

# **IPMR AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: THE NEXT 18 YEARS?**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It is with great pleasure that we assume the editorship of the International Public Management Review which has served as an outlet for research and debate at the heart of the International Public Management Network for 18 years. In offering the first collection of articles edited by the two of us, the opportunity presented itself to look back over public management themes and to look forward to future trends. It presented the opportunity to assess the landscape professionally and academically, throwing up the challenge to scholars in the network to respond with article submissions that will see the journal prosper for the next 18 years.

The extended editorial assesses the emerging and actual implications for public management of recent developments and in particular comments on the dramatic changes of recent months in both the USA and in Europe. Viewed through the prism of the changing priority of public administration scholars as evidenced by the focus of published research, it is a thought piece which suggests how external developments might impact upon the focus and direction of IPMR moving forward. Broken down into three separate parts it firstly presents data pertaining to the changing priorities of public management scholars over a five year period, secondly it offers some observations about the trends that can be identified, thirdly it takes a step forward to consider new challenges and speculates how academics might begin to synthesise and make sense of these dramatic political upheavals in light of the sustainability of economic and social policy and the delivery of public services.

Public Administration faces uncertainty in both the domestic and international spheres. Political, economic and social challenges emerging externally require responses on the ground by public managers delivering services but also by the academic community offering analysis and evidence for improving those services. The challenges today are significant and multifarious. There is a new polarisation identifiable across much of the world. This has seen major upheaval in Europe (BREXIT and population movement issues) and in the USA (the Presidential election and associated perception of paradigmatic shifts). This all comes at the tail end of a period popularly referred to as 'austerity'. Following the global economic crisis, this has been a period of sovereign debt crises and squeezed public spending. It is a period where administrations across Europe and the United States were challenged to deliver 'more for less' (or at least the 'same for less'). Elsewhere, demographic changes in western population continue to put great strain on resources as an aging population consumes increasingly more health and social care. Meanwhile, the emphasis on innovation, technology, devolution and cooperation has focussed attention on what managers can do to improve those services through better practice, efficiencies and coproduction demonstrating benefits that can

accrue from major external shocks. New challenges for the public administration, public management and public policy spheres are both likely to be highly significant and are hard to predict accurately. Social media has emerged as a major force in political change (Enli, 2017; Ott, 2017). The current academic literature is still somewhat bemused about the wider implications of BREXIT (Alexander, 2017). Although there are indications that the shock it represents could be a window of opportunity to do things differently (Barber, 2017). IPMR serves the IPMN community and has done so for 18 years. In analysing public management trends, it serves to speculate about the priorities over the next 18 years.

Fundamentally, this paper takes a partial view of these developing environmental challenges by examining some key journals at different levels in the rankings and producing 'word cloud' analyses of the terms used in titles and abstracts, comparing 2016-17 with equivalent priorities of 5 years ago. The results show that it appears there are some terms which are consistently found, some which appear to be declining in usage and some which appear to be emerging in usage and some which are newly found and which were not noted in the earlier version of the journal. The results suggest that there might be value in the use of this analysis on directing the development of a journal in this area towards the emerging and new terms found in high quality academic journals.

## LITERATURE

It is the usual practice in journals for editors (or another author) to review the contributions over time in order to analyse the nature of the literature and directions of research. This is typically a 'helicopter' type appraisal which uses either discipline field or sub- categories of the fields in order to produce an account of how the journal has changed in terms of contributions. A recent examples is provided by Stephen Osborne for the journal he edits (Public Management Review). The summary table from his article is produced below as an example (Osborne, 2017). Osborne identifies the topics of papers for the two time frames in sequential order and shows that some topics such as public management reform and public policy have been clearly declining over the two time frames his analysis considers. Topics such as performance , collaboration and partnerships hold steady. The growing topics are those including innovation, strategy and citizenship and co-production.

As this particular recent article had been produced from PMR we elected not to include this journal in the list of ones examined. Also in some rankings PMR was relatively close to IPMJ and we sought to include relevant journals which covered a range of rankings. The section on methodology sets out the rationale for the chosen journals.

