

# **THE LOGISTICS OF LEARNING: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING A PART-TIME GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**

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## **Introduction**

The only Masters degree programme in public management in New Zealand, established in 1998 at Victoria University of Wellington, is part-time and attracts a broad cross-section of mid-career public managers. Participants in the programme have the same needs as other adult learners, to be able to draw on and reflect upon their own workplace experience in their learning. The demands of the workplace also compete heavily for the time they plan for study. The main challenges for the programme are to meet the needs of the students as adult learners and practitioners, to develop a common approach to learning about public management for participants from very diverse working backgrounds and to provide continuity of learning when classroom sessions are in short blocks separated by several weeks of home study.<sup>1</sup>

University involvement in education for public service in New Zealand originates with a two-year full time Diploma in Public Administration programme at Victoria University of Wellington, the capital city, established in 1940 with the active support of the Public Service Commission, the New Zealand Government's central employing authority. The DPA met a need for further education for a generation of public servants who rarely had degrees<sup>2</sup> but who should be "given the opportunity of furthering their education in such a way as to develop such capacities as they already have"<sup>3</sup>. Candidates were hand-picked by the public service employing authority for their potential to advance to the senior ranks of the public service. The DPA provided a practitioner-oriented qualification which was nevertheless founded on a general base of politics, economics, law and administrative science.

With the rapid growth in tertiary education in the 1960s and 1970s, the requirement for a specific qualification for senior public servants became less pressing. The DPA was wound back to a one year course and in 1975 was replaced by a Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree. The MPP, fashioned along the lines of public policy programs in the United States, had a set of core papers which included public administration, public economics, public law and techniques of policy analysis. The MPP provided a more general education for mid-career officials in the art and craft of policy analysis and advice than its predecessor. In the mid-1980s the University also established multi-disciplinary public policy group and renamed its Chair of Public Administration as a Chair of Public Policy.

In the 1980s New Zealand experienced a rapid growth in demand for management education, particularly of the MBA variety. The MBA also became an increasingly popular qualification in the public sector. At the same time, at Victoria there was a growing interest amongst MPP students in management education. The University began to offer electives in public management and strategic management within its MPP programme.

Neither the University's MBA nor the MPP were aimed at management education of public managers. The MPP's main focus continued to be public policy. The introductory course in public management took a perspective of politics and public

policy rather than of management theory or practice. The MBA at Victoria had a much stronger practitioner focus but was aimed mainly at managers in the private sector. Some Victoria academic staff associated with the MBA had exposure to public sector agencies through employment or consultancy; but there was little case material available relating to the public sector and a strong focus on the specific requirements of private sector managers.

It was in this environment that, in the mid-1990s, the University agreed to the introduction of a Master of Public Management (MPM) programme. The programme received academic sanction in 1996 and teaching began in 1998.

### **Programme Design**

There were some basic parameters in the original programme design. The academic discipline base was to include politics, economics and law (the main discipline base of the MPP) as well as management. There was to be a modest research component to the degree: participants were expected to complete at least one research paper out of the twelve papers. The study load of the whole programme is roughly equivalent to three semesters of full time study<sup>4</sup>.

The programme was intended primarily for graduates. Entrants were expected to have a basic degree, although it is possible to enter without a basic degree but with relevant practical experience.

The target market was mid-career managers in the broadly-defined public sector: the core public service and agencies, specialist services like the health and education sectors, police and armed services, and local government. The assumption was that most participants would be in demanding jobs and that it was unlikely that many would be able to take time off to complete a one-year programme full time. The programme was therefore to be offered on a part-time basis. Furthermore, to enable it to be offered nationally, the programme would have a block structure rather than weekly classes.

Thus, classes are currently offered in six blocks (called “modules”) of two or three days each from February to October in each year. Each taught paper has about 25 hours of classes spread over three modules. It was assumed that students would typically complete four papers a year (including one or two research papers or an internship) over three years. It is also possible, with electives from other graduate programmes, to complete the degree in less than two years.

