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This paper contends that the concept of 'development' poses substantive challenges for how research proceeds to analyse and offer impressions into the development orientation of state administrations, evaluated chiefly by the performance of state administrations implementing development programmes. It is further suggested that, in debating how to increase the effectiveness of public administrations for development, state actors may be underplaying the significance of how *meanings and values* shaping conceptualisations of development are generated and shaped within public administrations, and infuse more limited technocratic formulations of enhancing skills and administrative capacity.

The 'Administration of Development' in South Africa: Exploring Institutional Meanings and Values

DRAFT 3

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Introduction

Ten years after a democratic transition the 'development' context of South Africa continues to be defined by severe and persistent socio-economic disparities. A recent illustration of these conditions is contained in the 2003 country report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), revealing that poverty trends remain on average high and disparities continue to conform to historical patterns between South Africa's people and locales (see table 1). Prompted by the persistence of this situation, further inquiry was undertaken into the nature of development to enable a fuller understanding of the commitment of the South African state's commitment to make public administration more "development-oriented" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). Based on this preliminary inquiry, it is submitted that the nature of 'development' poses a substantial challenge for assessing the development orientation of post apartheid public administration, which forces researchers to expand their speculations and interpretations about issues such as skills, capacity and effectiveness of government development performance.

Table 1: Absolute Poverty Trends in South Africa (1995 and 2002)

	National Poverty Line*		International Poverty Line			
	Population below poverty line (%)		Population below \$2 a day (%)		Population below \$1 a day (%)	
	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995
National**	48.5	51.1	23.8	24.2	10.5	9.4
African***	56.3	62	28.7	30.4	12.8	12
Coloured	36.1	38.5	11.2	10.1	3.6	2.8
White	6.9	1.5	1.4	0.3	0.4	0.2
Indian	14.7	8.3	6.1	1.2	3.1	0.7

*R354/month per adult

**Figures represent % of total population

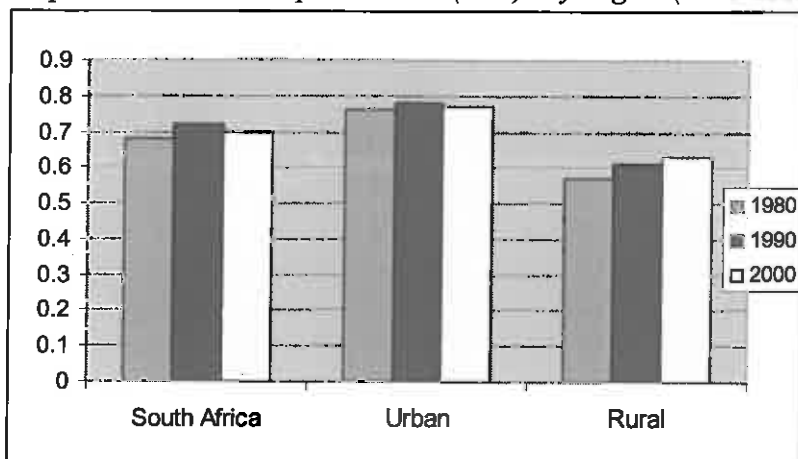
***Figures represent % of population within each group

Source: UNDP (2004: 41)

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Graph 1: Human Development Index (HDI)* by Region (1980-2000)**



* Figures represented proportionally based on UNDP graph illustration

** Rural HDI remains below urban and below the average for South Africa.

Source: UNDP (2004: 45)

On the basis of this position, the research question being proposed is the following:

On what basis can we argue that public administration in South Africa has become more development oriented?

This paper contends that the concept of 'development' poses substantive challenges for how research proceeds to analyse and offer impressions into the development orientation of state administrations, evaluated chiefly by the performance of state administrations implementing development programmes. It is further suggested that, in debating how to increase the effectiveness of public administrations for development, state actors may be underplaying the significance of how *meanings and values* shaping conceptualisations of development are generated and shaped within public administrations, and infuse more limited technocratic formulations of enhancing skills and administrative capacity.

