

Behavioral Systems and Structural Functional Approach to Public Administration

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Abstract

The behavioral approach to public administration owes its genesis to the Human Relations Movement of the 1930s. The movement started off as a protest to the traditional approaches to public administration that focused on organizations, institutionalization, rules, and code of conducts etc with absolutely no mention of people who are the center of all these activities. The pioneering work done by Taylor and the emergence of Scientific Management created quite stir not just in the industrial sector but also in management and study of public administration. Henry Fayol worked on his Fayolism at around the same time as Taylor and came up with different set of functions and principles for the management bringing in terms like discipline, unity of command, equity and team spirit. The structural functional approach to public administration is a term adapted from sociology and anthropology which interprets society as a structure with interrelated parts. This approach was developed by the celebrated anthropologist Malinowski and Radcliff Brown. So, according to them, a society has a structure and functions. These functions are norms, customs, traditions and institutions and can be analogized as organs of a body, as explained by Herbert Spencer. All these functions need to work together to make the body function as a whole. Having explained the broader meaning of the term; it makes more sense for us to understand it from the perspective of public administration which would guide our further analysis of the topic. During his stint as a Researcher at the Foreign Policy Association in USA, Fred Riggs came across an interesting phenomenon regarding the American Public Administration. He found them to be extremely narcissistic in their approach which believed that the American way of administration was unique without any counterparts elsewhere in the world and that it was capable of answering all the administrative problems emerging in the new developing countries.

Keywords: Public Administration, Behavioral Systems Approach, Structural Functional Approach

1.0 INTRODUCTION

I have come across a number of times during our exploration of the topic, that it is somewhat difficult to define public administration in concrete terms. It has close association, interaction and influences from several fields of studies like law, political and social science administrative science and human relations and even behavioral science for that matter. One can easily infer that the approaches to study this field would also be as varied and as vast as the subject matter itself. And indeed so, that there are many approaches to public administration as we shall read about in consecutive articles. For the moment, we would take a step back and try and understand the reason behind so many approaches to this field of study and why were they required. Public administration as a serious subject which required scientific attention was first promulgated by Woodrow Wilson and as we read in the Wilsonian vision of Public Administration he fiercely recommended that there should be more scrutiny and debate and studies carried out in this area to make it more efficient and robust.

However, it was only during the beginning of the twentieth century that American Universities introduced Public Administration as a subject of academic study influenced by L.D White's important book called Introduction to the Study of Public Administration. There were also attempts made by scholars to differentiate between politics and administration, hence comparative study of two to understand Public Administration better came into existence. Sometime later the Principles approach to public administration was introduced. This approach was influenced by W. F. Willoughby's work called Principles of Public Administration in 1927. His work emphasized that scientific study and research of administration can help derive fundamental principles regarding the same. This approach was championed by other authors and scholars like Fayol, Mooney, Lyndall, Urwick etc. So, resorting to scientific method of exploring, researching, observing, recording, classifying etc was used to study Public Administration.

By this time, some important work had started happening in the areas of Human Relations by the likes of Elton Mayo, his Hawthorne experiment threw interesting light on social and psychological forces in work situations. So the importance of attitudes, feeling, sentiments and social relations, work group dynamics etc started influencing the very formal structure and way of working; present and preferred by the public organizations. After the Second World War, behavioral sciences were quite a hot debate in the academics with a lot of research and work carried out in the field. Herbert Simon's Administrative Behavior and Robert Dahl's, The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems; critically questioned the inadequacies and limitations of the orthodox public administration of the prewar days. Simon focused on the aspect of decision making in Public Administration and stressed on the need to develop a robust and relevant administrative theory based on precise and logical study of human behavior.

And recently with the advent of technology in every walk of life and a common consensus amongst authors and scholars that both public and private administration are similar in many manner, the management science approach to public management came into existence. The newest approach is that of policy analysis approach since the Government is venturing into new areas and different activities with increased involvement in welfare programs, the process of making public policies and its analysis, the measurement of the output etc became the new areas of study for the scholars and subject matter experts.

