PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Making a Difference?

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This chapter examines the literature on professional associations in the public management arena and identifies future lines of inquiry for empirical research and theoretical development. Little empirical research has addressed professional associations, and even less has examined their activities in the public sector. However, there is considerable conceptual literature that lends itself to an improved understanding of the range of associations available to public professionals, their impact on public administration, and their potential for fostering public service excellence. This disparate and sometimes entirely conceptual literature is connected, in this chapter, to the very practical question of how professional associations support public sector management.

THE ASSOCIATION ARENA IN THE UNITED STATES

Associations are the common name for numerous not-for-profit, mutual benefit organizations that serve the interests of social, political, cultural, religious, and professional groups. They include communes, homeowners associations, producer cooperatives, trade and occupational associations, religious congregations, recreational clubs, fraternities and sororities, and political organizations. Their names are familiar—the Rotary Club, the American Heart Association, and the American Bar Association—and not so familiar—the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters, the National Association of Female Executives, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Quantifying the number of member-serving organizations depends on how inclusively the terms *association* and *membership* are applied. From a broad perspective, associations can be organized under several classes of the federal tax code governing nonprofits. The family of organizations incorporated under the 501(c)(5), (c)(6), (c)(7), and other sections of the tax code include chambers of commerce, social clubs, labor unions, and fraternal societies. One-quarter of all nonprofit organizations (about 336,000 entities in 2008) are organized legally as these mutual benefit organizations, created by individuals who join together to promote and protect collective interests (National Center for Charitable Statistics [NCCS] 2009).

Trade and professional associations represent a subfield of these organizations, numbering about seventy-two thousand in 2008 (NCCS 2009). Since some charities and other public benefit organizations also operate under a membership structure and provide educational services to warrant a charitable status, the actual number of associations may be considerably larger. It is worth noting that a few associations have found that a for-profit status better serves their interests. For

Table 4.1

A Selective List of Associations Organized by Representational Level

Jurisdictions and Authorities	Professions	Functions
National Association of Counties	Government Finance Officers Association	National Association of State Charity Officials
Florida League of Cities	California State Firefighters Association	Association of Public Health Laboratories
Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors	National Forum for Black Public Administrators	American Public Works Association
Public Library Association	Federal Managers Association	American Public Transportation Association
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments	Council for Excellence in Government	Public Risk Management Association
Regional Council of Rural Counties	Association of Government Accountants	National Emergency Management Association
Public Housing Authorities Directors Association		

example, the New York Stock Exchange converted from a not-for-profit business league to a publicly traded corporation in 2006.

Collectively, professional associations educate, train, and credential people in many occupations (e.g., engineering, medicine, education), provide commercial services to professionals, and advocate for member interests in the public policy arena. In the public sector, hundreds of professional associations represent the interests of governmental *jurisdictions* and *authorities* (e.g., the National Association of Counties), *professions* (e.g., the Government Finance Officers Association), and *functions* (e.g., the National Association of State Charity Officials). Association membership can be open to individuals, institutions, businesses, or governments. It is quite possible that every career public official belongs to one or more professional associations (see Table 4.1).

THE PUBLIC VALUE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The authors conducted a review of thirty textbooks commonly used in introductory public administration courses and advanced courses in leadership and ethics and found only sixteen books that address the benefits and values that professional associations contribute to public management. Thirteen books provide a paragraph or so, while only three describe the value of associations in acculturating graduate students to the core values of public administration.[1] In fact, one text—Starling's *Managing the Public Sector*—describes the professional codes issued by professional associations as of "limited usefulness" (2008, 181).

Rather than accept this casual dismissal of the importance of professional associations, we suggest the need for a broader appreciation of their value in public administration. Haynes and Samuel (2006) contend that associations serve multiple purposes, including enabling members to participate in wider communities beyond those experienced in the workplace (e.g., global connections) and contributing to policy development and implementation, especially at the national level. Associations also provide leadership training and experience through participation in the governance of membership organizations.

