

The Milestones of the Development of Public Administration as a Distinct Field of Study: A Commentary

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Abstract: - This paper examined the development of public administration as a field of study. Being an evolving area of human enterprise, it has played a significant role in governance and public service reforms in the developed and developing countries of the world. The dynamic nature of public administration indicates that government operations will continue to under go changes. The changes that will be experienced in government operations will not only transform processes but institutions where these processes will be deployed. The methodology used for this paper is the secondary data from secondary sources such as existing literature from the textbooks, journals and materials downloaded from the internet. The paper covers definition of public administration, generic functions of public administration, history of public administration, approaches and schools of administrative theory in public administration and prospects of public administration. The paper concluded that the dynamic nature of public administration has made the field worth studying because of its impact on governance and public service reforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

Public Administration is a field of study that has being in existence for ages and its history is as old as that of human civilization. This field of study is an engine for driving governance and public service reforms in the developed and developing countries of the world. Governments as the primary instruments of democracy in the society exercise the power of the state on behalf of the people of the society in that territory which constitutes the state. Government makes policies to respond to the needs of the communities which it must serve, and then organizes and enables its administration to give practical effect to those policies. This implies that well-organized and enabled administrations will successfully engage in thought processes and actions to deliver services that satisfy the needs of the society.

Public administration has never been static; its nature has been evolving and changing as result of global forces and factors. It is in this connection that Robinson(2015) said Public administration in the 21st century is undergoing dramatic change, especially in advanced economies, but also in many parts of the developing world. Globalization and the pluralization of service provision are the driving forces behind these changes. Policy problems faced by governments are increasingly complex, wicked and global, rather than simple, linear, and national in focus. The changes in public

administration has led to an ever-increasing need for a value-orientated public service approach based on public administrative practices to provide efficient and effective services to meet the changing needs of society. Administration is not an end in itself, but is still a means to an end and the relationship between administration, the government and the environment in order to meet the needs of society is obvious.

It is against this background that this paper is aimed at discussing public administration in details from its old to new nature and from its traditional to modern view point. Generally, this discussion will enable us have a full grasp of public administration and how it has come about including its impact on governance and public service reforms.

II. DEFINITION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Public administration as a dynamic concept can be approached and defined in diverse ways. Cloete (1967) defined public administration in terms of its generic functions to mean public policy-making, organizing, financing, staffing, determining work methods and procedures and controlling.

Coetzee (1988) provide some of the definitions of public administration as:

- ❖ The executive branch of government; civil service; bureaucracy; the formulation, implementation, evaluation and modification of public policy. The term represents a broad ranging, amorphous combination of theory and practice whose objectives are to promote understanding of government and its relationships with society, to encourage public policies that are more responsive to social needs, and to institute managerial practices in public bureaucracies that are designed to achieve effectiveness and efficiency and, increasingly, to meet the deeper human needs of citizens. The term also refers to all employees of government except members of the legislature, the chief executive, and judicial officials, or high-level employees of government departments or agencies that make non-routine decisions that set standards to be carried by subordinates.

- ❖ Public administration is decision making, planning the work to be done, formulating objectives and goals, working with the legislature and citizen organizations to gain public support and funds for government programs, establishing and revising organization, directing and supervising employees, providing leadership, communicating and receiving communications, determining work methods and procedures, appraising performance, exercising controls, and other functions performed by government executives and supervisors. It is the action part of government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realized.
- ❖ Public administration is a comprehensive and peculiar field of activity, consisting of numerous activities, processes or functions performed by public officials working in public institutions, and aimed at producing goods and rendering services for the benefits of the community. These activities or functions can be classified into three groups:
 - ✓ *The generic administrative activities or functions of policy-making, financing, organizing, staffing, the determination of work procedures, and the devising of methods of control.*
 - ✓ *Functional activities peculiar to specific services such as education, nursing, public works, or defence.*
 - ✓ *The auxiliary functions such as decision making, data processing, planning, programming and communication, which are necessary to simplify or expedite the execution of the generic administrative functions and the functional activities.*

The summary of the above definitions is that public administration consists of activities that form part of the executive, as opposed to the legislative and judicial powers of the administrative side of government. The focus is to marshal human and material resources in order to achieve the objective of public policy. That is, the production of certain products and the rendering of services for the benefit of society in order to provide for an acceptable way of life for that society. The success or failure of these activities of the state depends upon how efficient public officials implement policies

Rosenbloom and Kravchuk (2002) viewed public administration as the use of managerial, political and legal theories and processes to fulfill legislative, executive and judicial mandates for the provision of government regulating and service functions.

The definitions above can narrow the definition of public administration to mean planning, organizing and conducting government business with the available resources to accomplish the goals set by public policy. Public

administration is an instrument for good governance and effective public service system.