TABLE 1 Public Management Review Analysis

Table 1. Papers published in PMR across 1999–2002 and 2015–2016.

Topic	Year		Total
	1999–2002 (%)	2015–2016	
Public policy	9	5	7
Public management reform	16	4	9
NPM, contracting, competition and privatization	19	7	13
Performance management and accountability	13	13	13
Collaboration and partnerships	7	7	7
Networks and governance	10	9	10
Innovation and change	3	9	6
Strategic management and marketing	4	9	6
HRM	5	14	10
Citizen involvement and co-production	0	9	5
Other	14	14	14
	100% (n = 103)	100% (n = 108)	100% (n = 211)

HRM: Human Resource Management.

Source: Osborne 2017

Curry, as part of CICOPS (an EU project), examined future trends in public administration (Curry, 2014). The key summarised findings are presented in Table 2 below. Though these date from 2014 (which is earlier than the Osborne analysis of the PMR articles) it picks up some similar themes with a slightly different focus through the use of trends. In particular it also identifies aspects such as Network Governance, Performance, Strategic planning and New Public Management.

However the aspects of collaboration, citizen involvement and co-production are perhaps strangely absent (given the general focus of COCOPS).

TABLE 2 Key Trends for Future of Public Administration

Key Trends Influencing the Future of Public Administration	
1. Shifts in Context	Global Changes The Financial Crisis
2. Shifts in Governance and Engagement	Network Governance E-Governance Accountability, Transparency and Trust
3. Shifts in Management	New Public Management Performance Management Evidence-Based Policy-Making and Strategic Planning
4. Shifts in the Discipline	

Source: Curry 2014

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this article involved a combination of approaches. We examined several recent sources and also identified work by key authors in the field. This was addressed in a focussed literature review which identifies and a number of key themes. We also personally identified a number of journals which we regard as core to the field of public management and which are generic in nature (ie are not narrowly focused on , for example procurement or a geographical region). This required some aspect of judgement. We regarded the international orientation of the journals as a key in the choice. This typically involved both an international focus in the name and also in the actual content (in respect of both articles and authors). However, JPART was viewed as qualifying as international in nature. We also deliberately chose journals which were represented the spectrum of ratings. For this purpose we utilised scimagojr and focused on the Management Rankings (for 2016)<sup>1</sup>. The journals chosen included the following:

- Journal of Public Administration and Theory (JPART) was chosen primarily because it represents a top end journal which has a long track record. It is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the chosen ranking
- International Journal Public Management Journal (IPMJ) was chosen for obvious reasons due to its links with IPMN and also because of its high ranking. It is ranked 8<sup>nd</sup> in the chosen ranking
- International Journal of Public Administration (IJPA) was chosen to represent a middle ranking journal with a more N American orientation. It is ranked 67<sup>th</sup> in the chosen ranking
- International Journal of Public Sector Management (IJPSM) was chosen because it is a middle ranking journal which has a UK and European focus whilst also having a strong international orientation. It is ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> in the chosen ranking

Once we had selected the journals, the approach was to construct two databases for each journal. The first was the most recent issues of the journal representing a substantial number of articles . This was usually 2017 articles though as is often the case for such journals many of the articles had in fact been accepted for publication in 2016. The second was to reach back 5 years to 2012 and take a similar range of issues from the journals

Each database constructed consisted of the entire abstracts from all the included articles and the article titles. The names of authors were removed. Then the entire database for each journal (and each time frame) was run through ‘word cloud’ to produce both a word count and a visual representation.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.scimagojr.com>

Then the word counts were reviewed to remove the following:

- Words which only occurred once or twice
- Words which had no value for trend analysis because of their nature (viz ‘can’ ‘will’ ‘two’)
- Words which had a high occurrence but were not relevant for evaluating trends (such as ‘academic’ or ‘study’)

The word cloud analysis was then run again with the more reduced word list to enable a more focused visual representation. This use of two time periods also enabled a comparison to identify changes in the terms appearing in the journals.

