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Public professionalism in an era of radical transformations: its meaning, challenges, and training

Profissionalismo público em uma era de transformações radicais: seu significado, desafios e treinamento

Profesionalismo público en una era de transformaciones radicales: su significado, desafíos y entrenamiento

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Public professionalism lives within a schizophrenic world today. On one hand more people aspire to be professionals than ever before. As the late Everett Hughes, perhaps the most eminent scholar of this topic, once wrote, "professions are more numerous than ever before. Professional people are a larger portion of the labor force. The professional attitude or mood is likewise more widespread; professional status more sought after." Everywhere in advanced and developing nations public professionals and professionalism are triumphant in contributing to the GDP growth to shaping and implementing most if not all areas of public policy. In 2017 27% of the full-time American Federal Workforce are classed as professionals, 37% as administrators, and 27% as technical personnel such as 5,521 economists, 35,529 nurses, 20,115 electronics engineers, 17,118 attorneys, and 242 museum curators. Thus over a one-third of federal employees are classed as "professional-technical (a figure which would be much higher if contract employees were included). So widespread is professionalization that long ago, Frederick Mosher termed government as "the professional state"; or Don Price referred to it as "the scientific estate" or Zbigniew Brzezinski called it "the technocratic society". Whatever it is labelled, public professionals unquestionably make modern government tick and contemporary society run. Yet, in 2017 western nations are reeling from widespread, determined populist revolts against unelected officials. Voter cries against public professionals and their pervasive influence over shaping public policy are loud and frequent. The Brexit vote last year in England sought independence from those unseen, unelected EU officials in Brussels. Donald Trump's presidential inauguration this year can be attributed significantly to the fact he was "an outsider" who had never been an elected politician, nor even served in any public position, even the military (the first such president ever in U.S. History). His campaign targets were established institutions such as Nato, the Paris Climate Accords, Affordable Health Care, the CIA, and more recently the FBI Director. France,

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Italy, the Netherlands, and others have witnessed the rise and power of similar populist leaders with wide-ranging agendas to cut government and/or radically reform it. In short, recently the electorate everywhere seem to want to "apply a stick to the backsides" and "bloody the noses" of experts! Ideally rid the world of them!

This lecture will attempt to address the challenges of professionals who work in this Janus-Faced, contradictory world that both enthusiastically embraces and forcefully rejects them by examining first, what is public professionalism today? How do we define the term nowadays? What are its major foundational values?

Second, what are the key political-sociological-economic trends influencing the activities and shaping actions of public professionals? Their sources and impacts? And how are these forces reshaping the work professionals perform as well as those foundational values that served in the past to create and sustain public professionalism?

Finally, given these new realities of radical transformations confronting public professionals world-wide in the second decade of the 21st century, how best can teachers educate those aiming for careers as public professionals as well as advance the skills and expertise of "old hands" who are already in the public service? How can "it" be best taught, given the immense challenges governments everywhere confront?

Before going further, it is important to spell out the premises behind my lecture. They are six-fold, relatively clear-cut, and simple:

1. Government decisions and official behavior immensely impact every nation and the world as a whole by influencing society's development, its economic prosperity, and legitimacy of democracy;
2. The great bulk of public sector decisions, indeed THE key decisions, are determined by public professionals who are largely unelected and tenured;
3. The quality and kinds of decisions and actions these public professionals make depend upon their skills, orientation, outlooks, and values;
4. These professional qualities depend heavily upon their backgrounds, training, education, career development, as well as their current involvement in whatever professional associations or groups they belong;
5. Government is composed of many professions—physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc.—and so it never can hope to become just one professional body, but rather public sector professionalization realistically involves advancing the degree of their individual influence on decision-making as well as inculcating professional values throughout many groups working in the public sector; and
6. The activities and challenges facing public professionals as well as the advancement of professionalism within each nation are not identical but share many of the same attributes world-wide today.

