A positive engagement between practitioners and academics is vital to maintaining and developing a vibrant theory and practice of public administration in South Africa. A robust dialogue between these two spheres provides a space in which to explore the limitations of practice and develop new approaches and theories to the challenges of public provisioning. It also ensures that the stories, problems, disasters, achievements and innovations of public provisioning are documented and examined for history and, more importantly, for further learning and knowledge production.

However, the interface between practitioners and academics is complex and complicated by a blurring of lines and roles in areas such as research, consulting and education and training. This has to do with the nature of public administration as an academic discipline and a professional practice. The traditional domain of academics is the generation of knowledge, yet it is often practitioners who know more about the challenges of public provisioning and the means to deal with these. This is a tension between the academic requirement for a strong scientific foundation for the discipline and the professional necessity of relevance to practice. Ospina and Dodge suggest that this tension resides at the heart of the academic/practitioner interface.

Which of the two realms represents the legitimate source of knowledge production: the discipline of public administration or the activities of public administration? Who produces this knowledge, only academics, only practitioners, or both? For what reason do we produce knowledge: to build theory, to inform practice, or both?

This engagement is further complicated, in the South African context, by the fact that the survival of academic schools of public administration is dependent, to some extent, on creating and sustaining a market for education, training and research consumption within a public administration practice which is itself a player in the field. Various government departments, including the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and The Presidency, conduct research, educate and train in the area of public administration.

The Senior Management Service (SMS) of the public service in South Africa holds regular conferences in which ‘academic bureaucrats’ or “pracademics” explore their practice. In her Keynote address at the 2005 SMS Conference, Minister Fraser-Moleketi, notes that

The SMS conference, now in its fourth year, is becoming an important goalpost in our annual activities. It offers the opportunity to focus our attention on important challenges that we face and exchange some lessons and advice on how to overcome these.

In addition, an in-house journal, Service Delivery Review, explores the challenges of service delivery through the eyes of practitioners. This knowledge is important given the specific challenges faced by public administration practitioners transforming the apartheid bureaucracy, whilst simultaneously expanding service delivery. However, practical knowledge is often focused on immediate challenges and can be devoid of the carefully thought through theoretical considerations that create innovations.

Academic knowledge, similarly, can be very abstract and distant from the world of practice. Such knowledge is often criticised for a lack of rigour in terms of social...
science criteria, limited relevance to professional and institutional challenges, and/or inadequate theorisation. As an academic discipline, public administration is hard to define, as it combines a number of older disciplines such as political studies, economics and public policy into a single field characterised by its professional and applied nature.

The purpose of the paper is to document the history of the academic/practitioner interface in public administration with a view to exploring the knowledge dynamic in relation to research, public service and engagement, consulting, education and training. The argument is that the context, and the nature of the transition to democracy, defines this interface. As the context changes from negotiations to transition to democratic government and then delivery, so the interface between academics and practitioners is redefined and rearticulated.

A close interface between Afrikaans institutions and government during apartheid is challenged by academics in the early nineties as South Africa negotiates a new democratic beginning. This leads to a collaborative partnership in the late nineties between new government officials and academics that dissipates in the new millennium. Current initiatives seem to be driven by practitioners seeking opportunities to look beyond their practice. It is unclear whether academics and universities are meeting this need through a rigorous process of engaging, documenting and theorising.

Changing the paradigm – debates about public administration in South Africa

The early nineties shift away from apartheid was marked by the 2 February 1990 speech made by the then President FW de Klerk unbanning liberation movements and starting the negotiations that would lead to a democratic settlement. This led to a shift in the established dynamic between public administration and universities in South Africa creating a bridge between the separate worlds of progressive academics and activists (within the African National Congress (ANC) and other opposition movements) as a means to challenge the dominant model of knowledge in the field - the generic process approach. This approach facilitated the administration of apartheid policy by disguising the inherent bias of separate development by separating politics (and apartheid values) from administrative science and process. This approach was evident in the writings of J.J.N. Cloete who developed the generic process model which dominated South African public administration practice.

