of practice (Bertucci, 2006; Klingner, 2006a; United Nations, 2006).2

HOW ASPA CAN NETWORK MORE EFFECTIVELY TO BUILD GLOBAL GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

For ASPA to participate more fully as a networked professional association building global governance capacity, its leaders should consider some critical shifts in vision, programs and governance.

Vision

ASPA leaders should continue to emphasize its role as the premier generalist organization for US public administrators, and also make two conceptual shifts essential to expanding its intended
domain (Thompson, 1967) from government to governance, and from
the US to the world.

**Enlarging ASPA’s Vision from Government to Governance**

When ASPA was founded in 1939, supporting public administration and public service meant professionalizing government agencies and civil servants. This is still true today because despite ideological shifts, public employment has steadily increased since World War II to its current level of about 21 million (US Census Bureau, 2002). However, contemporary public administration is increasingly state and local rather than federal; and it is much more likely to involve cooperative and competitive service delivery among public agencies, NGOs and private businesses. So in addition to its traditional membership base of state and local public administrators, ASPA must also target those non-profit and private sector employees engaged in public service delivery as potential new members. It must focus on issues like interagency effectiveness, multilateral accountability, organizational culture and personal ethics generated by the conflict and collaboration across sectors and levels of government as the locus of its member-driven programs and activities.

**Widening ASPA’s Vision from US to Global Public Administration**

While the US began professionalizing the public service over a century ago, the need to support professional public administration and public service internationally remains strong. It thus offers ASPA the opportunity to attract international members and strengthen relationships with counterpart global organizations (Klingner, 2006b), for two reasons. First, this will help us get ideas from international colleagues about how best to support public administration and public service (Klingner & Washington, 2000). Second, focusing on big global development issues like poverty, social equity, economic justice, environmental sustainability, and public service ethics can re-energize US ASPA members by re-connecting them with the reasons why professionalizing public administration and public service were so important to developing administrative capacity in the US two generations ago (Klingner, 2004b). There are problems with this perceptual shift, or ASPA would have done it a long time ago. Can ASPA sell American public administrators on learning from other
countries? Can ASPA provide an effective home for those interested in big global development issues?

Programs

If ASPA leaders agree on the need to move in these directions, here are some concrete steps ASPA could take:

1. **Market ASPA to Employees of NGOs and Government Contractors.** A major trend of the past generation has been the increasing delivery of public services by non-profits and the private sector. Also, the ranks of full-time public service professionals have been augmented by temporary and part-time workers. While precise figures on their number vary by exactly how the contingent workforce is defined, up to 230,000 additional contingent workers are employed in public administration (US Department of Labor 2005). These professionals need associations like ASPA to welcome them as full partners in support of professional public administration and public service values.

2. **Offer Corporate Memberships or Sponsorships.** ASPA now offers only individual memberships. Creating an additional corporate membership or sponsorship category (as does IPMA-HR) would allow employers of government contractors to award individual ASPA memberships to their employees as a public service gesture or a training and development opportunity. It would also enable ASPA to recognize these corporate sponsors by giving them reduced journal advertising or conference exhibit rates, or reduced conference or workshop registration fees.

3. **Offer Reciprocal Membership Discounts with other Professional Associations.** Disney sells multi-day passes to encourage vacationers to visit several theme parks at a discount over daily rates. ASPA should pursue a similar strategy that would allow members of one professional association to join ASPA at a discount, and vice versa. This would boost membership and strengthen ASPA’s intended domain as a facilitative, networking partner. Potential money-handling issues could be minimized by extending this reciprocal benefit to an identical number of members of each organization. And to emphasize ASPA’s global interests and membership, we should offer the same benefit to
members of our international counterparts such as the UNPAN regional partners (United Nations, 2006). The unknowns with this proposal are its effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in attracting more members.

4. **Cooperate with other Associations in Conference Exhibits and Programming.** Most ASPA members belong to other professional associations. ASPA might cooperate with these associations by exhibiting at their conferences. It might also take advantage of its membership base of generalists and academicians by offering to provide one of these as a discussant on conference panels organized by more specialized and practitioner-based associations. Many ASPA members belong to other professional associations. ASPA could organize brainstorming sessions to see if any of these other associations had “smart practice” innovations that ASPA could adapt and adopt. And we could also ask, “What other strategies could ASPA consider that might lead other associations to think of ASPA as a resource they could use to benefit themselves?”

5. **Attract More International Members.** If the future of public administration and public service is international as well as domestic, ASPA needs to attract more international members. We can do this by more widely advertising our international electronic membership, increasing ASPA sponsored programs’ other activities through Sections and memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and asking the international professional associations that partner with us to advertise ASPA and reciprocal membership discounts on their web sites, with reciprocity.

6. **Offer More Web-based Services to International Members.** Some of the major benefits of professional associations are conferences, technical assistance and publications. Yet distance and visa problems make it difficult if not impossible for international members to attend US conferences. We might offer more virtual (web-based) conference activities, and provide more list-serves and other threaded discussion groups for international members. Because the cost and vagaries of international mail service make it counter-productive to mail paper documents internationally, ASPA should provide these electronically to all international members. It would be necessary to explore the copyright implications of this for those ASPA publications (like
Public Administration Review) that are distributed via contractual agreement by an outside publisher like Sage or Blackwell.