The theoretical basis for examining institutional 'meanings' and 'values' will be introduced later in this paper. For now, I will illustrate why I believe this approach to be particularly relevant to

South African public administration in the post apartheid period.

To begin with, I refer to what appears to be unevenness in messages about the relationship between concepts of development and institutional and individual capacity for development, which generally tends to characterise those delivered from key quarters of the South African state. These include vague rhetorical statements about the public service discharging its responsibilities as a critical player in the process of growth, reconstruction and development (it is neither clear nor substantiated what this process is or why the public service is critical in it); to raising skills levels within the public sector and ensuring its managerial and technological modernisation, again linked to what is an ambiguous reference to being driven by a “clear understanding of the developmental tasks of a democratic state” (State of the Nation address, February 2004). Recent statements by the Department of Provincial and Local Government seem to confirm this ambiguity, where a call is made for the “concept” of development planning to be “de-mystified” (DPLG 2004: 3-4). The construct of such statements could well question the basis for, I would argue, more limited solutions aimed at enhancing practical and technical administrative capacity.

Other state institutions apply an even more technocratic orientation, for example the Public Service Commission’s (2004: 19-20) measurement of public service “development – orientation” emphasising the efficacy of good implementation practice, which, ironically, also concedes a lack of strategic thinking on development:

...the PSC’s PSM&E System has found that while many departments implement poverty alleviating projects, these are often not implemented in accordance with generally accepted good development practice. For example, project management guidelines are often not used, criteria for support are not clearly defined and results are not monitored...The absence of an overarching national development strategy is sorely felt in the Public Service. Without clear guidelines on what kinds of projects should be supported and how, Public Service development efforts will remain dispersed and fragmented.

Perhaps the most substantive non-technical message to emerge recently from the state is attributed to the Minister of Public Service and Administration, during a parliamentary media briefing in January 2004. Here, the Minister refers to the South African state remaining a “pivotal

development partner” in the context of global research pointing to the increasing role of the state as a key agent in the *processes* of planning, consultation, negotiation and decision-making between multiple partners and stakeholders from varied fields, activities, regions, cultures, professions and interests. Although this description conveys a more expansive and less clearly defined definition of development, it is perhaps for this reason probably a more realistic definition. This kind of definition also forces researchers to engage with a wider spectrum of issues influencing institutional programming for development, as a *process*, which include skills and capacity, but also must include the meanings and values that the institution generates and attaches to its development responsibilities.

In summarising these statements, it is noteworthy that each tries, with varying but mostly unsuccessful degrees of success, to ground their meanings in a kind of substantive development logic. In particular, there is an absence in these statements of attempts to infuse the enhancement of practical and skills capacity for development with key issues marking the study of post apartheid public administration. For example, Wooldridge and Cranko (1997: 324; 326) argue that the search for “developmental administrations” in South Africa ought to be linked to the extension of “democracy” into the organs of the state, allowing public administrations to develop the capacity to negotiate, interact on and mediate conflict over resource allocation, which would presumably be constrained or negatively influenced by concentrating decision-making authority. This argument is fairly persuasive in the context of South African history, in so far as it rejects the concentration of authority within the apartheid public service.¹ (Piccard and Garritz 1997: 68; Evans 1997: 17)

Latib (1995: 11-13) further argues that administrative performance during apartheid was evaluated within tightly controlled hierarchical and secretive public policy decision-making between bureaucrats reporting to their political heads, with the tasks being highly prescriptive, regulatory, and geared towards what he calls “procedural accountability”. Set within this ethos, Noam Pines (1979: 5) gives an account of the lack of success of many development initiatives managed by the apartheid public service in black homeland territories, arguing that the most prominent feature of community development was its “system-maintaining” properties, resulting in government officials, by initiating self-help schemes, being unlikely to promote social-political processes outside of, but parallel to, the established political structure.

