

## **Global collaboration to promote standards of quality in public administration, public affairs and public policy education**

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### **Abstract**

Developing quality public service education and, in turn, quality public service is an ongoing challenge. Programs around the world are urged by accrediting bodies and other stakeholders to develop measures or indicators of quality and to meet established standards. As the world becomes increasingly more interdependent, common problems can often be met with common solutions when possible. However, in the field of public administration education seeking that common ground may be a challenge. Though the challenges may be similar around the world, differences among countries affect the implementation of solutions. This paper looks at the people and the process (collaboration) that impact successfully producing standards of quality (the product) for public service education and training.

### **Introduction**

There is what seems to be a common recognition among public service educators and practitioners that preparing individuals for public service is a global challenge – whether through traditional initial preparation in educational avenues such as universities, institutes and schools, executive/mid-career education, or government-sponsored civil servant training programs (UNDESA/IASIA, 2002; IIAS, IAD and IASIA, 2007; NASPAA 2009). Because the public seeks high quality services, organizations in the public sector must be high performing. In order to perform well, persons working in the public sector should be of the highest level of skill and preparation. Consequently, the institutions that educate and train public sector workers must continuously strive for excellence because better governance can fundamentally be linked to the more effective preparation of public administrators (Task Force on Standards of Excellence in Public Education and Training, 2008; Newcomer & Allen, 2010). Public service education and training (i.e. public policy, public administration and public affairs) programs must have as one of their primary goals the need to produce public sector leaders with knowledge, skills and abilities to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing global environment. Caddy and Vintar found that there is a link between economic development and the presence of professional public administrators and a competent and well-established public sector management (Caddy & Vintar, 2002). According to Bertucci, “Developing strong leadership in the public sector is a crucial task in order for any country to prosper. In fact, the quality of government leadership has a great impact on the quality of governance, which in turn is often closely related to the level of development of a region” (Bertucci, 2007). Similarly, Mishra asserts that the effectiveness of service deliver by public agencies depends on the competence of individuals managing public organizations. He further states that “it becomes an immediate objective and goal for every government to ensure that its public servants are educated and trained properly and adequately to meet the challenges posed by globalization and supra-national organizations on one hand

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the work of the individual author and does not necessarily reflect the official views and policy of NASPAA. This is a work in progress; the author welcomes all comments.

and web technologies on the other.” Such an objective can be achieved if the standards and quality of higher education systems, particularly public administration education and training are enhanced by adopting innovative methods (Mishra, 1999).

How should the goal of achieving quality public service education be met? Educational and training institutions and their accrediting bodies have put forth concerted effort to ensure this is accomplished. Achieving this goal, however, requires a holistic approach. Stakeholders and collaborative partners must go beyond academic and civil servant training and one-dimensional agency conversations. In an environment of increased global interdependencies, it is essential for public sector stakeholders around the world, and across agency and organizational boundaries, to communicate about shared educational concerns and interests and to identify and pursue standards that will equip current and future public sector professionals with the capabilities to address complex social challenges. This paper holds that the process of collaboration should be clearly defined, and that having a process accepted by all stakeholders produces better results – in this case better quality standards of quality for public service education. Using a ten point model of collaboration defined by Hudson et al. this study looks at several themes that may promote better interactions among public service stakeholders in order to better define and measure standards of quality for public service education and training.

### **Quality Standards and Global Collaboration**

Defining and determining quality public service education can be arduous. Defining quality is obscure, especially in higher education. The meaning of quality can be interpreted and applied differently by different organizations (van der Krogt, 2005; Burrows and Harvey, 1992; Pfeffer and Coote, 1991; Gibson, 1986). Each organization has a different perspective on quality. Harvey and Green note that “this is not a different perspective on the same thing but different perspectives on different things with the same label” (Harvey & Green, 1993). Pfeffer and Coote observed that in assessing quality in higher education the traditional concept is useless because it provides no definable means of determining quality (Pfeffer & Coote, 1991).