The MPM is based in the University’s Graduate School of Business and Government Management, which is responsible for delivery of most of the post-experience management programmes of the Faculty of Commerce and Administration. Teachers for the MPM are nearly all based in other schools within the Faculty. A few contract staff are employed from outside the University. With the exception of the Programme Director and one other staff member, no staff members are employed on MPM teaching for more than half of their teaching time.

## **Profile of Current Students**

There are currently 76 students enrolled for the degree at various stages of their programme. The characteristics of our students have a substantial influence on the way the programme is designed. The main features of relevance are discussed below together with their implications for programme design and delivery.

- (1) *Distance*: the MPM is marketed as a national programme: a third of our students come from outside Wellington. There are a small number based in other countries as well but generally because they have moved from New Zealand after starting the degree<sup>5</sup>.
- (2) *Employment*: Nearly all of our students work within a New Zealand public management environment. Roughly half are employed in core government departments with the balance approximately evenly divided amongst other central government agencies, local government, health and education providers and the private sector. Most have current management responsibilities and many spend 50-60 hours a week at work.
- (3) *Career*: It appears (although we haven't formally asked them) that a high percentage of our students will change their jobs shortly before, during, or soon after their time in the degree program: for a variety of reasons including promotion, redundancy or voluntary career shift. We don't know if this is a parameter or a variable!
- (4) *Age*: Our students range in age from late twenties to early sixties but fully half of them are in the forties and the median age is about 43. Most of them therefore are in mid-career. Many have significant family responsibilities and partners with their own careers.
- (5) *Previous education*: The great majority of students have a degree and many have significant further professional education; but two-thirds or more will have been out of formal education for a decade or more and a significant minority enter the programme without a university degree.
- (6) *Technology*: All students have email and web access for study purposes either at home or at work and all can use their PCs at least for word processing, sending email and browsing the Web. Sometimes access is restricted by demands of other users or by poor Internet connections.

## **Logistics of Distance**

Having a significant group of students from out of town affects how we teach the programme and support the students between the residential blocks.

### ***Timetable issues***

We try to minimize the time that students have to take off work to attend classes. Therefore most of the time those from out of town spend in Wellington is actually in class. The teaching days run from 8 or 9 am to 6 pm with a shorter day on Saturday. A 10-hour day is testing the limits of endurance of our students and staff. But this schedule leaves them little time to visit the library or to participate in any of the

activities of full-time campus life. Socialising tends to be confined to the breaks during the day and informal gatherings at the pub or in restaurants in the evening. There is also little time for individual staff-student consultations during the blocks.

A further significant implication is that most of the opportunities to take electives from other programmes are only available to out of town students if they make extra trips to Wellington. This is because the MPM is taught on a separate timetable from other graduate programmes. Opportunities for common timetabling of modular programmes are constrained by lack of teaching space.

### ***Student collaboration***

The scattering of students across the country and the intensive use of time in Wellington also limits the opportunity for group work amongst students. Some Wellington students have formed study groups. Our work habits survey also indicated that students do meet or email each other occasionally to discuss approaches to assignments or other study matters but that most do not do so frequently. Group work during classes is common: course coordinators often divide larger classes into groups for topic discussions. However there is very little group work outside class and none for assessment. The absence of group assessment is partly a consequence of the scattered nature of the MPM student body but also of the problems that staff perceive with equitable assessment based on group work.

### ***Distance support***

Out of town students require distance support between modules but many of our Wellington students also have limited opportunities to visit the campus and require distance support as well. Out of town students have about the same frequency of contacts with staff or other students as Wellington students.

Contact and resource access between modules is therefore typically by mail or email both for out of towners and Wellingtonians. For example:

#### ***(1) Resourcing:***

- (a) Course materials including supplied readings have to be mailed individually to students;
- (b) The library distance service mails books, journals and photocopied articles to students although for some high demand publications the student's access may be limited to three days;
- (c) The University's electronic copyright databases are available to registered students on the Web;
- (d) We are increasingly posting electronic documents, course notes, PowerPoint presentations etc on the University's web-accessible network drives;

#### ***(2) General communications:***

- (a) Students usually email or post us their assignments;

- (b) General announcements, news items and so on are usually made by email.
- (c) While the Wellington-based students occasionally call in to our offices to see academic or administrative staff, both Wellingtonians and out-of-towners contact use much more often by email. My Programme Administrator and I between us probably receive 5-10 emails a day from students.