Public administration was defined as a process involving policy making, financial administration, organisation, work methods and procedure, control and personnel provision and utilisation. Effective administrators did not challenge the political purpose of policy but focused instead on the administrative systems which ensured delivery. This approach tended to ignore the context of shifting social processes and was limited by a lack of political awareness which would ensure that the complexities of administration arising from the system of apartheid were overlooked. As a consequence, it was seen as a means of justifying apartheid practices through its apparent neutrality and exclusive focus on implementation only.

This early period of engagement was characterised by a proactive push from academia fired with the challenges of transformation to change the theory and practice of public administration in the country. There were a number of early initiatives to begin a debate on the nature of the post-apartheid state both from the academic community and the ANC. In the late eighties, Erwin Schwella and Donavan Marais, among others, were writing about the need for a new approach to public administration in the country. Schwella argued that the generic approach was
inappropriate to the context and work of practitioners, while Marais\textsuperscript{13} suggested that it was not a theory at all.

The ANC established a group to explore post apartheid public administration in South Africa (referred to as PAPASA\textsuperscript{14}) and its implications. The view of the ANC was that public administration practice should be redirected to development management through education and training. There were suggestions made about the need for a civil service college\textsuperscript{15}. Overall, there was a recognition that the paradigm of public administration would need to change\textsuperscript{16}. In August 1992, the ANC established a pilot team to work on public administration education and training priorities headed by Zola Skweyiya, who would later become the Minister of Public Service and Administration.

The apartheid public administration in residence at the time represented by the Commission for Administration (CFA) met this challenge with some resistance. The CFA had effective control over training, appointment and promotion in the central administration. There had been a mutually symbiotic relationship between a number of Afrikaans academics and the apartheid government prior to this period. There was continuous engagement between the CFA and academics through various fora such as the South African Institute for Public Administration (SAIPA) and through the SAIPA Journal of Public Administration. The University of Pretoria, in particular, was responsible for training senior managers in the service.

Schwella\textsuperscript{17} suggests that the generic administrative process approach provided a safe house for the discipline during the end of apartheid. He argues that many of its key protagonists were close to government decision-makers and stood to lose a favoured position if criticism was too sharp. He suggests these vested interests were compounded by recognition that the discipline was weak in terms of providing any relevant guidance on complex public management challenges. FitzGerald, in a speech to the Public Servants Association on 23 May 1992 notes:

\begin{quote}
The present public service establishment seems to retreat further into its old caste and ethnic loyalties, refuses to discuss openly and hides behind patently absurd and non-credible protestations of ‘political neutrality’. … It is time to decisively leave forever the absolute heart of darkness which so much of our workings of government have become. It is time to allow in the light of professional concern, social accountability and to seize the day of future development, good governance and a truly new public service ethos\textsuperscript{18}.
\end{quote}

Aspects of the new public management discourse\textsuperscript{19}, specifically those which focused on outcomes and delivery, were incorporated into the thinking of academics who were beginning to challenge the dominance of the generic process approach in South African delivery systems and public administration academia\textsuperscript{20}. Many of these academics and activists (recently returned from exile) stressed that a new approach to public administration practice should be development orientated, responsive, efficient, economically innovative and proactive. The New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI), formed in 1991, strongly reflected these sentiments.

The NPAI was comprised of a loose network of universities, technikons\textsuperscript{21}, NGOs, practitioners and individual government employees in the field of public and development management. Academics and activists predominated. The main objective of the NPAI was the discussion of an overall strategy for the professional development of public and development management practices in line with the tasks and challenges of a transformed South Africa. The NPAI led the paradigm shift in the approach to the public administration in South Africa by providing a forum for the
exchange of ideas on how to forge forward to the rapid professional development of public administration practice and training in South Africa.

In furthering its aims, the NPAI have held two national consultations to discuss issues critical the development of public administration theory and practice. The Mount Grace Consultation held at a hotel of the same name in the Magaliesberg resulted in a resolution which called for a paradigm shift in public administration. They explicitly rejected the generic process model and attempted to move towards a more appropriate model relevant to the South African context. Key elements of the resolution noted that the theory and practice of public administration was too descriptive, reductionist and reifying and lacked analytical technique. In addition to recommending a more developmental and responsive approach, the resolution called for “more rigorous scientific analysis, explanation and predication of governmental and administrative phenomena supplementing their mere description.”

