
UNIT-15 : SYSTEMS APPROACH: VIEWS OF DAVID EASTON AND CHESTER BARNARD

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15.0 Learning Outcome

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- know the meaning and nature of systems approach.
- analyse modern organisation as a open system.
- understand the David Easton’s application of systems approach to analyse political system.

- highlight the Chester Barnard's application of systems approach to understand administrative processes of an organisation.

15.1 Introduction

A modern organisation witnesses vast growth in size, complexity and scale of activity. Its growing complexity and scale of operations demand that a successful administration must integrate them within a framework. In an age of specialisation integration becomes more and more important in an organisation. Organisations are transcending national boundaries. They are engaging in product diversification. To explain such a growing phenomenon, systems approach of organisation become important. The modern organisational approach is called systems approach. The structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons, the political system theory of David Easton and the functional theory of Robert Merton, Gabriel Almond and others influence this approach. The system approach marks a departure from the earlier approaches of organisation. In present unit, an attempt is made to know the views of David Easton and Chester Barnard on analyses of political and administrative systems respectively.

15.2 Systems Approach: Meaning

A system is an interconnected set of elements that function as a whole. The theory of systems was first developed in physical sciences, but it has been extended to other disciplines such as political science, public administration, management etc. A system is characterised by three properties. First, it is a set of interactions taking place within itself. Second, these interrelated activities or elements have a boundary set around them. Third property constitutes the environment of a system. The most

important activity of a system is to maintain administrative order and equilibrium among sub-system.

According to systems approach administration is described as a system comprising sub-system, structure, people, action and interactions that enable it perform certain functions. An administrative system is divided into three distinct processes --- inputs, through puts and outputs. The system's framework assumes interactions between the three processes. Environment forces influence the administrative system.

15.3 Organisation – As a Open System

Systems approach of organisation theory places emphasis on studying organisation as a system in its totality. Organisation as a system is made up of a number of sub-parts or sub-components while at the same time it is also affected by an environmental supra-system, which comprises economic, social, political and technological influences. Organisation is an open system and it continuously interacts with environment. In this interaction, it takes inputs from the environment, processes these in the form of outputs, which are exported to the environment. The simplest open system consist of an input, a transformation process and an output which is depicted thus:

Input =>Transformation Process => Output.

A system cannot survive without continuous input, the transformation process, and output. There are three types of inputs that an organisation takes from its environment – materials, energy and information. The inputs are converted into outputs through men and machines. The organisation exports the outputs created through the

process of conversion. These outputs are given back to the environment for importing further inputs. Thus, this goes like a cycle.

Systems approach to organisations provides a useful framework for understanding how the elements of an organisation interact among themselves and with their environment. If administrators do not understand these interactions, they may tend to ignore their environment or to overlook important interrelationships within their organisation. The systems perspectives help administrators conceptualise the flow and interaction of various elements of the organisation as they enter the system, are transformed by it and then re-enter the environment.

In today's dramatically changing environment an open systems approach is becoming much more relevant and meaningful. Organisations do not exist in a vacuum. They are subject to forces from the outside world, such as culture, technological change, education, politics, natural and human resources as well as economic framework. All these constitute the external environment. Administrator's task is to ensure the integration of these variables in meeting the organisational objectives. This means that the modern administrator has to be a systems analyst.

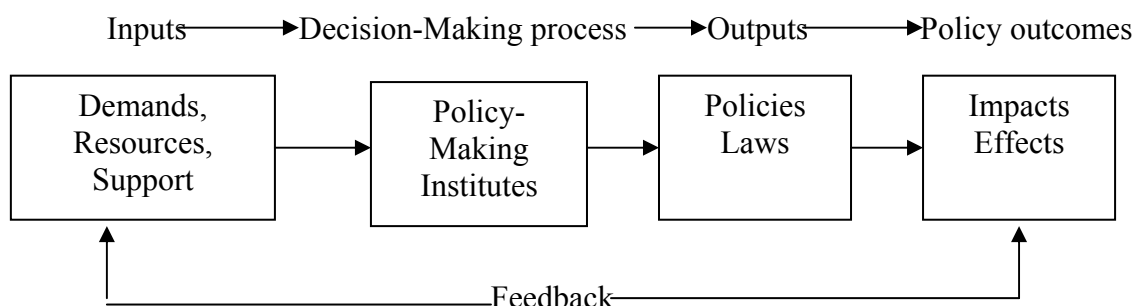
A representative author of systems approach literature stream is David Easton. He adopted this approach to public policy making. Chester Barnard regarded all organisation as systems, which are subordinate to longer system, such as society. The following sections discuss the views of David Easton and Chester Barnard on application of systems approach to analyse political and administrative systems.

15.4 Views of David Easton

Systems theory portrays public policy as an output of the political system. It is a useful aid in understanding the policy-making process. Systems approach helps us to conceptualise the linkages between the environment, the political system and public policy.

David Easton in his analysis of political system argued that the political system is that part of the society engaged in the “authoritative allocation of values”. The values held by the policy makers are fundamentally assumed to be crucial in understanding the policy alternatives that are made. Both internal and external environment have an influence on the policy making process is influenced by the values and ideologies held by the decision makers in the system. The demands and supports that the political system receives from the environment in the form of inputs go through a conversion process within the system and take the form of outputs. A feedback mechanism is developed through which the effects and consequences of out puts are put back into the system as inputs. To Easton a political system is a complex cyclical operation where a set of processes, which converts inputs into, outputs as a routine matter. The systems approach to political analysis can be shown in the following figure.