2.0 INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The instructional approach to the study of public administration concerns itself with the institutions and organizations of the State. The core area of this method lies in detailed study of the structure, the functioning, rules, and regulations of the executives, legislatures and the departments of the Government. The scholars who practice this approach consider administration to be an apolitical and technical function which lies only in the aspect of policy implementation. Now, there were many authors like L D White and Luther Gulick who concentrated their effort in describing what an institutional structure was and did little to build any theory actually. The reader may be intrigued as to why this special attention was paid to define institutions. The present day definition of institution encompassing all kinds of rules, regulations and organizations is argued as inaccurate by many authors like B Guy Peters and Jon Pierre. Institutionalization of an organization takes time.

An organization keeps getting complex by adding informal norms and practices which happens through its interaction with the external environment and they are in a sense independent of the individuals who make an organization at a given point of time. However, according to Selznick (1957), any organization which is complex needs to be infused with value which is beyond the technical requirement of the tasks that are performed by that organization. This means that an organization has a distinctive sense of self and identity and its way and its beliefs become important for the society as well. It also starts representing the aspiration of the community and in turn influences the community with their own values and beliefs. A real institution becomes a symbol for the community in many ways, like the very building in which it is housed. It can be interestingly explained and seen all through the History that the revolting group often occupy the presidential palace or offices or the parliamentary buildings or pose a threat to the powerful and symbolic structures like the terrorist threat on the Pentagon during 9/11 and the 26/11 Taj Hotel attack in India.

The above discussion becomes relevant with respect to the study of public administration because Government organizations are institutional in many ways and represent the needs and aspirations of the community. Therefore, studying and understanding their administration becomes important to make them more efficient and result oriented. The traditional study of public administration emphasized on the knowledge of History and Law but this institutional approach focuses on the organizational structure, goals and principles as primary. So, a lot of attention was given to the problems related to the functioning of an organization like delegation, coordination & control and bureaucratic structure. The main drawback to this approach was that little or no attention was given to the external sociological and psychological factors. These factors affect the organization in ways which are not always subtle, but have strong ramifications on the health and wellbeing of an organization.

With this new approach the older approach and theories to the study of public administration also underwent a few changes. There were serious questions raised on the politics- administration bifurcation.

The premise that the basic principles of administration can be applied universally was also challenged with the emergence of diverse administrative environments. The administrative goals of economy and efficiency were supplemented with social and economic progress. And also, a lot of management principles came into the field of public administration.

3.0 THE CLOSED AND OPEN MODELS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The closed and open model approach to the study of public administration focuses on the organization itself. One way to study complex organizations is to view them as an open or a closed system. Before we try to understand the open and close system with respect to the study of public administration in general and organizations in specific, let us make an effort to know what an open and a closed system are. An open system is a system which interacts and exchanges matter with its environment, imagine a pond while a closed system remains isolated from its environment; think an aquarium. While studying complex organizations American sociologist James D Thompson published a book in 1967 called *Organization in Action* in which he analyzed the behaviors of the complex organization as entities in action. He studied the organization in the light of their technologies and environment and thus he came to identify the meaning of a closed and open system within organizational context.

According to Thompson, an organization is called a close system when: The resources of an organization are employed in a functional manner. Each component of the organization contributes to the logic of the system where controlled mechanisms are employed to diminish uncertainties. The examples he gave of a closed system were Taylor and his Scientific Management, Weber's concept of beurocracy and Gulick and Urwick's Administrative Management. Thompson also defined an open system with respect to organizations, he said that: The complex organization is a set of interdependent parts which together make up a whole because each contributes something and receives something from the whole which in turn is interdependent with some larger environment. So an open system is dynamic, full of surprises as well as uncertainties. Systems keep evolving through a continuous process of development and strive to attain homeostasis or the state of equilibrium.