Schwella argued that the traditional approach entailed a dogmatic adherence to the administrative process model, which reduced complex societal phenomena to generic processes and six administrative functions. This is inappropriate to a society in turmoil as it effectively ignores complex socio-economic problems. Moreover, this model had been reified to the status of reality through politically powerful institutions. He therefore suggested that management theory should provide an environmental context for public administration. The debate at Mount Grace noted the challenge of inserting values and principles into the structures, institutions and processes which comprise the domain of public administration. It was concluded that only a normative approach could counteract the bogus neutrality of the old model.

The views of the NPAI were not well received by many within the public administration establishment. Many were concerned about the effects of the transition of their salaries and pensions and jobs. There was also some contestation amongst the public administration academic community. Some felt that the NPAI was not as inclusive of different views as it could be. In addition, there was some debate over the broad approach adopted. This led to a debate amongst academics about different theoretical approaches to public administration and their location in the practice of public administration. These approaches varied from the open systems approach advocated by Schwella and Erasmus, to a focus on development administration advanced by Cloete, a normative approach from Gildenhuys, to the new developmental and entrepreneurial ‘reinventing government’ approach advocated by FitzGerald.

A whole spate of books and articles on public administration was developed and produced during this period, each exploring a different aspect of public administration theory and practice. Although contested, the shift away from a generic approach to a normative paradigm was acknowledged. While the NPAI was overshadowed by the democratic elections in 1994, it had managed to redefine the terrain of engagement for public administration. Some of the influence of this conception of public administration as a practice can be seen in the early strategies and tactics adopted within the public service after 1994. This is partly because a number of the activists involved in these early debates went in government after the 1994 elections.

As practitioners busied themselves with the establishment of new systems and the business of government, there was less theorisation about the new public administration paradigm in South Africa. The extent to which the new paradigm took root is debatable. The 1996 Constitution certainly highlights the important normative role of public administration in the development and support of citizens in the country. In addition, a range of policies emerging from the DPSA adopted strategies consistent with the principles articulated in the NPAI debate and with the then...
globally dominant model of new public management (NPM). These included, for example, the introduction of the Batho Pele, performance management and the Public Finance Management Act. A second Mount Grace consultation held in November 1999 noted that Mount Grace I and the NPAI had a “substantial and significant impact on the academic direction and focus of public administration and management, and development studies sectors in South Africa”.

It is certainly the case that an entirely new way of thinking about public administration as a discipline was introduced over this period, with some impact of the practice and practitioners. The largest impact was probably felt through the cohorts of newly trained officials that went into public service from 1999 onwards. Over time, there is a shift from the more normative change orientation initially advocated to a more technical skills based approach focused building the capacity of the state to deliver. Some universities and academics were more adept than others in meeting new demands. Debate in the discipline was no longer about the science of public administration, but the practice.

Changing the teaching - public administration education and training

Donor agencies and foundations supported many of these early initiatives to explore a new paradigm and practice in public administration. Mount Grace I was supported by the Hans Seidel Foundation and Mount Grace II by the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the Anglo American Chairman’s Fund Educational Trusts. Liberty Life supported a number of early consultations about public administration training and education. The Canadian International Development Agency provided funding for research and education in the field of public administration and state transformation, as did Kagiso Trust, The Ford Foundation, The Open Society and the European Union. The Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University supported by funding from Otis Elevator and The Ford Foundation ran a series of workshops through the NPAI on the case method of teaching. However, as Picard notes, much of the aid provided during the transitional period was poorly co-ordinated and did not have a substantial impact on capacity building in public administration.