We did not include IMPR in the analysis in part because it did not have significant issues in 2017 which would have enabled useful comparison and also such that this article could look outside of our own journal.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

While numerous broad domestic and international trends can be identified either in public management, the delivery of public services, government and governance or indeed external factors influencing or affecting these, in themselves they can only represent a partial view of developments. Likewise, the approach taken by this paper is also partial but by systematically capturing and categorising the areas of examination prioritised by published researchers, it is hoped that evidenced observations can be made about the subject area. Naturally, such observations will also involve the nature and mechanics of academic research and publishing. Consequently some degree of synthesis with those broader external trends is essential in making sense of the data being generated.

First of all this paper will simply set out the results generated by the comparative word analysis of published research across three journals during two separate publishing years. Once presented, a narrative and critique can be developed to demonstrate recent trends, compare with external developments and even suggest future priorities.

One possible and expected trend that can be identified at a macro level across all the journal outputs is the move from emphasis on cutbacks five years ago to issues around quality in more recent research. This can be understood not by the easing of funding where pressures in terms of public spending can be seen to have continued. Instead it moves beyond innovations and efficiencies to follow to the real problems of declining quality and the corresponding implications for public services. Such concerns have been reflected in wider public debates surrounding the consequences of diminished service provision from social care to housing to health, on quality and longevity of life. Taking IJPA for instance, here it is possible to compare the more traditional focus in 2012 for ‘management’ with ‘performance’, ‘measures’ and ‘leadership’ in 2017 as dominant themes. Similarly, the IPMJ five years ago carried research analysing

overspend and strategic choice, demands-resources model. By 2017 the emphasis can be seen to be on citizen responses to performance and spending.

Another interpretation that can be inferred from these data is what might be described as the broadening of the nature of public administration. Even over this period the sharp distinction that once existed between public and private sectors has been replaced by a fluidity when it comes to public services and the idea of what a public manager looks like. Even in the absence of significant advancement of concepts like 'big society' in these two snapshots at least, studies acknowledge the more complex, wider and nuanced nature of public service delivery where public managers are as likely to be commissioning as delivering services and delivery could well be the responsibility of non-state actors. Furthermore there is the distinct development from public services as something 'done to' citizens to something which should be developed in collaboration with citizens. Combined, these complementary themes can be seen to have embedded themselves over the period as accepted foundational concepts.

Interestingly 'participation' was already a strong undercurrent in IJPA 2012 as was 'stakeholder' (a term which has a long and varied history) and yet there remained a strong preponderance for 'public sector', 'agencies', and 'governance' here. By 2017, 'citizenship', 'behaviour' and 'transparency' have moved very much to the fore suggesting a serious evolution in how we conceptualise public services. In the IPMJ 2017, the analysis of not-for-profits can be seen to have assumed a near comparable status to traditional public sector organisations with studies including those around 'collaborative networks' and competitive advantage in non-profit grant seekers, sitting alongside more traditional studies of public sector motivation and performance measurement in local government. What is interesting when comparing publications five years earlier is that the settled assumptions of today around the scope of public administration and the breadth encompassing not for profits, civil society and even commercial organisations, had already been signalled. Research was published questioning the potential efficiencies in non-profit contracting and collaboration as well as the issue of reputation management (something associated with marketisation of the public sector). But there were also studies of a more traditional mould around public sector motivations, public sector leadership, bureaucracy, regulation and corporatisation of government agencies.

## JOURNAL ANALYSIS

These are presented in WORD CLOUD format with the ODD Number figures (1, 3, 5 etc) representing the total result for the journal and year without any words being removed (other than the names of the authors of the papers). The EVEN number figures (2, 4.6 etc) are the word clouds for the journal and year where there has been a reduction applied in accordance with the methodology set out previously.

