

Lingnan University and Education
University of Hong Kong
Collaborative Research Postgraduate
Students' Seminar Series

LECTURE NO.1

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH: TOWARD A RELEVANT RESEARCH AGENDA

XIAOHU WANG, CITY
UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

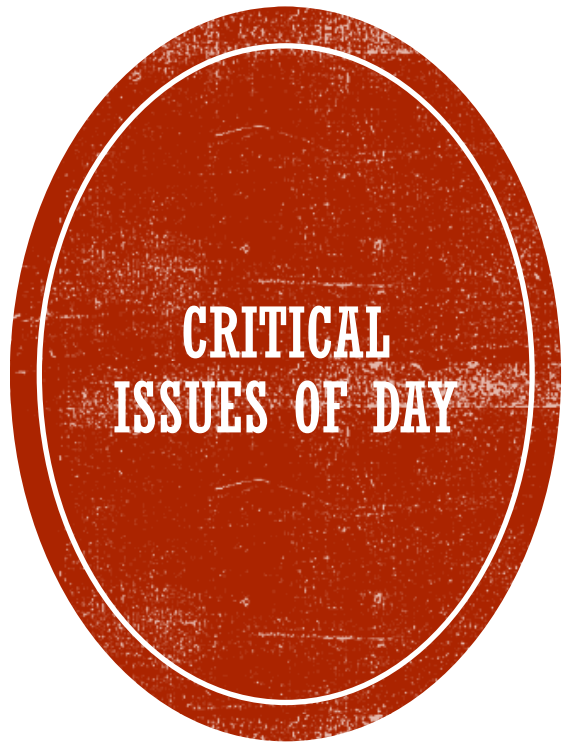
XiaoHu WANG



OUTLINE

- Part I: A relevant research agenda
- Part II: The state of the field in Public Administration Research
- Part III: Critical issues in public administration
- Part IV: How to be successful in Public Administration Research