Mokgoro (2000: 5) reminds us of the scale of the institutional transformation ushered in by South

Africa's first democratic elections, by noting that public administration comprises a complex system composed of many interdependent and interrelated subsystems. Oldfield (2000: 35) infuses this with historical meaning viz. state-civil society relations, by recognising that "...the state is a product of political compromise, and a site and agent in post-apartheid struggles for resources and power, its relationships with organs of civil society are complex and uneven". She adds that state structures encompass multiple sites of power (and contestation) at various levels, and that the level of determination and co-ordination of priorities as well as perspectives of recipients impacts on the shape, pace and implementation of initiatives (ibid: 21-22).

On the basis of these contextual features, I would argue that evaluations/assessments of administrative and institutional practical and technical capacity for development must find some way of searching for and commenting on significant factors in the institutional environment that shape meanings and values attached to development.

Theoretical Orientation

It may be assumed that the 'nature' of development is more complex, if it is argued that assessing the development-orientation of public administrations poses a substantial challenge. One may begin to engage with this complexity by tracing the evolution of development within the international community. ² The United Nations, representing the collective deliberations of the international community, has passed hundreds of resolutions since its creation in 1945 addressing 'development' and the promotion of economic growth, where an increasing amount of attention has been directed over the years to an expanding agenda of issues (as illustrated in table 1).

Table 2: Resolutions on Development by Comparative Type

Resolutions on Development	Number	%	Year of First Resolution
UN Support*	108	43.72%	1948
Social Issues**	34	13.77%	1952
State capacity	26	10.53%	1968
Women	25	10.12%	1957
Human Rights	24	9.72%	1969
Africa	19	7.69%	1961
Business and Development	4	1.62%	1995
Rural issues	3	1.21%	1950
Community issues	2	0.81%	1955
Environment	2	0.81%	1971
TOTAL	247	100.00%	

* "UN support" encompasses a mix of activities including facilitating development cooperation (technical assistance and finance), monitoring and the improvement of direct development assistance by UN agencies, ongoing consideration of new issues emerging from development research; strategy and planning for development; publicising development issues.

** "Social issues" includes disaggregated population groupings, i.e. disabled, family, youth, the aged, as well as covering education and health services

Table two provides a useful illustration of the range of issues that have come under the banner of development over the past fifty years. Academic attempts to clarify and derive meaning from this complexity have included paradigmatic models roughly distinguishing pure economic constructs from socio-economic phenomena. Wilber and Jameson (1988: 14) for example classify development into two basic paradigms, the first of these comprising so called orthodox *economic models* to explain and predict the combination of factors for producing economic growth such as output of goods and services produced, and related to this the allocation of income (per capita/head). The second paradigm takes a *political-economy approach*, concerned about the "nature of the process by which economic growth is achieved", which encompasses a wide range of views critiquing growth from sociological (comparative historical circumstances) economics (economic relations) and political (relationships involving authority and influence, resource allocation, etc.) perspectives. Other attempts to classify the literature on development have yielded similar observations, with Ferguson (1990:15) distinguishing between development as a process of economic and particularly industrial transformation, *and* development incorporating issues of quality of life, standard of living, and the reduction and amelioration of poverty and material want. Regardless of which paradigm one applies, the variations in meaning remains largely in tact, which has been distilled into the idea that development is essentially about

“change”, as linked to social and economic transformation (Gant 1979: 20; Thirlwall 1983: 8; Nixon 1996: 10).