The method of assessing and measuring quality is important and should be explored in global conversations. Though there are numerous models for assessing quality Burrows, Harvey and Green explore four themes that appear consistent in many models.

- Conformance to specification or standards
- Quality as fitness for purpose
- Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals
- Quality as meeting customers ‘stated or implied needs

The Task Force on Excellence in Public Administration Education and Training suggested eight standards of excellence for public administration education and training:

1. Public service commitment in all activities – teaching, research technical assistance and other service activities
2. Advocacy of public interest values
3. Combining scholarship, practice and community service
4. The faculty are central
5. Inclusiveness is at the heart of the program: A critical element in the achievement of excellence in public administration education and training is an unwavering commitment on the part of faculty and administration to diversity of ideas and of participation
6. A curriculum that is purposeful and responsive:

7. Adequate resources are critical (Task Force on Standards of Excellence in Public Education and Training, 2008)

While each of these approaches has some relevance in assessing quality in public administration education and training the model for quality has been the acceptance of standards. Standards define an expected level of requirements and conditions against which quality is assessed or that must be attained (van der Krogt, 2005). In using standards as a means of measuring quality it is important for education stakeholders to have a common understanding of how each standard is defined and applied (Burrows, Harvey, & Green, 1992). It is important to consider the diversity of cultures, forms of government and other areas of uniqueness. In a recent paper presented by Laurel McFarland and Younguck Kang they assert that in assessing the quality of international institutions there is a need to take account of national and regional distinctiveness (McFarland & Kang, 2013).

Public administration and management training (PAMT) in developing countries has expanded and diversified in the past three decades. Five preconditions have been identified as necessary to ensure the effectiveness of that training:

- training policies and management of institutions,
- the educational system,
- the stock of educated personnel,
- personnel policies and systems,
- the administrative culture of governments

Few less-developed countries (LDCs) have formally adopted training policies, especially related to public enterprises (Paul, 1983). These factors should be considered as standards are defined.

### **The Need for Global Collaboration**

How to raise and sustain standards of excellence in public affairs education and training is a longstanding and perennial challenge (UNDESA/IASIA Task Force, 2007). In a working paper produced by USAID the author notes the importance of quality improvement in education globally and the desirability of international collaboration in order to facilitate improvement (Kendall, 2006). Accrediting bodies such as the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) also recognize the significance of collaboration in quality improvement. The preface to NASPAA Standards 2009 states: "As the needs of the public sector change, NASPAA must undertake an earnest discussion of how to best educate and develop public affairs leaders, ensuring that graduates of accredited programs obtain the relevant and competitive skills and competencies they need to excel in public service professions" (NASPAA Standards 2009: Defining Quality in Public Affairs Education ).

Comparable discussions were held by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) and similar bodies. These discussions on how to best educate and train public affairs leaders should not be confined within individual schools, accrediting bodies or associations but should have broader participation. As there are many high quality programs around the world as well as "a striking rise in international flows of students, faculty, scholarship and international jobs in public affairs" the discussion of standards of quality should include input from around the world and across stakeholders. The discussions should be collaborative in nature, taking into account both the similarities and differences of the participating stakeholders. Recognizing the emerging international trend, McFarland

concluded that an internationalized set of standards and an international accreditation process would require an internationally convened body to create and administer it (McFarland, International Accreditation Issues: NASPAA White Paper, 2007).

While international accreditation has not been broadly agreed upon, conversations about quality public affairs education abound. Questions continue to be raised about the need for common standards. Common goals do not necessarily mean common standards. An examination of the standards of NASPAA, EAPAA (European Association for Public Administration Accreditation) and the Standards of Excellence in Public Education and Training developed by the Task Force on Standards, to name a few, show that most standards are general in nature and are often very similar to, or taken from, each other. If this paradigm continues the question of quality public affairs education should focus on the knowledge and skills required for public sector management/administration, the extent to which we can measure and/or assess quality and the extent to which public affairs academic and training programs can effectively carry out quality improvement. Are the requirements the same or similar for academic and training programs? Who, or what individuals, organizations or institutions, can best define what will be most beneficial for education and training programs?