III. GENERIC FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The universal and basic functions of public administrations revolve around the following:

Public policy

This is authoritative allocation of values through the political system to individuals in society and it is a purposive course of action to be followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. Public policy is thus a response to opportunities or situations that need to be attended through well-conceived and clear goals followed by government action. Public policy consists of details as to what should be done, by whom, when, how and with what resources.

Financing

Sound, transparent and accountable management of public finances is at the core of organizational performance. Financial performance management as a prerequisite for organizational performance determines to a large extent the government's capacity to implement policy and manage public resources through its own institutions and systems. Financial performance provides the foundations upon which to build effective, capable and accountable administrations, able to fulfill their responsibilities and deliver basic services to the poor.

In order for a government to render services to its citizens, it needs money to finance the government and deliver the services. The state uses public money and receives this public money from the public in the form of taxes, tariffs, levies, fees, fines and loans.

Human Resources Management/ Personnel Administration

This is a multifaceted function, which that includes the generic enabling functions of policy-making, financing, staffing, organization, procedures and control, as well as social and labour issues. Since no government department can function without money, it cannot function without people to carry out its work. Public institutions generally have a division that deals with human resource management based on legislation of the government of the day. Human resources are about people and the administrative processes associated with them. It is about employee satisfaction and motivation and performance.

Organization

The process of organization involves, among others, different structural arrangements, line and staff units, span of control, delegation of authority, centralization and decentralization and co-ordination of activities.

Methods and Procedures

Methods and procedures relate to administrative practices that are designed to make it possible for administrators to carry out their daily work. These methods and procedures are not law, but they are derived from a combination of the many agreed authorizations the institution gives to the administrators to do their work. Methods and procedures are usually put in writing in the form of manuals or managerial policies and need to be revised regularly to ensure improvement and control.

Control over the administration

The ultimate aim of control over the administration is accountability and transparency of government. Control is applicable to financing, staffing, procedures and methods and organizing, as well as control itself. The control process normally starts by the setting of standards and then measuring the performance against the set standards. Control is also linked to governance with specific reference to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence

Management

Public management refers to the study of management as a unit of administration. Administration uses policy, finance, personnel, procedures and control for goal attainment, whereas management is concerned with the mobilization of the individual skills of good managers to make administrative tools operational by applying intellectual activities.

IV. HISTORY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: OLD TO NEW

As earlier stated, this paper is focused on the journey of public administration and the landmark achievements of this journey. This journey can be explained in phases or modes.

United Nations (2007) observed that over the past 50 years, the concept of public administration has gone through four phases. First phase, public administration was perceived to be a set of state structures, institutions, and processes. It was characterized, among other features, by hierarchy, continuity, impartiality, standardization, legal-rational authority, and professionalism. It was expected to provide human security and protection of property, establish and enforce societal standards, and sustain the rule of law, among other functions. Yet, in practice, traditional public administration was severely criticized in the 1970s for red tape, slowness, paternalism vis-à-vis citizens, wasting resources, and a greater focus on processes and procedures rather than results.

The second phase, public management, focused on the application of management principles, including efficiency in utilization of resources, effectiveness, customer orientation, reliance on market forces, and greater sensitivity to public needs. It called for expanding the role of the private sector and

correspondingly, minimizing the size of the public sector and the domain of traditional public administration. It sought to use private sector principles in public sector organizations.

The third phase, New Public Management (NPM), continued the previous trends. It focused on outcome-oriented partnerships between the public and the private sector to provide services to citizens. Its main principles were: (1) flexibility to enable managers to cope with on going changes in the national and global environment; (2) empowerment of citizens to promote more efficient, entrepreneurial, and results-oriented management including “steering rather than rowing;” (3) new responsibility mechanisms that go beyond compliance mechanisms to search for innovations and results over processes; (4) introducing business principles into public affairs, including out-sourcing and contracting out; (5) promoting professional ethics in the public sphere; and (6) performance management and budgeting.

The fourth phase, governance, has been defined as a system of values, policies, and institutions by which a society manages its economic, social, and political affairs through interactions within and among the State, civil society and the private sector. It comprises the mechanisms and processes through which citizens and groups can articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations. It provides the rules, institutions, and practices that set limits and provide incentives for individuals, organizations and firms.

Osborne (2006) outlined three modes that moved public administration from its old state to new state with their associated principal characteristics. **Public Administration** (PA-statist and bureaucratic), **New Public Management** (NPM-competitive and minimalist) and **New Public Governance** (NPG-plural and pluralist).