No research has yet asked public managers to identify systematically the professional associations they consider most useful in their work, nor the benefits they value the most. A content analysis of organizational Web sites mentioned by leaders of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) suggests a typology of organizational benefits for public managers.[2]

These benefits include training and development, awards and recognition, research and knowledge creation, certification and standard setting, ethical guidance and codes of conduct, professional networking and career development, leadership opportunities, and public service value advocacy. The following sections describe ways in which associations provide these benefits.

Training and Development

Most associations offer training and professional development opportunities. Public administrators can acquire new skills and hone those acquired earlier in their careers. A study of seventeen thousand association members conducted by the American Society of Association Executives in 2006 found training and development to be the most important function that associations provide (Dalton and Dignam 2007). Training opportunities vary widely, from webinar offerings by the Association of Government Accountants and ASPA to extensive professional development by the Association of Inspectors General and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Awards and Recognition

Associations also recognize practitioner and scholarly achievements. For example, ASPA and the National Academy of Public Administration cosponsor the National Public Service Awards and collaborate with the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration to recognize outstanding contributions in faculty research, service, and teaching. Indeed, ASPA's award listing continues for many pages and covers the field from chapter newsletters to lifetime achievement awards (www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index_awards_about.cfm). The ICMA offers an extensive awards program that recognizes extraordinary accomplishments as well as dedicated service to the profession of city and county management.

Research and Knowledge Creation

Associations offer a wealth of publications, including glossy magazines, learned books, newsletters, scholarly journals, white papers, and other commentary. Associations also provide a venue for those who wish to have their own research published and shared with peers. Often, associations serve as the principal means by which professionals obtain timely information about scientific and technical developments in their field (Dalton and Dignam 2007).

Certification and Standard Setting

Many associations have programs that certify expertise and accredit academic programs that meet published standards. For example, a section of ASPA advocates for the Certified Public Manager designation, which indicates completion of training accredited by the Certified Public Manager Consortium and is offered through authorized stated-based entities. Similarly, the Association of Government Accountants has developed the Certified Government Financial Manager program. To achieve and maintain the designation, members undergo extensive testing, complete continuing professional education hours, and must adhere to the Association of Government Accountants' code of ethics. The ICMA has a voluntary credentialing program that allows public managers to earn the designation of ICMA-CM (for "credentialed manager"). The certified public manager program includes an Applied Knowledge Assessment (AKA) tool that is based on ICMA's

Practices for Effective Local Government (Streib and Rivera 2010). As discussed in this volume, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration establishes rigorous standards for accrediting master's programs in public policy, affairs, and administration (see chapter 5, "Accreditation and Competencies in Education for Leadership in Public Service").

Ethical Guidance and Codes of Conduct

Most, if not all, associations that serve public administrators promulgate ethical standards and issue codes of conduct. Indeed, it is only in this area that introductory public administration textbooks make more than a passing mention of professional associations. Most often noted are the codes of conduct for members of the ASPA and the ICMA.

Jeremy Plant (2000, 317–318) explores the history of ethical standards and codes of conduct, noting that a "fruitful source of insights is provided by the literature on public professional associations, many of which have a long and rich involvement in ethical issues, as well as a strong historical connection to the field and practice of public administration." In the case of the ICMA, Plant observes that no other association has the wealth of experience or duration of interest in promoting ethical practices and behavior. Plant asserts that the lasting significance of codes of ethics is that "they can lift individual public servants above the 'do's and don't's' of ordinary organizational life to give meaning and reality to the highest values of a democratic society" (328).

According to Plant (325), four types of associations are most likely to have a formal code of conduct:

1. Engineering associations, including such public sector associations as the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the American Public Works Association;
2. Associations representing professionals in administration of justice or regulatory activities using the law as an enforcement approach [including the many well-known state trooper associations, the Professional Law Enforcement Association, and more esoteric organizations, such as the American Working Dog Council, which sets standards for police dog training];
3. Associations with a clearly public sort of professionalism, including ICMA, American Planning Association/American Institute of Certified Planners, GFOA [Government Finance Officers Association], and ASPA; and
4. Associations representing professionals in education [such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which has developed a professional oath].