### **Stakeholders in Public Administration Education and Training**

In September 2012, the second European Congress on Global Education held in Lisbon, Spain brought together international organizations, governments, local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, as well as educators from Europe to facilitate a dialogue, a learning experience and strengthen political commitment to global education among stakeholders (Ruano, 2012). Similar Congresses have been held in Latin America, the United States and other parts of the world. In order for public service education and training to benefit from such assemblies representatives from all continents, individuals from developed and less developed countries, international organizations, governments, local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, as well as educators must be a part of the discussion.

The concept of stakeholders stems from the sense of cooperative agreement or arrangements. According to Correia, the stakeholder concept “emerged in the 1960s among academics at the Stanford Research Institute, who proposed that, instead of focusing exclusively on shareholders, a firm also should be responsible to a variety of stakeholders without whose support the organization would collapse” (Correia, 2005). The term was made known by R. Edward Freeman, who included in his definition any or all individuals or groups who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 2010). In that vein most commonly defined stakeholders in public administration are citizens, policy makers, and corporations or businesses. These are the same stakeholders for public administration education and training with the addition of faculty and students. Globally, those contributing to the discussion of standards for public affairs education depend on the political and administrative culture and organization of each country. These different stakeholders may play different roles or have different input into what knowledge, skills or competencies are needed for public service; the stakeholders, however, remain fairly consistent.

The discussions about public affairs education must be structured so that all stakeholders are represented and all contribute to the conversations. There are numerous models of collaboration. The model defined by Hudson et al. takes a comprehensive approach to promote more productive discussions. This model is explored below taking into consideration previous discussions as well as existing paradigms of collaboration among public service organizations.

## The Collaborative Process

The literature on collaboration provides many definitions and structural possibilities. The general meaning of the term collaboration is to work together toward a common end. It assumes an association among the participants and that participants in the process “co-labor to achieve common goals, often working across boundaries and in multi-sector and multi-actor relationships. Collaboration is based on the value of reciprocity and describes the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved easily by single organizations” (O’Leary, Gazley, McGuire, & Bingham, 2008). Brna states that the “notion of collaboration appears to be almost universally accepted as being valuable as a way of encouraging learning to take place in the classroom. However, the term collaboration is often used as if it were either unambiguous or intentionally vague. The literature on collaboration indicates that there is a significant degree of disagreement” (Brna, 1998).

Hudson et al. in reviewing the literature on collaboration identify ten components of collaborative endeavors. Like the research of Hudson, this paper notes that there is no one-best-way of collaboration codified. However, recognition of the more dominant factors found in the literature may help those organizations encouraging a collective discussion to promote quality public service education. Hudson’s stages are:

1. Contextual factors: expectations and constraints
2. Recognition of the need to collaborate
3. Identification of a legitimate basis for collaboration
4. Assessment of collaborative capacity
5. Articulation of a clear sense of collaborative purpose
6. Building up trust and principled conduct
7. Ensuring wide organizational ownership
8. Nurturing fragile relationships
9. Selection of appropriate collaborative relationship
10. Selection of a pathway (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood, & Wistlow, 1999)

### **Contextual factors: expectations and constraints**

The authors suggest that individuals or groups involved in the collaborative process begin the process by exploring what participants expect from the process as well as possible restrictions or limitations. Honest conversations must be promoted at this stage so that geographical, cultural financial and other possible obstacles are considered. Can possible limitations be the manner in which past collaborations regarding public affairs education and training have taken place? Previous interactions have been organization or institution specific. For example, discussions among accrediting bodies have been limited to those bodies such as discussions among academic and training institutions. While each of these groups bring input from their organizational stakeholders, is this sufficient? Are discussions at this level one-dimensional? This issue must be raised and resolved as collaborators begin discussions.

