THE CHANGING FACE OF ACADEMIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Introduction

Academic public administration has a long history of identity crisis (Ferlie et al, 2005; Lynn, 2005; Stillman, 2011a). Nearly 50 years ago the founding father Dwight Waldo used exactly this phrase (Waldo, 1968), and nearly 70 years ago he famously referred to our field as 'a subject matter in search of a discipline' (Waldo, 1948). Today is no different – once again, though perhaps in new ways, the nature and future of the subject in the world of universities and research institutes is in doubt. I would like to discuss some aspects of our current condition, but in order to do so we need to explore why it has come about.

In order to be able to frame current trends, I will first take a quick look at the history of our subject. Then I will describe key current trends in theory, methods and publishing, and comment on some of their implications. Finally, I will explore the consequences of all this for ourselves and our academic institutions.

Public administration: a potted history

Fortunately, there are a range of excellent histories of our field (e.g. Raadschelders, 2011a; Lynn, 2005). Here I have only enough space to pull out a few key points:

Academic Public Administration (PA) is disciplined, but not a discipline (but neither are most other social sciences – Raadschelders, 2011a, p205). It is an interdisciplinary field, unified mainly by its real-world 'object of study' – government (or, more broadly and recently, and still slightly controversially, governance). This material focus has given rise to a shared agenda of issues, recognized as significant by many (but not all) scholars in the community (Lynn, 2005). In terms of theories and methodologies, however, PA has always been pluralist, and currently remains so (see, e.g. Bouckaert and Van de Donk, 2010). This is not so different from other social sciences):

> 'Where public administration is a field of study defined by its material object, its theoretical make-up is a mosaic with a rich variety of theories and conceptualizations about government that are successfully used in public administration scholarship' (Raadschelders, 2011a, p147)

The theories come from those disciplines which have intermingled over time to create the contemporary field of PA. These include law, political science, economics, management studies, organization theory and social psychology.   New contributory disciplines may enter (as organization theory did after the Second World War) and others may fall out (as, regrettably, law has done in many universities). However, its pluralist character and continuing object of study do not change – or not very much or very fast. Pluralism (the upside) and fragmentation (the downside) will persist, indeed, they may be increasing (Ferlie et al, 2005). One key difference

between these two ways of characterizing the field is perhaps that in pluralism the different groupings talk to each other, while in fragmentation they shout at each other, or do not talk at all. Unfortunately, at the moment, academic PA may be becoming more fragmented than pluralistic. Traditionalist, hard-line orthodox social scientists, radical social constructivists and post modernists each have their own conferences, their own journals and their own networks. They don't talk to each other very much, and when they do it is as often to attack as to look for bridges or common ground (e.g. Andrews et al, 2008; Bevir and Rhodes, 2006; Luton, 2008; Lynn et al, 2008).

PA has not by any means been a narrow field, exclusively concerned with questions of governmental machinery. 'After all, government serves society and the study cannot afford to be disconnected from the major questions about and challenges in the society in which it is embedded' (Raadschelders, 2011a, pp146-7). 'It is not in the organization of public administration in the narrow sense, but in shaping society in the broad sense, rooted in the behavior of citizens and consumers, where the key lies to effective policy…' (Bouckaert and Van de Donk, 2010, pp13-14). So it most certainly includes the nuts and bolts of public service delivery, but also wider questions of policymaking and 'speaking truth to power'. If PA becomes a separate technical subfield, divorced from politics and law, PA is the poorer.

PA is also a field with a distinctive relationship to practice and practitioners. This relationship has always been – and remains – very close. In a survey of European PA academics 69% of those who responded to the open question 'What impact do you want your work to have?' explicitly cited hoped-for effects in the real world of public administration (Bouckaert and Van de Donk, 2010 – n = 91). Only 31% answered purely in terms of academic objectives.   '[A] field such as public administration - an applied field – cannot survive without finding ways to bring the insights of both cultures together' (Radin, 2013, p1)

Of course this does not mean that some academics cannot pursue 'pure' academic research, without much if any thought for its practical application. Some can and some do (and it essential that this high freedom is preserved, in at least a few places). But these 'purists' are a minority, and have probably always been so. If they were somehow completely to dominate the field an important element in its *raison d'etre* would be lost. The head of one of the academically most respected continental PA research units put it like this:

> 'PA research needs to remain connected to PA practice. Most of our students will not become academics after graduation, but the public administrators and public sector cadres of the future…Besides, how in the long run can we legitimize the substantial public spending that goes into academic PA research if we are not able to demonstrate that our field maintains an active and productive dialogue with the world of practice?' (Bovens, 2010, p125).

