

Towards A Theoretical Definition of Public Administration

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to examine the Theoretical Definition of Public Administration. The study seeks to identify the definitions, the meaning and the evolution of public administration. From the study, it can be deduced that public administration is a dynamic force which definition has not fully come to its perfection.*

The works of scholars as regard what they postulated were reviewed. The problems associated with public administration were identified during the cause of this study and recommendations on how best public administration could be managed were made.

I. Introduction

Public administration is the implementation of government policy and an academic discipline that studies this implementation and that prepares civil servants for this work. As a “field of inquiry with a diverse scope” its “fundamental goal is to advance management and policies so that government can function.” Some of the various definitions which have been offered for the term are: “the management of public programs”; the “translation of politics into the reality that citizens see every day”; and “the study of government decision making, the analysis of the policies themselves, the various inputs that have produced them, and the inputs necessary to produce alternative policies.”

Public administration is “centrally concerned with the organization of government policies and programmes as well as the behavior of officials (usually non-elected) formally responsible for their conduct” Many unelected public servants can be considered to be public administrators, including heads of city, county, regional, state and federal departments such as municipal budget directors, human resources (H.R.) administrators, city managers, census managers, state [mental health] directors, and cabinet secretaries. Public administrators are public servants working in public departments and agencies, at all levels of government.

In the US, civil servants and academics such as Woodrow Wilson promoted American civil service reform in the 1880s, moving public administration into academia. However, “until the mid-20th century and the dissemination of the German sociologist Max Weber’s theory of bureaucracy” there was not “much interest in a theory of public administration.” The field is multidisciplinary in character; one of the various proposals for public administration’s sub-fields sets out six pillars, including human resources, organizational theory, policy analysis and statistics, budgeting, and ethics.

II. Definitions Of Public Administration

Kernaghan, Kenneth (2010) claims that “public administration has no generally accepted definition”, because the “scope of the subject is so great and so debatable that it is easier to explain than define”. Public administration is a field of study (i.e., a discipline) and an occupation. There is much disagreement about whether the study of public administration can properly be called a discipline, largely because of the debate over whether public administration is a subfield of political science or a subfield of administrative science”. Scholar Donald Kettle(2010) is among those who view public administration “as a subfield within political science”.

The North American Industry Classification System definition of the Public Administration (NAICS 91) sector states that public administration “comprises establishments primarily engaged in activities of a governmental nature, that is, the enactment and judicial interpretation of laws and their pursuant regulations, and the administration of programs based on them”. This includes “Legislative activities, taxation, national defense, public order and safety, immigration services, foreign affairs and international assistance, and the administration of government programs are activities that are purely governmental in nature”.

From the academic perspective, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States defines the study of public administration as “A program that prepares individuals to serve as managers in the executive arm of local, state, and federal government and that focuses on the systematic study of executive organization and management. Includes instruction in the roles, development, and principles of public administration; the management of public policy; executive-legislative relations; public budgetary processes and financial, management; administrative law; public personnel management; professional ethics; and research methods).

According to Tunji Olaopa (1998:8-10), he explained that the word public administration is very often used, but very difficult to define. This is because the boundaries of the field have never been precisely delineated. In recent years they have never become increasingly determined as both practitioners and scholars have considerably broadened their concepts of what public administration covers, (Nigro and Nigro, 1973:3). This problem notwithstanding, various definitions have been put forth to fix the meaning of the term 'Public Administration'. White (1995:1) observe that 'Public Administration consists of all those operations having for their purposes the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy.

Hodgdon (1969:1) in the same vein, opines that 'Public Administration comprises all activities of persons or groups in government or their Agencies whether these Organisations are International, regional or local in their scope, to fulfill the purposes of these governments or agencies.

Scholars like Pfiffner and Presthus (1960:3) lay more emphasis on the coordinating role of administration. In their opinion, administration consists of getting the work of government done by coordinating the efforts of people so that they work together to accomplish their tasks.

Adebayo (1982:4) says that, when 'Administration' is qualified by the word 'public' it simply means the practice of administration in a particular segment of society; that of the public sector. Public Administration is therefore governmental administration and operate in the particular sphere of government. It is the machinery for implementing government policy.