### ***Student activity between modules<sup>6</sup>***

The average time students spend on study per week varies widely but the modal range reported is 11-15 hours; but most students occasionally work for significantly longer during a week. Study time is strongly weighted towards preparation of assignments and less on preparing for class or other MPM work. More often than not, students say they would like to do more study but are restricted by other commitments such as work and family. Unpredictable demands of employment are a common problem.

Most respondents to our survey reported that they at least dipped into most of the readings supplied for upcoming modules, although not many read most of the readings “closely”. Students however are fairly proactive about reading outside the distributed readings. For the courses they were undertaking, the respondents had in total read an average of 32 additional documents. The most popular source of additional material was the Web, followed by journal articles, official reports and publications and chapters from books. Students discovered these additional readings about equally from Internet search, work, course reading lists, previous study, other publications and library catalogues or collections.

More generally, the survey asked what sources of information respondents had employed between modules in preparation for classes or assignments. The most common source of information was experience or observation in the workplace, but advice from or discussion with staff members, students and work colleagues was also sometimes used.

Information search was most commonly through the Internet (38 sometimes or often accessed documents from non-Victoria University web sites), accessing documents in class Web directories (25), followed by use of the VUW library catalogue (22).

We were interested in how much students communicated with staff or their classmates about their study. On the whole respondents to the survey didn’t communicate a lot with academic staff or other students during the period surveyed and many never did. Less than half reported that they had made any contact with an academic staff member to seek advice on assignments or other aspects of study – although nearly half said they had approached a staff member at least once to seek extension of an assignment deadline! Students more commonly speak to other students about assignments or other study-related matters. Those who do communicate with others most commonly use e-mail, or sometimes meetings or telephone calls.

The survey rather short-sightedly omitted to ask what contact there had been with the programme administrator. However it is clear that contact is probably more frequent with the administrator than with academic staff and that she fields many questions on behalf of the academics. The programme administrator plays a valuable role in

encouraging students to get in touch if they have questions or problems with their courses.

### *In-house or distance?*

The MPM is thus somewhere between an in-house and a distance education programme. If we are to keep the Wellington-based course delivery at a constant then further support will have to be by distance media. The options include more structured support for work from home include:

- (1) notes on topics to be covered in class,
- (2) guides to reading including study questions,
- (3) short self-tests on specific topics,
- (4) short exercises to be completed for assessment,
- (5) web-based discussion groups, and
- (6) more supplied reading materials and other study aids.

There are two sorts of constraints on enriching distance support: acceptability to staff and students and available media.

First, students have a strong interest only in more guidance on what is important to read and how to approach the subject matter to be covered in class. Not nearly as many want further assessment tasks, whether or not for credit, or opportunities for topic discussions. Many students have difficulty getting through the reading supplied at present and few want more reading to cope with. Furthermore, interactive tasks such as assessment or discussion groups require the presence of staff between modules. One of the attractions both for learners and teachers on the MPM is that they can by and large programme their time around other commitments; more commitments between modules would reduce this flexibility.

Second, if we are to increase distance support the logical medium is the Internet. Basic Internet access for email and downloading documents is a necessity. The options for further development include much more systematic use of the Web as a reading resource and for more interactive work across the Web. The University is experimenting with comprehensive web-based teaching environments at present<sup>7</sup>.

There are however also constraints to increasing distance support. Staff would be required to re-think the way that they deliver material: published course notes now tend to be Powerpoint presentations or summaries of lectures and other similar didactic material rather than aids to self-directed learning. By no means all staff are confident about using new software or concepts like web publishing to make material available to students. MPM students, too, can have problems. All have basic access to the Internet, but some have to compete for access to their home PC or have unreliable or slow Internet connections. Not all are comfortable either with reading off a screen or other aspects of working in electronic media.

