

What is Public Administration?

Module 1, Basic Concepts

CRJU/POSC 320: Introduction to Public Administration

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What is Public Administration?

Overview

- What is public administration?
- Public vs. private administration
- Policy execution vs. policy making
- Administrative responsibility
- Accountability
- Theory and practice

What is Public Administration?

- Public administration is the study of how public organizations function and how they are managed.
- Public organizations are characterized as bureaucracies, formal rational systems with administrative authority to execute public programs.
- Bureaucracy's association with authority and accountability dates back to 14th century France.
- Civil servants play a critical role in public service.

Public vs. Private Administration

- Public administration
 - is often contrasted with private administration.
 - is concerned with the implementation of public policy.
 - involves political conflict, requiring careful management.
 - is subject to greater public scrutiny and accountability.

Public vs. Private Administration

Crucial differences: the **what** and **how** of administration

- Public organizations do the public's business—implementing public policy.
- They use different processes and work in different environments than private organizations.

Processes that make public administration different

- Career Service: Public orgs are staffed by career civil servants.
- The Bottom Line: Public orgs are not profit-driven.
- Competing Standards: Public orgs must balance efficiency, equity, and responsiveness.
- Public Scrutiny: Public orgs live in "fish bowls."
- Persuasion: Public managers persuade employees and balance conflicting political demands.
- Scope of Authority: Public orgs have limited authority and are required to administer programs according to law.
- Oversight: Public orgs are subject to oversight by elected officials and the public.

Policy Execution vs. Policy Making

Policy Execution

- Public administration is concerned with the implementation of public policy.
- Policy execution is the process of translating public policy into action.
 - Expanding some individuals' opportunities by extending governmental services and protections to them.
 - Regulating the behavior of individuals and organizations.
 - Redistributing resources from some individuals to others.
 - Protecting the public from harm.

Policy Making

- Public administrators help decision makers make policy in two stages:
 - Policy formulation: identifying problems and developing solutions.
 - Policy implementation: translating policy into action.

Administrative Responsibility

- Public administrators are responsible for the effective and efficient implementation of public policy.
- Complex and confining system of accountability:
 - Statutes and regulations limit administrators' discretion.
 - Legislative oversight committees monitor administrators' actions.
 - Budgetary oversight committees control administrators' resources.

Administrative Responsibility

- Commitments that shape administrative responsibility:
 - Complex web of government and a legitimate role for other parts of government, including those with legal control over administrative behavior
 - Loyalty to agency and to the programs they carry out
 - Professional civil service standards and desire to be recognized by fellow professionals outside government

Accountability

- Accountability is the obligation to explain and justify actions to some higher authority.
- Fundamental problem:
 - External controls lead to rules, standardized procedures, and red tape.
 - Internal controls can replace external oversight, but that requires trust between administrators and elected officials.

Our politics is Greek but our administration is Roman.

Theory and Practice

- Public administration is both a theoretical and practical field.
- Public administration is bound by time, place, culture, and context.
- How do we advance the field with limited generalizations?

Theory and Practice

- Universal elements
 - Independent of time, place, and political system
 - Selection, motivation, control, and coordination of human behavior
 - Budgeting, accounting, and record keeping
- There is no one best way to organize and manage public organizations.
- PA as a field of study should be neutral but reflective of its polity

Theory and Practice

What is really important?

- The theoretical *and* the practical
- The theorist informing the practitioner
- The practitioner informing the theorist
- For example, [Public Administration Review](#)

What is Public Administration?

Review

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