Access to funding seems to significantly define the academic/practitioner interface in public administration training and education. The more significant impact of the NPAI was probably in putting the training and development of public officials on the national agenda. The process of developing new curricula and approaches was supported by the various donors and foundations backing the NPAI. However, towards the end of 1993, the NPAI began to fade away as more pressing national issues such as the formation of the Transitional Executive Council and its many working groups and the national elections took priority. At the same time, significant donors began to shift their funding focus from institutions to government following the democratic elections.

Schools of government were forced to operate in a state of “co-opetition” in order to access significant funds for capacity building for the new democratic public administration, while at the same time competing for the students, research and consulting that would ensure their survival. Over time, government through the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI), a reconstituted Public Service Training Institute (PSTI), controlled the engagement between academics and practitioners in the area of capacity development by virtue of its access to funding. Academics and academic institutions were forced to operate as providers to education and training demands articulated and defined within government departments.
Six schools of government (Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Fort Hare, Western Cape, Durban-Westville and Witwatersrand) formed, with the approval of the government, the Joint Universities Public Management Education Trust (JUPMET). The purpose of JUPMET was to build the institutional capacity of the participating providers to meet national management development needs. This loose NPAI network was to some extent replaced by a more formal mechanism aimed at enhancing the capacity of Schools of Government to support management development for the public service. This process led to a significant shift in the academic/practitioner interface from the early proactive and creative engagement about training and education possibilities led by the NPAI to a more constrained customer/client relationship driven by the need to survive in an increasingly competitive arena.

Liberty Life funded the first "Co-ordinating and Consulting Working Conference on the Teaching of Public Administration in South Africa" in February 1990. Its purpose was to facilitate discussion on new forms of public administration teaching. The scale of need for training and developed at all levels highlighted the importance of a new mode of training and education and the need for increased capacity to meet these varying demands. This led to the formation of the NPAI as a mechanism to build regional and national co-operation to ensure an efficient utilisation of resources, through a pooling of strengths or a focus on specific areas. The NPAI was therefore viewed as a forum for the exchange of ideas on how to forge forward to the rapid professional development of public administration practice and training in South Africa. Areas of interest included course content, pedagogy, context, curriculum development and ethos.

At the time, the prevailing management development paradigm was based on the conceptualisation of scientific administration which had dominated the field for so long. A review of past practices reveals that in-service training at the central and regional level was directly linked to promotion and career advancement. There was an emphasis on technical and functional training as officials were taught precisely what was necessary to get the job done. Officials tended to gain experience on the job without developing a broad base of knowledge or frame of reference. The PSTI took the lead in providing such training and SAMDI has struggled to rise above this legacy. Lower level training was also technical and directly related to specific job functions. The classification of personnel into different classes meant that instead of being developed as managers, civil servants were straitjacketed by their job descriptions and training. This shifted with the development of new administrations at the provincial level and the development of new approaches to capacity building.

Senior managers did receive intensive general management training which focused on the tasks of a "public administrator" rather than the necessary analytic and conceptual tools which would enable them to be more effective in most situations. The generic approach was prevalent. The most effective management development mechanism was (and still is) the induction of new personnel into the "culture" of the civil service, in terms of establishing set procedures and approaches to issues. In general, the lack of a government training policy led to a fragmented training system in all levels of government. Training was conducted on an ad hoc basis without sufficient attention being paid to career advancement and performance evaluation. This absence of a structure and policy led to a management development context which failed to provide a framework in which programmes, resources and performance could be evaluated.

Many universities and technikons also utilised the generic approach. Courses tended to be descriptive and historical in nature, focusing on existing state structures, rather than on context, comparative structures and processes of change and transition. No relation between theory and practice was established, as students (with the exception
of technikon students) were not required to have any practical experience. Degrees were not professionally oriented and provided the students with an academic background of technical procedures and ideal ethics. Post-graduate courses were slightly different as students were usually experienced. However, this experience was not always utilised to encourage discussion and debate and their course material was subject to the same inadequacies discussed above

In response to the changing political and social context in South Africa, several institutions, such as Wits, Stellenbosch, Western-Cape, Durban-Westville and others, took up the challenge of change by designing new curricula. These initiatives recognised the need for a strategic shift in the approach to capacity development. There was an attempt to move beyond the generic "value-free" approach to one that is value-oriented, normative and based on community needs and expectations. Thus, both course orientation and content were under direct scrutiny. This involved a complex curriculum development process based on extensive consultation in order to ensure that training was oriented towards needs and driven by real and projected market demands. There was significant dialogue between newly appointed officials and academics in this regard.

