

Modern Public Administration - Managing Public & Nonprofit Organizations

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Abstract

The term Public Administration is the one concept that is yet to settle properly into one internationally recognized definition. It has never achieved a definition that may command the general assent of the subject. As Leonard White posits, to define a subject is to fix its boundaries or if this turns out to be fuzzy, its essence and core characters can be identified. But unfortunately for "Public Administration", this has proven to be so intricate a problem that is said to be suffering a "crisis of identity" (Leonard, 1929, *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*). Development of the very concept is yet another controversially debated matter. The study of public administration was initially clustered under political science, unlike today, in which case it is regarded as a discipline of its own. Evolution of this discipline of public administration has commonly been attributed to Woodrow Wilson who contended for the separation of the two, that is, public administration and Political science (James, 1968, *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*). In this essay, attention has once again been given to the principle concepts that have over the time been applied in the study and understanding of public administration as a discipline.

Ways through which inter-organizational can improve our Understanding of Public Administration

As per the arguments of James Charlesworth, Inter-organizational approach is that system which facilitates the flow of communication and information within an organization or between organizations, aimed at reaching a desired chain of management system. Inter-organizational system is a business oriented paradigm its basic mandates include forecasting on the needs and desires of the clients and lubrication the relationships between the organization and its clients. This approach is focused at increasing organizational reputation in terms of service deliveries and productivity (James, C. 1968. *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*).

An organization may apply the Inter-organizational system for quite a number of reasons. Such reasons may include, pursuance of economic goals, increasing its competitiveness, encouraging a global system of communication, benefiting from technological innovations, organizational risk reduction and overcoming barriers in its investments (James, C. 1968).

Public Administration on the other hand is simply defined as the management of public affairs. The term Public refers to people who are identified with a recognized geographical boundary that is legitimate and sovereign. "Administration" is derived from the Latin word, "Ad", meaning, people, and "minstrate", to imply, management of affairs. Administration as a concept may thus be defined as the administration of peoples' affairs. It has also been defined as the co-operation and co-ordination of efforts aimed at achieving definite goals. Co-ordination here carries the sense of direction (Leonard, 1929, *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*). According to Herbert Simon,

administration is “the activity of groups of people co-operating to accomplish common goals”. Dwight Waldo defines it as “human actions directed towards the achievement of desired goals (Leonard, 1929).

From these definitions, that of inter-organizational system and public administration which have been defined separately in the form of what “public” implies and then “administration”, there are consensuses. In both cases, focus is given on how best to achieve the organizational desired goals. Management of people’s affairs is also a key factor in the two scenarios.

In the Inter-organizational system, relationship between the organization and its clients is given a salient attention by fostering for smooth flow of communication between these two entities, that is, the clients and the organization. Public administration is essentially concerned with the administration or management of the people’s affairs. It’s thus appropriate to say that inter-organizational approach may help improve on our understanding of public administration.

Public Policy: Its Development and Implementation

A single decision that affects the behaviors and conducts of people within an organization and between organizations and its public spheres is referred to as a public policy. A policy may be defined as the right of every individual in a specific group or an organization to act or decide on certain issues that are seemingly recognized by the group members to be in order, common binding knowledge , and acceptable to all parties involved (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968, *The Study of Policy Formulation*).

Policies are framed in general terms and conditions that can enable an organization to have a framework within which it is capable of working towards achieving its goals and objectives. In “the context of public administration”, a policy is also perceived to be a guiding principle through which the government administration makes decisions and takes appropriate administrative measures (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968). Public policy is therefore the “general platform on which a government provides services to the people”. However, the framework should form a basis for decision making and action provisions in the interest of the general public (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968).

The role of policy making and formulation is taken care of by an arm of government known as the legislature. Implementation of the same is yet another responsibility assigned to a different arm of government called the executive.

In spite of the arguments of Woodrow Wilson that the process of policy making falls outside the scope of public administration (Nicholas, 2004, *Public Administration and Public Affairs*), public administration plays a significant role in the policy making process. The process of making public policies begins with public administration which is in close contact with the public. The administration is responsible for providing mechanism through which the policies are made. It also gives information that is always required for the formulation of the policy making process (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968, *The Study of Policy Formulation*).