PART I: A RELEVANT RESEARCH AGENDA



The case for
global
competition

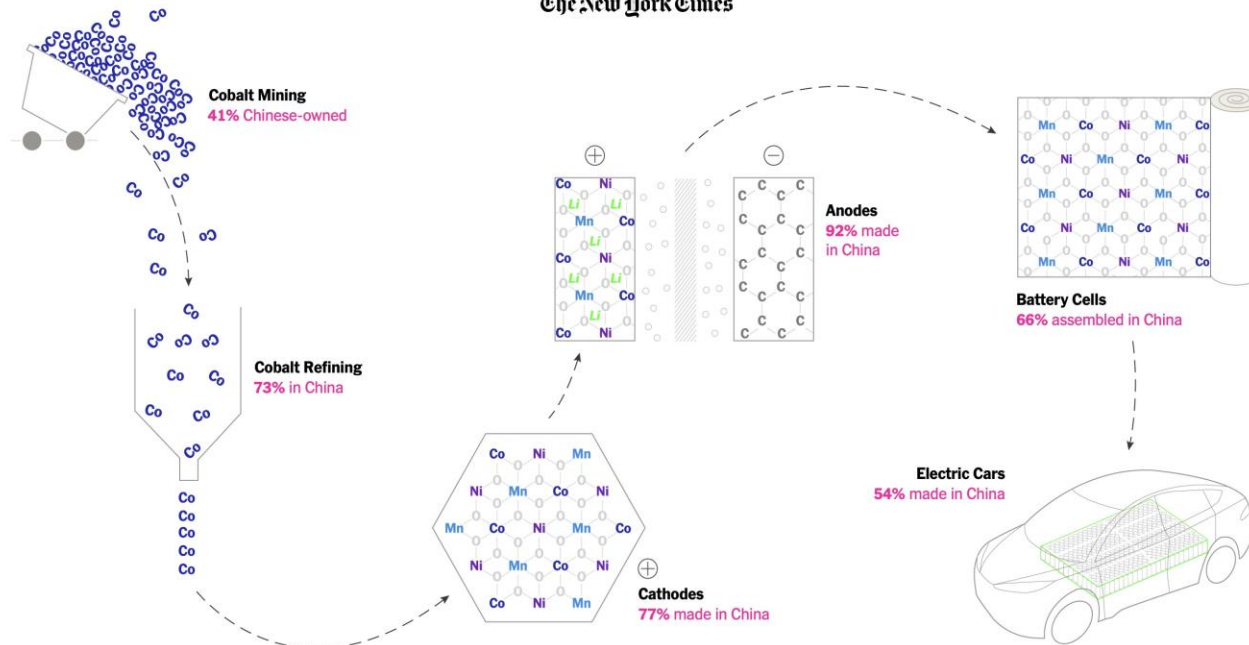
The case for
global
collaboration

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 16, 2023

The New York Times: Digital and Home Delivery Subscriptions

Can the World Make an Electric Car Battery Without China? - The New York Times

GIVE THE



Can the World Make an Electric Car Battery Without China?

By Agnes Chang and Keith Bradsher May 16, 2023

It is one of the defining competitions of our age: The countries that can make batteries for electric cars will reap decades of economic and geopolitical advantages.

THE NEW YORK TIMES JUNE 9, 2009

SEARCH

The New York Times

China Orders Tesla to Recall 1.1 Million Vehicles Over Braking Risks

In Norway, the Electric Vehicle Future Has Already Arrived

Musk Warns Tesla Shareholders to Expect "Challenging" Year



Wheels

The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You

An Electric Car With Chinese Roots

BY JIM MOTAVALLI JUNE 9, 2009 1:51 PM



Coda sedan.

Add one more to the growing list of small private electric-car companies: [Coda Automotive](#), a new brand started by Miles EV, a company that's been selling low-speed electric vehicles from China for about four years.

The Coda sedan was unveiled last week in Santa Monica, Calif. It is based on the Saibao, a gas-powered car built by the Hafei Automobile Group, a state-owned company in China. The chassis was originally developed by Mitsubishi (which licenses it to Hafei). According to Coda, Hafei sells 200,000 cars a year and has delivered more than a million units since it was [established in 2006](#).

Coda addressed Chinese quality questions by giving the Saibao a big makeover. The electric version had a front and rear redesign by Porsche, a partner, as well as considerable re-engineering to accommodate the battery drive and meet United States safety standards. "We think we have the right combination of existing automotive know-how and a mass-manufacturing partner," said

THE CASE FOR COMPETITION

- Geopolitical or ideological?
- Globalization, trade, and domestic politics in the US
- Key technology developments (semi-conduct chips, AI, and space technologies etc.)
- Which developmental model? The applicability of the liberal democratic model
- The institutional development; the role of
 - the state building,
 - the rule of law
 - the democratic accountability mechanism
- The China model?
 - Is there a distinctive China model, in institutional development? (Two views)
 - China simply follows the normal development path in industrialization (development of property rights, responsibility system in the countryside)
 - A strong state and the ability of the state to adopt effective industrial modernization strategies
 - What makes a China model? Central imposition, top-down, mobilization capacity etc.



THE CASE FOR COLLABORATION

- Global sustainable development
- Infectious disease control and global public health
- Arm control, especially nuclear arsenals
- Other areas (trade, global financial system, cross-country crime, anti-money laundry, science and technology collaboration etc.)

THE CHINA MODEL

- The China model in a context of global competition—comparative in reference of western liberal democracies
- The dominated role of the central government in institutional development and capacity building in policy making and implication
- Underscored, in policy implementation, in two areas of distinctions with the western model
 - Capacity to mobilize
 - Capacity to motivate
- The China model appears strong in the first, but weak in the second aspect, compared with a decentralized western model

CAPACITY TO MOBILIZE

- Associated with the centralized decision making and implementation in a unitary regime
- Chinese government has strong mobilization capacity, however, such view doesn't go unchallenged (The vaccine policy in Covid as an example— due to local implementation limits)
- Mobilizing policy capacity is a system that consists of multiple capacities— financial resources, expertise, leadership, and if necessary, institutionalization. Not all these are equally developed in China.
- Globalization and skill/expertise specialization neutralize the effect of mobilization capacity to certain extent (e.g., the global design-production chain of the chip industry)