Professional Networking and Career Development

Associations enable professionals to interact with and observe colleagues across generations, sectors, and levels of experience. Many associations, including ASPA, the Partnership for Public Service, ICMA, the National Association of Redevelopment Officers, the Association of Government Accountants, the Association of Inspectors General, the Government Financial Officers Association, and others, offer recruitment and job placement opportunities. Conferences, local chapter meetings, and workshops provide a venue for meeting people in the field one might ordinarily not encounter. Online resources provide electronic networking opportunities through blogs, Listservs, and social networking sites. Some associations become important recruitment mechanisms for

the functional areas they represent (such as civil engineers, government accountants, or foreign service officers), with programs that encourage young professionals to enter their fields.

Leadership Opportunities

In addition to professional paid staff, associations have a member-led governance structure (nonprofit organizations are legally required to have an operating board). Beyond the formal governance structure, numerous committees of lay members help achieve associations' operational objectives, including conference programming, review of professional standards, and the creation of training curricula. Association governance and committee activities can and do provide members with valuable leadership experiences. These leadership opportunities provide a means for honing interpersonal skills and developing better citizens for the association and the community at large.

Public Service Value Advocacy

Associations offer a venue for connecting members with others who hold similar values and advocate for public policy initiatives that promote those values, such as fairness, social equity, and transparency. Association representatives from both the private and public sectors regularly participate in local, state, and national legislative hearings as expert witnesses, advocates, or lobbyists.

RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Scholars from many disciplines—sociology, social psychology, political science, economics—have been interested in why and how individuals with common interests organize themselves in groups. In the beginning of his famous work on collective action, Mancur Olson (1965, 17) cites Aristotle's argument that humans have a predisposition for group formation. The remarks of Alexis de Tocqueville, the renowned French observer of 1830s America, are also used today to suggest that Americans have a strong disposition to solve problems through volunteer associations (Dalton 2008, 138–160).

Along this historical path, the reasons behind association formation have been widely debated. The lack of agreement stems, no doubt, from the tremendous diversity of the field, the variety of intellectual frameworks that can be brought to bear on associational activity, and the difficulty in categorizing associations into defined groups according to purpose, legal form, or representation. Abbott (1988), Knoke (1986), and Tschirhart (2006) have produced the most comprehensive work on associations, although none of them has addressed associational activity in a public service context. Their perspectives, however, not only help build an understanding of associations but also help to identify the association field's lack of a core theory or conceptual framework. Multiple perspectives are offered as explanations for the formation of associations.

WHY WE JOIN

An economic perspective relies on exchange theories to suggest that individuals join associations when they derive sufficient benefits beyond the cost of their dues and time. Political scientists emphasize the representative nature of associations and their ability to serve a pluralist function and to organize group interests. Sociologists and human ecologists view associations as social units that organize collective life, build social capital, and contribute to collective (though not necessarily

majority) interests (Hawley 1950; Putnam 2000). Rational actor and institutional theories, widely applied in public management, describe the ability of associations to set standards of conduct and legitimize their actions by imposing behavioral expectations on other institutional actors (Brignall and Modell 2000; DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Many scholars have observed that underlying the challenge in understanding public sector association activity, a substantial empirical and theoretical gap exists in the general research on mutual benefit associations (Hudson and Hudson 2002). As Knoke (1986, 2) writes, "Put bluntly, association research remains a largely unintegrated set of disparate findings, in dire need of a compelling theory. . . . [Without it], students of associations and interest groups seem destined to leave their subject in scientific immaturity." Two decades later, Tschirhart (2006, 535–536) suggests that "these earlier assessments still hold today. . . . We need more theories and empirical work" about the role of associations in American civic life. Tschirhart notes in particular the dearth of high-quality, cross-sector research that can produce generalizable models of association effectiveness.

As noted, observers also suggest that associations do not necessarily offer societal benefits. Although voluntary associations can support democratic processes and diffuse knowledge, they can also suppress minority voices and promote inequities (Tschirhart 2006, 526). Many associations represent powerful special interests. The typology of nonprofit organizational forms makes a crucial legal distinction between those organized for public or general societal benefit and those organized for collective or mutual benefit. Associations as mutual benefit organizations are under no particular obligation to benefit the public. They can exclude individuals from receiving benefits by imposing membership criteria or high entry fees and can advocate for public policies that do not serve the public interest as a whole.