### **Participants as Adult Learners and as Practitioners**

Last year we invited comment from our students about their learning needs, particularly focusing on classroom activity and preparation of assignments. What we heard back from them generally reflected the conventional wisdom about adult learners<sup>8</sup>. In particular, adults:

- learn by relating their new learning to their life and work experience;
- expect their own life experience and particular knowledge to be recognized and valued;
- have to balance study commitments with the demands of work and family life, which may contribute to periods of distraction or fatigue or sometimes absence from class; they will also come to the seminars in varying degrees of preparation (accentuated by a tendency to assign a much higher priority to completion of assignments than to preparation for class);
- have higher expectation of being in control of their environment and therefore may be threatened in an unfamiliar environment in which they are not in control; some in particular will have had limited experience (at least recently) of university study and may be quite nervous about its demands;
- may have developed their own learning styles and expect teachers to be flexible in responding to them; indeed, study habits and preferred learning styles vary widely: some prefer a high degree of structure in the seminars and a lot of input from the staff while others will want extensive opportunity to debate and challenge; some work well in groups while others prefer time to reflect and digest on their own.
- are more likely than younger students to assert their expectations as consumers; they expect class time to be well-organized; they are more likely to seek extensions to assignments, expect quick turn-round of assessments, and contest marks;
- can tire more easily than younger students and more often have hearing and vision problems.

While it is difficult to generalize too much about the lessons to be drawn from these responses, there are some comments worth making.

#### ***Classroom time: facilitative or didactic?***

We are confronted with a variety of preferred learning styles, some of them perhaps inherited from distant memories of undergraduate life, but nevertheless not always that easy to shift, particularly when participants are coming in to class direct from a busy working week. Some students arrive well-prepared and others don't; some prefer to sit back behind their eyes and take time off, others want to question and challenge whatever is said. I have been told with equal vigor by one course member that the instructor is paid to deliver material to them, not to facilitate and by another that they are not sitting in class to listen to lectures.

Nevertheless on balance the first lesson of adult education is the old adage that the teacher needs the learner but the learner doesn't necessarily need the teacher. Consequently the traditional chalk and talk, although it has its place as a flexible and reasonably efficient means of conveying information, needs to be strongly counter-balanced by extensive discussion and debate and opportunity to exchange views both with staff and other students. The best advice I can offer course coordinators therefore is that they will encounter a variety of learning styles and preferences, and of levels of preparedness, and that consequently they need to vary their teaching approaches during the course of a block of classes to keep everyone engaged and at the same time ensuring that they are covering the material. So most course coordinators combine a relatively small amount of lecturing – to set the framework and the issues for discussion – with a mix of more student-centred approaches including group discussion or small group work (based on topics or cases).

### ***Students as practitioners***

Most participants come to the degree with the idea of learning how to do their job better or to equip (or credential) themselves to expand their career opportunities. They have this motivation to add to the general adult trait of wanting to reflect on and value their life experience. We therefore try to link the group learning and assignments strongly to practice. Three aspects:

- (1) *Case studies and case material*: there is a limited supply of New Zealand public management cases written specifically to be used in case method teaching; however, some of the University's series on Cases in Public Sector Innovation<sup>9</sup> are useful and there are other well documented landmark events such as the inquiry into Work and Income New Zealand (Hunn 2000) which are useful teaching resources for class;
- (2) *Resource persons*: we get very good cooperation from existing and past public managers and politicians who will usually come and help us in class on a pro bono basis with presentations, case studies or on panels; provided that guest resources are given appropriate roles (gently discouraging them from long lectures with many Powerpoint slides, for example, and getting them to share their experience more interactively) they add credibility and much useful learning to classes;
- (3) *Work-based assignments*: many of the assignments in the MPM are based in the course member's workplace; recent assignments have asked students to consider the strategic HR issues faced by their employer or the major issues in budget reprioritisation, or to give an account of an organisational change process they are familiar with; or simply to discuss a management issue they have encountered, its significance for their organisation and an appropriate response

### ***Ethical issues***

Asking students to draw on work experiences in class and assignments raises issues of confidentiality. Many of our students would be reluctant to discuss workplace issues if they thought that their contributions would be repeated outside class.