The Old Public Administration/Bureaucratic Model

This mode was influenced by the ideas of Max Weber, the prevailing approach to public administration for much of the 20th century drew on a model of bureaucracy based on the twin principles of hierarchy and meritocracy. It was initially introduced as part of wide-ranging bureaucratic reforms in the United Kingdom and Prussia in the late 19th century to overcome patrimonial systems of administration where patronage and favouritism dominated government decisions and public appointments. This approach had a number of distinctive features. It relied on centralized control, set rules and guidelines, separated policymaking from implementation, and employed a hierarchical organizational structure (top-down). The watchwords were efficiency and effectiveness in the management of budgetary and human resources. McCourt (2013) sets out the central features of this model:

- ✓ A separation between politics and elected politicians on the one hand and administration and appointed administrators on the other;

- ✓ Administration is continuous, predictable and rule-governed;
- ✓ Administrators are appointed on the basis of qualifications, and are trained professionals;
- ✓ There is a functional division of labour, and a hierarchy of tasks and people;
- ✓ Resources belong to the organization, not to the individuals who work in it;
- ✓ Public servants serve public rather than private interest.

This “command and control” approach to public administration was the reference point for bureaucratic systems introduced around the world under colonial rule and then after independence in most Commonwealth countries. Other countries introduced variants of this model, primarily drawing on French and Japanese experience, where political factors influence public appointments under a centralized bureaucratic model. This approach worked well in a number of countries, notably in Singapore where the post-independence political leadership built a high quality and efficient civil service along these lines.

The New Public Management/Competitive Model

The New Public Management (NPM) refers to a series of novel approaches to public administration and management that emerged in a number of OECD countries in the 1980s. The NPM model arose in reaction to the limitations of the old public administration in adjusting to the demands of a competitive market economy. While cost containment was a key driver in the adoption of NPM approaches, injecting principles of competition and private sector management lay at the heart of the NPM approach. The key elements of the NPM can be summarized as follows (Osborne, 2006):

- ✓ An attention to lessons from private-sector management;
- ✓ The growth both of hands-on “management”, in its own right and not as an offshoot of professionalism, and of “arm’s-length” organizations where policy implementation is organizationally distanced from the policymakers (as opposed to the “inter-personal” distancing of the policy/administration split);
- ✓ A focus upon entrepreneurial leadership within public service organizations;
- ✓ An emphasis on input and output control and evaluation and on performance management and audit;
- ✓ The disaggregation of public services to their most basic units and a focus on their cost management; and
- ✓ The growth of use of markets, competition and contracts for resource allocation and service delivery within public services.

The NPM approach took root in the UK, New Zealand, the USA and Scandinavia from the mid-1980s.

The New Public Governance/Pluralist Model

The New Public Governance (NPG) approach proposed by Osborne (2006, 2010) adopts a very different starting point from the two earlier public management traditions. In contrast with the emphasis on bureaucratic hierarchy and administrative interest as the defining features of the old public administration and the managerial discretion and contractual mechanisms associated with NPM, the NPG approach places citizens rather than government at the center of its frame of reference. In a similar vein Bourgon (2007) calls for a New Public Administration theory that is grounded in the concepts of citizenship and the public interest, expressed as the shared interests of citizens rather than as the aggregation of individual interests determined by elected officials or market preferences. The centrality of citizens as co-producers of policies and the delivery of services fundamentally distinguishes the New Public Governance approach from both the statist approach associated with the old public administration and market-based NPM approaches, rather than simply proposing a new form of public administration. NPG incorporates a number of features:

- ✓ The state is both plural in that public service delivery is undertaken by multiple inter-dependent actors and pluralist in that multiple processes and inputs shape policy making;
- ✓ The fragmentation of policy space with the emergence of multiple actors and jurisdictions alongside growing interdependence between actors operating at local, national and global levels;
- ✓ Government is treated as just one actor alongside others engaged in policy deliberation and service delivery and is no longer assumed to be the sole or predominant force shaping public policy and implementation; and
- ✓ The NPG approach emphasizes inter-organizational relationships and the governance of processes, in which trust, relational capital and relational contracts serve as the core governance mechanisms, rather than organizational form and function

The views of United Nations (2007) and Osborne(2006) is a clear indication that public administration as a field of study came a long way and as the field was evolving, its relevance and significance became pronounced to government operations and activities and more especially to the society. In summary, the journey of public administration has enabled us to pinpoint the features of bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organization and this can be seen on table.1 below.