To reiterate, very little research addresses the particular context of the public sector associations with their distinct accountability expectations. (See chapter 11, "The Pursuit of Accountability: Promise, Problems, and Prospects.") Many theoretical perspectives described previously have not been verified either in the particular context of association activity or, more specifically, in public sector contexts. However, it is important to do so given the unique political and legal obligations under which public sector professionals operate, the greater public scrutiny of their actions, and the value in bringing the best training and education to bear on solving public problems. Indeed, Guy B. Adams joins Terry L. Cooper and others in concern over the "tension between a meaningful democratic politics on the one hand, and a professionalized, scientized, expert administration on the other" (Adams 2000, 300). Beverly Cigler expresses the problem as a "paradox of professionalization." She observes that "as the professionalization of permanent career bureaucrats at all levels increased significantly, bureaucracy's acceptance by its clients—citizens and political elites alike—decreased" (1990, 638). This phenomenon suggests a risk in public sector associational activity if the greater expertise within government creates a disconnect between the work of professionals and the citizenry, and leads these professionals to discount public views.

Theories of the Underlying Function of Professional Associations in a Public Sector Context

Complicating the landscape on professional association research are the multiple functions these associations provide and their status as instruments of collective action. As Cigler and Adams observe, the multiple roles of public associations as representatives of jurisdictional, institutional, or individual interests means that broad assumptions should be avoided with respect to the potential benefits, limitations, or influences on effective public management, public policy, and public regulatory systems. However, some conceptual frameworks are helpful in both capturing the differences and describing the common ground.

Recent research on the challenges public administrators face as they engage with nongovernmental organizations in networked activities yields fertile ground for examining nonprofit association activities. Agranoff (chapter 17, "Collaborative Public Agencies in the Network Era," in this volume) opens the door to further exploration when he notes that "the literature on networking points to the importance of expanding information and access to expertise of other organizations." Political and collective-action perspectives also are essential in understanding that managers can find from time to time that their professional and institutional affiliations clash with one another. The following five perspectives are not intended to be inclusive but are presented to illustrate that associations introduce both benefits and challenges to public professional life.

Public Professional Associations as Regulatory Agents and Promulgators of Institutional Rules

One widely cited argument about organizational behavior has particular relevance to association activity. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 147) describe professions as some of the "great rationalizers" of the latter twentieth century in terms of their ability to impose standard operating procedures and other "rituals of conformity" (150) on their members. Brignall and Modell (2000), and Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) lump professional associations together with public regulatory agencies in their common ability to define institutional norms and regulate behavior. Associations allow professional communities to represent themselves to others both within and outside their field, and they develop, monitor, and enforce norms of behavior for their fields. Their influence is reflected in their ability to enforce standards of conduct even to the point where association membership is required for advancement.

Haynes and Samuel's (2006) work, titled *Value of Membership in Professional Associations,* discusses the potential for associations to influence public professionals positively. This view, however, requires empirical confirmation since the phenomenon they describe may also suggest that association participation might have unintended consequences. While association participation can expose professionals to radically different perspectives and encourage tolerance for diversity, alternatively, long-term affiliation with a professional association could homogenize perspectives and dilute rather than promote tolerance for differences. Haynes and Samuel note the importance of shifting from "assimilating" members of different cultural backgrounds and viewpoints to "raising awareness of differences, valuing them, and making use of them" (5).

With respect to the influence that association activity has on organizational behavior, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest that there is a relationship between managerial participation in trade and professional associations and the level of institutional isomorphism that occurs. This isomorphism is a form of organizational conformity driven by various external pressures. It manifests itself through behaviors surrounding professional activity: *Coercive* isomorphism occurs as a response to regulations, licensing, and accreditation expectations; *normative* isomorphism may result from the imposition of societal or professional standards on an industry's members; and *mimetic* isomorphism can happen as organizations adopt performance standards and benchmarks from peer institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Frumkin and Galaskiewicz 2004). These *behaviors* can be found in all three sectors of economic activity—nonprofit, commercial, and governmental. Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) have compared these three sectors to understand the relative influence of associational activity on isomorphic behavior. They find that a public manager's membership in professional associations can be a powerful external influence on a