We have two rules in place to draw a safe perimeter around the programme. The first is an adaptation of the Chatham House Rule of the Royal Institute of International



Affairs: you can use information you get from an MPM class, provided you do so in a way that doesn't reveal the source. The second is that items of assessment are confidential between the student and the course coordinator unless the student agrees to circulation to other members of the class or more widely. The only exception to this rule is research papers completed for the research requirements of the degree, which are lodged in the Library, available on request to bona fide researchers, and may be cited in other publications.

We quite often have essays or contributions in discussion that speak frankly of management problems but there has never been a breach of these rules. Although some employers in the public sector might be expected to be particularly sensitive about the issue of confidentiality, I am only aware of two occasions when an employer has attempted to censor something a student has written for an MPM class.

### **Learning through Argument**

Barzelay views argument about public management (in particular the New Public Management or "NPM") as a particular sub-set of argument about public policy, where those arguing are (consciously or not) deploying three terms –philosophies of public governance, doctrines about public management and empirical knowledge of the practice of public management. Is learning about public management the same thing as Barzelay's "argument"? The second element of "NPM" is "the substantive analysis of public management policy" which "concerns the advantages and disadvantages of various combinations of government-wide<sup>10</sup> institutional rules and routines within specified contexts". (Barzelay 2001 p 158). Barzelay asserts that analysis of NPM is best regarded as a process of argumentation because propositions about NPM can only be plausible rather than "true" (which I assume means refutable in a Popperian sense) and "analysis takes place in a dialectical context".

If analysis of NPM is "argumentation" then it is because NPM is one of many possible sets of "institutional rules and routines", a point made with great clarity in Hood and Jackson (1991). The government management we see today in New Zealand is by no means a perfectly realized ideology but a snapshot in time in which we observe many half-completed struggles between conflicting discourses. Boston et al (1996) for example observe that the separation of policy and operations, considered an essential ingredient of the NPM derived from public choice, only partly happened in the New Zealand context. Anyway, as one of my colleagues remarked recently, "the pendulum is swinging back" in NZ as a political group effectively out of power for fifteen years critically evaluates the management practices that they inherited when they assumed office in late 1999. The result however will be undoubtedly that public management will change, but not back to what it was in 1984.

A policy dialectic approach brings also enables us to deal with argument not as refutable propositions but at least as the combination in Barzelay's  $T_i$ . Learning then may mimic the dialectic. Students come into our programme with some ideas about practical outcomes based on their pre-existing stock of experience and mental models. They exit from the programme, perhaps, with some different ideas and solutions. What goes on in between is a hopefully accelerated process of self-examination in terms of their philosophies of governance, theories of management (where scholarship perhaps can illuminate what differences there are in the proverbs and doctrines of management and why) and empirical knowledge of government – not only cases

prepared by teachers and other resource persons but of course the empirical knowledge the students bring in themselves.

Discussion in class tends to move freely amongst these three dimensions of argument. For example, in the introductory class this year, one course member presented a case for the limited contracting out of prisons management based on a combination of public choice arguments and an appeal to the successful experience with privatisation of the British and the state of Victoria. The response from other students drew in arguments about “inherently governmental” functions; assertions about the possibility of specification of contracts; and conflicting accounts of experience with private prisons in UK and two Australian States. In essence, argument ranged freely amongst principles of public governance, theories of management and empirical knowledge (several members of the class having relevant experience with corrections policy and operations).

Our students start this argumentation from diverse bases. The public sector is a broad church. It includes many people who think of themselves as professionals (soldiers, police, teachers or nurses) rather than as government employees. Others work in managerial positions but in special purpose authorities or local government and similarly have little sense of belonging to a wider entity called the public sector. A small number of students are from other countries. Finally, not all MPM students work in the public sector.