An important case study was carried out by Philip Selznick in 1940s to study the open system approach to organizational analysis. He conducted his research on the emerging Tennessee Valley Authority entitled *TVA and Grass Roots* (1949). He focused his research on the aspects of decentralization and involvement of already existing local and state agencies, with a view, to practice democratic planning. It was during this case study that he defined an open system also known as the institutional approach, about which we know from the previous chapter. According to Selznick, an organization is understood to be a means to achieve goals but the members of the organization act more than just means; they participate whole heartedly with each individual equipped with different skills, expertise, motivations and desires. An organization also needs to interact with parties, interest groups and other agencies, which communicate and influence the organization; and each other. From the managerial context, an organization cannot take only one strict approach that is, either of an open or a closed system, it needs to keep switching positions as and when need arises to achieve the stability and certainty required to perform jobs and deliver goals.

4.0 PUBLIC POLICY APPROACH TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

I remember reading about the Wilsonian philosophy of public administration and the famous dichotomy of politics and administration. After Wilson, there were many authors like Frank J Goodnow, L D White and F. W. Willoughby who elaborated on the topic and reaffirmed the need to separate the political functions and administrative functions of the government. Willoughby went to the extent of calling public administration as the fourth branch of Government after legislative, executive and judiciary. However, this politic-administration dichotomy theory lost it relevance after the Second World War. The writers, authors, academicians and subject matter experts finally awakened to the fact that administration of a government can never be free of political elements. They started protesting and writing against the separation of politics and administration as they could clearly see that both were horribly intertwined with one another and impossible to separate both in spirit and action.

After the Second World War, there was a renewed interest in the aspects of administration because of the practical encounters and alliances formed during the war, creation of international

organizations and emergence of the developing countries. Also, after the war, the Government reinvented itself from a peace keeper and provider of services to become a Welfare State. The public expenditure in most parts of the world increased greatly after 1945 as the Governments started taking more and more initiatives for the welfare of the society. A lot of reforms were carried out in areas not just regarding the content of public policy but also the ways in which they were formulated.

This new approach gained momentum after 1970s when a lot of analysis started happening around the way the government policies affected the people. The Vietnam War and Watergate scandal in US, the Administrative Reforms Commission established in India in 1966, the initiative to reduce public expenditure in order to reduce direct taxation under Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the creation of the Malaysian Administrative and Management Planning Unit in 1977 in Malaysia were to name a few. With changing times, the needs of the society have also changed and so has the role of the government and nature of its policies. The increase in the average age of the population has made the Government to look into the pension policies in the developed countries while the young illiterate population of the developing countries has forced their governments to come up with policies like Right to Education in India.

The irony of this public policy approach is that it encompasses many aspects of government functioning. The spectrum has become so broad that; to a student of public administration, it appears confused and spread all over. The other approaches that have clear segregation between the politics and administration were clearly distinguishable and easy to understand. Many readers may also get dissuaded to realize that politics influence the policy making as well as the administration aspects of the way a Government functions. However, with increasing number of stakeholders and pressure groups, the politics can be kept in check and the role of politician comes under scanner to dissuade any kind of strategic policy making to benefit only a few.

5.0 POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

I have read about the famous Wilsonian dichotomy of politics and administration and after the Second World War the diminishing relevance of this dichotomy. The above reference is vital to be kept in mind to understand this topic which brings together the science of politics and economic together to gain a detailed understanding of the administration of the state and its resources. After the New Public Administration theory of 1968, there was a new approach proposed in the 1970s which talked about economic approaches to analyze public administration called the Public Choice Theory. We shall take a step back to understand a few concepts and developments of that time to better analyze the Public Choice Theory. By the middle of the last century, the Pigouvian social welfare system was adopted by many economies. British economist Arthur C Pigou wrote a book called *The Economic of Welfare* in 1920 and also tried defining what welfare is in economic terms. According to him economic welfare can be measured like monetary welfare by means of using money as a yardstick.