Features of Bureaucratic and Post-Bureaucratic Organization

Characteristics of the bureaucratic organization	Characteristics of the post-bureaucratic organization
Policy and management culture	
Organization-centered Emphasis on needs of organization itself	Citizen-centered Quality service to citizens (and clients/stakeholders) – Financial performance
Position power Control, command and compliance	Participative leadership Shared values and participative decision-making for financial performance
Rule-centered Rules, procedures and constraints	People-centered An empowering and caring milieu for employees for financial performance
Independent action Limited consultation, co-operation and co-ordination	Collective action Consultation, co-operation and co-ordination for financial performance
Status quo-orientated Avoiding risks and mistakes	Change-orientated Innovation, risk-taking and continued empowerment for financial performance
Process-orientated Accountability for process	Results-orientated Accountability for results and financial performance
Structure	
Centralized Hierarchy and central controls	Decentralized Decentralization of authority and control for financial performance
Departmental form Most programmes delivered by operating departments	Non-departmental form Programmes delivered by wide variety of mechanisms for financial performance

Source: Adapted from Kernaghan *et al.* 2005.

V. APPROACHES AND SCHOOLS OF ADMINISTRATIVE THEORY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Public Administration as a field of study has been influenced by many disciplines such as Political Science, Law, Sociology, Psychology, History and Business Management. According to Rosenbloom and Kravchuk (2002), there are three main theoretical approaches, namely the managerial, the political and the legal, which have influenced the understanding and practice of public administration.

Managerial Approach

The managerial approach is that government's core focus should be on what government can successfully do and how it can succeed with maximum efficiency (Rosenbloom & Kravchuk (2002). Thus, according to the managerial approach, public administration should strive towards maximising economy, efficiency and effectiveness using practices similar to those prevalent in the private sector.

Classical administrative theories, such as the scientific management movement of Frederick W. Taylor (1856-1915), the administrative principles of Henry Fayol (1841-1925) and the bureaucratic model of Max Weber (1864-1920) influenced managerial public administration.

The scientific management movement of Taylor prescribed a set of principles to be followed for an organisation to be effective and efficient. These are: (i)

systematic scientific methods of measuring and managing individual work elements; (ii) scientific selection of personnel; (iii) financial incentives to obtain high performance of workers; and (iv) specialization of function, namely establishing logical divisions within work roles and responsibilities between workers and management.

Fayol's (1841-1925) 14 principles of administration are considered to be essential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations. The 14 principles of administration developed by Fayol are division of labour, authority, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction, subordination of particular to general interests, remuneration, centralization, hierarchy, order, equity, stability of personnel, initiative and unity of personnel or esprit de corps

Max Weber (1864-1920) emphasized formal organizational structures as a requisite for effective and efficient organizations. Weber described an ideal type of bureaucracy as characterized by a high degree of specialization, impersonal relations, the merit system of appointment and hierarchical authority structure.

Political approach

The political approach to public administration stressed the value of representativeness, political and administrative responsiveness, and accountability to the citizenry through elected officials. These values, which promote transparency and participation in administrative decision-making, were seen as crucial for the maintenance of

constitutional democracy. Thus, it was argued that incorporating them into all aspects of government, including public management, was a necessity. Accordingly, public administration as a policy-making center of government must be structured in a way that provides political representation to a comprehensive variety of the organized political, economic and social interests that are found in society at large.

Legal approach

The legal approach embodies three central values. The first is procedural due process, a term which stands for the value of fundamental fairness, requiring procedures designed to protect individuals from malicious, arbitrary, capricious, or unconstitutional harm at the hands of the government. The second value concerns individual substantive rights as embodied in the constitutions of many contemporary states. Thus, the maximisation of individual rights and liberties is viewed as a necessity within the political system in general and in public administration in particular. The third value is equity, which stands for the value of fairness in the relationship between private parties and government. It encompasses much of the constitutional requirement of equal protection.

VI. PROSPECTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Taking a critical look at the journey of public administration as a field of study, that is from public administration to public management and now public governance, government operations are now involving and participating, as the state is both plural in that public service delivery is undertaken by multiple inter-dependent actors, government is treated as just one actor alongside others engaged in policy deliberation and service delivery and is no longer assumed to be the sole or predominant force shaping public policy and implementation, building collaborative relationships with citizens and groups of citizens, encouraging shared responsibilities, disseminating information to elevate public discourse and to foster a shared understanding of public issues and finally seeking opportunities to involve citizens in government activities. Therefore, the need to carry stakeholders along in governance activities is the focus and the hallmark of the new public administration.

VII. CONCLUSION

Public administration is an evolving field of study that is impacting positively on governance and public service reforms in the developing and developed countries of the world. This is to say that as the field keeps evolving, government operations and public service reforms will be taking new dimensions and shapes. This paper concluded that the dynamic nature of public administration that moved its focus from the old to new public administration and public governance will shift its focus in the near future to another level of development that will improve government operations and service to citizens drastically. One can know say that public administration worth studying considering its relevance to governance and public service reforms that facilitates socio- economic and political development across nations.

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