CAPACITY TO MOTIVATE

- The issue of motivation (for sustaining a level of capacity)
- Two modes in developing motivators—the open system and top-down vertical system
- The open system— decentralized with motivating stimuli from horizontal and vertical sources of stakeholders
- The top-down system— centralized with key vertical accountability chain
- Adaptability of the two systems
- Adaptability during emergencies while initiatives and risk-taking are required
- Inability to motivate street-level bureaucrats at a high-level seems to be an important issue in the Chinese's governing system

**PART II: THE
STATE OF THE
FIELD OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION
RESEARCH**

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

- “Hallelujah” the song by Leonard Cohen --The Holy or the Broken
- Social science---the social or the science?
- Self-actualization vs. the will (Hegel or Schopenhauer)
- Since when the standard deviation is greater than the mean? Do we have a mean? Or is the mean meaningful? (ask a physicist what a mean is)
- Psychoanalysis vs. the behavioral approach
- The ultimate standard: are we getting happier? Or do we live longer?

FEATURES OF RESEARCH IN THE FIELD

- The field is known for applied research---the research that strongly connects with practice
- Issue-driven vs. theory-building (theory-driven)
- Action-based vs. theory-based
- Interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary--- influence from political science, economics, sociology, and psychology
- Empiricism (evidence-based research) with strong emphasis on quantitative analyses
- Major journals divided into broad areas of general issues, specific sub-disciplines



INFLUENCES FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

- Political science— political institutions and their behaviors
- Economics— economic institutions and their behaviors
- Sociology— sociopolitical context for the issues in the public sector
- Psychology— Individual behaviors in institutions and within public sector context

PATHS TO RESEARCH RIGOR

- Critical analysis and historical analysis--- before 1940s and 1950s
- Emergence of empiricism since then
- Empiricism without theory
- Lack of a robust theory for bureaucratic behaviors leaves the field flooded with “issue of day” analyses without direction
- Major journals started to pay attention to the issue of lacking middle range theories in the field (Public Administration coming from the other spectrum of phenomenon from sociology)
- Balance of theory-driven and issue-driven

SOME TRADITIONAL ISSUES OF RESEARCH FOCUS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- Publicness
- Red tapes
- Public Service Motivation (PSM)
- Performance management
- Policy innovation
- Collaborative governance
- Data, information, and knowledge in policy process
- Others



WHERE ARE WE?

- Compared to who? (Economics, political science, sociology, psychology)
- Lagging behind in
 - Theory development
 - Method sophistication
- Behavioral revolutions in economics and political science
- Conditions for the revolutions
 - Unit of analysis (individual vs institution)
 - Tools in data analysis
 - Highly trained in statistical analysis of large datasets



NEW TRENDS – BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

- What is it?
- Why analyzes behaviors of individuals?
- Behaviorism in economics and political science
- Behavioral approaches in policy and public administration
 - PSM
 - Leadership studies

NEW TRENDS— EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES

- Shortcoming of non-experimental basis in theory development
- Starting from basic human behaviors
- Experimental approach in economics
- The efforts in public administration and policy in using experimental studies
- Critique
 - Overemphasis on method improvement?
 - Method rich and content poor?