Trends: fashions in theories and epistemologies

Academic PA has always boasted a variety of theoretical positions. This can be construed as a symptom of good health (Ferlie et al, 2005) or, alternatively, as a sign of weakness and fragmentation. At the moment, however, there seems to be a danger that the 'middle ground' is being increasingly squeezed out between two powerful and antagonistic theoretical wings. The first wing is what we might call scientific orthodoxy, with its HQ in the United States, and the second is a more motley grouping of radical constructivists and post-modernists ('pomos'). These 'radicals' exist on both sides of the Atlantic, but are probably more prominent in Europe.

Scientific orthodoxy has been a well-established position in the social sciences for many decades. It is founded on a relatively unproblematic view of reality (it is 'out there', waiting to be uncovered). It vigorously espouses the hypothetical deductive approach to theorising: one derives a testable hypothesis from an over-arching theory, distills within it a line of causal inference and then subjects the hypothesis to empirical testing. It believes that the world can be represented by a system of constants and dependent and independent variables. These variables can and should be measured, so that the relationships between them can be converted into statistical relationships. In this 'variables paradigm' the crucial elements are assumed to be the same thing across a variety of different contexts, simply taking different numeric values as circumstances vary (Pollitt and Bouckert, 2009, pp173-175).

This is still a very widely-held view of what 'real science'should be like. As one of the key texts from this approach states: 'our capacity to simplify depends on whether we can specify outcomes and explanatory variables in a coherent way'(King et al, 1994, p10). The best theories are those which are 'capable of generating as many observable implications as possible'(*ibid*., p19) – so we must be able to observe external, empirical reality, locate our theoretically-derived dependent and independent variables, and then measure changes in the dependent variables as they respond to changes in the independent variables.

This orthodox approach still has much to be said for it and, under the right conditions, it can deliver powerful explanations. From the point of view of PA scholars, however, it has a number of quite severe limitations. First, many of the questions PA scholars want to ask cannot be adequately addressed from within the orthodox framework. To put it another way, the right conditions for orthodox techniques to be convincingly and fruitfully applied turn out to be rather narrow. In many situations in PA it is just not possible to identify and isolate key variables and then conduct hypothesis-testing, using reliable quantitative data. Furthermore PA also has to deal with normative questions, where scentific orthodoxy cannot have much to say. Second, and partly because of this first problem, the orthodox approach has not delivered much of what it promises. 50 years of attempts at 'scientific' PA have not produced many robust, widely-

accepted and firmly-grounded generalisations about how public services should be organized. As Fukuyama wrote a decade ago:

> 'Most good solutions to public administration problems, while having certain common features of intsitutional design, will not be clear-cut "best practices" because they will have to incorporate a great deal of context-specific information'(Fukuyama, 2004, p58)

Third, in the social sciences more generally, scientific orthodoxy has been under a long and sustained assault from a variety of alternative epistemological positions. In other words many scholars do not agree with orthodox claims that this is best way to do academic research. Indeed, a good deal of effort has been devoted to showing how inappropriate this approach often is for addressing the social, the organizational and the political (e.g. Abbot, 1997; Clegg and Pitsis, 2011; Fischer and Forester, 1993; Pawson, 2013; Tsoukas, 2005).

Despite these limitations scientific orthodoxy still holds a powerful position within our community and - equally if not more important - retains a legitimacy among non-academic practitioners. It is of great contemporary significance that scientific orthodoxy dominates most of those journals which, with modern bibliometric methods, have come to be seen as the top PA research outlets. We will return to this point later.

At the other extreme, *post-modern and radical constructivist perspectives* have made their mark in PA, as elsewhere. They have made a major contribution in deconstructing the surfaces of texts and analysing political and bureaucratic rhetoric and story-telling. They have assembled a powerful critique of scientific orthodoxy (Bogason, 2005), though they are not the only ones to have done this. However, the more radical claims of some post-modern ('pomo') PA scholars can be regarded as destructive of the basic rationale for the whole field. A PA which is reduced solely to the interpretation of texts, which denies or doubts the existence of an external reality, which attacks any notion of causation, and which holds all interpretations to be in some sense equally valid, is no longer the PA to which so many scholars and governments have given their best efforts, and attention.