### **Recognition of the need to collaborate**

This point has previously been established in this study and among many of the stakeholders in public administration education. Several accrediting bodies and other organizations including UNDESA/IASIA in 2003, Network of Schools of Public Policy Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) in 2003 and 2007, and the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) in 2006, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 2005, and others have been discussing quality standards. There are a number of reports with similar findings, exploring the notion of how to

measure quality (UNDESA/IASIA, 2002; IIAS, IAD and IASIA, 2007; NASPAA 2007). Similar discussions may have been held among organizations and institutions that train public administrators. Their findings are not so prevalent in the literature.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration began exploring the development of international standards for public administration and training. What resulted was a series of papers that explored the critical issues in public administration education and training with some prescriptive observations on the delivery and design of public administration education and training programs and the standards applied to evaluating the quality of those programs (UNDESA/IASIA Task Force, 2007).

A paper issued by USAID emphasized the lack of progress in this area. According to the author, “Education quality improvement experiences emphasize the potential benefits of collaborative practices. Although international education literature highlights the desirability of participation, the development community has had little success implementing collaboration-based processes, and participatory efforts are often piecemeal and ineffective” (Kendall, 2006).

#### **Identification of a legitimate basis for collaboration**

The achievement of excellence in public administration education and training is the basis for collaboration. Individuals preparing for leadership roles in the public sector should be adequately prepared to address global problems and challenges. According to Rosenbaum and Kauza, challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, and economic obstacles faced by governments worldwide, health issues that are not contained within geographical boundaries, terrorism and poverty are problems faced by the majority of countries around the world require leaders that are well-prepared and competent (Rosenbaum & Kauzya, Introduction, 2007). For these reasons, and numerous others, collaboration on how to best prepare students and public servants should be in the global arena with global contributors.

#### **Assessment of collaborative capacity**

The literature and basic definitions of collaboration indicate that successful relationships are built on mutual goals and trust among participants. Hudson et al. note that collaboration can often be based on altruistic assumptions about individual and organizational behavior which can often result in less than satisfactory relationships among collaborators and less than satisfactory outcomes of the collaboration. Given the complexities of both aligning and competing interests among participating organizations, collaboration is often a challenge (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood, & Wistlow, 1999). The 2011 Memorandum of Understanding between EAPAA and NASPAA highlight an arrangement that prevents such competition. The document acknowledges “the shared goals and procedural overlap” of the two agencies and develops a way in which potential areas of competition between the two are eliminated. A model of inter-organizational collaborative capacity (ICC) developed by the Naval Post-Graduate School addresses such an approach. “A key assumption of this model is that building collaborative capacity requires deliberate leadership attention and the alignment of organizational design elements toward collaboration” (Hocevar, Jansen, & Fann, 2012). The leadership of NASPAA and EAPAA is exemplary for future efforts.

#### **Articulation of a clear sense of collaborative purpose**

Collaborative arrangements defining mutually beneficial solutions to problems must go beyond the needs of any one individual or organization. Regular and effective collaboration among governments, nongovernmental organizations, educational and training institutions and communities can strengthen

quality improvement efforts (Kendall, 2006). Hudson et al. emphasize that goals and objectives need to be clear to all collaborators, and be realistically capable of attainment. Goals and objectives lacking clarity or attainability will diminish collaborative enthusiasm (Hudson, Hardy, Henwood, & Wistlow, 1999). Lessons on collaboration learned by the USAID in a project in Malawi indicate that successful collaborations:

- Treat local stakeholders as full collaborators.
- Provide broad frameworks, space to identify local problems, and support to effect change.
- Create ongoing and generative communication between actors and institutions.
- Allow local realities to lead policy and programming reform (Kendall, 2006).