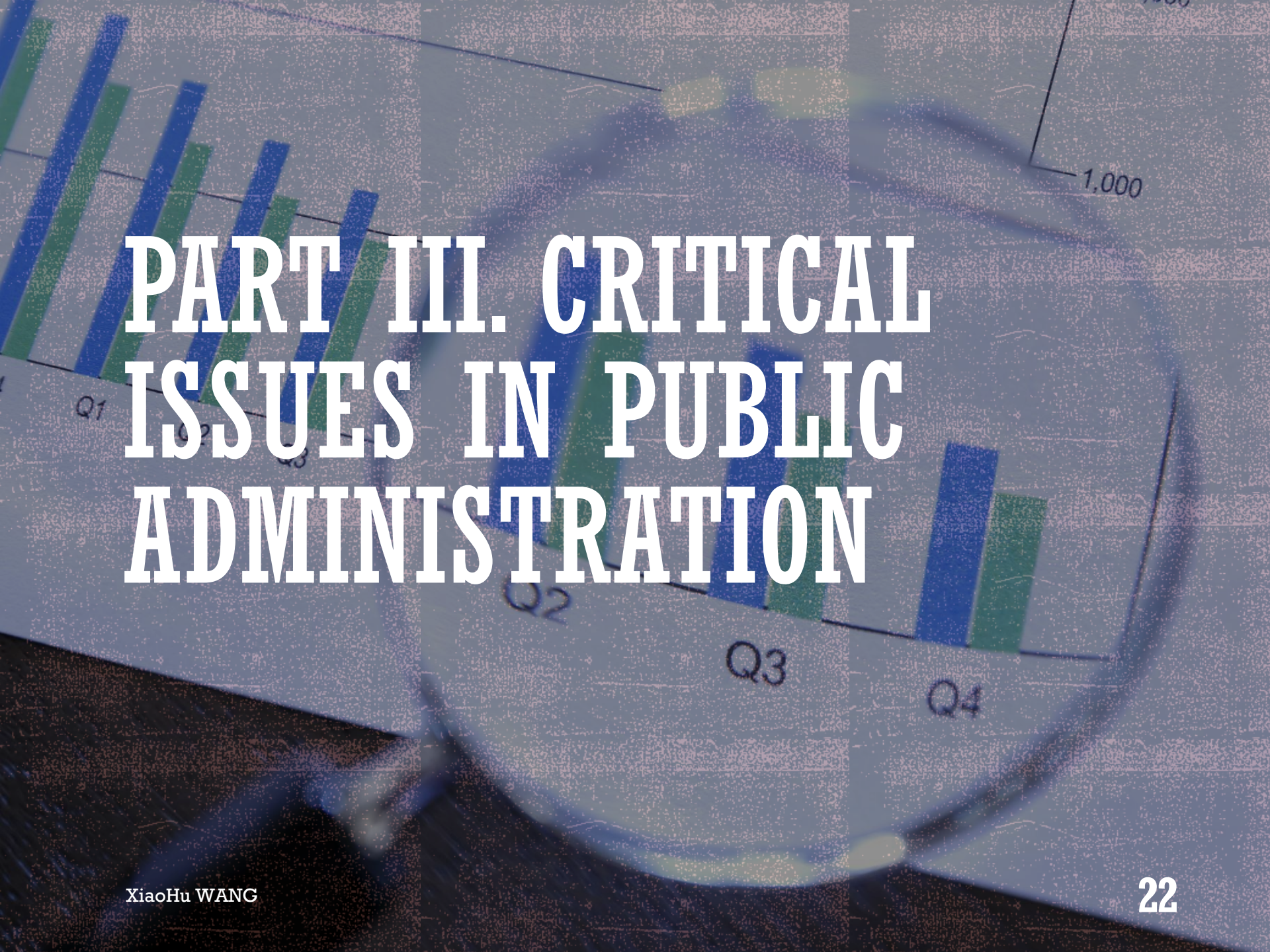


NEW TRENDS— BIG DATA AND DATA MINING

- Applications in policy areas
- Applications in management
- Availability of data infrastructure and highly trained individuals
- Policy simulation exercises
- Use of AI in social science research

OTHER TRENDS

- Meta analysis and text analysis--sufficient accumulation of quantitative studies
- Triangulation in research
- Replication in research
- Evidence-based policy analysis
- High quality research regardless of data collection method (e.g., longitudinal case study methods)
- Open access movement
- Data openness and accountability
- Others