The shift was from the more inward looking approach of scientific management which focused on inward accountability and formal organisational procedures to more client focused activity. Management development approaches in South Africa in this area manifested themselves in different ways, but most notably in a shift in conceptualisation and wording from public administration to public management. Universities also attempted to establish links between the development and public administration fields. Many of business sector management development strategies and methodologies in areas such as human resources development, productivity or performance management entered the arena under the guise of new public management.

At the same time as curricula were being revised, the Kennedy School of Government, supported by Otis and the Ford Foundation, came to South Africa to explore whether the teaching methods used at the Kennedy School might be useful in the new South Africa. South African methods had tended to be confined to lecturing. This was considered inappropriate in the professional development of practitioners. In January 1992, forty academics spent one week writing and teaching cases at the University of the Western Cape with eight Harvard facilitators. This workshop, using a combination of case studies, reflection and managed discussion, exposed South African academics to an entirely new way of teaching and working. It introduced a professionalism into the teaching of public administration in South Africa that was reinforced through annual workshops. It also led to the development of South African cases for teaching public administration using the experiences of practitioners written up by academics.

In addition to discussion about the curricula and teaching approaches that would support training and education for a new public administration practice, academics and practitioners engaged in a series of discussions about fast tracking, bridging and executive development. A wide range of short courses were implemented by a number of institutions in the lead up to the democratic elections. Groups of ANC officials were sent all over the world to examine different administrative practices. The British Civil Service College trained an initial cohort of ANC officials and continued to provide support to SAMDI over a number of years. The practitioner discussion on these issues seemed to go in-house in order to focus on government priorities set out in the 1995 White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service which envisaged a public service that was
appropriately skilled and affordable to the taxpayer. A Public Service that was representative of the demographics of society. One that was efficient and effective. It would be a public service that was oriented to development and service delivery. It would also be transparent, accountable and equipped with the appropriate technology.44

SAMDI’s role in the capacity building of the public servants was contested from within government as well as by academics. Critiques ranged from the quality of the training provided, to inadequate skills, to poorly conceptualised development programmes. Yet SAMDI continued to control training and education through its access to funding and met many of its objectives through a process of contracting services to individuals, JUPMET institutions and other public and private providers. Increasingly, dialogue between the schools of public administration and the government seemed to narrow so that by the second Mount Grace consultation in 1999, very few practitioners participated. Academic institutions discussed the state of public and development management without the applied wisdom of practitioners. Similarly, SAMDI and public administration training policy was developed without being pushed by new conceptual approaches or lessons learned by academics in delivering professional management development programmes.

In fact, Mount Grace II seems to represent a hiatus in the academic/practitioner interface. While many academics as individuals continued to provide support and advice to government as consultants, the circle of engagement was limited to a small pool of academics and academic institutions. The vested interests of institutions with more access than others once again came into play. The much wider and more robust engagement of the earlier years had waned. This was probably due to a reduction in the resources available to support such dialogues as larger donors such as the European Union reduced their focus and support in this area.

In addition, the 1999 elections heralded in a new focus for public administration practice with a strong emphasis on the delivery of public services and a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Academic institutions, like government, were required to adapt to a changing higher education funding and regulatory system focused on rationalisation and efficiency, democratic governance and the relevance of education to economic growth. In practical terms, this meant that public administration departments were increasingly compelled to generate income to supplement declining government subsidies.

Schools of public administration shifted focus from policy development in the 1994 to 1999 period to an emphasis on the tools and challenges of implementation in a resource constrained economy. Many courses were re-engineered for changing market needs. For example, competency-based courses to support the development of the Senior Management Service (SMS) as a mobile group of expert managers (Director level and above) were developed. Public administration academia tended to respond to the demands of government, rather than participate in public debate and research. Tendering became the name of the game. Engagement happened within the confines of contractual agreements and not more generally. Neither the discipline nor the practice of public administration was enriched.