The post-modern 'tendency' has its own star professors and journals. Some of its followers are/were no doubt attracted by its claims to radicalism and iconoclasm. We find well-known authors in PA and public policy committing themselves to propositions such as the following:

> 'A fact is a piece of evidence that nearly everyone in a given community would accept as true…We define objectivity as evaluation by comparing rival stories' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006, p28) and:

> 'Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p45)

To the first of these propositions one may reply (my wording):

> 'Only if you are prepared to accept that everything one wishes to study in PA is best conceived of as a narrative'.

To the second (again, my wording and, again, deliberately combative!):

> 'Taken literally, this implies that the whole mission of traditional social science – and of PA – is foolish and unworkable. No generalizations that 'travel' are possible. If so, one can see no reason why the public should pay much attention to academics, or, indeed, why the taxpayers should be prepared to fund them – other, possibly, than as a kind of neighbourhood social worker'.

Not all advocates of these approaches are so puritanical. A minority of post-modernists have made valiant efforts to suggest that their approach is capable of conducting empirical, socially-relevant research. A few even struggle to redefine what it might mean - very cautiously - to generalize. Alvesson (2002) is one example of a leading scholar who has tried to make 'pomo' fit for empirical social research. In his somewhat tortured book he is in the end driven to seperate 'hard core pomo' from the rest, and then try to build bridges between the rest and other post-positivist approaches. Even then, the kind of empirical research that can be envisaged is painfully narrow. It is not particularly encouraging to be told that any narrative of events around a policy or programme (politician, civil servant, journalist, academic) is as valid as any other. And the idea that no form of reasoning can be elevated above any other form of reasoning (Bogason, 2005, p252) would appear to put the whole edifice of policy analysis and evaluation - not to speak of the reasoned choice of public policies by elected representatives - on thin ice.

In practice most post modernists clearly *do* put some forms of reasoning above others - their whole critique of rationalistic modernism is based on the belief that a qualitative, interpretive, contextualized approach is superior. They are implacable foes of generalization, except for the huge generalization that generalizations themselves are inadmissable. They are resistant, if not hostile, to those post-positivist realists who struggle to construct context-sensitive middle level generalizations (e.g. Pawson, 2013). Respect for other approaches is in short supply.

Post-modernism in all its various forms has made some valuable critical points about PA but it has very little to say to those many PA academics - and practitioners - who still believe that we *can* engage with an external reality and that some ways of doing so are - in certain types of context - likely to be more successful than others. This may be why an element of mainstream exasperation creeps in on those rare occasions when 'empiricists' and post moderns actually get into structured dialogue (Lynn et al, 2008; Luton, 2008; Andrews et al, 2008).

Are radical constructivist and pomo treatments of PA growing? It is hard to say. The 'linguistic turn' took place more than a quarter of a century ago (Fischer and Forester, 1993). It no longer has the excitement of novelty. But it has quite successfully institutionalised itself, and its

adherents continue to be impressively active. So, whilst possibly no longer gaining strength, it continues to make a lot of noise, and can offer impressive critiques of the less reflexive types of public administration (of which there is still a great deal).

Trends: methods

PA is going through the same process of post-graduate professionalisation as most of the social sciences. In more and more countries doctoral students are required to take rigorous methods and research design courses. This is all to the good. No academic in their right mind would object to giving close attention to, and a clear account of, the methods employed in a piece of research. However, this healthy trend carries with it at least two risks. First, method comes to take precedence over substance – in effect method is fetishized. Papers are now regularly published in which the discussion of methods takes up far more space than the discussion of findings, and where rather weak or uninteresting research questions are dressed up in sophisticated methodological costume in order to make them appear 'rigorous'. Some of our best students are being led to believe that this sort of technical display is necessary, and is a hallmark of real postgraduate scholarship. This is a species of 'teching up' (Flinders, 2013, p160)

Second, one particular method is claimed to be the gold standard, and all others are regarded as poor substitutes, if not wholly unacceptable. This is the idea of one best way applied to social science. Curiously, this seems to emanate from *both* ends of the spectrum that runs from hardline orthodox to the post modern relativists . Both camps, in effect, disown the richly multi-theoretical, multi-method history of the PA field in order to insist that *their* patch, and their patch alone, is the real deal. Here, though, I will deal only with scientific orthodoxy, since overall it seem to be in a more dominant position within the academic field – at least in Anglophone contexts. I begin with an unqualified statement from an article in a top American PA journal:

> 'The gold standard in social science is a randomized experimental design in which a treatment is tested against a control' (Brown et al, 2013, p401).