Consequently students’ intellectual positions on and experience of all three of Barzelay’s terms will vary widely. Consider the following:

- (1) A senior policy advisor in a central policy agency whose public service career has been exclusively in the Westminster tradition of Cabinet government and a supporting officials’ structure;
- (2) A community groups liaison worker in an employment agency who believes she is empowered to develop local employment policy on the basis of the wishes of “the community”;
- (3) A social worker who works mainly with Māori families and tribal groupings and who believes that (a) Māori are empowered by New Zealand’s constitution to develop their own framework of rights of children and families and (b) traditional Māori social structures provide the most valid basis for management of child, youth and family services;
- (4) A clinical specialist in a large base hospital whose basic ethical framework is one of patients’ rights to treatment rather than public accountability.

In short, if we defined “publicness” and its actualisation entirely in terms of Westminster concepts of Ministerial responsibility, we would be excluding the experience of over half our programme participants. Thus the first challenge is to ensure that our programme is engaging all these different interests and perspectives. We begin with a search for the meaning of “public”. I have found Moore (1995) and Wilson (1987) helpful here – Moore because he takes a both a welfare economics and a public choice perspective on publicness and Wilson because he emphasizes the contingent nature of organisations, public or private (thus to some extent limiting the

usefulness of general theories of public management). A classroom debate on what functions are “inherently governmental” – say on the arguments for and against private prisons – can also help to tease out students’ basic philosophies of public governance. I try to look for the different ways in which public activities are legitimated through political processes and search for what they have in common.

It is equally important for the teacher to be examining his or her own intellectual position. If students come into the class with a diverse set of philosophies of governance, so do teachers. Teaching public management is to be challenged daily by issues on which it is difficult or impossible to affect disengagement, whether it is the choice of the New Zealand police to discontinue the search for the remains of two murdered young people, or the likely outcome of a case brought in the Employment Court by a current CE against her employer, or the responsibility of social workers for the death of a battered child. Teachers can suggest how to argue about these issues and direct students to the rhetoric of politics and philosophy on governance. They also need to understand their own personal ideologies.

Similar issues of diversity of experience arise in discussions of management theory or doctrine. Participants come to the programme with ideas on management gained from experience, acculturation by “group”; the “grid” of official doctrine<sup>11</sup>; and other formal learning on management. The teacher’s first task is to get them to think about how they learn about their craft. The first classroom exercise and the first assignment for the introductory course are built around management problem-solving. In the classroom exercise I set small groups a number of fairly typical day-to-day management problems for discussion (examples: dealing with an employee grievance, agreeing on a service delivery contract, responding to a complaint from the Minister, meeting an imposed cut in budget). I make it clear that there is no right answer. Later I ask them to consider what was influencing their decisions, such as previous similar experiences, observation of another manager, advice, structured learning of some sort, or help from office rules or guidelines. Then I ask them to consider where they feel on safe ground in their decision-making and where they are unsure about what to do; and what their reaction would be to the latter situation: to defer action until they could think further about what they needed to do; to discuss a course of action with someone else; to consult a book or some other reference; or go ahead and take action and adjust their responses according to the reactions? How much would they be inclined to experiment in the situation? What could they do that might contribute to their understanding and help them to learn about what best to do?

This experiment in reflection on action – using examples that are common to most course members – produces some interesting results and good discussion in class, generally confirming that previous experience, observation and advice in that order are the most common sources of inspiration. The message is humbling for teachers, of course, but it simply confirms that most real learning about management takes place on the job and that academics can’t actually add very much to this learning in the classroom. However they may be able to provide managers with opportunities to reflect for themselves on their experience. This supposes that there is more to learning than Schön’s “reflection in action” (Schön 1983) and that some learning is the slightly more distanced “reflection *on* action” which might take place through a combination of experience of management and opportunity to integrate this experience into one’s

mental model of a management process with the assistance of directed reading and discussion<sup>12</sup>.