public agency's behavior and structure, possibly rivaling internal forces (such as a bureaucracy's tendency to mimic other bureaucracies). For example, they find that government agencies with stronger associational tendencies are less centralized and formal in their operations. Their findings suggest the potential for an influential role for professional associations in shaping the organizational culture, strategic direction, and performance of public agencies. Further, with respect to the influence of associations on organizational performance, Heugens and Lander (2009) performed a meta-analysis of DiMaggio and Powell's arguments and validated the role that associations have in improving organizational performance. Although sometimes limited in their claims, these studies reveal potentially important differences between the sectors in terms of how associational activity influences the behavior of public managers or agencies.

Public Professional Associations as Sources of Ethical Standards

Whether or not associations can impose codes of conduct, they often offer standards of behavior that managers can follow voluntarily. In the wake of controversial policies and governmental scandals during the 1970s and 1980s—the Vietnam War, Watergate, and Irangate, among others—a survey of ASPA members found that "promoting ethics is perceived to be the single most important activity that ASPA performs" (Bowman 1990, 352). A "skills triangle" developed by Bowman, West, and Beck (2009) emphasizes technical, ethical, and leadership competencies and argues that their mastery is essential for the consummate professional. Referencing Menzel (2009), Bowman notes that each public servant "should strive to become ethically competent. This means being committed to high standards, possessing knowledge of relevant ethical codes and laws, engaging in ethical reasoning, acting upon public service ethics and values, and promoting ethical behavior in organizations" (Bowman, West, and Beck 2009, 92).

Public Professional Associations as Sources of Role Conflict or Culture Clash

Another perspective suggests that public managers with strong professional affiliations can find their functional and professional roles in conflict with one another. From a public administration perspective, Starling (2008, 448) suggests that increased professionalization has revived the politics/administration debate. He quotes Dennis L. Dresang, who argues, "A professional, almost by definition, typically seeks autonomy and a status that commands deference. The mixing in a common arena of a political official pursuing the mandates of the ballot box and a professional expecting to dominate in the policymaking process is bound to generate conflict and distrust. There are likely to be frustrations, too, because a politician and the professional need each other."

From a policy-making perspective, conflicts are caused when competing goals are introduced. For example, Susskind (2003, 273–274) observes that many public managers responsible for community mediation have a planning or public administration background. They may identify themselves as mediators and belong to umbrella organizations such as the Association of Conflict Resolution, but they also "continue to maintain their affiliation with professional planning and public management associations. This means that the interveners who seek to mediate public policy disputes are sometimes part of the city's planning staff. From the standpoint of a neighborhood upset with what the government has proposed to do in its area, the idea that someone in city hall, regardless of the skills he or she might have, could be neutral is almost impossible to accept." Susskind concludes that public managers who attempt to mediate public policy disputes must be able to separate their professional and governmental identities.

Public Professional Associations as Sources of Hierarchical Conflict

Yeatman (1987, 346) observes the potential for conflicting ideologies or values—not in Susskind's context of a public manager with a dual identity, but in the sense that managers at different supervisory or functional levels view their objectives differently:

> Professionalization of the upper and middle ranks of public servants is confined within the model of professional management. This is a technical or methodological professionalism. It vies with and even overrides the professionalism of substantive expertise. Thus professional engineers, doctors, social workers, lawyers and so on in the public sector may find that the discretionary authority they require to interpret their task and to respond to needs has been seriously circumscribed by the requirements placed on them by professional managers. The rise to power of professional managers in the public service is not only at the expense of the erstwhile authority of substantive professional positions in the public service. It leads also to a deskilling of the latter by reducing, as far as possible, the type of work involved to technical input and output measures.

One persuasive argument in support of this perspective is offered by Romzek and Dubnick (1987, 235) who attribute the 1986 explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle to a clash between political responsiveness and professionalism. In the *Challenger* tragedy, engineers who held essential information about shuttle safety by virtue of their professional training were relegated to a subordinate role in the managerial decision-making process, which favored other, competing forms of accountability (political, hierarchical): "Had NASA relied exclusively on a professional system of accountability in making the decision to launch the *Challenger* space shuttle, perhaps deference would have been given to the technical expertise of the engineers. Their recommendation against launch might never have been challenged."

