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# IMPROVING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN APPROACH: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

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In October 1990, an article in the *Chronicle* of Higher Education stated that: "For teaching to gain prestige in higher education, faculty members must make pedagogy a subject of scholarly debate" (Watkins, 1990, p. A11). This article goes on to quote Lee S. Shulman, a professor of education at Stanford University, as saying: Teaching will be considered a scholarly activity only when professors develop a conception of pedagogy that is very tightly coupled to scholarship in the disciplines themselves" (p. A11). Commanding a professional base of knowledge of subject matter with knowledge of how to teach it effectively to others is the primary purpose of classroom research (Cross, 1990).

Certainly there are many opportunities to conduct scholarly research in public administration education. The purpose of this effort is to identify some research questions that emerge from applying one specific approach— instructional design—to the development of public administration courses.

Instructional design is said to involve "organizing and using tools of the mind and tools of learning to improve the conduct of education and training" (Johnson, 1989, p.3). "it is a process and a set of products, brought about by a designer with specific skills" (Van Patten, 1989, p. 30). Van Patten goes on to say:

The process concerns the generation and evaluation of information for engineering efficient and effective solutions to knowledge and skill needs. The products of instructional design are project-specific in that they are design

specifications for a particular knowledge of skill need (p. 30).

In addition, the instructional design approach, in contrast to the traditional approach, consciously uses a systematic process to create instruction. The generic process of instructional design includes the following steps:

1. Needs assessments;
2. Specifications of broad goals and detailed objectives or learning outcomes;
3. Analysis of learner characteristics;
4. Specification of instructional strategies based on objectives and learner analysis

(Johnson, 1989, p. 13). The need for further research, relevant to the public administration community, in these steps will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

**Needs Assessments:** Various needs assessments document the desired performance of public administration practitioners. These assessments include the efforts of Watt, Parker, and Cantine, (1973); Kerrigan and Hinton, (1970); S. Wyman, (1981); the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, (1975); and the National Training and Development Service [NTDS] (1975). A more recent effort resulted in a draft report called *Guidelines on Local Government Management Education* produced by the ICMA/NASPAA Task Force on Local Government Education (1989). Still more work needs to be done on this topic, as well as refinement to the research already completed. Obviously one aspect of the instructional design approach to public administration that requires continuous research is the identification of the educational/training needs of public managers.

**Identification of Desired Learning Outcomes:** After the public management development needs have been specified student-oriented behavioral learning objectives (SOBLO's) can be developed (Wooldridge, 1987). Mager (1962) describes an objective as "...an intent communicated by a statement describing a proposed change in a learner - a statement of what the learner is to be like when he has successfully completed a learning experience" (p. 3). The identification of student-oriented behavioral learning objectives (SOSLO) is an extremely important element in the educational planning process (Wooldridge, 1987).

**Analysis of Learner Characteristics:** Knowles (1973), among others, points out that understanding how a person learns is a major requisite for a successful education program. The question of how a person learns is the major focus of the concept of learning style (Piggy Busch & Lacy, 1980). Studies have shown that identifying a student's learning style and then providing appropriate instruction in response to that style can contribute to more effective learning (Claxton & Murrell, 1987). Keefe (1979) has developed the following definitions of key concepts in the learning style construct

**Learning Styles** are characteristic, cognitive, affective, and physiological behavior: that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. **Cognitive Styles** are "Information processing habits representing the learner's typical mode of perceiving, thinking, problem solving, and remembering." The term,

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*Affective Styles*, refers to those motivational processes viewed as the learner's typical mode of arousing, directing, and sustaining behavior. *Physiological Styles* are biologically-based modes of response that are founded on sex-related differences, personal nutrition and health, and accustomed reactions to the physical environment (pp. 4,8,11, & 15).

Under each of the main categories of learning styles, cognitive, affective and physiological, there are a variety of dimensions. Fortunately, not all dimensions have equal implications for improving the learning process. Under each main category, Keefe (1979) identifies those dimensions having the greatest implications for improving the learning process.

**Cognitive Styles:** Perceptual modality preferences (Dunn, Dunn & Price); Field independence vs. dependence (Witken, et al.); Conceptual Tempo (Kagan); Leveling vs sharpening (Holzman; Gardner).

**Affective Styles:** Conceptual level (Hunt; Dunn, et al.); Locus of control (Rotter); Achievement motivation (McClelland); Social motivation (Hill); and **Physiological Styles:** Masculine-feminine behavior (Maccoby and Jacklin). For a more detailed description of each of these learning styles see Keefe (1979), or the citation listed for the lead researcher identified with each dimension. Important research questions include: What are the important learning styles of the students in public administration courses? And what are their implications for the design and delivery of public administration education?

**Specification of Instructional Strategies:** Within the past few years, some excellent work has been carried out that relates the effectiveness of different instructional methods (e.g. lectures, films, case studies, role playing etc.) to specific learning objectives (McCleary and McIntyre, 1972; Newstrom, 1980; Olivas and

Newstrom, 1981; and Carroll, Payne and Ivancevich, 1972). This literature can provide the public administration education community with some general guidelines that can assist in the selection of instructional methodology to achieve certain broad categories of learning objectives.

Research needs to be carried out to determine what instructional methods are most effective to achieve what specific learning objective? Moreover, research needs to be conducted in the public administration education environment to test the "Contingency Approach to Instructional Design: (Wooldridge, 1978) that suggest the effectiveness of an instructional method is "contingent" upon both the learning objective to be achieved and the learning style of the participant. public administration education would be enhanced by research that provides an understanding of how the relative effectiveness of different teaching methods," optimal for a specified set of learning objectives, need to be modified to take into account the differences in learning styles of individual students.

**Conclusion**  
Public administration education, as with other forms of higher education, is operating in an environment that calls for greater accountability and an increased assessment of the quality of its instruction. Anything an academic department can do to improve its teaching process will respond to this legitimate demand from the customers/clients of public administration education. To paraphrase professor K. Patricia Cross of the University of California at Berkeley, "For the public administration instructor to become 'better at teaching, he/she 'must' first become a student of learning." Hopefully becoming a student of learning- while using the instructional design approach can also provide research opportunities for the public administration faculty.

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