Each journal will be briefly analysed in turn utilising the WORD CLOUD data and primarily focussing on the reduced version of the word cloud. The key words which stand out will be identified and described. The numerical results are available but in

interests of brevity these are not utilised at this stage of the work. We seek to get a ‘helicopter’ view rather than a microscopic analysis.

Figure 1 JPART 2012 All

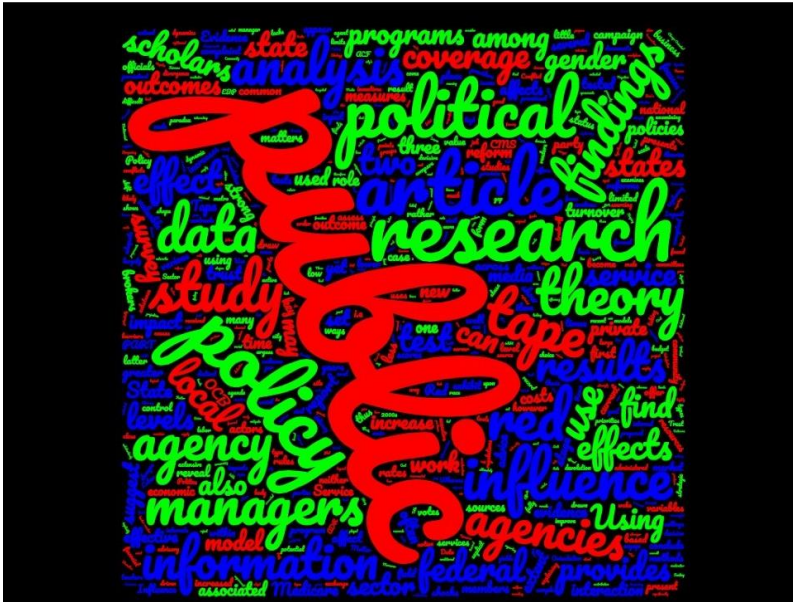


Figure 2 JPART 2012 Reduced



The reduction of JPART (2012) shows that other than the continued dominance of terms such as policy and political words which have prominence in the reduced word cloud are ‘influence, red ( as in red tape)and in particular ‘performance and influence. The importance also of terms such as ‘agency’ ‘local’ and ‘service’ emerge.

When the 2017 results of the analysis for JPART (Fig 3 and 4) are considered there are terms which emerge such as organisational , network , evidence and bureaucrat which suggest a change in the focus of JPART over the 5 years towards these concepts in the published articles. Also terms such as clients, results. The terms ‘agency and influence’ have also diminished but service (in various iterations) is still very much present.

Figure 3 JPART 2017 All



The analysis of IPMJ (Fig 5,6,7 and 8) shows some similar aspects. In 2012 the reduced word cloud picks up on red tape and also has a stronger orientation than JPART toward organisation based terms. There is a particular prominence of one country – China – which is not found in the JPART analysis. The authors note that “collaborative” is present in the full word cloud and should probably be reflected in the reduced one. Terms such as ‘service’ and ‘results’ figure and network is significantly present in 2012 (probably earlier than in JPART). In 2017 the terms influence appear ( which seemed to have diminished in JPART) and terms relating to methods emerge more strongly together with motivation.



Figure 4 JPART 2017 Reduced



Figure 5 IPMJ 2012 All





Figure 8 IPMJ 2017 Reduced



The next two journals ( IntJPA and IRSPM) are arguably more ‘junior’ in the journal rankings but differ somewhat in their focus with IntJPA presenting a more North American focus whereas IRSPM is more UK and European based ( at least in terms of its editorial ownership). Hence it is of interest to compare the word cloud images for these two journals bearing in mind this aspect

The IntJPA (Figures 9-12) shows a focus on one particular country in 2012 (Kazakhstan) but terms such as participation and stakeholders also emerge in the reduced word cloud. There are country references (Egypt and Thailand) suggesting that the journal has particular country foci in its articles for 2012. This could be indicative that more ‘junior’ journals attract (or are more likely to accept) country based submissions than ‘senior’ journals like JPART. This theme is also reflected in 2017 though the countries which emerge there of significance are Japan and Latin America.