Thus economic welfare, in the Pigouvian sense is the utility satisfaction that a person derives from the use of goods and services which can be exchanged amongst each other. The important aspect of this theory was that to maximize the welfare through the means of distribution of national income. Now, we also need to understand a term called externality. It comes into action when an individual X affects Y in a reckless manner without taking Y's gains or losses into account. This leads to a situation called externality. Therefore, in an economy, the Government intervention becomes important to address these externalities.

Consider this example given by Pigou himself: If a person is running the business of manufacturing alcohol, there is a specific and substantial social impact of this product. This can be, increase in crimes, increased cost of police staff and prisons, the long time and resources investment of the judiciary etc, which exceeds the net private product, the alcohol. To counter this, the alcohol production will have to be increased by the manufacturer. To deal with this overproduction the Government would have to impose a tax on the manufacturers. This tax would be to equate the private cost (of the manufacturer) and the social cost. The above explanation was necessary to understand the Public Choice theory in a rather detailed manner. Before this theory was proposed, economists and other subject matter experts considered State or the Government to be an agent beyond the realms of economic theories. The state functioned on different drivers than economy and it was an accepted fact. However, the Public Choice theory challenged this very fact and proposed the use of economic yardstick to evaluate the resource allocation in the public sector and economic analysis to identify the inefficiencies in the Government policy

and decision making processes. It also makes a premise that the bureaucrats and politicians work on a model to increase their own power and influence and end up formulating policies which may be against the larger public interest. Not, that we needed a theory to prove that however, it got a thumbs up from many authors and subject matter experts. This theory also brought in a more consumer centric approach in the formulation of policies and the manner in which the government machinery should function. There was a clear inclination towards democratic administration from bureaucracy and an important aspect was emphasized that the government action needs to be in sync with the values, needs and wants of the citizens.

6.0 MARXIAN TRADITIONS AND THEIR APPROACH TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Karl Marx has often been cited as the most powerful personality in the history of human civilization. He was a philosopher while being an economist, a socialist who was also a journalist and a historian who proposed the materialist conception of history. His views regarding his areas of work and interests are collectively termed as Marxian. Karl Marx was a rebel in many ways which also contributed to his abilities to look and understand beyond the obvious. He firmly believed that the world cannot be changed just by generating ideas; changes can be brought in, only by real, physical activity. Even as a student Marx was deeply influenced by the work of German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. It was Hegel who inspired Marx to switch from legal studies to philosophy; a fact Marx admitted in a letter to his father, justifying his decision. What is interesting is that, Hegel and his inspiration did not prevent Marx from comprehending the lacunae between the rational and the real in the philosophies of Hegel. One of his important works was his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the Right. It is advisable to the reader to do a little background study about the philosophy and works of G.W.F. Hegel, to understand the above discussion in a better light.

It would only make sense to point out to the readers at this stage is that Marx wrote very little about bureaucracy as such, and mostly after 1843. However, whatever little he wrote gives a clear understanding of his stand regarding the need and relevance of bureaucracy in a modern State. Marx believed that understanding the functionalism and structuralism of bureaucracy was critical because it is the political expression of the division of labor. In his *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx calls France as the abode to bureaucracy as opposed to Germany which in his opinion, up until then was the supreme example of oppressive bureaucratic conditions in the states. He suggests that bureaucracy create conditions which subjects people to gross manipulations. Another important deviation from the Hegel influence can be viewed in the manner Marx and Hegel understood bureaucracy. According to Hegel public administration was a bridge between the State and civil societies. The state through bureaucracy joined various particular interest to arrive at one general interest.

On the other hand, Marx viewed that the State did not represent the general interest but the interests of the ruling or the dominant class. And obvious enough, this class was a part of the civil society. He went on to say that in a capitalist economy, the bureaucracy is aligned with the dominant class and it masquerades the interests of this dominant class as the general interest which is subsequently forced on the society. While reading Marx on bureaucracy one can visualize it as an oppressive, mysterious system beyond the understanding or control of common people. It has certain symbols and secret ways of working and staunch traditions which makes it inherently incompetent in so many ways. Lenin was a follower of Marxian approach on bureaucracy and had ruled out any scope of it when the capitalism would be thrown out of Russian. But, after 1917, when he came into power, he could not help but rely on bureaucracy to help him run the State. Marx was never oblivious to the growing popularity of bureaucracy and the need of public administration as an aspect of Government functioning, around the world. Nevertheless, this promulgation of bureaucracy did not prevent him to see the dangerous loopholes it carried.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 Behavioral Systems Approach to Public Administration