He added that Dimock (1973:31-32) defined public Administration as the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. It deals with the problems, and powers, the organization and techniques of management involved in carrying out the laws and policies formulated by the policy-making agencies of government.

Nigro and Nigro (1973:18) summaries the meaning of public administration in these words: Is cooperative group effort in a public setting Covers all three branches-executives, legislative and judicial and their interrelationship. Has an important role in the formulation of public policy and is thus a part of the political process is more important than, and also different in significant ways from private Administration. As a field of study and practices has been much influenced in recent years by the human relations approach; and is closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community.

The various definitions cited above, point to the fact that public Administration is governmental in action. It is concerned with the executive, operative and the most obvious part of the government, which deals with the formulation and enforcement of public policies. Patrick (2006) also made mentioned of definitions by different authors as follows: According to Woodrow Wilson, 'Public Administration is a detailed and systematic application of law. Every particular application of law is an act of administration.' Harvey Walker says, 'the work which the government does to give effect to law is called public administration'

In the words of Dwight Waldo, 'Public Administration is the art and science of management as applied to the affairs of the states'. Luther Gullick opines, 'Public Administration is that part of the science of administration which has to do with the government and thus concerns itself primarily with the executive branch where the work of the government is done'. Aderibigbe A.M. (2012), PGDPA lecture note, defined public Administration as the machinery as well as the integral process through which the government functions. It is a network of human relationship and associated activities extending from the government to the lowest paid and powerless individual charges with keeping in daily touch with all resources, national and human and all the aspect of the life of the society with which the government is concerned.

EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (prior to the 19th century)

Dating back to Antiquity, Pharaohs, kings and emperors have required pages, treasurers, and tax collectors to administer the practical business of government. Prior to the 19th century, staffing of most public administrations was rife with nepotism, favoritism, and political patronage, which were often referred to as a "spoils system" "Public administrators have been the "eyes and ears" of rulers until relatively recently. In medieval times, the abilities to read and write, add and subtract were as dominated by the educated elite as public employment. Consequently, the need for expert civil servants whose ability to read and write formed the basis for developing expertise in such necessary activities as legal record-keeping, paying and feeding armies and levying taxes. As the European Imperialist age progressed and the military powers extended their hold over other continents and people, the need for a sophisticated public administration grew.

The eighteenth-century noble, King Frederick William I of Prussia, created professorates in Cameralism in an effort to train a new class of public administrators. The universities of Frankfurt an der Oder and University of Halle were Prussian institutions emphasizing economic and social disciplines, with the goal of societal reform. Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi was the most well-known professor of Cameralism. Thus, from a Western European perspective, Classic, Medieval, and Enlightenment-era scholars formed the foundation of the discipline that has come to be called public administration.

Lorenz von Stein, an 1855 German professor from Vienna, is considered the founder of the science of public administration in many parts of the world. In the time of Von Stein, public administration was considered

a form of administrative law, but Von Stein believed this concept too restrictive. Von Stein taught that public administration relies on many pre-established disciplines such as sociology, political, administrative law and public finance. He called public administration an integrating science, and stated that public administrators should be concerned with both theory and practice. He argued that public administration is a science because knowledge is generated and evaluated according to the scientific method. Modern American public administration is an extension of democratic governance, justified by classic and liberal philosophers of the western world ranging from Aristotle to John Locke to Thomas Jefferson (Ryan, M., Mejia, B., and Georgiev,(2010) In the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson is considered the father of public administration. He first formally recognized public administration in an 1887 article entitled "The Study of Administration." The future president wrote that "it is the object of administrative study to discover, first, what government referred to as a "spoils system "Public administrators have been the "eyes and ears" of rulers until relatively recently. In medieval times, the abilities to read and write, add and subtract were as dominated by the educated elite as public employment. Consequently, the need for expert civil servants whose ability to read and write formed the basis for developing expertise in such necessary activities as legal record-keeping, paying and feeding armies and levying taxes. As the European Imperialist age progressed and the militarily powers extended their hold over other continents and people, the need for a sophisticated public administration grew. The eighteenth-century noble, King Frederick William I of Prussia, created professorates in Cameralism in an effort to train a new class of public administrators. The universities of Frankfurt an der Oder and University of Halle were Prussian institutions emphasizing economic and social disciplines, with the goal of societal reform. Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justice was the most well-known professor of Cameralism. Thus, from a Western European perspective, Classic, Medieval, and Enlightenment-era scholars formed the foundation of the discipline that has come to be called public administration. Lorenz von Stein, an 1855 German professor from Vienna, is considered the founder of the science of public administration in many parts of the world. In the time of Von Stein, public administration was considered a form of administrative law, but Von Stein believed this concept too restrictive. Von Stein taught that public administration relies on many pre-established disciplines such as sociology, political, administrative law and public finance. He called public administration an integrating science, and stated that public administrators should be concerned with both theory and practice. He argued that public administration is a science because knowledge is generated and evaluated according to the scientific method.