Figure 9 IntJPA 2012 All

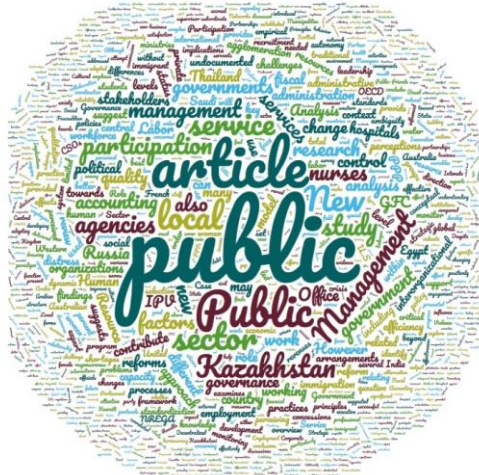


Figure 10 Int JPA 2012 All



Figure 11 IntJPA 2017 All

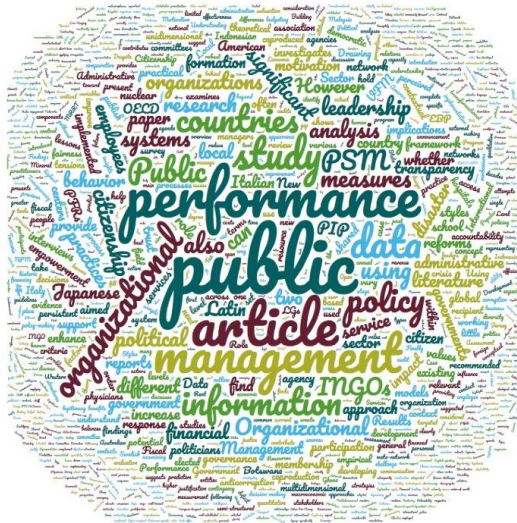


Figure 12 IntJPA 2017 Reduced



The final journal (IJPSM) appears to have a lesser specific country orientation though China does figure in 2012. There is a particular orientation on procurement in 2017 which was viewed as a skew due to a special issue on this subject. As this term dominated it was removed in the reduced word cloud to enable other terms to be revealed more clearly. However the development of special issues is clearly a way of highlighting a particular issue in the field. It raises a question though, as to whether such special issues may also indicate that the subject of study is a long term phenomena or rather one which could be considered to be a topical one. For example special issues on aspects of responding to austerity might be seen by some in this light.

It is perhaps significant that terms the authors might have expected to find in the word clouds for public sector and public management journals did not seem to be there... in particular terms such as ‘austerity’, migration and demography did not register significantly on the word cloud and in both 2012 and 2017 this would seem surprising. Possibly it is a reflection on the lag to publish or it may simply mean that these terms are not seen as discipline relevant for the public management/administration academic journal field.

