

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY: AN INTRODUCTION

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Contents

1. Prologue
 2. Public Policymaking and Organizational Context
 3. Development of Administration: Ancient
 4. Modern Systems
 5. Contemporary Developments
 6. Administrative Management
 7. Public Policy
 8. Epilogue
- Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

1. Prologue

“If men were angels, wrote Alexander Hamilton in 1788 under the pseudonym *Publius*, “no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary”. And we all know that we are not angels—not by any long shot. People living in a state of nature—whatever, the nature of state was (Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, for example)—realized that they were not living well, and organized themselves into a civil society. That was also the beginning of public administration, if administration were to be defined as two or more people working together towards an agreed upon objective. Public administration is as old as civilization itself, and the two remain inseparable.

That UNESCO, in its encyclopedic venture, identified public administration as a “life support system” on a par with such subjects as biology, environment etc., is both admirable and gratifying. It is admirable in that there is a final recognition of the inevitable importance of public administration, and gratifying in that it got the recognition it richly deserves despite all the current clamor for government “privatization,” “right sizing,” “downsizing,” and so on. Even the New Public Management (NPM)—despite the debate whether it signifies a paradigm shift or not—with its reliance on the market model cannot but recognize the inevitability of public administration. Even a country like the United States—a bastion of capitalism and fierce individualism—came to recognize the crucial need for public administration and regulation as far back as in the 1930s, when there was an explosion of state activity under the New Deal. The same necessity has been further reinforced, if any one were to

have any doubts, since the disastrous events of September 11, 2001 and the near meltdown of the corporate ethic of the year 2002. In the case of the former, the nation turned to public servants for help—public servants who were ready and willing to, and in fact did, put their lives on the line while running up the stairs of the World Trade Center towers, rescuing those people running down the stairs in an attempt to escape from the inferno. In the case of the latter, suddenly all eyes are on the President and the Congress for more and stricter regulations controlling the behavior of corporate executives who apparently are driven by only one motive—lining their own pockets, much to the detriment of the shareholders and the society.

Thus, although how much public administration is enough is a continuously debated point, it would be sheer foolishness to question its legitimacy and the very need itself. “For forms of Government, let fools contest,” wrote Alexander Pope, “whatever is best administered is best.” Stating that he did not mean to claim that one form of government is better than the other, he explained further, thus:

... (N)o form of Government, however excellent or preferable in itself, can be sufficient to make people happy, unless it be administered with integrity. On ye contrary, the Best sort of Government, when ye Form of it is preserved, and the administration is corrupt, is most dangerous.

Following are several perspectives on different aspects of public administration and policy, starting at first with placing the subject matter in proper political and organizational context.

2. Public Policymaking and Organizational Context

The current commonly observed tendency is the proliferation of democracy. The study of its contributions, even failures, does not cease. There has been a concerted effort of late to export and institute democratic forms of government in the comity of nations, including in the Middle East—that bastion of autocratic rule. But the belief that what works in one culture will necessarily work similarly in another is misplaced. Hence the importance of “ecological study” as advocated by John M. Gaus and Fred W. Riggs. Others, such as Almond and Verba, have empirically studied the “civic culture” to assess the working of polities. Basically, the admonition of most comparativists is to first know the people and their culture before trying to understand the working of their governmental institutions. This was precisely what Plato succinctly stated about 386 BC. In his Republic, he says to Glaucon:

Do you know...that governments vary as the dispositions of men vary, and that there must be as many of the one as there are of the other? For, we cannot suppose that the States are made of ‘oak and rock,’ and not out of human nature.... The States are as the men are; they grow out of human characters.

There is always an interaction between social and political systems. Michie believes that market mechanisms alone will not lead to development, particularly in less developed countries (LDCs); neither would decentralization. State intervention is necessary, and even crucial. The issues, however, are what kind of intervention, and how much of it.

She examines at what level—federal, state or local—the various decisions are to be made, and what tools the governments have at their disposal to make appropriate decisions.