A number of models have been in use when formulating policies. Among them is the normative policy making models, descriptive models and the theory of comprehensive rationality. Normative model asserts that a policy should try to address

the question of what the organization is or ought to be. Descriptive model is pegged on how the policies are made based on what has been observed rather than what ought to be observed. Comprehensive rationality posits that policy formulation should be a subject of multi-dimensional processes and procedures before it qualifies to be called a public policy (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968).

This model of comprehensive rationality was, however, disapproved by Herbert Simon who proposed for the model of bounded rationality. Simon's policy making model of bounded rationality contends that policy makers should not always seek for many good alternatives available for policy making, but should instead go for the best option feasible within the limits of human beings (James, 1968, *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*).

Public Administration versus Private Business

Public administration is the management of governmental affairs. It's, to some extent, synonymous to a private business or private administration. At the same time, there are some sharp distinctions between the two, that is, public administration and private business.

The first similarity that exists between public and private business administration is that they are both forms of administration characterized by division of labor and organizational principles. In both cases, work is divided on the basis of specialization and they apply the principle of departmentalization in managing a systematic and "smooth" flow of operations (Nicholas, 2004).

Most of the skills, techniques and procedures used in both cases are synonymous. For instance, procedures involved in decision making, budgeting, and

accounting. The element of cooperation, coordination and bureaucracy can also be pinpointed in these two scenarios (Nicholas, 2004).

There are, though, quite a number of dissimilarities compared to the few differences highlighted here. Public administration is established on the basis of laws and governmental legalities, while private businesses are created by individuals based on some common private policies and mutual agreements. Public administration, unlike a private business, is subject to public scrutiny. The government is held accountable to its operations by the people. This is not the same with privatized sectors which follow a given set of autonomous rules and regulations and are not accountable to the public fraternities (Nicholas, 2004). Private administrations are basically profit oriented organizations, unlike public administration which is funded through taxations and with the motive of delivering services equally and fairly to the public domain. In the same vein, public administration do not advertise their services like the private businesses do (Nicholas, 2004).

There could be more to tell between the two, but these form part of the key differences and similarities that can easily be observed between public administration and private businesses.

Agencies of the executive branch of government

Executive arm of the government is an organ responsible for “the administration and enforcement of laws passed by the legislature. Chief executive Office to this organ of the government is called the governor. He or she, however shares the powers and responsibilities with some other government elected officials (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968).

The executive arm of the government is made up of a number of government agencies. Among them are, “the governor’s office or the office of the president, the office of Secretary of State, office of the Attorney general, department lieutenant governor, office of the treasure, commission of insurance, commission of elections” and some other subordinating agencies and departments (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968).

Politics versus Administration

Politics are concerned with the social interactions and dispositions which are directly or indirectly aimed at obtaining binding decisions about who have desired resources and when and how these resources can be obtained in any enduring social system Harold Lasswell, a renowned political scientist, posits that politics is all about who gets what, when and how (Nicholas, 2004). Administration on the other hand is the co-operation and co-ordination of efforts aimed at achieving specific goals and objectives.

Politics comes into administration when certain decisions and policies have to be made. Who makes the policies and/or the decisions, and in whose interest the policies or decisions are made is therefore a matter of debate. The debates are basically defined by the interests, desires and opinions of the politicians, making administration process to be more of a political affair rather than a public affair.

Public Administration in relation to Democratic Individualism, Equality and Liberty

Democratic Individualism is a philosophical theory which holds that “all values are human centered, the individuals are of supreme importance and all the individuals are morally equal” (James, 1968). These individualistic arguments have been attributed

to Britain philosophers like Jeremy Bethem and Adam Smith. The philosophy of Individualism gives also of emphasis on attributes such as self reliance, mutual respect and individual privacies. According to this notion of democratic individualism, public administration should try as much as possible to “keep its interferences in the lives of individuals at a minimum level” (James, 1968). Individuals should be free and flexible in making decisions on how they prefer to be governed rather than the government administration deciding on how to administer them. Democratic individualism generally enforces for the prosperity of every individual. People are allowed to explore their potentials of becoming better individuals in the society in the most moral ways they can (James, 1968, *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*).