PART III. CRITICAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

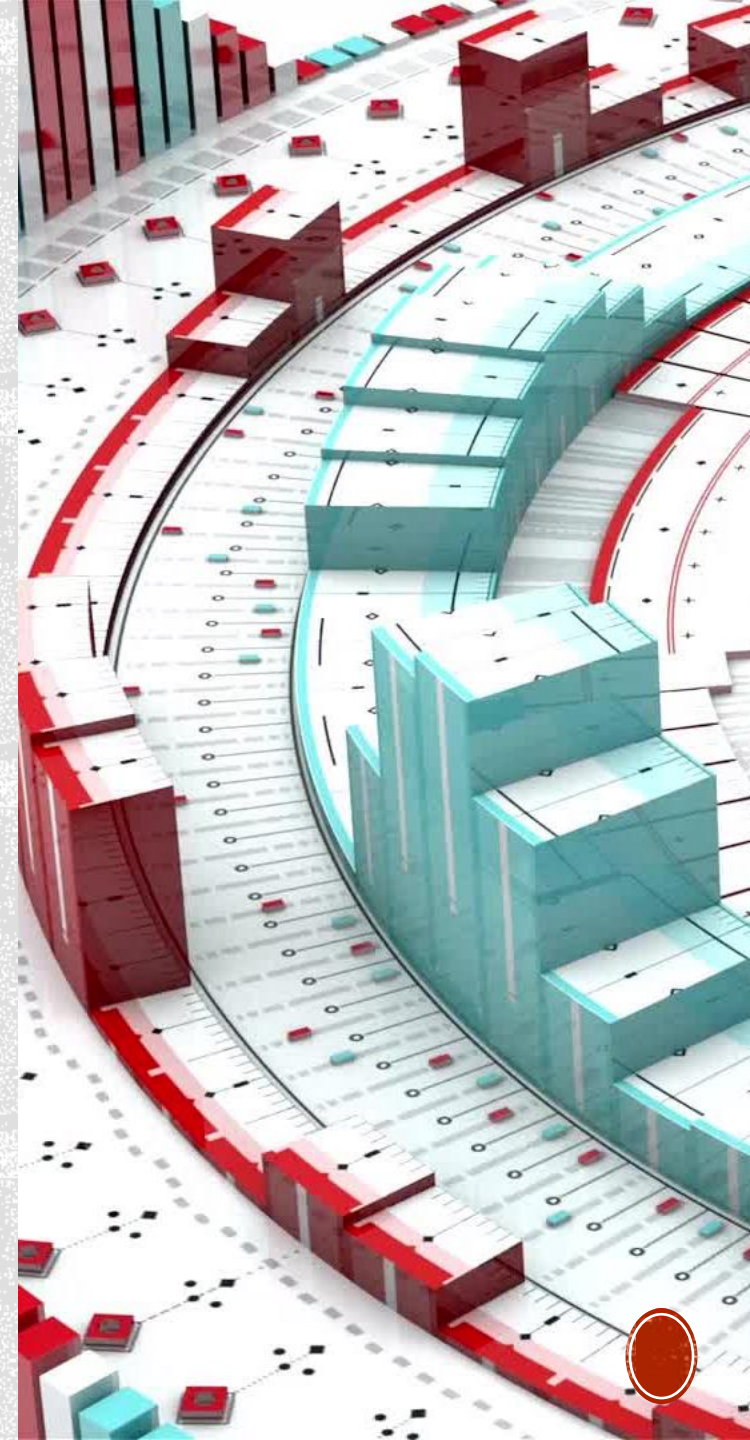
ISSUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- Nationalism vs global perspective. Analysis of uniqueness of nations or cultures with a global lens. Understand how things are done in regions, countries, and cultures. Call for an understanding of other ways of doing things not because of their efficacy but because of their direct influence over people.
- The urgency to interpret the China model (the way that things are done in China at the policy-implementation level, in bureaucratic decision making and behaviors for example) in a comparative context that makes the international scholar comprehend. The importance to identify the differences, improve mutual understanding, and maybe defuse conflicts.
- The China model vs. the China case



ISSUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (CONTINUED)

- Science, technology, innovation management. Smart cities. Big data. AI. The uses of ICT in various work settings. Productivity issues. Leadership issues. Capacity issues.
- There seem to have two distinctive but related perspectives of these issues.
 - At the macro policy making level, there is a discussion on how to harness the benefits of data in policy making, for example, for developing policy making platforms in crisis management or AI-simulating policy making.
 - At the micro-managerial level, there is a discussion on how to use the data to improve service delivery, and how managers can use ICTs to improve leadership skills in communication for example.



ISSUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (CONTINUED)

- Resilience, agility, and robustness of governance, especially during emergencies or turbulence times. Emergency management, especially public health emergencies such as governing issues in infectious disease prevention, response, and recovery. For example, how to improve the accountability system (or performance management system) to incentivize early responses at the local level
- Collaborative governance, at local, regional, and international levels. a) Regional collaboration with issues in environmental governance, economic development, infrastructure development, and information management. b) International collaboration for solving issues of global impact like infectious disease prevention, climate changes, technological disruptions (disinformation campaigns, fake news, spread of conspiracies, abuse of biotech and InfoTech etc), and not to mention the nuclear wars. Covid-19 shows that competence of local bureaucracies could have direct global impact. The world is connected economically, politically, and bureaucratically



ISSUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (CONTINUED)

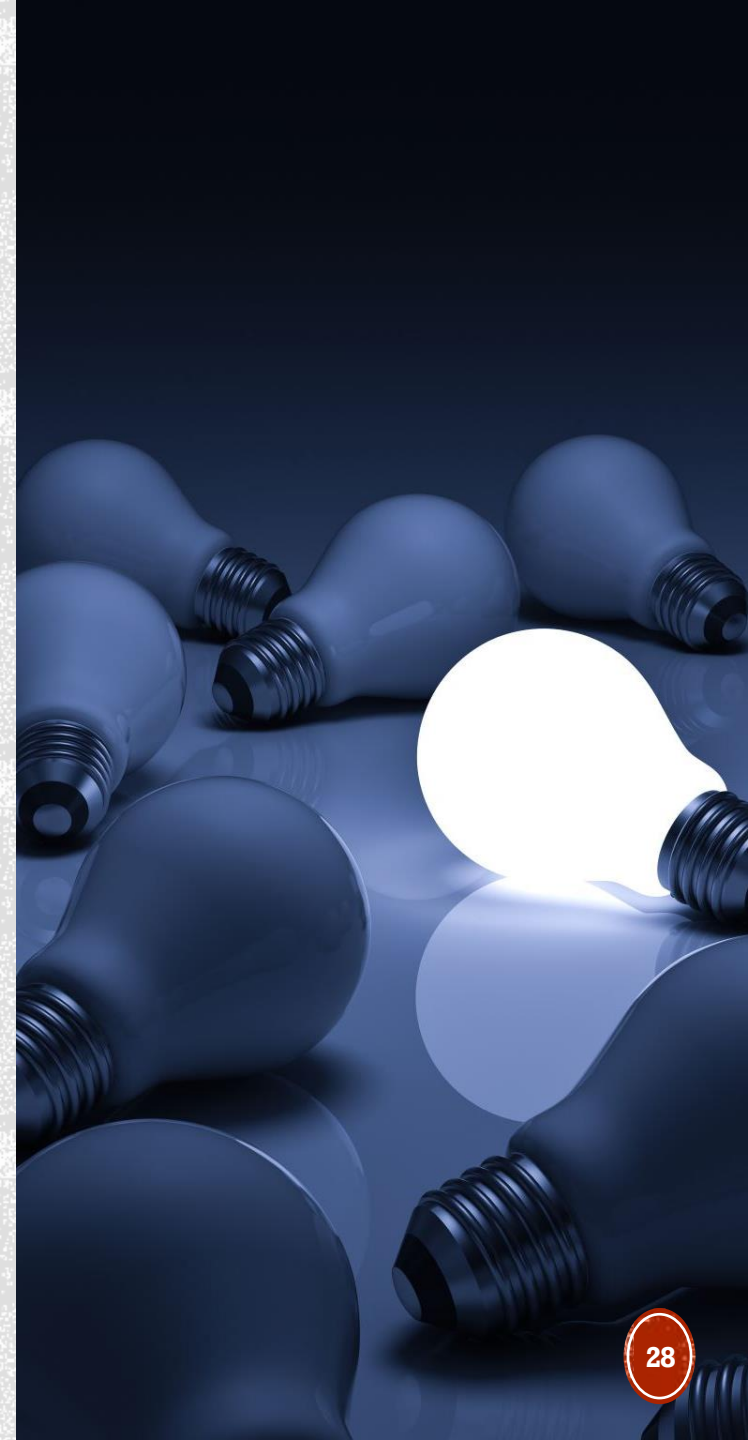
- Environmental and sustainability issues. Managerial issues in environmental (sustainability management): leadership, finance, network management, institutional capacity etc.
- Gender issues, social equity issues, and emotional labor etc.
- Contextualization of traditional important areas in PA such as PSM, performance management, and accountability and transparency issues.
 - Global perspectives of public administration issues— such as fiscal transparency and accountability (the IBP study on fiscal transparency)
- The importance of methods: experimentation, meta analysis, and advanced statistical and analytical tools
- Behavioral public management