Among the several societal groups, the most important criterion for an efficient working and well-being of a democracy is the successful working of political parties. Although at one time they even performed social functions such as helping the new immigrants to settle down in the country, as was the case in the United States, political parties are crucial within the democratic context. The chapter by Goldman, *Political Parties: Principal Arenas of Policymaking Conflict*, provides a brief historical perspective, and explains the complexity of typologies. It also deals with the role of political parties in some life support policies, with particular reference to such disparate countries as Colombia, India, and Russia. Two, often ignored, but major perspectives are crucial: Political parties as an alternative to warfare (among competing interests/groups), and as planning agencies.

The relative role of the market and the state is a subject of continuous discussion. Similarly, what makes organizations in both the sectors to be effective mechanisms to carry out human purposes? And what facilitates motivation, innovation and change? “Public choice” theory, which is now being touted as a panacea, holds that all human beings are driven by self interest, and their efforts at maximizing their values make the world move ahead. Consequently market mechanisms are put on the pedestal.

Contrarily, the Nobel economist, Simon, turns political scientist “to defend our political institutions against the imperialism of utility maximization, competitive markets, and privatization” (also, see below). As far back as in 1945, he challenged the rationality of humankind thus: “Administrative theory is peculiarly the theory of intended and bounded rationality—of the behavior of human beings who *satisfice* because they do not have the wits to *maximize*.” The “invisible hand” of the market forces of Adam Smith has long disappeared. Other social organizations such as business and governmental stepped into the arena. And the interaction between these is crucial. For markets to work efficiently, stability in manufacturing, consumption, trade, etc., is essential. Social/political organizations help maintain, and on occasion even destroy, economic equilibrium. It is organizational identification that is what drives people to perform, and perform better (see below the concept of organizational “culture”). He also suggests a caveat in that the consequences of the recent proliferation of information technology for organizational behavior are imponderable.

Change is eternal. In any dynamic society change is inevitable. So, how is it that some societies produce organizations that foster change while others seem to suffer from inertia? Why is it that the former thrive while the latter stagnate? How to inaugurate planned organizational change, and what are the successful ingredients in this venture? For Jones, change need not be haphazard and uncertain; it can be organized, constructive and of course beneficial. Drawing upon a great deal of socio-technological knowledge, he argues for planned change. He contends that an optimal organization can survive only in a free and open market atmosphere which in itself has a certain Darwinian character. There is a dialectic—a continual state of being born, transformed and destroyed. Seven operational elements are identified in the planned change process.

And the crucial variable is the “change agent” who is professionally equipped to intervene at the right time. Often times, weak public will comes in the way of planned change, thus necessitating a strong government presence as a catalyst. Jones is optimistic that organizational changes can be inaugurated which would lead to the eradication of poverty and establishment of social justice.

While organizational change commands a great deal of literature, a new dimension that has come to be studied of late is “organizational culture,” as advocated by writers such as Edgar Schein. In *Organizational Culture: Understanding Theoretical and Practical Applications*, Leland deals with this aspect by equating culture as the very personality of an organization. Departing from the age-old formal structural analysis, and borrowing from the study of anthropology, this new variable has come into vogue only in the 1970s and 80s. Once internalized by its members, an organization’s culture serves as the glue that keeps them all together while motivating them to work in furtherance of the organizational purpose. In so doing, shared culture also lessens the need to exercise authority. But it also can engender a blind faith, also known as “groupthink”, which may have some serious consequences for an organization in that it might cripple innovation as well as criticism. Hence the importance of the role of the leader, who at times must act detached, to not only understand, manipulate and maintain, but also change the organizational culture as befitting the developing dynamics.

3. Development of Administration: Ancient

There is a major debate going on now as to what role the public sector should play. Most public administration literature is also considered nascent. This is true to an extent in that the first modern textbook on the subject, *Princeps d’administration publique*—was written by Charles-Jean Bonnin and published in France in 1812. The beginning of serious study of public administration in the United States is credited, often erroneously, to the publication of Woodrow Wilson’s seminal article, “The Study of Administration,” in 1887. The first textbook to be published—*Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*—was that of Leonard White in 1926. And the first college course on comparative administration was introduced by Dwight Waldo in the University of California, Berkeley, in 1948. Yet, some of the public administration practices of the ancient world, dating back to the sixth century BC in countries such as Persia, Egypt, China and India, are good to this day. And there is a hoary history of writings on the subject in different countries. One might suggest Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* out of India, dating back to 321-296 BC. Statecraft in ancient days was indeed a highly developed subject, and could well be studied now.