The terminology of development and the role of public administration are at best complex and at worst ill defined. For example, on what basis do we proceed to analyse this question if we consider the multi-dimensions of Wunsch and Olowu’s description of development (2000: 71), as incorporating a mixture of economic, social and political decision-making, involving complex and co-ordinated behaviour by diverse peoples across large areas of time and space.³

The difficulty of defining the responsibility of administration for development is reinforced by Heady’s (1984: 256) remark about the ideology of development setting the sights for political and administrative action but not specifying the exact form of the machinery for politics or administration. Although Hope (1984: 63) provides more clarity on the responsibility of public administration for development, encapsulated in the term “development administration”, his definition also acknowledges a “complexity”, but at an inter-institutional level, characterised by a “complex” of agencies, management systems and processes that governments establish to achieve development purposes.

The existence of a standard agenda of responsibilities public for the pursuit of development by public administration is, as one can see, difficult to do. Perhaps the more immediate challenge therefore is in identifying an appropriate theoretical basis for examining how such responsibilities are determined within public institutions, and specifically those factors impacting on this. To begin to probe this I would refer to Denhardt’s (1984: 12-13) useful distinction between, on the one hand, public administration as viewed from the discipline of political theory and on the other hand public administration focusing more on organisational analysis, where the chief concern is efficiency, and where the prevailing disciplines are business administration and industrial psychology. In the former, the workings of public administration are analysed from the viewpoint of public bureaucracy having a significant role in the broader governmental process, affecting the development and implementation of public policy. The significance of the bureaucracy’s broader role is further cast in the terminology of “governance”, by Green and Hubbell (1996: 38; Rohr 1989 quoted in Green and Hubbell: 39). Whether one accepts the use of the term ‘governance’ in this context or not, it does, for these individuals, represent “administering in a political context”, which, *inter alia*, requires that administration possesses the ability to sustain dialogue among competing interpretations of regime values, and to balance their inherent tensions within and

among diverse policy contexts.

It is argued that the multidimensional, complex and possibly contentious processes attributed to development, supports more strongly adoption of the first approach identified by Denhardt. This approach sees administration as part of a wider constellation of forces engaged in decision-making processes that determine and negotiate the parameters and details relating to socio-economic transformation, which appears to be the formative indicator of development. Although efforts to enhance practical and skills capacities and general “administrative obstacles” are factors that can significantly impede efficiencies and the quality of development efforts and goal achievement (Sapru 1994: 9; 42; Rodman 1968: 8), it is also the case that one cannot attempt to effectively evaluate these without examining the basis on which development goals and objectives are constituted, which moreover ought to be part of assessing the significance of the bureaucracy’s broader role in public policy. The “basis” could moreover refer to meanings and values attached to development as interpreted and reified by public administrations.

An illustration of the need to widen our examination of technocratic performance of public administrations in responding to development is Rapley’s (2002: 136-144) observation that states lack the strength to engineer development if they cannot in the worst-case scenario “successfully implement...policies”. Although it is accepted that non-successful implementation can contribute to underperformance in reaching particular policy objectives, this does not seemingly appreciate whether a *particular* conceptualisation and make-up of development engineering, in the first instance, is the way ‘success’ should be defined. Perhaps his initial question could be asked another way, that is: ‘The ability of a state to successfully implement policies is diminished if it lacks the strength to engineer Development’. The difference in making the statement this way is that it shifts the onus on identifying those features of development that positively or negatively impact on implementation.

If we generally agree then, based on our treatment of the concept of development thus far, that it is appropriate to adopt a political theory orientation to public administration’s responsibility, then the next task would be to select an appropriate theoretical basis for examining how public administrations and in particular institutional contexts shape discourse and responses to development. Adopting a perspective from within the study of comparative public administration (CPA) would facilitate the search for appropriate theoretical frameworks. I base this contention

on the flexibility of comparative approaches, in so far as they have historically allowed for a factoring in of a wider set of variables impacting on administrative contexts, including the political, social and economic settings within which administration takes place (Jreisat 2002: 20). By emphasising a more intensive analytical versus descriptive approach, CPA also goes beyond a strict definition of overtly comparing administrative systems and processes across two or more countries. Its emphasis on a general application of a comparative approach includes for example single case studies with a greater concern for building and testing theory, including via comparisons of intra-national settings and by testing certain hypotheses (Van Wart, Cayer 1990: 240). This would appear to lend itself to the circumstances surrounding democratic transition in South Africa, as well as testing particular theories about public service transformation within this setting.