Changing the practice – approaches to public administration reform

There was considerable dialogue and exchange about the nature of post apartheid public administration and public sector reform in the 1990 to 1993 period. Many academics and activists were involved in these debates as part of Transitional Executive Council work or ANC processes of preparing for government. There was
considerable interaction between academics and activists leading to joint research work and the joint development of policy. For example, the 1992 Policy Research and Action Training (PRACT) project comprised a series of papers focused on the transformation of public and development management in post-apartheid South Africa. Research processes led by the ANC in education, reconstruction and development processes, health and other areas also included academics and paid attention of public sector transformation. At this stage, debates on public sector reform were relatively new.

The NPAI put forward a number of goals with respect to transformation, including issues such as restructuring the CFA, giving priority to education and training, ensuring cultural diversity and identifying change agents. Academic activists developed and implemented a particular approach to change as local government level premised on the need for a strong centre to plan strategically and perform functions such as redistribution and auditing. Techniques included the shifting of power to elected officials, loosening bureaucratic rigidities through establishing task teams for projects consisting of management, unions, end-users and community representatives, participative planning and increasing the capacity of civil society to participate in decision making.

In the public service itself, the CFA and departments tended to take control of the technical aspects of the transition process by virtue of their being in situ. Many of the changes were driven by the state, on the authority of existing legislation and in terms of the Interim Constitution. There were also state driven sectoral initiatives where, for example, the Department of Education Co-ordination Services was required to integrate all education departments on a regional basis by 1 April 1994. Finally, there was a range of regional or geographically specific forum activity. Regionally specific "Civil Service Forums" played a role in restructuring to the extent that they coalesced the interests of an important group of stakeholders in the change process, notably the bureaucrats. Many of these processes were supported by regional academics or institutions.

The most notable tension in initiatives directed towards management restructuring was the lack of clarity over the roles of different levels of government and the likely decentralisation of functions. However, until the 1994 elections, much of the debate remained as the level of principles and wish lists, with little serious work being conducted on the nuts and bolts of change. Few academics had the experience to consider the institutional implications of constitutional change and most relied on international trends in public sector reform which focused on change management techniques and organisational development to change the apparatus, mechanisms and "engineers" of the governance process.

Many of these approaches were put into action after the elections as a large number of progressive academics went into government as heads of department, senior managers, public service commissioners and political leaders. These academics who had been leading the push to change the practice redefined the terrain of public administration. This was followed by a period of alignment between schools of public administration and government which resulted in research, the development and implementation of a range of training and educational programmes and individual and institutional consulting work. Donor funding, particularly from the European Union, facilitated this growth and development.

The academic/practitioner interface shifted significantly as these newly appointed officials called on their academic networks as change management consultants, participants in review committees and members of commissions. Some universities,
such as Stellenbosch, established consulting companies to feed this new market. Reflective practitioners and engaged academics trawled the corridors of government. Strategic Management Teams (SMTs), for example, introduced as a temporary measure to plan for a restructured administration, created a space for the introduction of those formerly excluded from the governance to participate in the crucial phase of transition as advisors to the national and provincial ministers. They also provided a buffer between new political heads and established administrative and management networks which wielded considerable power in terms of their access to information and existing management practices. However, very little of this work, some of which resulted in the building of new institutions and administrative processes, has been documented or analysed.

Within government, scientific management (the process approach) continued to appeal because it enabled departments to maintain control of implementation through regulation and line accountability. The new public management emphasis on professionalism and performance was useful in terms of reorienting the public service to new objectives. The democratic participation ethos responded to demands for a more responsive and development-friendly public service. Over the first five years of democratic government, there was a shift from a more open and engaged practice of public administration to a more regulated and bureaucratic style as the realities of implementation and fiscal constraints became evident. This was evident in a growing emphasis on the decentralisation of responsibility, performance contracts and professionalism. The approach adopted was underpinned by an assumption that professional behaviour combined with rational management techniques would improve service delivery.