Since "public professional" and "public professionalism" are frequently referred to, it is first essential to define what we are talking about here. These terms are slippery, even ambiguous and open to many interpretations and ways of thinking. Oxford English Dictionary, for example, tells us its earliest meaning derived from "professing" or someone who "professes" to know more about a subject and is better qualified to do a job as a result. "The occupation which one professes to be skilled in and to follow […] A vocation in which professional knowledge of some branch of learning is used in its

application to the affairs of others, and in the practice of the art based upon it." Originally the term "professional" was confined to the traditional callings of divinity, law, medicine, and the military. Today it applies to a far wider, more pervasive, and ever growing groups—some employed exclusively by government such as foreign service officers, city managers, police, military, and urban planners and others employed across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors who enormously influence public sector choices such as lawyers, engineers, scientists, physicians, and economists. And this does not even begin to encompass the newly emerging professions such as cyber-security and emergency disaster personnel or other many specializations and sub-specializations. Given the ever-growing numbers of specialized occupations, can these recent job categories be labelled as professionals? It is not easy to tell nor offer up clear-cut definitions. While there is no commonly agreed up meaning today of public professionals and/or professionalization of the public service, Frederick Mosher's definition is useful, both precise and flexible enough to fit common-day understanding:

> […] a more or less specialized and purposeful field of human activity which require some specialized education or training (though it may be acquired on the job), which offers a career of life work, and enjoys a relatively high status. It normally aspires to social, not selfish, purpose. Usually, but not always, it requires a degree or certification, and credential of some kind. Often its members join in a professional organization, local, state, or national, which enunciates standards and ethics of professional performance sometimes with the powers of enforcement.

Note the three value components of Mosher's definition that serve as the foundational norms of public professionals past and present: applied expertise, corporate identity, and ethical responsibility.

First, and above all, public professionalism is based upon expertise. Knowledge, theoretically based but pragmatically applied to shaping directly or indirectly human affairs, serve as origins and ongoing rationale of every professional's existence. The modern military profession grew out the creation of the formation of the nation-state in the 15th and 16th centuries that demanded trained expertise in what Harold Lasswell once characterized as "the management of violence". The American City Manager Profession was a mundane result of what to do about potholes in city streets thanks to the newly invented automobile at the dawn of the 20th century. Staunton, Virginia hired the first city manager in 1909, Charles Ashburner, a trained civil engineer, to deal with that pothole problem. Similarly, contemporary responses to specific empirical necessities of coping with cloud computing, applying new crime-fighting CSI techniques, dealing with a sudden outbreak of a heretofore unknown medical disease, or combating the threats of Isis are likewise the cause of the origins and growth of new professions. An urbanized, industrialized, globalized, and information-driven world spawns professionalization at a rapid rate, far more rapid than ever before. Not too long ago, someone went to "an ear, nose, and throat doctor" to treat ailments related to those body parts, but nowadays a myriad of specialists subdivide work in that single area with strange unpronounceable titles such as otolaryngologists, pulmonologists, gastroenterologists, allergists, and much more. Specialization is driven by speedier accumulation of scientific knowledge that requires a subdivision of labor but it also stems from self-interest, i.e. specialized expertise is generally considered higher status and receives higher pay. But whatever the cause of narrowing specialization, according to a recent empirical study by Lotte Anderson and Lene Peterson, professionalism is negatively correlated with compassion,

defined as being emotionally (empathically) based motivation to do good for others by improving public service delivery. Rather professional norms of applied expertise are the determining factor for effective service delivery performance to clients rather than the application of more humanly compassion or user friendly approaches. In short, the degree of specialized applied and theoretical knowledge and the firmness and consistence of its application remain the cornerstone of "best practices" of professionals everywhere.