To which one may well reply (my wording again):

> 'No, actually it is not. It is the gold standard for those for whom it is the gold standard. For the rest of us, (many!) the status of the randomized experimental design ranges from "occasionally very useful but unsuitable for many important questions" to "a misguided, positivistic pretence to ape the natural sciences under conditions where such an approach is fundamentally inappropriate"'.

This approach to social science afflicts many disciplines, especially political science, where it has amusingly been termed 'physics envy' (Flinders, 2013 – for public administration specifically, see Raadschelders, 2011b). Econometrics has been an even more severe case. In PA experimentalism certainly has a place, but it has hitherto been quite a small place, and for a number of practical, political and ethical reasons, it is likely to remain so.

In short, the continuing - perhaps even intensifying - emphasis on what I have here termed the orthodox scientific method threatens to unbalance what has been previously been a pluralistic set of approaches to methods. PA scholars should note that, while the orthodox scientific method deserves respect, and can sometimes be very powerful, it is misleading to regard it as some pinnacle that we should all be striving to attain. Neither general texts on social science methods (e.g. Robson, 2002) nor good methods books which are focussed specifically on PA (e.g. Van Thiel, 2014) treat it in that way, and we should not worship it either.

Trends: developments in academic publishing

The explosion of bibliometrics has affected academic PA in many countries. While Rhodes could write in 2011 that 'the most striking feature of the citation data is that it shows America and Europe as two relatively self-contained academic communities' (Rhodes, 2011, p560) bibliometric pressures may be beginning to change this . Many university research centres in EU states now proclaim their official missions as increasing publications in the elite, top journals as measured by the Impact Factor.

What is wrong with this? Well, to begin with, this is an arithmetic absurdity – there are simply are not nearly as many 'slots' in the top journals as there are academics and units proclaiming aspirations to publish in them. More profoundly, there is an identifiable, dominant methodology in most of the very top journals, which, whatever its merits, is not that adopted by many scholars in the field. Furthermore it is an approach actually not suitable for addressing many of the key types of question in PA (although may be highly suited to some of them). 'When public administration scholars focus on what is measurable, they risk losing sight of big questions about issues that do not allow for measurement' (Raadschelders and Lee, 2011, p28). The increasing focus on JPART and IPMJ-type publications therefore amounts to, *de facto*, a progressive unbalancing of a previously diverse academic community.

> 'Most prestigious journals are invariably dominated by North Americans who share much *habitus* in common, such as graduate school, training and cognitive maps of the field of production of knowledge' (Clegg and Pitsis, 2012, p67).

It should immediately be acknowledged that these journals – *JPART*, *IPMJ*, *Governance* and, to a lesser extent (because of its stronger practitioner links), *Public Administration Review* – are somewhat more pluralistic than their political science counterparts (most notoriously, the *American Journal of Political Science* and its UK cousin, the *British Journal of Political Science*). They do sometimes publish papers - and occasionally even entire theme issues - which depart from the standard scientific format. Nevertheless, they have a certain image (especially *JPART* and *IPMJ*) which influences who submits what to them, and which is sustained in the majority of their published articles. The image is that of hypothetico-deductive social science, normally involving heavy quantitative analysis. Papers are typically arranged in a sequence of problem-framing, hypothesis statement, data collection, analysis, findings. They do not usually

publish discursive essays, or 'think pieces'. ' [T]here is an unmistakable bias in American administrative sciences to idolize a specific, positivist type of knowledge' (Raadschelders, 2011b, p917). Even in *Public Administration Review* the trend has been strongly towards quantitative empirical material, and the number of practitioner contributors has dwindled fast. Reviewing the articles published in *Public Administration Review* from 2000-2009, Raadschelders and Lee concluded that: 'The emphasis on methodology without reference to ontology and epistemology, is tantamount to placing the cart before the horse' (2011, p26). This trend is therefore closely related to, and overlapping with, the issues with methods discussed earlier.