Herbert Sumon was one of the torch bearers of this moment and stated that administrative behavior is part of behavioral sciences and the study of public administration cannot be complete without the study of individual and collective human behavior in administrative situations. The behavioral approach

has certain salient features like: The literature that has been written on the topic stays away from being prescriptive. It follows a descriptive course with an exception to the studies carried out in the areas of motivation. Individuals were paid attention to and aspects like motivation, decision making, authority and control were brought into focus. The informal aspects of an organization and communication patterns amongst the members were emphasized. The effort was to identify operational definition of terms and a lot of empirical study like field study, laboratory study and statistical methods were conducted. It borrows a lot from other social sciences, social psychology and cultural anthropology.

This approach made more sense and had greater relevance than earlier approaches as it took into consideration the fact that the political, social, economic and psychological environments have an effect on human motivation and which ultimately has an effect on the work output of an individual. It also helped to develop an understanding of what, how and why of the way the public administrators act. It showed that the way administration is conducted is influenced by human sentiments, presumptions, biases and perception, which many of us may have experienced firsthand during our interaction with government organizations and public administrators. Behavioral approach has contributed to the study of public administration in many ways like the scholars started studying cross-structural and cross-cultural administrative behaviors and which further paved the way for the comparative study of public administration.

Like all new things, this approach too has its fair share of criticism and the critics have ruthlessly questioned the utility of this approach in the analysis of administrative problems. They find it limited in scope and of little use. The study of public administration goes beyond small social groups and deals with large communities and therefore the behavioral approach falls short. The modern behavioral approach is leaning towards becoming more action oriented and prescription format nevertheless. Roscoe Martin and his Craft Perspective define the shift better. It concerns itself with the decisions, outcomes and the political skill needed to perform a particular managerial job.

7.2 Structural Functional Approach to Public Administration

To explore the consequences of intermingling of contrasting systems in the developing countries, I looked at the structural functional approach of the social sciences. This approach provides a mechanism to understand social processes. The function is the consequence of patterns of actions while the structure is the resultant institution and the pattern of action itself. It reads complicated but the theory in itself is not that difficult to understand. Social structures can be concrete (like Government department and Bureaus or even specific societies held together by shared beliefs, customs and morals) and also analytic like structure of power or authority.

These structures perform certain functions and in terms of structural functional approach, these functions have an interdependent pattern between structures. So as a public administration student, if one would want to study bureaucracy, the first step would be to view bureaucracy as a structure which has administrative system with characteristics like hierarchy, specialization, rules and roles. The behavioral characteristics can be rationality, neutrality, professionalism and rule orientation. Subsequently, one can proceed to analyze the functions of bureaucracy.

Now, we come to an interesting and relevant question pertaining to the above explanation. Do the similar kinds of structures perform the same functions? The structural functionalists say a big No to that, which means that a structure can perform multiple functions and vice versa i.e. one function can be performed by multiple structures. According to Riggs, there are five functional requisites of a society: Economic, Socio-communicational, Symbolic and Political.

While talking about Riggs explanation of the concept and contribution to this approach, we cannot proceed further without mentioning his Prismatic Model. This model uses a common phenomenon as an analogy, when white light passes through a prism it breaks into seven colors of different wavelength. As per Riggs, the white light is the fused structure of traditional society. The rainbow represents the diffracted (or refracted) structures of an industrialized society. Inside the prism the society was in transition.

Prismatic Model: Riggs challenged the traditional approaches of public administration implying that basic principles of administration have universal application. It also contributed to the comparative study of public administration by providing a more relevant perspective; that not all systems work the same in all places, so one can take what one likes and leave the rest.

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