Second, a corporate identity forges development and expansion of professions. It also gives structure and purpose to their existence, sets boundaries for the scope and substance of any professional activity, and establishes lines of who belongs inside its ranks and who does not. It further defines and creates "professional elites" who govern and control internal "hidden hierarchies", in the words of Corinne Gibbs. State Bar Associations or Medical Societies for traditional fields like Law and Medicine or the International City/County Managers' Association and Society of Civil Engineers for newer careers in local public management and civil engineers provide such corporate structures in America and define the best educational practices, entrance routes, credentialing requirements, continuing training options, codes of conduct, and methods of enforcement. They serve as advocates for a profession by advancing its cause through publicity campaigns with many varieties of internet, lobbying, and hard-copy literature and disseminate knowledge through regular meetings and serious journal publications. As a recent study by Mirko Noordegraaf underscores, professionalism is developed and nurtured via "connectedness" which is advanced in three ways: between professional actions and practices, between segments and groups, and between workplaces and other spaces. Above all, professionals resist political intrusion into their work. Ironically professionals of all stripes often express hostility to anything smacking of "the political" although public professionals by definition work for government and must be ultimately responsive to elected officials. Likewise, they are keen to maintain their independence from other professional groups. Fierce rivalries inside government are frequent between neighboring professions like the repeated conflicts among army, navy, air force personnel. Often invisible to the public and little studied by scholars, these professional associations and their elites exert powerful influences over shaping modern-day professional identities and the public actions they take.

Finally, ethical responsibility undergirds as every profession's ultimate *raison d'etre*. Professions are rooted in moral purposes of serving others beyond selfish interests. Such moral aims are more often than not codified in written statements, explicit codes of conduct, frequently combined with enforceable mechanisms to ensure their compliance. These may be framed in ancient Hippocratic Oath of Doctors to do no harm or more recent public professional codes of ethics of the Government Finance Officers Association or the American Society for Public Administration that spell out complicated professional, moral, legal standards of conduct for association members. Though realistically the transmission of ethical norms throughout professional ranks is not a product of written documents or codes of ethics but through informal communications of what is acceptable behavior or not. Especially the role models of elites serve to set standards for "best practices", norms of good behavior, essential training, "ideal career tracks", and what defines success or not within the field. Conferences, in-house journals, informal discussions inculcate ethical values informally throughout

the membership. As James Svara wrote recently, the essence of the articulated ethical values for public professions should stress serving "the public with respect, concern, courtesy, and responsiveness, recognizing that service to the public is beyond service to oneself." Effective enforcement prods strong, ongoing reminders that violations have significant career consequences—both in the short term and long run. The challenges of ensuring effective ethical enforcement within every profession remain some of the most difficult, complex, and enduring issues they confront.

So how are the socio-economic-political trends of today reshaping these professional foundational values for tomorrow? What are the challenges professions face world-wide in recent years? Are the core values upon which public professions were created and grew being strengthen? Or, in decline? My thesis: the traditional three values—applied expertise, corporate identity, and ethical responsibility—upon which public professionals originated and are sustained nowadays are being transformed profoundly across the planet by a series of influential, even contradictory forces. Here are several that appear prominently world-wide, serving shape and reshape the framing values of public professionalism:

1. Populist Revolt vs. the Necessity for Expertise in the Public Sector: As was indicated at the beginning of this lecture, western democracies in recent years experienced strong reactions to unelected officials of all stripes and elected many committed to cutting or eliminating such individuals, but at the same time the demand for more government services remains unabated. How to reconcile these opposites which simultaneously reject and sustain effective government as well as the core values of neutral, objective expertise at the heart of public professionalism?
2. Social Media vs. Sustained Expertise: In 2007 Apple launched it iPhone; late 2006 Facebook opened its doors; Google came out with the Android operating system in 2007; Amazon introduced Kindle in 2007; and Airbnb started in 2007. Thanks to social media the last decade witnessed a fundamental reshaping of individual behavior, work, commerce, finance, education, government, the economy, and yes, public professionalism. Social media asks everyone to be immediately involved, offering immediate answers to complex issues, plus making rapidly shifting demands on public officials. Yes, social media is more democratic because it allows everyone to be involved almost instantaneously, but simultaneously social media fosters "presentism" that drives out long-term thought and action. So how can public professionals who value—indeed require--long term, neutral, applied, objective expertise for problem solving cope with social media? How can they nurture applied expertise that involves thoughtful reflection and careful decision-making among those "who know best"? Given the massive data available—more information than accumulated by humans up to 2003—what is the right sort of data to identify, collect, and utilize vs. ignore and disregard? How do we know the real impact of social media on public professionals?
3. The Pseudo-Event vs. the Real Event: Many years ago Daniel Boorstin referred to a media created event that was unreal or fake as "a pseudo-event". The rise of social media has accelerated what now is called "fake news". Often pseudo-events create reality that happens and has serious consequences, such as suicides, staged riots, or shootings. Yet, professionalism rests upon honest information, verifiable facts, as well as objective analysis. Sorting out truth from fiction has always been challenging for public professionals, but the expansion of social media during the last decade only exacerbates

an already devilish dilemma. How can professionals discern fact from fiction today and respond appropriately in an increasingly social media saturated world?