**PART IV: HOW TO
BE SUCCESSFUL
IN PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION
RESEARCH**

LESSONS FOR SUCCESS— SOME GENERAL POINTS

- Will and skill— Strong skill, but stronger will
- Choose a topic area that sustains a long-term interest and meaning
- Be flexible and ready to adapt in research interest and direction, in response to the issue of day
- Train yourself to be creative and innovative (read, and think/non-think)
- Versality in methods allows flexibility and freedom in research
- Networking



GETTING PUBLISHED

- Finding the topic
- How to frame your research
- Selecting the method
- Choosing publication outlets
- Dealing with rejections and working collaboratively



HOW TO FIND A TOPIC



Does it sound
interesting?



Do you see strong
policy applications or
implications?



Can you see a major
contribution to
theory building?



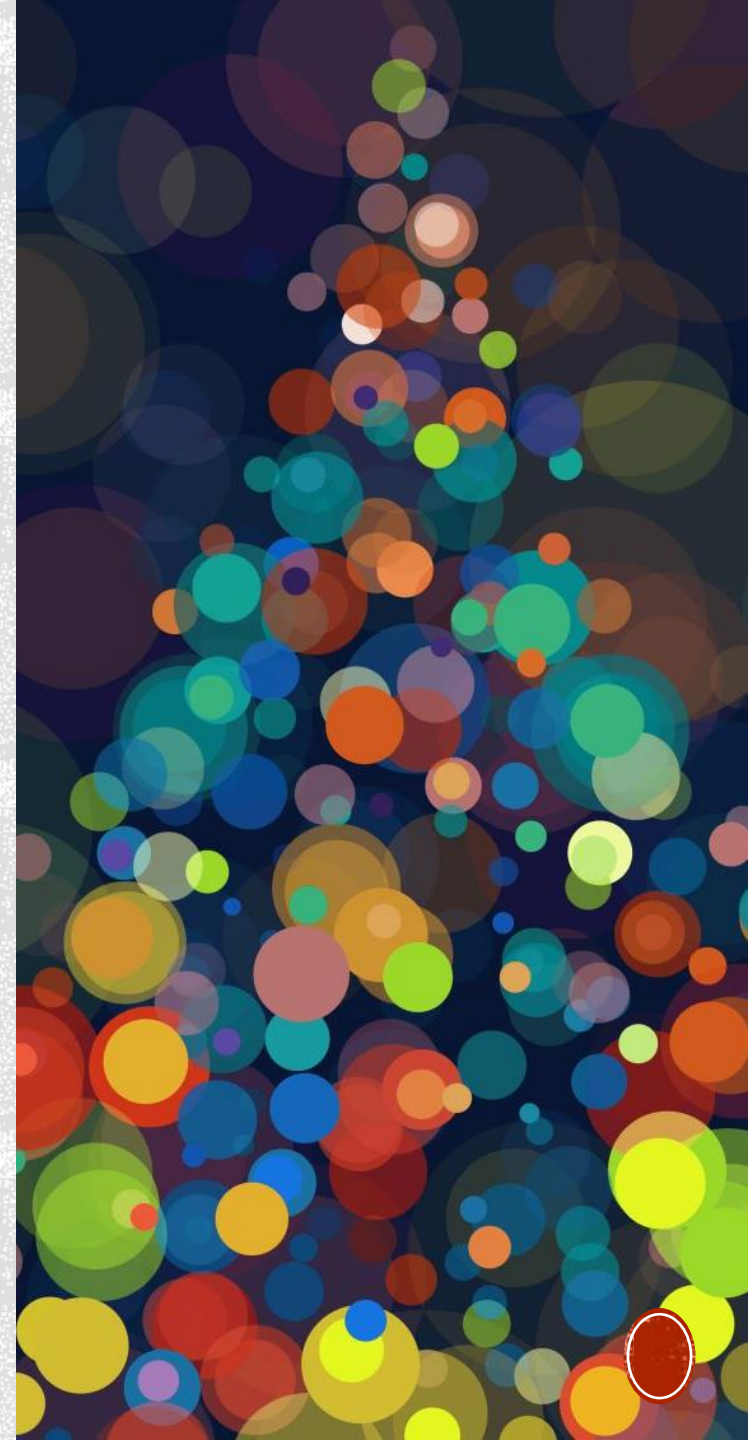
HOW TO FRAME THE PAPER?