In the final report of the Task Force on Excellence in Public Administration Education and Training, Blue Wooldridge similarly suggests:

- Commitment to a clearly described vision and mission
- Focus on quality services for the client
- Empowerment of employees
- Valuing diversity
- Communicating effectively (Task Force on Standards of Excellence in Public Education and Training, 2008)

These elements should assure that the purpose is well established and participants feel the process will be mutually beneficial. According to Rosenbaum, building a community of excellence that is constantly debating the critical issues of the public sector and the relevant processes of administration and policy formation and evaluation, as well as the efficacy of the various approaches to problem solving is implicit in public administration education and training. (Rosenbaum, Excellence in Public Administration Education: Preparing the Next Generation, 2007)

No matter how hard public administration academic and training programs attempt to match their programs with comparable programs elsewhere, they cannot ignore local contexts in their curriculum design efforts. Therefore, as far as public administration standards are concerned, the craving for universal knowledge is conjoined with the pressure for local relevance. How to address those intertwined issues should form an important component of cooperative endeavors (UNDESA/IASIA Task Force, 2007).

### **Building up trust and principled conduct**

Trust based on a perception that all collaborating members are competent is the beginning. The willingness among participants in the process to trust one another is critical to exploring problems sharing information, creating innovative ideas or taking risks that will move education and training programs toward excellence in program quality. Building trust and sometimes consensus requires addressing a number of issues, including stakeholder concerns, lines of effective communication and flexibility to improve outcomes and sustainability (Kendall, 2006). According to Child:

- Trust generates a willingness to overcome cultural differences and to work through other difficulties that arise in collaborations.
- Trust encourages people to work together to cope with unforeseen circumstances, thus permitting them to adjust more rapidly and with less conflict to new circumstances which contracts and other formal agreements may not have foreseen.
- Trust provides an alternative to incurring the costs and potentially de-motivating effects of close control and a heavy reliance on contracts.

- Trust encourages openness in exchanging ideas and information, which is a necessary condition for problem solving, innovation and other forms of knowledge creation (Child, 2001).

#### **Ensuring wide organizational ownership**

Organizational representatives to the collaborative process must be in the position to obtain buy-in to collaborative decisions from others in their organizations. This requires full-participation by all collaborators. Each participant should believe the process is fair and that they have full access to the process. Smith et al. emphasize that trust emerges as a key antecedent to co-operation (Smith, Carroll, & Ashford, 1995).

#### **Selection of appropriate collaborative relationship**

Natalya Kolisnichenko finds that all sectors – public, private and nonprofit – are heavily involved in the provision of public administration education. After undertaking a survey of practices within and across countries, she concludes that no one model approximates all experiences (Kolisnichenko, 2005). There must be an effort to balance collaboration and competition. Because cooperation and collaboration can be a win-win situation for all involved, competition should be minimal.

#### **Selection of a collaborative pathway**

According to the authors of this model collaborators should consider different pathways to achieve their goals. The natural science disciplines have created a number of different pathways to collaborate that began with research. Meetings of professional associations, accrediting bodies and the creation of special entities to explore the challenge of quality public service education and training have all been tried, yet the discussions continue. Perhaps one of the pathways is to merely continue the discussions. Participants at these meetings continuously take back new information to their organizations that energize positive change.

### **Conclusion**

Stakeholder collaboration in the definition of quality, implementation and measurement of standards, and the improvement and evaluation of programs arguably increases the likelihood that the resulting changes to programs will more effectively meet the needs of various stakeholders, be judged meaningful and successful by a wide range of stakeholders, have fewer unintended consequences, and be more sustainable (Kendall, 2006). Lots of efforts have been made in attempting to ensure quality public service education. Whether there should be common international standards, standards that are country or program specific, or whether there should be continuing discussions about common global challenges continues to be debated. Is there a sufficient amount of global cooperation already to promote quality public service education? These questions must be explored by public service stakeholders. What may be helpful in those conversations is to note successful models of collaboration and to incorporate them into the conversations.



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