The aforementioned journals play a crucial role in the game of appointments, promotions and tenure in the US. They hold the high spots in PA impact analysis, thanks partly to their very large natural constituency of American academics, who seldom read non-American material: 'the overwhelming proportion of content in American political science and public administration journals is by Americans for Americans on America' (Rhodes, 2011, p560). In short, the apparently desperate desire of an increasing number of European universities (and individuals within them) to 'score' in these journals amounts to a distortion of both European academic tradition and European academic practice. It also cuts academic PA off even further from the practitioner world (Radin, 2013, p4).

Is the lust for elite publication increasing? Probably. The use of bibliometrics in university management is still spreading south and east from its European point-of-origin in the UK. Aspiring PA scholars in (*inter alia*) Italy, Portugal and Switzerland are being advised to aim for the top American journals. Paradoxically, the attraction of the 'scientific model' as a career-enhancing mode of publication is increasing at exactly the same time as its epistemological authority, battered from several sides is diminishing – at least in academe, though perhaps not in the practitioner world.

Difficult implications for academic departments and individual academics

The current condition of academic PA poses difficult choices for us, organizationally and individually. These are, in a sense, choices of our identities. But they are also choices which will influence our relations with other parts of the international academic community, with funding bodies and with practitioners.

To begin with, the current trends, there seems to be a danger that traditional, descriptive/analytic PA might be increasingly squeezed out between hardline quantitative analysis on the one hand and radical constructivist and postmodern approaches on the other. Already this type of material is becoming less common in the leading journals and that, in itself, acts as a disincentive to academics to produce it. For example, the categories identified by Rhodes as dominant in the UK journal *Public Administration* during the 1970s – 'descriptive recollections and logical argument' are almost entirely squeezed out (Rhodes, 1995, p5). The value of case study work is

also limited, because a case study comes to be seen as either a poor cousin of a 'proper' large N analysis, or as just one story, no better than any other, and certainly not to be used as the basis of any generalisation (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009, pp170-194). One might think of this process as the diminishment of what was hitherto the middle ground of PA, and the growth of the extremes.

In so far as this is happening, it poses choices both at individual and organizational levels. At the individual level young academics face pressures in their initial choice of research subject matter and technique. If they want to get into top journals, then the temptation to go for the hypothetico-deductive approach, decorated with hard quants, is considerable. Usually they will not have the time and resources to construct large quantitative databases for themselves, so research gets distorted into a game of 'hunt the database' and then feast on it. Alternatively, young researchers can join the community of pomos and radical constructivists, piling layer upon layer of interpretation, sometimes in very clever and amusing ways, and sometimes achieving no more than pretentious obscurity.

At the level of departments and institutes, similar pressures operate. More and more, organizational units are being measured on the basis of their publications in peer-reviewed journals. Both funding and esteem often follow these bibliometric 'scores'. Again, the biases against traditional descriptive/analytic PA and in favour of the hypothetico-deductive American model are likely to apply. A few places may specialize in radical constructivism and pomo, so long as they achieve high publication rates in the specialized journals that cater particularly to those approaches.

Arguably even more serious than the tensions alluded to above is the impact of current academic trends on the relationship between the academic and the practitioner communities. To put it bluntly, the more the orthodox hypothetical deductivism and the radical constructivists gain authority and influence in the academic sphere, the weaker the influence of academic PA is likely to be in the practitioner world. That is because the products of these two approaches tend to be unusable for practitioner purposes.

Scientific orthodoxy often generates narrow focus, highly technical publications which either cannot be fully understood by a majority of public officials, and/or do not recognisably address the messy, multi-dimensional, partly-politicised problems they find themselves dealing with. The growing split between theory-driven academia and an increasinngly pressurized practitioner world led Radin to title her 2012 John Gauss Lecture *Reclaiming our past: linking theory and practice* (Radin, 2013).

The radical constructivists and pomos cannot be blamed for the frequent irrelevance of their publications for practitioner concerns because they were never aiming to meet those concerns in the first place. Their work runs directly against a strong and valuable thread through the history of academic PA – precisely that of empirical studies 'on the street' (e.g. Crozier, 1964; Lipsky, 1980; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Ingraham et al, 2003).

The future of PA

I would not want my analysis here to be misinterpreted. It is not a counsel of despair. Even if I am correct about the pressures on the centreground of PA from what I have termed the two extremes, that does not mean there is anything inevitable or unstoppable about the situation. And neither is my analysis a plea for us all to retreat to the traditional ways of doing things. Some of the traditional descriptive case studies and analytic essays that were published in large numbers in the 1960s and '70s were excellent, but many were not. We cannot go backwards to the future, and neither should we just surrender to current trends. What I would like to advocate is therefore *a revival of the core territory of academic PA, but in a new and more demanding form*.