Public Professional Associations as Institutions That Build Social Capital and Support Civic Connectedness

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam addresses the relationship between associations and civic participation. With respect to work-based organizations, Putnam argues that these organizations represent an "important locus of social solidarity, a mechanism for mutual assistance and shared expertise" (80). Indeed, he asserts that work-related organizations have been among the most common forms of civic connectedness in America. However, like community and church-based organizations, Putnam has observed a decline in membership among professional organizations during the latter part of the twentieth century.

   Putnam does not distinguish associations by economic sector. The professional organizations he addresses (e.g., the American Bar Association, American Medical Association, American Institute of Architects) rely on broad memberships that transcend public and private sector distinctions. Nonetheless, Putnam develops the notion of "social capital"—that is, "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them"—in ways that prove useful to observing the role of professional associations in public administration, as well as in the actual practice of public administration (2000, 19). Recent research on networks and collaborative management underscores the importance of social capital—of trust and reciprocity—to public management across sectors in the twenty-first century. (See chapter 17, "Collaborative Public Agencies in the Network Era," in this volume.)

Not all commentators have agreed with Putnam's bleak portrayal of a decline in civic engagement. In *The Good Citizen* (2008), Russell Dalton argues that "the good news is . . . the bad news is wrong" (161). Rather than attribute the decline in social capital to the "slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of older, civic-minded generations by the disaffected Generation X" (3), Dalton challenges the "norms of citizenship" and the definition of what it means to be a good citizen. According to Dalton, a host of social changes have affected how the American public acts and thinks about politics. At an earlier time, traditional norms of American citizenship—voting, paying taxes, belonging to a political party—have evolved into what he calls "engaged citizenship." Dalton asserts that "engaged citizenship emphasizes a more assertive role for the citizen and a broader definition of the elements of citizenship to include social concerns and the welfare of others."[3]

There are several significant connections among Dalton's description of active citizenship, the role of public administrators, and professional associations. The public administration professionals of today and tomorrow rise from the very citizens Dalton describes. Schools of public affairs and administration can find much to ponder in the literature on the "knowledge workers" and the "creative class" that Dalton and others explore (see, for example, Florida 2002). Moreover, public administrators of today and tomorrow serve the citizenry Dalton describes. Their concerns, inclination toward engagement, and perspective on government affect how public administrators engage their publics and respond to an ever-changing policy landscape. Broad-based professional associations may offer a venue in which public administrators explore the implications of these societal changes and seek ways to respond to emerging needs of the "new" citizenship. (See chapter 15, "Citizen-Driven Administration: Civic Engagement in the United States," in this volume.)

Strengthening Research on Associations

A further limit on understanding association activity in the public sector is the fact that no comprehensive empirical effort has been made to document association activity. The lack of even basic descriptive statistics on the extent of association activity has limited hypothesis testing and sophisticated theoretical development. In some instances, promising theoretical groundwork has been produced in related fields but lacks testing in the context of association activity.

The principal limit to generalizable research is that most associations collect data only about their own members' characteristics and preferences. Although many peer-reviewed studies have made use of such data, especially in management journals, this effort has little value in understanding sector-wide patterns of behavior. We challenge the assumption that associations have no incentive to collect data about nonmembers. It is very likely that they would find cross-organizational comparisons useful. However, it is clear that the incentives to do so are limited. The most significant effort to collect generalizable data has come from the American Society of Association Executives. This organization represents the interests of the association sector generally, and trains and credentials professionals who manage associations. Recent surveys involving a half dozen to nearly one hundred separate associations have investigated membership satisfaction, member philanthropic activity (volunteerism, giving), and the impact of the 2009 economic recession on associational activity (Dalton and Dignam 2007; Dignam 2009; Gazley and Dignam 2008).