Theoretical Approach

A relevant theoretical framework, using development as the independent variable, ought to, *inter alia*, be concerned with the responsibility for development as interpreted by public administrations. Given then that my emphasis is on how public administrations interpret their development responsibilities, I have selected a theoretical framework rooted in organisational theory. I maintain however that this does not contradict the choice of viewing public administration from the discipline of political theory rather than from organisational analysis, because our chief concern *is not* with efficiency, but with how public institutions attach meanings and values to development, thus shaping development programming. This represents formative questions in how and why development programming is conceived within public administrations, which cannot be said to be fundamentally about *efficiency*.

Searching for an appropriate organisational theory model brings us to Christensen's (2003: 111) discussion of various types of such theories, including the subset of environmental theories. These consist of technical and institutional approaches. *Technical environment* theories address a complexity of relationships between the actor (public administrator) and the demands of his/her organisational environment including structure, functions, roles, and resources. This incorporates perspectives such as contingency and resource-dependency theories, which focus on how organisations respond to environmental exigencies (Hult 2003: 152; Hatch 1997: 78; Bozeman 1993: 252).

Institutional environment theories concentrate perhaps on a less concrete constellation of factors (i.e. institutional meanings and values) that influence administrative actions. Belief systems play a formative part in why organisations are erected and the logic behind how they are managed and pursue particular objectives. I would further submit that the nature of ‘development’ orientation as discussed in this Paper, as concerning the *processes* of decision-making about socio-economic change involving social, economic and political elements, ought to assume that meanings and values generated within institutional environments permeate these processes, and therefore can impact on the determination of “contingencies” and resource “dependencies”.

Meyer and Rowan’s (1992: 1; 3; 5) approach to factors that produce and maintain organisational structure is to view organisations as “cultural” systems, defining and legitimising organisational structures and aiding in their creation and maintenance. On the one hand this supports Fox and Miller’s (1995: 99) point about formal institutions (such as public administration) existing in a context of legitimating value orientations that influences their “objectivity”. But it also takes a decidedly institutional rather than instrumental position, stressing the reification and projection of legitimating values by the institution, rather than how institutional actors (individual and collective) shape organizational purposes including in the service of their own interests. They take this position by arguing that these actors become enactors of the social rules *on which their existence depends*, or, that their rational choices are constrained by certain claims of legitimacy and public standing held by the institution. Therefore, we need to focus on how decision-making processes are shaped by institutional meanings versus rational choice (Hatch 1997: 85-86). It is further argued that the credibility of ‘public’ institutions lends itself to these holding as well as projecting values associated with public accountability and representation of public values, which can constrain instrumental or user-driven motivations. Finally, we cannot assume nor would the evidence support ‘development’ as generally articulated and written into policy for the advantage certain individual or collective interests. It would fall to a closer examination of how meanings are generated and attached to development within institutions, to shed further light on the kinds of interests being served.

With reference to these arguments, Meyer and Rowan (1992: 5) point to a number of avenues for empirical research including “unlocking the nature of institutional meanings, examining ways they are constructed and organised, and analysing the mechanics by which they flow into local settings. Hatch (1997: 86) also suggests that researchers ought to imagine how the organisation

might gain greater legitimacy within its institutional context. I would submit that these institutional-focussed arguments offer a particularly discerning approach to questioning the basis on which to argue that public administration has been made more development-oriented. This would allow for the identification and description of the content, patterns and impacts of institutional meanings and values, how these shape development responses in institutions of public administration, and the significance of these questions for examining and explaining development progress.

