

JGSPA Doctoral Qualifying Exam Study Questions: Public Management

Field Questions

1. Discuss the trends that public management has gone through with respect to its development as a field of study. Some argue that public administration and public management are simply subsets of other fields such as political science or business management. Discuss the extent to which this is true/untrue. In the course of your answer, discuss the theoretical approaches that have had impact on the field and analyze their contributions (and their detriments) to the field. As a result of your evaluation, discuss where the field is going next and what you expect to come out of this next stage in the field's evolution.
2. How would you characterize the state of research in public administration as it has progressed thus far? In what areas has research made the most progress, and in what areas is progress still at the fledgling stage? What are the major questions that should occupy public management researchers over the next 20 years? Why?
3. Since the 1960s, much of the focus of organizational studies has been on the role of organizational environments and their influence on how we structure and manage organizations. A large body of public administration research also has explored the distinctions between public and private sectors, particularly the question of how the political environment of public organizations makes public organizations distinct from generic management or management of private firms. Assess the state of theory and research on organizational environments. What have we learned about the role and influence of the environment from previous research on this topic? In what ways is the public sector environment different from the environment in which private firms operate, and what effects do these differences have on public management?
4. Some scholars argue that Public Administration as a field has not matured because it has not achieved a central research focus that unifies inquiry. Others argue that it has progressed precisely because it has achieved a diversity that allows it to be comprehensive in terms of covering the various components that exist in Public Administration. Engage this debate and provide conclusions as to where you think Public Administration is now in terms of its development. In order to do this you will need to discuss how American Public Administration has developed as a field of study over time. In the course of your answer, you will also need to discuss the theoretical approaches that have had an impact on the field and analyze their contributions (and their detriments) to the development of the field in terms of its maturity. You will also need to discuss major methodological and research approaches and analyze their benefits and detriments in terms of reaching a conclusion about the extent to which the field has or has not taken advantage of the right methodological approaches that allow it to reach maturity. If you find that Public Administration still has some distance to travel in order to reach maturity as a research field, discuss where the field must improve to do this. If you find that it is fully mature as a research field, discuss why you think so.

5. Public management as a field emerged out of public administration, which itself was once a subfield of political science. While maintaining certain linkages with that discipline, public management has grown considerably and has been influenced by other disciplines and professional fields. The core contributors would be: sociology, economics, management, urban and regional planning, social psychology, management science and operations research, and philosophy/ethics. Choose two of these fields or disciplines and discuss the contributions of these fields to public management. Compare and contrast these two approaches to public management with how political science conceives of public management. In what ways do the three fields reinforce the identity and focus of public management? In what ways do the contributions of the fields to public management create conflicts within the field? How do you propose these conflicts be resolved?

Public Management Subfield Questions

6. Discuss various approaches to decision making in the public sector. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? What can be done to improve decision making in the public sector? What factors will affect the workability of the approach or approaches you suggest?
7. What characterizes management in public sector networks? How does management of networks differ from management in a single organization? As a result of research undertaken so far, what do we know about research in network management that can serve as a fairly reliable guide to practice? What else do we need to know about networks, and how would you suggest we pursue research to discover this knowledge?
8. In this age of accountability, citizens and their representatives are seeking ways in which they can hold government and nonprofit organizations accountable. Measuring performance of public programs and individuals in public service has received particular emphasis in recent years. Discuss approaches to performance measurement and how they have been implemented. Discuss what factors influence the likelihood of implementing performance measurement systems successfully. Discuss whether particular approaches to performance management are likely to increase, have no effect on, or decrease accountability of public agencies.
9. Administrative reform has been a continual focus of attention in public administration. Discuss major approaches to administrative reform. Evaluate to what extent these approaches to reform have contributed positively to the effectiveness of public management. Discuss to what extent the focus on reform and research that has focused on particular reforms has assisted or hurt the development of public management research.
10. Discuss the relationship between law and administration. Discuss the extent to which the public law has or has not influenced the development of the field of public administration and the extent to which knowledge of public administration has influenced the development of the field of public law. What are the causes of these conditions? What are

the effects? Describe the factors that will affect the evolution of the relationships as they develop over time.