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- a. Separation of politics and administration
- b. Comparative analysis of political and private organizations
- c. Improving efficiency with business-like practices and attitudes toward daily operations.
- d. Improving the effectiveness of public service through management and by training civil servants, merit-based assessment.

The separation of politics and administration has been the subject of lasting debate. The different perspectives regarding this dichotomy contribute to differentiating characteristics of the suggested generations of public administration.

By the 1920s, scholars of public administration had responded to Wilson's solicitation and thus textbooks in this field were introduced. A few distinguished scholars of that period were, Luther Gulick, Lyndall Urwick, Henri Fayol, Frederick Taylor, and others. Frederick Taylor (1856-1915), another prominent scholar in the field of administration and management also published a book entitled 'The Principles of Scientific Management' (1911). He believed that scientific analysis would lead to the discovery of the 'one best way' to do things and by carrying out an operation. This, according to him could help save cost and time. Taylor's technique was later introduced to private industrialists, and later into the various government organizations (Jeong, 2007).

Taylor's approach is often referred to as Taylor's, Principles, and/or Taylorism. Taylor's scientific management consisted of main four principles (Frederick W. Taylor, 1911). Replace rule-of-thumb work methods with methods based on a scientific study of the tasks. Scientifically select, train, and develop each employee rather than passively leaving them to train themselves. Provide 'Detailed instruction and supervision of each worker in the performance of that worker's discrete task' (Montgomery 1997: 250).

Divide work nearly equally between managers and workers, so that the managers apply scientific management principles to planning the work and the workers actually perform the tasks.

Taylor had very precise ideas about how to introduce his system (approach): 'It is only through enforced standardization of methods, enforced adoption of the best implements and working conditions, and enforced cooperation that this faster work can be assured. And the duty of enforcing

the adoption of standards and enforcing this cooperation rests with management alone.' The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) the leading professional group for public administration was founded in 1939. ASPA sponsors the journal *Public Administration Review*, which was founded in 1940.

US IN THE 1940S

The separation of politics and administration advocated by Wilson continues to play a significant role in public administration today. However, the dominance of this dichotomy was challenged by second generation scholars, beginning in the 1940s. Luther Gulick's fact-value dichotomy was a key contender for Wilson's proposed politics-administration dichotomy. In place of Wilson's first generation split, Gulick advocated a "seamless web of discretion and interaction" (Fry, Brian R. 1989). Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick are two second-generation scholars. Gulick, Urwick, and the new generation of administrators built on the work of contemporary behavioral, administrative, and organizational scholars including Henri Fayol, Fredrick Winslow Taylor, Paul Appleby, Frank Goodnow, and Willam Willoughby. The new generation of organizational theories no longer relied upon logical assumptions and generalizations about human nature like classical and enlightened theorists.

Gulick developed a comprehensive, generic theory of organization that emphasized the scientific method, efficiency, professionalism, structural reform, and executive control. Gulick summarized the duties of administrators with an acronym; POSDCORB, which stands for planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. Fayol developed a systematic, 14-point, treatment of private management. Second-generation theorists drew upon private management practices for administrative sciences. A single, generic management theory bleeding the borders between the private and the public sector was thought to be possible. With the general theory, the administrative theory could be focused on governmental organizations.