- Do an experiment. Find a small group of people (could be friends or relatives), can you use five minutes to tell a puzzle and arouse an interest among the audience for the answer? If yes, write it down, and work on it. That is your abstract and introduction
- First 1-2 pages of your paper are critically important. The Abstract and Introduction are the key to get through the editor and reviewers. Competing for spaces in a journal is brutal these days. Why the editor *has to* publish this work?
- Find some top journal articles which you believe that have best framing (interesting, concise, significance). Write a framing that is better.



THE METHOD

- Methods and topics. Important topics with proper methods. Good methods alone don't fly, but neither without them
- Appropriate methods vs. advanced methods
- Stories vs. numbers (scientists like numbers but humans understand their worlds through stories; can you use numbers to tell stories?)
- Any innovation in the method (DID, experiments etc.)? The “Wow” effect. Read some of Malcolm Gladwell's stories (“Tipping points” “Talking to Strangers” etc, the Sylvia Plath case on studying suicides for example). (Wow, how can I not publish that! How can you make the editor say that?)



FINDING PROPER OUTLETS FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPERS

- Is this a reputable journal?
- Has the journal published similar research topics before?
- How frequently are the similar topics published? How current are these publications?
- Who are the authors?



DEALING WITH REJECTS

- Rejects are the default. It is the given position. You are going to get more rejects than accepts. It is common that the acceptance rate of top journals is around or less than 10 percent
- Adversity is more expected than pleasantness in a critical field like academics (just like in life...smile).
- Your attitude toward failure will determine your chance of success. In boxing, you succeed by keeping being beaten by the competitor of bigger and better. Same here. You get better by keeping being beaten by critical reviews. The key is to keep trying and improving.
- When you receive the news of rejects
 - Don't take it personal. It is a reject on the paper not you as a person
 - Read it quickly, and breath, put it away for sometime, and then read it carefully later (a few days later if you want)
 - The key is to learn to improve
- When it is a R&R
 - Distinguish quality improvement and simply meeting the need of a reviewer (they are the same often, but not always)



WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Working with a good team is one of most effective ways for success
- Finding your niche in the team (the leader, the theorist, the methodologist etc.)
- Learning to work with others is a lifetime skill that will benefit you greatly
- Knowing that working with others is difficult and you may have to sacrifice sometimes for compromise on your view, time, and even reputation (e.g., order of authorship)
- In my career, successful collaborations (those leading to academic success and personal satisfaction) have been hard to come by. That may be your case too. So I try to hold on them if they do come.



Thank you!
Questions and
Answers