Connection between Individual democracy and liberty or equality may, however, be a matter of debate. While equality has much to do with the even and fair distribution of resources, liberty is a concept of being neutral in making decisions and choices, it is the freedom of choice and decision making (James, 1968). Democracy on the one hand is full of connotations, but more precisely, it can generally be perceived as the voice of the people. It calls for the mass opinions instead of good but limited opinions (Nicholas, 2004). Democratic Individualism is another thing altogether, more or less synonymous to liberty.

In public administration, all the three play a critical role. Public administrators are indebted to be liberal in formulating policies, democratic in making decisions and with the interests of the people at heart. Distribution of resources and/or services that is not done evenly may not be taken well by the public, so there ought to be equality in public administration.

Basic Managerial Skills

Management is the practice of establishing cohesiveness and togetherness of the people working within an organization, with the aim of achieving the organizational objectives and goals. It involves processes like planning, staffing, leading, controlling and organizing a governmental or a business entity whose basic mandate is to accomplish a set of goals (Nicholas, 2004).

However, achieving the goals require some management skills and expertise. The act of management requires that an individual leading the organization be an experienced leader at least with skills in planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and also good at formulating administrative policies.

In the process of implementing policies or business strategies, the policies must be discussed, first by all the staffs and the managerial personnel. The managers have to be well versed on where and how to implement policies. They then devise a plan of action, followed by a series of assessment of the policies. The regular assessments are meant to establish a conducive environment for the implementation process, identifying the weaknesses and strengths of the policies, determining mission and vision, and coming up with an appropriate implementation plan (Raymond, A. & Gergen, K., 1968, *The Study of Policy Formulation*).

Generally, managerial skills in an administrative leader will determine the success or the failure of an organization. A leader needs to be extensively informed on management roles, be aware of the internal and external factors likely to influence organizational operations, be a critical thinker in making decision, an analyst, and of good morals

Bureaucracy and Democracy

The concepts of democracy and bureaucracy are generally perceived as “antithetical approaches to providing governance for a society” (James, 1968).

Bureaucracy is a hierarchical system of management where authority and powers are concentrated at the top management offices as it goes down the organizational system (James, 1968).

In a bureaucratic system, activities of the organizations are conducted in a given order, with the top leader possessing the most powers and authorities to dictate what the organization should do and how. This is quite opposed to democracy, in which case, the say of the majority prevails rather than the superiors leading the way. There is a sense of specialization in bureaucracy, where people do what they know best (James, 1968). In democracy, the sense of specializing may be lacking, as everyone has a say on how he or she expect things to be done.

Ethical deliberation in Public Administration

Ethics can be described as a philosophical study of principles that govern the conduct of people. An ethical policy, also referred to as code of conduct, or a set of social-cultural doctrines, can be a significant management tool in ascertaining and communicating the reputation of an organization (Leonard, 1929).

Visibility in the Public, Private and Non-profit organizations

Visibility is concerned with the management protocols, openness and the closeness that exist between an organization and the people or the clients it serves. In most case, as (James, 1968) confirms, the operations of public administrations remains in “cognito”, or obscured to the public. Who delivers what service and when, is not clearly defined. Public administrations have largely been perceived as more of policy makers than profit makers, as they do not advertise themselves or the services they render to the public. Both the private and the non-profit organizations are more exposed to the clients or the people, as they identify themselves, who they are, what they do and their target audiences, unlike in public administration which has no specific audience to be served but the entire public.

The management protocol in the public organization is more rigid and suffers from what public administrators have termed as the “the red tape”. This is a situation where a given set of legal procedures have to be strictly followed in executing programs or delivering services to the public arenas. In the private and non-organizational administrations, the problem of red tape is not very visible; the mission is always to deliver the services with the immediate effect to the clients, not having to follow the prolonged and at times unnecessary legal procedures (James, C. 1968. *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*).

Should the Government run more like a Business?

No, the government is far from being a business entity whose principle mandates are to gain profits from the public domains. Government administrative organs should be autonomous and very independent from the private business sectors. Public administration, unlike private sectors is supposed to operate in ways that the interest of the public is at the core of its undertakings, working for the people and not for a few groups of individuals.

Nevertheless, business entities are not so much concerned with public affairs, but very much apprehensive about their relationship with the public. Business administrations have a common agenda for fostering good relationships with the public, that is, to ascertain their profit oriented goals. It is thus not appropriate that government entities be run like businesses if the interests and desires of the peoples are to be observed.

References

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