Post-World War II To The 1970s

The mid-1940s theorists challenged Wilson and Gulick. The politics- administration dichotomy remained the center of criticism. In the 1960s and 1970s, government itself came under fire as ineffective, inefficient, and largely a wasted effort. The costly American intervention in Vietnam along with domestic scandals including the bugging of Democratic party headquarters (the 1974 Watergatescandal) are two examples of self-destructive government behavior that alienated citizens. The costly Vietnam War alienated US citizens from their government (pictured is Operation Arc Light, a US bombing operation) There was a call by citizens for efficient administration to replace ineffective, wasteful bureaucracy. Public administration would have to distance itself from politics to answer this call and remain effective. Elected officials supported these reforms. The Hoover Commission chaired by University of Chicago professor Louis Brownlow, to examine reorganization of government. Brownlow subsequently founded the Public Administration Service (PAS) at the university, an organization which has provided consulting services to all levels of government until the 1970s. Concurrently, after World War II, the whole concept of public administration expanded to include policy-making and analysis, thus the study of 'administrative policy making and analysis' was introduced and enhanced into the government decision-making bodies. Later on, the human factor became a predominant concern and emphasis in the study of Public Administration. This period witnessed the development and inclusion of other social sciences knowledge, predominantly, psychology, anthropology, and sociology, into the study of public administration (Jeong, 2007). Henceforth, the emergence of scholars such as, Fritz Morstein Marx with his book 'The Elements of Public Administration' (1946), Paul H. Appleby 'Policy and Administration' (1952), Frank Marini 'Towards a New Public Administration' (1971), and others that have contributed positively in these endeavors.

1980s—1990s

In the late 1980s, yet another generation of public administration theorists began to displace the last. The new theory, which came to be called New Public Management, was proposed by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in their book *Reinventing Government*(pp. 247—255)The new model advocated the use of private sector-style models, organizational ideas and values to improve the efficiency and service-orientation of the public sector. During the Clinton Administration (1993—2001), Vice President Al Gore adopted and reformed federal agencies using NPM approaches. In the 1990s, new public management became prevalent throughout the bureaucracies of the US, the UK and, to a lesser extent, in Canada. Some modern authors define NPM as a combination of splitting large bureaucracies into smaller, more fragmented agencies, encouraging competition

between different public agencies, and encouraging competition between public agencies and private firms and using economic incentives lines (e.g., performance pay for senior executives or user-pay models).

Patrick Dunleavy et al.(2006) NPM treats individuals as “customers” or “clients” (in the private sector sense), rather than as citizens.(Diane Stone, 2008) Some critics argue that the New Public Management concept of treating people as “customers” rather than “citizens” is an inappropriate borrowing from the private sector model, because businesses see customers are a means to an end (profit), rather than as the proprietors of government (the owners), opposed to merely the customers of a business (the patrons). In New Public Management, people are viewed as economic units not democratic participants. Nevertheless, the model is still widely accepted at all levels of government and in many OECD nations.

LATE 1990S—2000

In the late 1990s, Janet and Robert Denhardt proposed a new public services model in response to the dominance of NPM.(Denhardt et al,2000),A successor to NPM is digital era governance, focusing on themes of reintegrating government responsibilities, needs-based holism (executing duties in cursive ways), and digitalization (exploiting the transformational capabilities of modern IT and digital storage).One example of this is openforum.com.au, an Australian non-for-profit Democracy project which invites politicians, senior public servants, academics, business people and other key stakeholders to engage in high-level policy debate. Another new public service model is what has been called New Public Governance, an approach which includes a centralization of power; an increased number, role and influence of partisan-political staff; personal-politicization of appointments to the senior public service; and, the assumption that the public service is promiscuously partisan for the government of the day. (Aucoin, P.2008) Increasingly, public policy academics and practitioners have utilized the theoretical concepts of political economy to explain policy outcomes such as the success or failure of reform efforts and/or the persistence of sub-optimal outcomes. (Corduneanu-Huci 2012).

III. Recommendation

From all the definitions listed above, it is obvious that there is no universal acceptable definition of Public Administration. However, this group is of the opinion that Public Administration has to do with the governing or administration of the people in a particular enclave towards rendering services that will improve the quality of life of the people. The government through the instrument of public service utilizes the available resources of the people to provide their basic needs such as cloth, food, shelter and security.

IV. Conclusion

Public administration can be seen as the activities of government at the Federal, State, and Local levels. It is concerned with the executive, operative and the most obvious part of the government which deals with the formulation and enforcement of public policies. It is public administration that brings about the activities of the government to the people. It is through effective and efficient public administration that exposed the government efforts in rendering quality service to its citizen.

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