A shift in the focus of donor funding, a change in government public administration strategy and a sense of complacency within universities shifted the terms of engagement in the late 1990s. Universities and academics were less proactive and perhaps more focused on the game of survival in a restructured higher education terrain. Former academics leaving government tended to go into consulting or business rather back into academia. This meant that the reciprocal dynamic that characterises the academic/practitioner interface in places such as the United States was absent in South Africa. Government was increasingly concerned with the challenges and technicalities of service delivery and, finding fewer answers in academia, set up processes to seek them elsewhere. While individual academics continued to provide support and advice in their specialist policy areas, it was left to government to facilitate an engagement through processes such as the Public Management Conversations.

Thinking into the future

What lessons are there from the early years that might enable us to move forwards to a more productive academic/practitioner interface in the future? The first is to acknowledge the tension that is likely to exist in terms of knowledge production. The very nature of public administration, as both a practice and a discipline, implies that both academics and practitioners have valid claims in the production, generation and dissemination of public administration knowledge. However, seeking opportunities to combine the wisdom and experiences of practitioner understanding with rigorous theorisation about the implications of such experiences will considerably enrich the field. Such engagements are only possible if both practitioners and academics see the purpose and relevance of dialogue, and clearly recognise their roles. This opens possibilities for exchanges, fellowships and other programmes that enable practitioners to reflect on their practice in an academic environment and academics to explore practice in a government context.
As is evident from the experience of the NPAI and other initiatives, joint projects, teaching and research are only possible if adequately resourced and supported. Universities often cannot afford to undertake large scale research projects to support government change initiatives without funding and access. Government departments may also lack the time and capacity to manage such projects. In the absence of such support, many academic institutions will be obliged to run after the money and play the game of tendering and consulting. Government departments will simply get on with the business of delivering services. There would be a need to change the terms of engagement from government as contractor and academic institutions as providers. This locks the academic/practitioner interface into a particular mode of interaction that does not lead to the pushing of boundaries or innovation.

Finally, a productive academic/practitioner interface requires the building of trust and an openness of engagement. Vested interests in future projects or training courses need to be set aside to ensure a critical consideration of the state of public administration practice. Practitioners would need to try not to be defensive and shut down dialogue. Similarly, academics would need to rise to the occasion by producing rigorous and thought provoking research and theory about the state of public administration now and in the future. This would lead to the identification of trends relevant to the practice of public administration and the building of a strong social science foundation for the theory. It would lead to the production of knowledge that could regenerate the theory and practice or public administration in South Africa. This would seem to be the most appropriate interface between academics and practitioners in the field of public administration.

Endnotes and References

1 Dr. Anne Mc Lennan from the Graduate School of Public and Development Management, Wits University wrote this section.
3 Ospina and Dodge, ibid, p.411.
4 A colleague, Wendy Ngoma, coined this phrase.
5 Ospina and Dodge, ibid, p.410.
6 Keynote address by Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister of Public Service and Administration at the opening of the SMS Conference, 4 September 2005, Johannesburg.
10 Cloete, ibid.
Personal communication with Patrick FitzGerald.


Schwella, ibid.


Now universities of technology.

Mc Lennan, A. 1993 DSA in Depth, Aug/Sep.


Mount Grace Papers, ibid, p.23.

Mount Grace Papers, ibid, p.25 onwards.


Marais, ibid.


Mc Lennan, 2007, ibid.


A term used by Patrick FitzGerald at the time to define the relationship between higher education institutions providing public administration education as both cooperative and competitive.


Mc Lennan, 1993, ibid.

Mc Lennan, DSA in Depth, 1993


See Picard, 2005, pp. 208 to 211, for a more detailed discussion.


See list of participants in the Mount Grace II process, Theron and Schwella, 2000.

44 Zola Skweyiya, DPSA Minister, Public Service Transformation Graduation Address University of the Witwatersrand: Graduate School of Public and Development Management, 26 June 1998.

45 These papers are collected in the 1995 Policies for Public Service Transformation edited by Cloete and Mokgoro.


49 Mc Lennan, 2000.