The American Society of Association Executives data shed limited light on public sector participation in professional association activity. These data are useful for studying the considerable variation in association participation by public managers: In one recent study involving twenty-one associations (including a variety of professional groups such as nursing, education, and engineering) the percentage of respondents who work in the public sector varied from 1 percent to 19 percent depending on the organization (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Sectoral Representation of Selected Association Members (in percent)

	Government sector	Nonprofit sector	Academia	Business sector	Self-employed
American Nurses Association	13	32	29	21	5
American Society of Civil Engineers	16	1	4	75	4
American College of Healthcare Executives	16	55	6	20	3
American Industrial Hygiene Association	17	3	8	62	10
Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers	7	3	19	61	10
American Institute of Certified Public Accountants	5	5	4	59	27

Source: Gazley and Dignam 2008.

The data also reveal that members who work in the public sector are more likely to indicate that there are too many associations in their field, but they are similar to the private sector members on many other measures of membership satisfaction, especially on the benefits of joining an association. Public employees agreed with private sector members about the value of associations in providing members with technical information, training and professional development, networking opportunities, standards of practice, timely information about their field, and advocacy for the field when dealing with government agencies and the public (Dalton and Dignam 2007). No data were collected in this particular study about where government employees worked. Thus, while additional attention to the American Society of Association Executives data might shed light on how attitudes about the value of association participation vary across the public and private sectors, they do not provide sufficient detail about the market penetration of professional associations into governmental agencies or occupations.

Further Directions for Research

The state of theoretical and empirical knowledge about public administrators' participation in professional associations points to many opportunities for scholarly inquiry. The following lines of research might be pursued to develop more inclusive knowledge and information about association activity in the public sector.

First, to understand the influence of associations on public managerial behavior, it would be useful to organize them according to several possible dimensions. The typology shown in Figure 4.1 is offered as a starting point.

Associations can be organized and compared in the following ways:

- According to the jurisdictional interests they represent within the public sector (such as ICMA for cities, National Association of Counties for counties)
- By the nature of their representation (jurisdictions/communities, institutions/agencies, individual managers, citizens/consumers of public services, or perhaps all of these)
- By their emphasis on professions across (or regardless of) the entire employment sector (such as nursing, teaching, engineering)
- By industries or functions (such as emergency management)
- By mission and purpose (labor representation, regulatory change, and so on)

Figure 4.1 **Typology of Association Characteristics**

- By their membership requirements: Some associations are open to any dues-paying individual interested in their mission, while others impose strict educational, experiential, or behavioral criteria
- By the services they provide to members (education, advocacy, research, credentialing) and members' perceived benefit of those services
- By level of coercion or influence on members or nonmembers; Tschirhart (2006) observes that some ideas about association activity apply only to the majority of associations where membership is voluntary, while others have relevance for the more coercive, guild-like organizations where membership becomes almost compulsory for managerial performance or professional success[4]
- By market conditions such as the number of associations representing any particular occupation or field and the subsequent level of competition for members
- By the level of professionalization to which an association or an occupational field aspires. Professionalization can be measured according to "the universality of credential requirements, the robustness of . . . training programs," the proportion of managers in an occupational field who belong to a professional association, the size of those associations, and other variables that signify the vitality of a professional or trade association (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 156). (Given that defining "professionalism" can be a moving target, we suggest the strongest reliance on measures of professional activity that have good qualitative value and broad agreement about their worth to a field.)

The value in this research effort is to understand at a much more comprehensive level the influence that associations have on managerial outlooks or performance. For example, one might apply

such a professional association framework to studies that seek to understand effective public leadership, to managers' perspectives on public sector accountability, and to the growing body of work on public service motivation. The research on public service motivation is actively interested in why employees enter the public workforce, how they professionalize themselves as public managers, and how these factors influence their performance (see also Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2009). Scholars in this field of research could make a much stronger and deliberate connection between a manager's professional association activity and his or her public service outlook.

We note that the role that these professional associations play in supporting performance at managerial or organizational levels is contextual, and causal connections are difficult to make. However, the contextual nature of their influence is as much of an argument to consider their role as it is to discard their influence. In certain instances, for example, association membership plays such a central role in a public manager's ethical perspective, values, or daily work that aspects of that association experience must be included in a research model for the model to be adequately specified. In the public service motivation research and elsewhere, scholars can increase their understanding of the impact of professional training on managerial behavior by treating associational activity as a multidimensional construct with distinct qualitative variations.

