American Society for Public Administration's role in building global governance capacity through networked professional associations

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Introduction.

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, 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.

1. 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 whose membership includes both academics and practitioners can connect the four essential elements of effective public management (theory, research, practice and teaching).

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

b. Providing Member Services that Build Competence. All professional associations provide their members with benefits beyond those available to them as individuals at a reasonable price. These include professional training and certification, technical assistance, professional publications, conferences, networking, policy advocacy and internet-based services.

c. Uniting Theory, Research, Practice and Teaching. Public administration originates from diverse academic disciplines and applies to a range of professions. Thus, there is a constant need to integrate knowledge and apply it relevantly to diverse fields (Klingner and Washington, 2000; Lynn, 1996). Most US professional associations in fields related to public administration focus on improving

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1 The views expressed in this article do not reflect the official policy positions of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in which the author is President Elect
practice (e.g., 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 the US 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.

2. Organizing Human Activity in Networks rather than Hierarchies.

Hierarchies were once the standard method of organizing human activity because (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 and governance have worked together to reinforce the idea that networks are the most effective way to organize human activity. This includes professional associations as well.

a. Networked Organizations. Classical organization theory focused on bureaucratic hierarchies as the most effective and efficient method of organizing human activity, for many reasons: the industrial revolution, scientific management and military logistics during two world wars. 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, organizational effectiveness is more likely to defined around trans-organizational systems (Halley, 1994) organized into networks. Effective responses to public policy issues require coordinated flows of information, decision-making and program implementation among government agencies at different levels of government (local, state, national and international) and across sectors (business, government and community based organizations) (Brudney, O’Toole and Rainey, 2000). 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 and Fesler, 2005).

b. Networked Information and Communications Technologies. Conceptually, information and communications technologies are the technical platform that enables a knowledge management system to function by enabling people to organizing and compile information. Moreover, if organizing people in shared spaces for knowledge creation helps in mass production of knowledge on the technical side, information and communications technologies can enable virtual creation of such spaces – a solution that has not been tested sufficiently, but in theory, one that could revolutionize knowledge creation. In government and business, innovations in information and communications technologies 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 across 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 knowledge management applications. Interactive, participative, and networked knowledge management applications can be demand-driven and customer-centered, offering more opportunity for service enhancement through e-government (Klingner and Sabet, 2005).

This shift from hierarchical to networked information and communications technologies 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). To some extent, it is correct to assert that global New Public Management reforms represent similar governmental responses to common factors such as financial stress and the international transfer of New Public Management concepts among rich and poor nations alike (Kettl, 1998; Klingner, 2000; Pollitt and Bouchaert, 2000). Nevertheless, while problems seem similar across nations, solutions effective in one context may not succeed in another (Jones and Kettl, 2003; Barzeley, 2001; and Barzeley, 2003). Consequently, “smart practice” (Bardach, 2000: 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 and Klingner, 2004).

c. 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, non-governmental organizations and private businesses. Although many public administrators are more comfortable with traditional authority and accountability relationships, sovereign and hierarchical government now is expected to “steer, not row” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) within a governance network (Fountain, 2001; Cooper, 2003; Peters, 2001).

At one level, the Iraqi debacle and other current international policy conflicts between the US and the rest of the world exemplify these three 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?”

d. Networked Professional Associations. These precepts apply to professional associations building global governance capacity, in terms of both what they do and how they do it. In terms of what they do, 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 and 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 and Nye, 2000; Kahler and Lake, 2003). This transformation also applies to our understanding of innovation diffusion and adoption, organizational learning and knowledge management (KM). Innovation diffusion and adoption 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 organizational learning and knowledge management (Sabet and Klingner, 1993). In this context, 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, this is best done through formal or informal networks that share information and activities so as to improve research, theory, practice and teaching toward the reciprocal transfer of effective, efficient and sustainable “smart practice” innovations. Just as the most valuable efforts often occur in the interstices between scientific disciplines are fields of practice, so the most valuable innovations in building public administrative capacity often occur through the interactions of researchers, practitioners and teachers working together internationally (Bertucci, 2006; Klingner, 2006a; United Nations, 2006).

3. How ASPA Can Network more effectively to build Global Governance Capacity.

If ASPA is to network more effectively to build global governance capacity, its leaders should contemplate some critical shifts in vision, programs and governance.

a. Vision. ASPA leaders should continue to emphasize its traditional role as the premier generalist organization for US public administrators and make two conceptual shifts essential to expanding ASPA’s domain (Thompson, 1967): enlarge its vision from government to governance and expand its vision from the US to the world.

1. Enlarge ASPA’s Vision from Government to Governance. When ASPA was founded (1939), supporting public administration meant professionalizing government agencies and civil servants. This is still true today because despite ideological shifts the number of public employees in the US has grown steadily since World War II to its present 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. ASPA’s intended domain (Thompson, 1967) must change as well. In addition to its traditional membership base of state and local public administrators, ASPA must target those non-profit and private sector employees engaged in public service delivery as potential new members. It must also 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.
2. **Widen 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 and Washington, 2000). Second, focusing on big global 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?

b. **Programs.** Once ASPA leaders accept the need to move in these directions, there are some concrete steps ASPA could take:

1. **Market ASPA to Employees of NGOs and Government Contractors.** Increasingly, public services are delivered by non-profits and the private sector. In addition, temporary and part-time workers now join full-time public administrators. While 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 people 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. As ASPA moves increasingly toward supporting public administration globally from a US perspective, it makes sense to offer corporate memberships to international or transnational corporations as well as ones only doing business in the US. This 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. President Harvey White has already proposed informally that we move in this direction. However, those who fear such an initiative will corrupt ASPA will strongly oppose it.

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. In addition, 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. In addition, we could 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 members that are international. We can do this by more widely advertising our international 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.** Major benefits offered by professional associations are conferences, technical assistance and publications. Yet travel expenses and visa requirements make it difficult for international members to attend US conferences. We might offer more virtual conferences and more web-based discussion groups for international members. Because mailing paper documents internationally not effective, 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.** Financial issues also 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.

c. **Governance.** As the ASPA Governance and Strategic Planning Task Force under former President Edward Jennings moves toward 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 organizations. Some occur within a formally established MOU, 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 a Memorandum of Understanding with a counterpart organization in that country had already been established. ASPA’s increasing international involvement led to designation of the International Coordinator position in 2004 (Klingner, 2006b). However, 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” issues arise. ASPA needs to not 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 the employers of individual leaders for the initiation of international initiatives.

2. Revise 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 three representatives from each of five 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.

References


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**Biographical Summary**

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