7. **Offer Financial Incentives to International Members.** In addition to the above issues, financial issues often preclude membership or conference attendance. ASPA could offer fee reductions in these areas for members from developing countries (as determined by World Bank or UN development indices) (Klingner, 2006b). Before doing this, ASPA would have to determine the true cost (in financial and staff resources) of electronic membership.

**Governance**

As the ASPA Governance and Strategic Planning Task Force under former President Edward Jennings moves forward to draft ASPA’s quadrennial strategic plan for review and approval by the ASPA National Council at the March 2008 National Conference, it is important to remember that all professional associations need to re-align their goals, structure, programs and resource allocation with environmental changes (American Society for Public Administration 2004). For ASPA, this may include the following changes in governance:

1. **Clarifying International Activities’ Purpose and Coordination.** ASPA conducts a range of cooperative activities with international and trans-national organizations, sometimes with corporate sponsorship. Some activities occur within a formally established MOU with a counterpart professional association, but many others like those of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA) are conducted without benefit of an MOU. ASPA has also created Sections (i.e., the Section on China) in cases where an MOU with a counterpart organization in that country had already been established. ASPA’s increasing international involvement led to designation of the International Coordinator position and to International Task Force activities under Presidents Cheryle Broom, Don Menzel and Wendy Haynes (Klingner 2006b). But because the lack of clear alignment and accountability noted above with respect to Sections also may exist within this area as well, the same “form follows function” questions arise. Should ASPA work cooperatively with transnational and international corporations and NGOs as well as with counterpart professional
associations? What purpose is served by a formal MOU that goes above and beyond any other type of international collaboration? What policy and process governs review of ASPA’s international activities to make sure that they are consistent with ASPA objectives and that they are sustainable over time? Two contradictory tendencies are at play here: ASPA needs to not to commit itself financially and legally to affiliations with international counterpart organizations without an appropriate review of the purposes and risks of the proposed affiliation; yet ASPA also needs to not discourage international contacts by individual members that may lead to a formal ASPA affiliation, given ASPA’s dependence on the financial resources provided by individual member leaders through their employing institutions for the initiation of international initiatives.

2. Revising National Council Representation. Per Section 2 of the ASPA Bylaws (American Society for Public Administration 2001: 4), the National Council comprises 19 voting members including 3 representatives from each of 5 electoral districts. The International Coordinator position was created in 2004 without a Bylaws change by assigning this responsibility to an existing National Council member (Klingner 2004a). However, as ASPA evolves to include more international members and support more global activities, it may be advisable to change Section 3 to provide for election or appointment of an at-large international representative as a voting National Council member. Other professional associations such as IPMA-HR have done this when faced with a similar situation.

CONCLUSION

Professional associations for public administrators are essential in building global governance capacity because global connectedness increases the need to build public management capacity, and because professional associations provide essential member services that increase individual and organizational competence. Professional associations like ASPA are particularly important in this respect because, given that their membership includes both academicians and practicing public administrators, they can connect the four essential elements of effective public management (theory, research,
practice and teaching). In particular, the link between theory and practice (praxis) is important whether it applies to reflective practitioners (Brudney, O’Toole & Rainey, 2000; Denhardt, 2004) or to the consultants who constitute such a significant part of international development activities aimed at strengthening public administrative capacity (Bertucci, 2006).

Major shifts in how we perceive organizations and measure organizational effectiveness, information and communications technology (ICT) and governance have worked together to reinforce the idea that networks are the most effective way to organize human activity. In the past, hierarchies were the standard method of organizing human activity because classical management theory developed around bureaucratic hierarchies, available technologies for receiving, processing and interpreting information, reinforced the relationship between hierarchical design and centralized policy-making; and classical public administration equated centralized control with legal and political authority. None of these assumptions about organizations and their environments is as valid today as it was a half century ago. This applies to professional associations.

To make ASPA more effective as a networked professional association under these circumstances, ASPA leaders must continue to focus on ASPA’s traditional role as the premier generalist organization for US public administrators, and at the same time make basic conceptual shifts: expanding ASPA’s vision from government to governance, and widening ASPA’s vision from US to global public administration. These will help ASPA leaders be more receptive to ideas from international and corporate colleagues about how best to support public administration and public service. Also, focusing on big global development issues like poverty, social equity, economic justice, environmental sustainability, and public service ethics can re-energize US ASPA members by re-connecting them with the reasons why professionalizing public administration and public service were so important to developing administrative capacity in the US two generations ago (Klingner, 2004b). By accepting that change is a process rather than a goal and by continuing to move in this direction, ASPA leaders can take the concrete steps in programming and governance needed to make this happen.
NOTES

1. The views expressed in this article do not reflect the official policy positions of the American Society for Public Administration.

2. The twenty years I have spent traveling, living and working internationally have of course brought enjoyable opportunities to see new places. Above all, they have meant the chance to share ideas and experiences with intelligent and motivated colleagues throughout the world. If I work hard and listen well, I always learn more than I teach.

REFERENCES