The Impact of Professional Training and Education on Managerial Performance

This dimension of association activity can be examined from several perspectives. First, what contributions do professional associations make to educating public managers? Can these contributions be connected to organizational or managerial performance? Romzek and Dubnick (1987) argue, at least indirectly, in favor of this perspective. More recently, in the context of emergency management services, McGuire and Silvia (2010) and Brudney and Gazley (2009) find that professional training in emergency management (such as the training provided by the International Association of Emergency Managers) is related to a county emergency manager's perception that his or her jurisdiction is adequately prepared for disasters, and to the amount of intergovernmental collaboration and networking in which the manager participates. The study on which these authors relied is notable in gathering specific data about emergency management certification trends and the educational level of the respondents.

In addition, one might ask whether public affairs graduate degree programs are missing opportunities to teach students important lessons about the value (or limits) of associational activity in the public sector. Courses in human resources management, emergency management, planning, performance management, network management, leadership, and ethics would all be appropriate places to discuss the role of professional associations and societies in training public managers. Yet professional associations receive little attention in commonly used textbooks, and there is little evidence to indicate that faculty members in master of public administration programs strongly or consistently encourage graduate students to participate in professional associations.

Membership Behavior and Associational Activity in a Public Sector Context

Why do public managers join or not join associations? Tschirhart (2006) observes three research approaches in the general scholarship on joining behavior: research that examines how members calculate the cost-benefits of joining an association, research on the demographic predictors of membership, and research on external environmental factors that encourage or discourage joining behavior (such as economic or immigration trends). None of these frameworks has been applied yet to public management, but they could certainly be used to strengthen an understanding of where

and how public managers decide to obtain their training. There is value in closer collaborative activity between public administration scholars and the associations that serve the public sector, such as ASPA and ICMA. Joint data collection and analysis might help to identify information with both practical and scholarly value, such as trends in public sector professional association activity, how member preferences have changed over time, and what programs and services could meet public managers' future needs.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describes a broad field of professional activity: the associations and societies that train, support, and advocate for hundreds of managerial functions, public service sectors, and jurisdictional interests. This diffuse field of study has weak theoretical and empirical foundations. Nonetheless, conceptual literature lends itself to understanding the role and behavior of professional associations in supporting public management. Studying public sector associational activity is worthwhile because professional associations can, through training, advocacy, and other mission-related endeavors, play a role in addressing much larger public administration issues. Associational activity and training can support effective performance management, help public managers learn to operate within complex service networks and informal management systems, and possibly stem the brain drain in the public sector workforce. Are professional associations making a difference? The answer is an unequivocal *yes!*

Data collection may not be the main challenge to these research efforts. Rather, the barriers may be perceptual. Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002, 65) observe that "professional associations are notable for their attention to documentation." As noted earlier, some associations are increasingly interested in collecting data on member activities and preferences and in engaging both academics and practitioners in that effort. However, most membership data are still carefully guarded based on their commercial value. A greater acknowledgment in academia of the value of association research may also help reinvigorate public administration scholarship in this neglected but important field.

NOTES

1. The authors thank Amanda Donovan and Stella Ngugi for assistance in reviewing the texts; the list of texts with citations is available upon request (whaynes@bridgew.edu). The three texts that accorded fuller coverage of the topic were written by T.L. Cooper (*The Responsible Administrator*), H.G. Frederickson and K.B. Smith (*The Public Administration Theory Primer*), and W. Bruce (*Classics of Administrative Ethics*).

2. For purposes of this chapter, we focus on associations with missions oriented toward practitioner professionals, including public administrators. Academic associations such as the Association of Public Policy and Management, the American Political Science Association, and the Policy Studies Organization merit separate treatment but are not addressed in this chapter. The American Society for Public Administration provides a forum for both practitioners and scholars, so it is included in our discussion.

3. For a fine exploration of civic engagement and citizenship, see Terry L. Cooper's chapter in this volume: chapter 15, "Citizen-Driven Administration: Civic Engagement in the United States."

4. Associations range from those whose membership is entirely voluntary to guild-like organizations that can restrict some professional activity by nonmembers. The ability in the United States of occupational associations to require membership as a condition of employment in a field was abolished by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978 (Tschirhart 2006).

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