4. The Drive to Specialize vs. Integrated Professional Policy-Making: As was emphasized before, the drive to specialize and sub-specialize and so on is apparent within the professional ranks as new issues and new information demand new varieties of expertise. The result is what some term, "stovepipes" throughout government or little clusters of experts who talk to themselves rather than those outside their specialization, beyond their immediate agency, or wider general public. Hence, the right hand often is unaware of what the left hand is doing. Competition among professional groups such as within the defense department—army, air force, navy—further inhibits collaboration. Yet, effective public policy making requires integration across many professional fields to succeed. No professional group can go it alone in any policy-making arena. Thus the dilemma: how to foster integration and collaboration across increasingly narrow specialized and competitive professional ranks?
5. Proliferation of Temporary Contractors vs. In-House Professionals: The recent devastating leaks in American Intelligence have all been the result of temporary contract employees such as Edward Snowden. Increased use of contractors is often justified politically for keeping costs down and cutting government employees. That is good political rhetoric, but there is little evidence to support such rationales. Instead, in the words of Hugh Heclo, we have become a "government of strangers". As a result, there is potential for a serious erosion of a professional corporate identity due to the lack of commonly shared professional norms plus effective ethical enforcement mechanisms. Hence, the key question: how can professionalization of government as a whole advance when it is seriously challenged from within due to the rise of temporary contract workers (which in national security and law enforcement cases can jeopardize human life as well)?
6. Global Interconnectedness vs. Local Accountability: As mentioned before, professional groups are rooted in state and community level associations such as the State Bar Association or State Medical Societies for entrance exams, credentialing, ethics enforcement, and much more. Yet, increasingly professional work spans the global or at least are interconnected beyond the borders of any single nation. Again, problem-solving demands wider international cooperation and collaboration to succeed in almost every field today from environmental protection to military intervention. Hence, how to insure that public professionals, educated and credentialed within a local jurisdiction, are prepared to see "the big picture" and work effectively with colleagues across national boundaries?
7. Increased Ethical Responsibilities vs. Limited Ethical Training: Not very long ago, it was assumed if you studied public administration, you WERE ETHICAL! Hence, MPA programs until recently were largely devoted to training students in the "bread and butter" topics of training for the 3Es—economy, efficiency, effectiveness—via classes in organization and management, budgeting and finance, human resources management, etc. Few teachers paid much attention to ethics and the subject was largely absent from public administration curricula. While more is being done in classrooms to incorporate ethical training as well as establishing codes of conduct that are enforced by professional associations, the rapid escalation of ethical responsibilities and demands upon public officials continues to grow at a staggering rate. From first-line employee to top department head in government, ethical dilemmas are profound and pervasive. So the central, if not THE CENTRAL

CHALLENGE, confronting the field today is: how to develop ethical awareness among professionals in order to make and to apply ethically sound choices for resolving problems they confront?