11. A number of theories either directly explain or provide insight into organizational performance. Review the literature to identify the factors that potentially explain why some organizations are high performers, others are poor performers, and some fail. Synthesize the findings to describe a model of high performing organizations. Be sure to distinguish between high performing private firms and high performing public sector organizations.
12. A considerable amount of research has been done on the topic of leadership effectiveness. What do the different theories and streams of research on leadership tell us about factors that make leaders effective (e.g., traits, skills, behavior, use of power, dyadic relationships)? Is there “one best way” to be an effective leader? Explain your answer. Identify some of the pressures and influences unique to the public sector context that influence the exercise of effective leadership in government.

Organizational Theory/Organizational Behavior Questions

13. One of the central tasks of a manager is to motivate employees. Review and assess the main content and process theories of motivation. What does research tell us about values, motives and incentives that seem to influence public sector employees? What are some of the unique challenges public managers face in motivating their employees? How has public management research addressed (or failed to address) these challenges, and how should research in this area proceed moving forward?
14. What is an organization? Different theoretical perspectives and frameworks provide a different answer to this fundamental definitional question. Select at least four theoretical frameworks to answer this question and compare and contrast the definitions. One of the four must be network theory. Do the definitions change if we're looking at public agencies, non-profit organizations or private firms?
15. The majority of organizational theories have their roots in trying to explain the behavior and performance of private firms in competitive markets. Select two of the following theories and discuss their application to organizations that operate in the public sector – contingency theory, population ecology theory, institutional theory, and principal-agent theory. What are the important differences between private firms in competitive markets and organizations that operate in the public sector? Do these differences limit the application of the theories you've selected? If yes, how so? Are there ways we can adapt the theory to make it more generally applicable?
16. The study of organizations is dominated by positivist scholarship. More recently, feminism, post modernism and critical theory have challenged the notion that organizations can be studied in the “normal science” tradition. Take a positivist theory (i.e. contingency theory, transaction costs theory) and explain the methodological process a researcher would undertake under this theory to analyze an organizational question.

Then, explain how one of the challengers to “normal science” would critique the research. Can the two viewpoints be resolved?

17. The classical theories of organizations (i.e. Weber’s bureaucratic theory; Taylor’s scientific management) argued that there is “one best way” to structure organizations. Explain how organizational scholarship has evolved since these early approaches. What do we know at the beginning of the 21st century about how to best structure organizations?
18. Economic explanations of organizational design and behavior are ascendant (e.g. principal-agent). Identify the basic assumptions and describe the theoretical logic of such theories generally. Do such approaches suffer when applied to public organizations that may not experience true competitive market forces? Why or why not? Do these approaches fare better than alternative non-economic conceptual frameworks (e.g. institutional theory) in explaining why public organizations are structured and behave the way they do?
19. Organizational theorists have attempted to identify the causes and consequences of inertia and/or isomorphism within organizations. Identify two theories that address inertia/isomorphism and first discuss the similarities and differences between the two concepts. Then describe how theories explain how organizations achieve these respective states. Finally explain why these concepts are of relevance to organizational inquiry.
20. Different organizational theories treat the role and ability of managers to control an organization and produce desired outcomes differently. Some theories emphasize the importance of human agency in organizations and argue that managers are capable of influencing organizational performance through individual action; other theories argue that organizational performance is more determined by exogenous factors (i.e. environmental or cultural factors). Review the literature on agency versus structure (exogenous factors). Synthesize the arguments of the two sides to develop an explanation of when agency is important and when exogenous factors are more determinative.
21. A number of theories explain organizational change. Review the literature on organizational change to explain why organizations change. Why do some organizations survive the process and others don’t? Are there important differences between private firms in competitive markets and organizations that operate in the public sector in terms of the possibility and success of organizational change?
22. What’s the appropriate unit of analysis for organizational theorists? Different theoretical perspectives select different units of analysis. What are they? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of using to different units of analysis for inquiry? How does it affect the methodological tools used to undertake data gathering and analysis? If the use of different units of analysis is contingent on the question asked, explain when certain units of analysis are more appropriate than others.