Turning to the contributions of ancient civilizations, Farazmand, in *Persian Legacies of Bureaucracy and Public Administration*, starts with the Persian Empire and the legacy of Cyrus the Great and Darius, to point out that many of the current concepts can be seen as practiced by the Persians of yore. For example, they first developed the concepts of “state” and “federalism”. They in fact also developed an administrative state whose hallmark was large public works projects. Darius’ administrative reforms are such that a modern nation can take a few lessons.

Other older civilizations include Africa, whose administrative workings are discussed by Emizet in *Development of African Administration: Pre-Colonial Times and Since*. He contends that although generally post-colonial experiences are discussed, it is important to note that pre-colonial institutions were relied upon by the colonizing Europeans to consolidate their rule in Africa.

African communities followed two different ways: hierarchical political systems and horizontal acephalous societies. European colonization, the British and French in particular, was due to the need to acquire scientific knowledge of the “dark continent,” spreading the Christian religion, and the imperialist need for glory and gold. In pursuit of these ends, colonial rule took different paths. While the British wanted to keep the Africans apart from themselves, the French wanted the Africans to emulate them. The Portuguese on the other hand wanted to do both. Whatever education that was provided to the natives was meant to train them to do some semi-skilled work for the colonial masters, and not because of any altruism. And to rule the colonies, different forms of administration, ranging from direct rule to indirect and company rule, were devised. But the exploitation was brutal and intense. While many know what obtaining the prestigious Rhodes scholarship means, it is shown here that Cecil Rhodes acquired his wealth by extending the British Empire. It is also shown how the effort at nativizing an inherited administration that was meant for political domination and economic exploitation has failed. Bringing the subject up-to-date, some current administrative problems of Africa are highlighted.

Long before democratic institutions and regimes came into vogue, democratic processes and values were embedded in the Near East from the sixth millennium to the sixth century BC. Schmeil, in *Politics in the Ancient Near East* demonstrates how well these processes worked with the rulers of Egypt and Mesopotamia. There was a modicum of representation; consultation and deliberation took place with voting, if necessary. Power was limited and balanced. The Near Easterners were not ethno-centric in that foreigners found positions of power in the court. They were also aware of the darker side of politics, and made good use of it to make the system work.

Dealing with the Indian and Chinese ancient systems, Subramaniam goes beyond simple comparisons, and draws the relationships between societal developments and bureaucracies, and the capacity, or the lack thereof, to re-engineer changes. Relationships between socio-economic conditions of a civilization and the development of its bureaucracy are further explicated. He takes the subject further to draw lessons from historical legacies relevant to the current globalization efforts. There is the prevailing misconception that Asian experience is stagnant and tyrannical, and of no consequence to the modern day, when in fact ancient bureaucracies were quite effective although they may not have satisfied some of the Weberian criteria.

It is noted that the first few chapters in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* dealt with a centralized bureaucracy followed by a discussion of ruling foreign lands acquired either by conquest or diplomacy. There appears thus a reversal of order, in that lands are needed before a bureaucracy is developed to govern them, except that their mutual importance cannot be lost. While ancient India managed to develop without a centralized bureaucracy, China went in the opposite direction of highly centralized mandarins.

There was the scholar-ruler collusion in China, but the rivalry between the Brahmin (scholar/priest) and the Kshatriya (conqueror) is well known in India. The strangest thing, however, was that the Chinese scholars advocated a tentacular bureaucracy for a centralized empire while the Indian Brahmins followed the Confucian advice of providing independent service to competing princes.

As opposed to the English non-administrative model, the top brass of the English East India Company followed the ancient Indian practice of a single administrative head at the district (sub-state) level, and the District Collector was born—a position that was effectively used by the British to govern very successfully its colonies all the world over. Thus, the evolution of bureaucracies much depends upon the societal forces, in particular the relationship between the rulers and the scholars.