Figure 13 IJPSM 2012 All

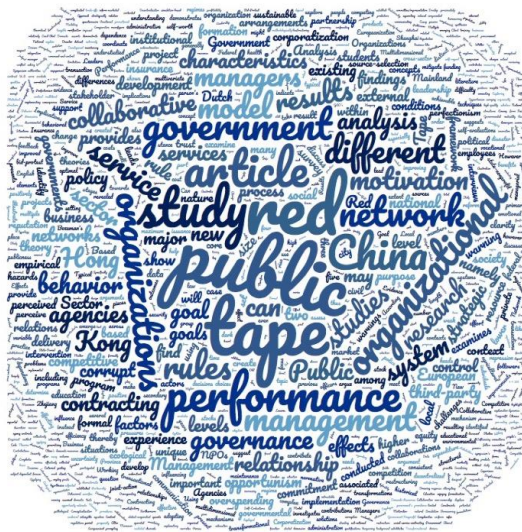


Figure 14 IJPSM 2012 Reduced





## DISCUSSION OF EMERGING CHALLENGES

The dominant themes of 2017 as measured by key terms in research published across three key public administration journals can be said to have been signalled in comparable articles five years ago with developments in the subject today consistent with the state of the subject in 2012. The nature and upheaval of the financial crisis and pressures on public finances had been established by then and the response of public management can be said to have had a narrative about it that meant studies in the present built upon the state of research five years previously. But research in 2012 naturally responded to the shock of the financial crisis which had huge implications for government, public spending and the management of public services. Future research could well repeat the exercise undertaken by this paper but taking data from 2008 as the financial crisis was happening but before scholars and public managers had the luxury of time to evaluate its impact. By doing this, it would be possible to demonstrate just how significant this shock was to the discipline and as an influencer of the trends identified in this paper. The judgement of the authors is that it was indeed significant and something of a turning point which if it did not force a fundamental change of direction, then emphasised and accelerated to an overwhelming extent core ideas such as innovative efficiencies, coproduction and participation.

Why is this important? If the financial crisis was indeed the turning point suggested by the theme development identified in this paper, then the external political events of 2016-17 could represent a similarly significant point of reference for future public management studies. By the early part of the next decade, the polarisation of society and politics alike *could* have emphasised and accelerated themes identified by the data gathering of this paper's research. And much the same as in 2008, it is highly unlikely that the external shock has yet registered on mainstream public management research.

The question, then, for evaluating future trends and developments centres on the extent to which the great political events of 2016-17 are as significant with comparable longer-term implications as the financial crisis itself.

What might be termed the 'Brexit environment' encompassing not only the British vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum but also the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency and other political developments across the developed democratic world, represent a new found populism that is deeply threatening to the established order. Time will tell if it is more than a blip but given that it builds on the impact of the global financial crisis and ensuing period of 'austerity' the authors of this paper suggest it is a development with the potential to cause profound implications for public administration as a profession as well as a discipline. Moreover, if this is accurate it is possible that some of the developments identified in the above sections will provide the springboard for trends in the coming years for public management. It now seems inevitable that this Brexit environment will pose huge challenges for developed democracies and it is something which has the potential to reach into nearly every corner of life. But what is the nature of the challenge?



One early study of the Brexit environment highlighted the distinction between aggregate measures and disaggregate experiences (Barber, 2017). That is while government measures its successes in aggregate terms – economic growth, employment, overall public spending – for vast numbers of ordinary citizens the picture painted is not one which corresponds to their own disaggregated experiences. At a more localised level, while national growth might be relatively strong, real wages have fallen; while aggregate public spending might have continued to rise, on the ground ordinary people experience cuts in services. This environment revealed a polarisation across society between the relatively well off and the relative poor; between the skilled and non-skilled between social classes. Combined it is a huge challenge to society and political leaders but it also represents a challenge to public management.

In the vein of themes identified in this paper, both civil society and the private sector is likely to be important in enabling a response to these challenges (French, 2017; Johnson, 2017). The challenges will include service delivery, planning of infrastructure and the development of policy. The primary role of the public sector may well be subject to change and challenge. Academics and practitioners will find themselves ‘living in interesting times’.

These challenges (present, emerging and yet to be perceived) will invite new (or revised) theoretical frames of reference. As the election of Trump will potentially rewrite the understanding of the US political process in order to ‘explain’ how it happened so the implications of ‘populism’, globalism, inequality and ‘being left behind’ will have implications for conventional academic approaches to understanding and responding to public policy and public management issues (Pyun and Gamassou, 2017). Theoretical adjustment and an appreciation of other (or new) disciplinary insights may be necessary in order to both understand and explain how change is happening and its implications. However, given the themes identified in his paper, it is likely that there is already the basis for future developments. Surely one significant lesson to be learned from the Brexit environment is that populism can be seen as the consequence of more rational choice forms of politics where voters are treated as consumers and it is possible to ignore segments of the electorate incapable of delivering election victories. While it might have been sustainable in more agreeable economic times when public finances were easier, the promise of more spending has proved illusionary during an extended period of ‘austerity’. Here perhaps public management has stolen a march on traditional politics given the strong emphasis on cooperation. Public management has championed the idea of citizens involvement in the design and delivery of services, in the (hard) choices that need to be made. With a realisation that everything is not possible and that everything cannot be funded but with the corresponding weariness of austerity, a move from rational choice to real citizen involvement would surely be welcome. In terms of services and public managers, this would have to be even greater localisation, devolution and broadening of the scope of ‘public’ services.