The other issue where the diversity of experience within the class and between class and teacher is important is in empirical knowledge of government. Course members bring their specific grounded knowledge of workplace and environment. Teachers add theirs: maybe out-of-date understandings of specific practice from past lives<sup>13</sup> or glimpsed through the narrow windows of consultancy or research, contact with students, or available case material<sup>14</sup>.

At its best, the instructor learns as much from teaching practitioners as the course members, particularly where the teacher is exploring the implications of a particular framework for a new topic area. Two experiences I have had of this on the MPM:

- (1) Linking the study of formal control systems (the limits to the cybernetic model of control) to risk management produced two fascinating systems maps from one student – a senior manager in a public hospital – the first exploring the points of intervention and risk in an elective surgery booking system and the other exploring a similar error model in a study of the relationship between clinical pathways and adverse drug events; both of these I thought added significantly to our understanding about the use of systems theory in medicine;
- (2) A course on managing policy organisations tries to explore what value-added theories of the firm and competitive advantage have to offer to our understanding of how public policy advisors add value; most of the students are practising policy managers and in the first two years of the course they have brought in a large number of insights about the sources of advantage in policy organisations (and particularly illuminating on the costs and benefits of a policy-operations split).

### **The Logistics of Block Courses: A Typical Course Trajectory**

In summary, when directing a part-time public management program for practitioners, it can seem as if the logistic problems of transport and communication and competing for students' attention with the other demands on their lives dominate the pedagogical concerns. The problem is to optimize the use of the time that we do have their attention or their presence (or both). One way I've tended to approach this is by thinking of the trajectory of the learning and teaching on a course over its duration.

A subject course has a trajectory in:

- (1) Calendar terms: a defined starting point and end point over a trimester with operation of the course processes in between;
- (2) Assessment terms: entry with assumed competency levels in subject matter, progression through to achievement of assessment standards for course content; and
- (3) learning terms: an increase in understanding to achieve course objectives.

The variables in this trajectory are inputs and outputs:

(1) Inputs: the different contributions of teacher and student who are co-producing the outputs.

(2) Outputs in the form of learning about:

(a) the framework: the discourse(s) with which the course is concerned and

(b) the practice: the available accounts of practice which can be interpreted by and in turn shed light on the framework.

The student's and teacher's contribution to inputs and their access to outputs ebb and flow over the period of the course. What is represented here is one possible trajectory.

Phase	Calendar time	Teacher inputs	Student inputs
<i>Phase 1</i> Setting the agenda for the course	<i>Pre-course</i> Four weeks Expected student input: 25-30 hours	Course outline: objectives, structure, calendar, assessment requirements; guide to existing scholarship (reading lists, suggested preliminary study questions and exercises).	Pre-session reading, completion of exercises.
<i>Phase 2</i> Exposition and discussion of intellectual frameworks and practitioner environment	<i>First module</i> 3 days 10 class-hours	Lecture or guided discussion on main theories and concepts, facilitated discussion of cases and significant questions for practice.	Questions and comment on frameworks and significant questions of practice; (small-group exercises, plenary discussions).
<i>Phase 3</i> Consolidation and assessment of "frameworks"	<i>Between modules one and two</i> Six weeks Expected student input: 35-45 hours	Facilitating Internet discussion, assessment and individual feedback on student essays and case report outlines; synthesis of issues of understanding for feedback to class as a whole.	Further reading and reflection on first module; (possible Internet discussion groups on significant issues from module, clarifying questions for lecturer); preparation and submission of essay; pre-reading of case material and preparation on "applications" questions and (possibly) outline for student case report.
<i>Phase 4</i> Specific issues and practice applications	<i>Second module</i> 10 class-hours	Plenary feedback on issues from essays; introduction and discussion agenda for cases; introduction of resource persons on practice issues (panels, interviews, presentations); facilitating synthesis	Group work and plenary discussion on cases, identification of significant issues for own case studies.

		discussions on practice issues.	
<i>Phase 5</i> Application of learning to specific practice situations	<i>Between modules two and three</i> Six weeks Expected student input: 35-45 hours	Assessment of and feedback on individual case studies; preparation of issues synthesis from previous discussion using case studies as illustration; moderating Internet discussion on issues.	Development and submission of case studies; reading, reflection on and synthesis of summaries of others' case studies.
<i>Phase 6</i> Consolidation of framework-practice learning links	<i>Third module</i> 5 class hours	Feedback on any general issues arising from project reports; synthesis of case study issues and setting agenda for general discussion of issues (small group and/or plenary); facilitation of general discussion (with resource person(s) or panel).	Formal presentation of project report or contribution from project learning to general or small group discussion.