8. Specialist vs. Generalist Public Service Education: Universities remain conveyor belts for advancing expertise, credentialing, and educating public professionals. Until relatively recently it was easy to name the top public administration schools, the top scholars in the field, an agreed upon means of academic preparation, and recognize a common curriculum for training throughout the field. A generalist orientation largely prepared students for a variety of public sector careers. While today university training beyond the BS or BA degree is generally accepted as the appropriate route to professional careers in government, the choice of schools, curricula, and specializations are staggering in the USA. Generalist degrees have largely declined or disappeared in favor of highly narrow subject matter such as defense policy making, emergency management training, law enforcement administration, budgeting and financial management, or human resources management. Once many of these were designated as sub-fields of a generalist MPA degree but now are offered as stand-alone graduate degrees. But does specialized training adequately prepare students for government work that requires understanding "the big picture", how to integrate the parts, and then make them operate altogether as a "whole ball of wax"? At what point does increasing professional specialization become counterproductive to achieving "the public interest"?
9. A Clear Dichotomy vs. An Integrated Political/Professional Team: Since the rise of democracy with elected officials and growth of bureaucracies with appointed public professions, the dilemma has always been how to "mesh" the two distinctively different realms of the political and administrative into an effective collaborative team to serve the public interest, especially since both have profoundly different incentive structures, agendas, outlooks, and purposes. The issue is as old as public administration itself; indeed, it was a major concern of Woodrow Wilson's first essay written in America on the subject, *The study of administration* (1887), i.e. how to ensure responsible government in light of the creation of a new civil service system? How to make certain professionals are accountable to the public? The topic remains front and center to the public sector world-wide today, namely how can elected officials hold appointed public professionals accountable while at the same time how can professionals offer the best neutral, objective, independent advice and service to elected representatives? Everywhere in the world nowadays this issue of "marrying" political and professional is not only challenging but decides ultimately the fate of many, if not all, key public policy debates.

Certainly other current world-wide trends impacting public professionalism could be added to this list, such as citizen participation, union representation in government, and career mobility. But I tried to emphasize those most recent, most critical, and with the greatest potential global impacts on the public sector. Granted, many of my examples and citations were drawn from the USA. So my perspectives and this discussion may well be somewhat limited, parochial, and even biased. I certainly know little about Brazilian public administration and the specific challenges your public service confronts, but I suspect many of the trends outlined above are effecting your nation and its public sector in equally profound, pervasive, and often unknown ways. Especially for those seminal public profession values of applied expertise, corporate identity, and ethical responsibility, my hunch is that individually and collectively these aforementioned forces serve to fragment, diffuse, even negate many aspects of

foundational professional values in Brazil as well as everywhere abroad. Thus my central argument for advancing public service education is aimed to revitalize, reinvigorate, and rejuvenate those core values that created and developed public professionalism as we now know it and are under attack in many quarters. Why? Again, as emphasized in the stated premises to this lecture, government decisions and official behavior have immense impact on any nation and the world—social, political, economic—hence, it is the education of public professionals that is critical to shaping public choices and actions. Effective government and a just modern society cannot work without a professionalized public service. If Carl Friedrich once wrote that "bureaucracy is the core of modern government", certainly "public professionals" are the core of that core.

So what are the best routes for advancing public professionalism in the second decade of the 21st century and beyond? Again, I must claim ignorance about Brazil's public service and its particular contemporary challenges. Though permit me to discuss general educational strategies in light of the nine forgoing global trends and speculate about routes that can significantly serve to strengthen and advance those three foundational professional values. Here I will sum up this talk--not by outlining specific remedies or educational programs and curricula, not arguing for part-time vs. full time alternatives, not in-house vs. university training, not online vs. in classroom face-to-face teaching—but rather by speculating on general educational strategies aimed at broadly strengthening the three seminal foundational values of public professionalism.

First, by fostering greater constitutional understanding: Here I am not suggesting more legal training in the specifics of constitutional law. Rather I refer to the broader Aristotelian sense of comprehending the basic purposes, meaning, and influence on public professionals of framing legal documents for every nation. In the case of the United States Constitution, such instruction would not ask students to learn the specifics of the 6 thousand word framing document but rather to comprehend its intellectual origins in the late 18th century and why that era and the men involved fashioned a very unique founding arrangement; its central aims as embodied in its preamble that lay out possibilities, limits, and roles of today's public sector; its general structure that shapes the current actions and constraints on modern American Government; as well as its 27 amendments since 1789 and evolving interpretations over time that influence public sector activities today. By linking greater constitutional understanding to contemporary public professional education can rejuvenate and invigorate basic ethical values that undergird all professional decision-making activities.