Everett (2003) applies a similar approach when examining definitions of poverty in South African national government department poverty programmes. With reference to his observations, it is instructive but not sufficient to consider Everatt's (2003: 86-87, 89) observations about the lack of consistency and substance behind national government department definitions of poverty. Although it is probably axiomatic to state that a failure or inconsistency in defining poverty can result in programmes and services lacking focus and clarity, is it the case that generating an overarching definition of poverty to "animate and cohere those of line departments" is sufficient, without considering the processes of engagement within departments where definitions are imbued with beliefs, and acquire meaning and values, in the process of designing, implementing and monitoring poverty initiatives? We cannot deal effectively with these questions if we only operate on the basis of horizontal consistency in definitions of poverty across departments.

Suggestions for Applying this Theoretical Approach

I am cognizant of the challenges in public administration research of applying a theoretical model to address such abstract phenomena as *meanings and values*. However, I believe the attempt is credible in so far as it emphasises a need to inject a more formative level of examination to assessing issues such as technical and skills capacity for development. I make an attempt to illustrate the kinds of questions we ought to be pursuing in this regard, based on the discussion undertaken thus far. These are illustrated in table two:

Table 3: Working Framework for Examining Institutional Meanings and Values on Development

Variables	Public Administration Institution ⁴	
	Structure in the Institution	Functional Processes in the Institution
Meanings and Values	<p>1. From where does the institution derive the beliefs that inform its development responsibility? To what degree is this grounded in recognizable theory?⁵</p> <p>2. To what extent are these meanings consistent with its administrative structure for pursuing development?</p> <p>3. Evaluate the depth and consistency of the institution's meanings toward development, across its development programming structures.</p>	<p>1. To what extent are meanings and values about the development process visible in and consistent with administrative processes (i.e. in the manner institutional agents communicate with recipients of development programming);</p> <p>2. Examine decision-making processes within the institution viz. development programming. Are these processes consistent with the meanings and values professed by the institution?</p>

Conclusion

Greater attention needs to be directed at the basis upon which institutions of public administration justify and legitimise their responsibilities for development. This requires increasing attention to how meanings and values about development responsibilities are interpreted and reified within institutions. The approach would also appear to lend itself quite well to a case study methodology, where research is focused on the internal workings of institutional structures and processes contributing to insights drawn from more surface level comparisons of development programming across institutions.

Finally, specific development issues that can be addressed by this framework, within institutions of public administration, include:

- Poverty alleviation programmes within institutions of public administration. One could undertake more extensive examination of the meanings and values attached to the government's various poverty alleviation/relief programmes;
- Human rights, as forming part of the development orientation of public administration. Particular attention should be paid to socio-economic rights *and* a "right to development".

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WRITER'S DRAFT COMMENTS:

1. Clarify what I mean by 'development', i.e. what does it imply about administrative practice, and why? On the one hand it can refer to defined programmes involving social and economic issues, however why is it useful to use it as a marker, i.e. what does it imply to people?
2. Include more SA examples.
3. Maybe put in references to SA circumstances framing what we mean by meanings and values.

¹ Include references to a 'state within the state' attached to the Department of Native Affairs/Administration in particular.

² The Millennium Development Goals (2000) represent perhaps the most widely supported platform of interventions to address development, with poverty at the top of the agenda.

³ Similar to the description of the South African Minister of Public Service and Administration, as recorded earlier in this article.

⁴ It is recommended that these questions be specifically directed at institutions of public administration that have clearly defined programmes and activities responding to development, as defined by incorporating primarily programmes/activities on socio-economic issues. Furthermore, questions ought to be aimed at strategic-level management staff, and development programme/activity staff.

⁵ Refers to being able to control for assessments of institutional objectives that may (or at least reveal the possibility of) mis-direct or ill-specify development interventions (Mosse 1998: X; Wood 1985: 364). Brodhead (quoted in Korten 1990: 113) also makes the point that it is impossible to be a true development agency with the absence of a guiding theory to generate assumptions about the factors that sustain the problem being addressed, beyond simply what is superficially visible