There has been some truth in the criticisms from the advocates of scientific orthodoxy to the effect that PA has often been undertheorised and that its methods are sometimes either sloppy or less than transparent, or both. Equally there has been some truth in the critiques of the radical constructivists who show that formal theoretically-driven generalisations are often empty, that meanings are slippery and shifting, that much of the material we engage with is essentially story-telling of one kind or another, and that context is often crucial to understanding and interpretation.

The answer, therefore, is a revived approach to PA's traditional concerns. We need to retain a focus on issues of large social and political relevance. We need to sustain a large body of independent-minded empirical work on these issues. But in doing this we need to sharpen our theoretical and methodological tools. We need to grapple with multiple meanings and the socially constructed nature of much of the debate around different forms and fashions in public management. We need to acknowledge and re-connect with the political and legal frameworks within which PA is conducted, and not pretend that we can devise optimal, purely technical solutions. We need not only to describe contexts, but to analyze and theorize them, so that they become integral and dynamic parts of our explanations, not just 'noise' or background (Pollitt, 2013).

Is it possible to do all these things at once? Definitely. Is it easy? Definitely not. Constructing context-sensitive generalisations is hard work, and demands an ability to synthesize a wide range of data and situations (Pawson, 2013: Pollitt, 2013). The proof that this is possible is that this kind of work already exists. We have, for example, Matt Andrews work on *The limits of institutional reform in development* (2013). We have Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts exploring *Digital era governance* (2006). We have Alasdair Roberts dissecting *The logic of discipline* (2010). These first three are all big, ambitious subjects, with global implications. They all combine theory, relevant empirical detail and a critical cutting edge.

At a more national, or local level we have Don Moynihan's sensitive treatment of *The dynamics of performance management* (2008), Mick Moran's *The British regulatory state: high*

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modernism and hyper-innovation (2003) or my own attempt with Geert Bouckaert to explore contextualized similarities and differences in two public services in adjacent countries - *Continuity and change in public policy and management* (2009) . And, last but not least, as a guide to how to conceive, theorize and conduct detailed policy-relevant social science, we have Ray Pawson's challenging recent text, *The science of evaluation: a realist manifesto* (2013). All these engage vigorously with both ideas and practices, with specific instruments and relevant contexts, with politics as well as administration. All display critical independence, yet engagement with the art of the possible. All have obvious policy relevance. All admit their limitations and point to further possibilities for better research.

These are certainly not the only examples that could have been given - they are simply a few illustrative works with which I am familiar. They show something of what is possible. They also show that a revived centre ground would not be dominated by a single theoretical approach or research methodology. The books I have mentioned display a diverse range of theories and methods and that, as I indicated earlier, is in the best pluralist tradition of academic PA. They also show something which may be under threat from the current fashion for journal-focused bibliometrics - that books, rather than journal articles still have a very important role to play in our field.

Another point for optimism, specifically in relation to the link with practitioners, is that writing books and articles was never the most important contribution academics made to practice. Rather, all sorts of *ad hoc* advice has always been both sought and offered (Pollitt, 2006). One key point here is the way in which academics in the advice role should still seek to maintain professional integrity, even if the practitioner wants a quick fix or smoke screen. There is a case for further professionalizing these various forms of advice, by training, the elaboration of codes of practice and other ways of clarifying the expectations and responsibilities of the various parties.

My conclusion, therefore, is (I hope) both realistic and optimistic. Academic PA is currently subject to considerable dangers (though that in itself is nothing new). It is rather fragmented, and some of the most fashionable trends within the field are damaging two of our key traditions. Both scientific orthodoxy and radical constructivism/pomo undermine the tradition of pluralism and, weaken the link with practice. Yet we as individuals and we, collectively, as departments and units and networks, have the solutions already in our own hands. We can choose, individually and institutionally, to support a renaissance of the heartlands of PA. We can seek out, study, teach and cite work which is theoretically explicit, methodologically sophisticated, contextually aware and socially and politically both relevant and independent. And, most important of all, we can carry out such work ourselves. It will be very hard work, and the temptation to retreat into one or another academic ivory tower or club will never go away. The struggle to maintain a balance between rigor and relevance is unceasing. But, if one can keep trying, life becomes so much more interesting!

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