4. Modern systems

The French wrote the first modern book on public administration, as already seen above. Woodrow Wilson argued that the Europeans had to develop an effective administrative apparatus, in that the feudal rulers needed someone not only to collect taxes and administer the land, but also serve as a proxy by maintaining the distance between the unpopular ruler and the rebellious ruled. Ever since the Napoleonic code, France stood at the forefront of this effort. Their *l'ecole nationale d'administration*—national school of administration—is a model for several others. While the French loath their bureaucracy, they would like nothing better for their progeny as the preferred profession. These divisive feelings, notes Rohr in *French Public Administration*, are the legacy of the French Revolution itself; the rift among the monarchists and the republicans of yore continues even today. The wounds, unlike the case in the United States, were never allowed to heal. Perhaps the close relationship of the public servants with the private sector as they serve on the various Boards of Directors is unique, just as their movement between being a civil servant and then a Cabinet Minister, only to return to the old civil service positions, is. So is their *droit administratif*—administrative law. Similarly, the “bifurcated” administration—with two executives, the President and the Prime Minister, perhaps belonging to different political parties, led to what is uniquely called “cohabitation.” While their Parliament exercised the enumerated powers, the Prime Minister, as head of the government, is vested with all the residuary powers.

Of the modern systems, the United States is not only the oldest democracy but also serves as a model for several other nations who have tended to emulate the Presidential form of government, albeit with some rather strange and unpredictable ways. It is also unique in more ways than one. Commenting on the inadequacy of the Confederation, Hamilton wanted that a reluctant confession of the reality of these defects be “extorted,” and a federal form established, “(B)ecause the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint. The result is a constitution created with the negative purpose of controlling the unbridled exercise of executive power, rather than providing for an “efficient” government.

Riggs found that the same presidential system which is successful in USA generally failed in foreign countries, or at least suffered constitutional trauma, while

parliamentary systems largely survived. He asks the intriguing question: Why is this so? He explains provocatively (in an argument not accepted by many of the mainstream political scientists), that this has been possible because of retaining the much abused patronage system in the form of “in-and-outers,” denoting those loyalists who are appointed by the US President and work alongside the “long-termers” who are the professional “functionalists”—the civil servants. The presence of the former, it is argued, prevents the risk of the latter forming cabals to control the government, as happens in other presidential forms. Moreover, the other nations have only succeeded in imitating the shell of the American presidential system and missed its nuances, thus resulting in failure.

In *Politics and Anti-Politics: American Public Administration in the Nineteenth Century*, Henry deals with the subject in a way which is cautionary as well as foreboding. He finds that the American government is the tail for the private sector dog. One can hardly fail to notice that all the American public sector together (federal, state and local) even today employs only 16% of the labor market. The reform attempts leading to the twentieth century professional service were impressive. But the latest creation of a new Cabinet Department of Homeland Security belies some of the progress made insofar as it seems to be turning the clock back. Over twenty-two agencies dealing with internal security matters were brought under one umbrella organization in 2003, and nearly 170 000 employees lost their civil service merit status. Now, reminiscent of the old system that Henry so aptly described, they may be hired and fired at will by the President. New Public Management, discussed below, would welcome this development.

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group of people on information is broken down. Information becomes the transforming agent, and the concept of sovereignty is now questionable.]

Biographical Sketch

Krishna K. Tummala is Professor and Director, Graduate Program in Public Administration, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506-4030, USA. He specializes in Comparative Administration, Public Budgeting and Public Personnel Management. His books during the last few years include: *Public Administration/Policy*, ed. (forthcoming); *Comparative Bureaucratic Systems*, ed., (2003); *Public Administration India* (1996). He also edited two symposia on behalf of SICA (Section on International and Comparative Administration, American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in 1998 and 1999). Over forty-five articles of his appeared in journals such as: *Asian Journal of Political Science*; *Public Administration Review*; *Asian Profile*; *International Journal of Political Science*; *International Issues*; *Indian Political Science Journal*; *Public Budgeting & Financial Management*; *Asian Survey*; *International Journal of Public Administration*; *Administrative Change*; *Public Personnel Management*; *Public Budgeting & Finance*; *Indian Journal of Public Administration*; *Southern Review of Public Administration*; *Congressional Record- Senate*; *Politics, Administration and Change*.

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