Second, by encouraging deeper appreciation of professional history and the lives of professional leaders: Professionals live within a stream of history that runs deep and wide and decisively influences their modern corporate identities of who they are, what they do, and how they operate in the modern-day world. History can tremendously enrich professional careers, inspire their work, by knowledge of their past development, key founders, their accomplishments and, yes, failures. It can broaden their way of thinking about problems; offer examples of not just how-to-do-something, but how-to-do-it-well; what works best or not; as well as approaches and strategies that succeed—or fail. Such education would include reading about the lives of the great professional leaders: why they entered the field, how they learned their professional skills, what they learned about, experienced in their apprenticeships that fostered their career development, how they rose to prominence within the professional ranks, what inspired their deep commitment to this line of work, role models that

aided their advancement, and decisions they made that made them historically famous—or infamous as professional leaders. Much of professional education requires hard work and sheer perspiration. History and biography offers invaluable inspiration for those who aspire to top leadership ranks as well as those "old hands" already in charge.

Third, by grasping lessons of administrative cases: The world of government does not present its practitioners with simple questions or neat solutions. Especially as they move up in every organizational hierarchy, administrative issues become more and more complex. Professionals in government do not wake up in the morning and say, "Today I will deal with a budget issue"; "tomorrow I will address policy of such and such an area" and "the next day hiring a new employee will be my agenda". Nothing is so neat and tidy in government. Rather, everything is usually interconnected, events come upon desks unpredictably, and choices are more often than not neither right nor wrong, but mixed with a lot grey uncertainty, without full information, and considerable questions as to the results and outcomes to be achieved. Here is where administrative cases are a necessary pedagogical tool. Unlike medical school or law school cases with often clear-cut right and wrong answers, the best administrative cases are open to many interpretations and force students to see the ambiguity and complexity of so much of what real-life government decision-making is all about. The best administrative cases encourage students to appreciate and navigate such cloudy operational environments as well as learn how successful policy-making and implementation of policy involves working across agency, departmental, and unit lines, using multiple administrative skills of budgeting and finance, human resources, planning, and so on in order to achieve results. In short, cases focusing upon gaining collaborative management skills, seeing "the big picture" beyond the limited intellectual horizons of most professional training, are vital for advancing professionalization in all parts of modern government.

Finally, by studying the future: The old adage that we should study the future because that is where we spend the rest of our lives is certainly true or contains an important truth for those who work in the public sector. For better or worse—or better AND worse—virtually all government activities involve shaping the future. It may concern big choices of peace or war, or simply entail plugging numbers into a line-item budget or hiring a new employee. Such big choices or mundane tasks in the public service help to decide what tomorrow will become. The destinies of societies everywhere are the hands of public professionals who are employed throughout government, deciding on the social challenges we face, what they are, and how to confront them by making choices big and small. Though few would debate the value of knowing about the future, the question is how? Or, how to educate professionals in futuristic learning? Certainly the rise of "big data" and its world-wide immense influence on business and government planning and decision-making is apparent and fact of modern life. Thus learning to gather, comprehend, and analyze large data, separating the essential from non-essential, fact from fiction, unlocking the relevant information related to the questions at hand in order to glean future trends is invaluable for predicting the future. But other less grand routes to glimpsing the future can be found by learning how to conduct focus groups, sample expert opinion, or gather reference material from a wide variety of document sources. While certainly no one-best-way exists to properly examine where we are headed tomorrow, the most striking aspect of professional education to date is how little involves thinking about the future. Part of the problem is the popular association of futuristic studies with tea-leaf reading and casting horoscopes, activities not enthusiastically embraced by university

academics—so far. But there are numerous more reputable technological-scientific methods worth at least somehow, someway incorporating into our professional training programs which include: trend extrapolation, genius forecasting, Delphic exercises, simulation, scenario building, cross-impact matrix development and much more that can help us predict and plan for tomorrow. Perhaps we cannot see the future with precision or a degree of accuracy we wish, but some guidance is better than nothing to point the way forward in order assist professionals to plan better today. Simply because we do not know how to educate for "it" or so far there is no agreed upon proper training methodology are no excuses for not trying—given that the stakes are so high for professionals working in government, indeed more generally for society's prosperity and survival.

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