Source: Laking, 2001

### Conclusions

Our experience now with three and a half years of the MPM suggests the following:

- (1) Students who are mid-career managers in the New Zealand public service have in general the same needs as adult students in other learning situations and a specific need to see a link between their learning and the workplace;
- (2) Part-time study on a national programme involves some inevitable compromises with ideal course planning because of the competition for students' attention, the lengthy periods of absence from the campus and the compressed nature of the block courses;
- (3) These constraints require both a careful planning of the learning trajectory of the on-campus blocks and to means of communication with students between blocks – so that the programme has to be seen as part distance and part on-campus;
- (4) The distance component can be enhanced (given a reasonably computer-literate group of students) by more sophisticated use of the Internet but further enhancement requires staff to rethink the way they communicate material and students to their study habits when at home;
- (5) Barzelay's suggested approach to public management as argument is a useful model for learning by students but pedagogy needs to take account of the widely diverse backgrounds and experiences of both students and teachers.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally prepared for the International Public Management Network workshop in Odense, Denmark, July, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> In 1972 a survey reported that only 7% of the senior ranks of the New Zealand public service (permanent heads and direct reports) surveyed had a full university degree. A further 11% had some form of post-school professional qualification (typically a qualification in accountancy); and 22% some experience of tertiary education. (Smith 1972)

<sup>3</sup> From a report of the NZ Institute of Public Administration ca. 1937, cited in Henderson (1990, p 159)

<sup>4</sup> The current structure of the programme can be found at [http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~lakingr/MPM\\_Web/MPM\\_Courses.htm](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~lakingr/MPM_Web/MPM_Courses.htm).

<sup>5</sup> We don't actively discourage foreign students but the part-time nature of the programme requires them to spend longer at it than they may be able to afford (although with judicious use of electives we can enable students to complete the degree in say 21 months).

<sup>6</sup> Based on a survey of current students conducted in May 2001.

<sup>7</sup> The current preferred software is [Blackboard](#).

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Jarvis (1983)

<sup>9</sup> A list of the cases in this series is available at <http://www.vic-link.co.nz/cases/>.

<sup>10</sup> I don't think "government-wide" is a necessary constraint. If policy is a dialectical process it can play out within the domain of government and frequently does.

<sup>11</sup> The references are to cultural theory and particularly to Hood (1996 and 1998).

<sup>12</sup> A colleague of mine (November 1996 and 1998) is convinced about the value of writing everything down in a journal – constantly revisited and commented on – so that the reflection is made visible in writing on the page.

<sup>13</sup> Ex-practitioners have to be sure that their fund of war stories is adding something to student's understanding. In my case I have found that stories about encounters with Robert Muldoon, a former New Zealand Prime Minister and a dominant figure in New Zealand politics from 1975-84, are less compelling to students in their 30s and early 40s than they are to me.

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<sup>14</sup> A further problem of tunnel vision might be to define the real world of public management exclusively in New Zealand terms. First, education of management practitioners might in the search for relevance neglect more general perspectives on management in favor of local and current institutions. Secondly, perhaps the seductive simplicity of the New Zealand model, which draws in academic critics like moths to a flame, might come to dominate our teaching. On the other hand, most of the literature we draw on is international and mostly indeed either from the US or the UK. In the scholarly literature on the reading list for the introductory MPM course, books from the US (10) and the UK (8) dominate. There are four books by New Zealand authors, two by Australians and one each by a Canadian and a Frenchman. There is indeed no New Zealand text comparable to Rainey (1997) in the US or Hughes (1994) in Australia.



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