The whole pedagogy of public administration and public management, then, could be subject to re-evaluation and possible change. Already literature is emerging which is promoting resistance in public sector professional education (Goodman and Grant,

2017). However, some are seeing the emergent populism as suggesting a rejection of ‘experts’ and by implication public sector professionals (Clarke and Newman, 2017). There are implications for public management and public administration curricula and a possible need for a focus to enable a wider appreciation of other frames of reference. An appreciation of what is meant by alternate facts and fake news may become essential for future public management education. The lessons of psychology and related disciplines may prove to be important (Kahan, 2017).

The solution may be found in more adaptable and innovative public management able to support organisational resilience, accountability and ‘new ways of doing things’ It will encompass a more open dialogue with both citizens and policy makers with a stronger grounding in the community and yet able to understand and recognise wider emerging trends. The failure of Hillary Clinton in the USA and the ‘establishment’ in the UK to recognise and respond to the deep currents of unease in the body politic could be seen as political failures. However the consequences will be felt in the public and also civil society the private sectors.

IPMR is now in its eighteenth year and we see the journal as well placed to respond to the challenges of the future. The international remit and practitioner orientation combined with the open access nature of the journal should enable IPMR to adjust and adapt to an uncertain and unpredictable world.

### **CONCLUSIONS : REFLECTIONS FOR IPMR**

This is very much an exploratory paper and the ‘helicopter’ view which the chosen method of analysis offers clearly has elements of subjectivity and possesses methodological limitations. However it hopefully furnishes a visual depiction for the chosen journals and two time frames which is not tied to the sub discipline tendencies which naturally influence academic researchers.

The overall suggestion from the analysis is that academic journals do changeover time in their orientation reflecting either the preferences of their editors or the focus of the researchers ( or more likely a mixture of both). Should a journal seeking to develop its presence ( such as IPMR ) consider the following strategies

1. To ‘follow’ where other journals have already trod a path and in effect pick up submissions from academics who are also following after a well-lit path is established
2. To seek to keep abreast of other journals and walk in step with them to address the issues which are current for those journals
3. To aim to anticipate the upcoming issues and offer an early ( albeit less well rated) means for scholars who are seeking also to anticipate developing area for academic interest.

We would argue that IPMR should aim for the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy and encourage submissions which look forward into areas of academic interest even though these may in some

cases be not necessarily long standing in nature. As we complete this final draft we read in a major UK newspaper ( Sunday 13 August) an article from an New York based former UK politician which offers some analysis on the situation affecting both the UK and USA following respectively the unexpected vote for BREXIT and the equally unexpected outcome of the USA presidential election. David Miliband, the ex-British politician now based in New York, notes that: ‘This transatlantic malaise has a common root: politics based on what you are against, not what you are for.’

Both the UK and the USA confront challenges which arguably reach beyond the usual and traditional remit of ‘public management’. There is a possibly profound shift taking place in which grievance and issues of both inequality and potentially nationalism are playing a major role.

We propose (with the support of Stu Bretschneider and Barry Bozeman at Arizona State University) to create an IPMR symposium issue to invite scholars to contribute which will examine the future issues for public management in its wider form. The pieces for this symposium should be both though provoking and explorative in nature.

We note that the third and most recent Minnowbrook public administration conference took place in 2008 nearly 10 years ago (O’Leary et al, 2011). It runs on a 20 year cycle so the next one is thus due in 2028. Potentially events may well have moved on dramatically by then in the public management field both locally and internationally.

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