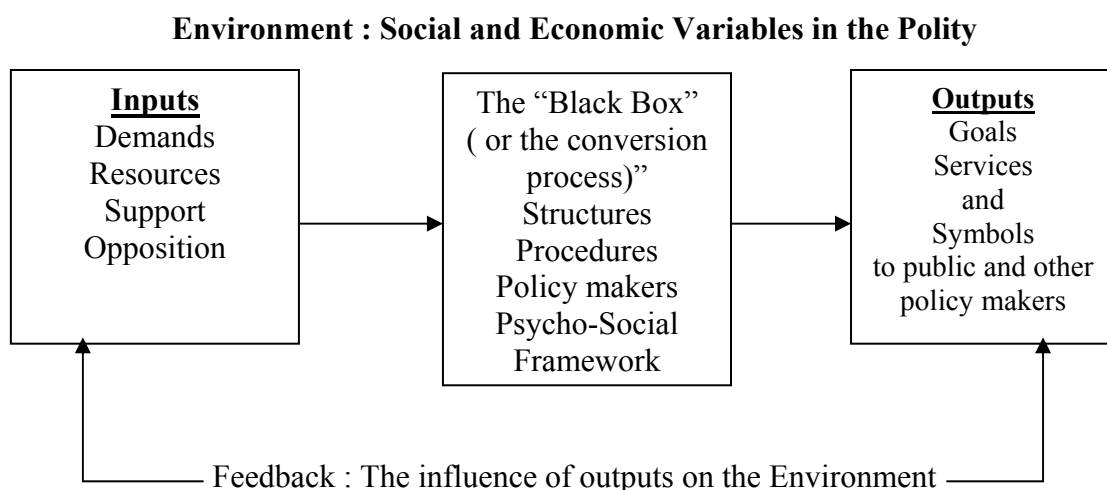
Environment : Social and Economic Variables in the Polity.



Easton states that the authorities formulate public policies in a political system. Policy analysis enables us to describe and explain the causes and consequences of

public policy. The policy making process has been regarded as a “black box” which converts the demands of the society into policies.

Policy-making is closely related to decision-making. However, it is not the same as decision-making. Policy-making does involve decision-making, but a decision does not necessarily constitute a policy. Decision making often involve an identification of problem, a careful analysis of possible alternatives and a selection of one alternative for action. The policy decisions eventually taken thus provide a sense of direction to the courses of administrative action. Anderson says “Policy decisions are decisions made by public officials that authorise or given direction and content to public policy actions”. These may include decisions to issue executive orders, promulgate administrative rules or make important judicial interpretation of laws. In simple, policy analysis is a technique to measure organisational effectiveness, through the examination and evaluation of the effect of a programme. The system model of public policy making and implementation is diagrammed in the following figure:



The field of public policy has assumed considerable importance in response to the increasing complexity of the society. Public policy is an important mechanism for moving a social system from the past to the future. David Easton adopted systems approach to analyse public policy making and implementation in a dynamic political system.

15.5 Views of Chester Barnard

Chester Barnard is considered to be the outstanding theorist in modern administrative thought. He introduced social concepts into the analysis of managerial functions and processes. While Taylor and his associates concentrated on improving the task efficiency of the individual, Barnard on the other hand, started with individual, moved to cooperative effort, and ended with executive functions. His views on motivation, executive leadership, authority, organisational decision, national planning demonstrate a profound understanding of the complexity of organisation process. His contributions vastly enriched organisation theory. He highlighted the broader issues of administration such as formal and informal organisational units, functional overlay, organisational relation to the external environment, and equilibrium among organisational units.

- **Organisation as a cooperation system**

Barnard regards an organisation as a system that is subordinate to the longer system – society. He emphasises “At root, the cause of the instability and limited duration of formal organisations lie in the forces outside. These forces both furnish the materials which are used by organisations and limit their action”. He viewed organisation as a social system. For him all organisations with the exception of the

State and the Church are partial systems since they are dependent upon more comprehensive systems.

Chester Barnard defines an organisation as a “System of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons”. He says that organisation comes into being when:

- (a) There are persons able to communicate with each other;
- (b) Who are willing to contribute action; and
- (c) To accomplish a common purpose.

Therefore, the elements of an organisation according to him are (a) communication, (b) willingness to serve, and (c) common purpose. The principal concern of organisations is that of adoption to changing circumstances. To Barnard organisation is a cooperative system. He maintains that ‘cooperation originates in the need of an individual to accomplish purposes which he individually cannot achieve’. With the result organisation becomes an enlistment of other individuals cooperation.

For the purpose of cooperative effort in a formal organisation the question of incentives is also important. The net satisfaction, which induces a man to contribute his efforts to an organisation results from the positive advantages as against the disadvantages. The incentives are of two kinds; material and non-material. The material incentives include the conditions of salary and chances of promotion etc. There are also the non-material incentives, which include the hierarchy of positions, with gradation of honours and privileges and maintenance or pride of organisation, community sense and

so on. Both the types of incentives are essential. He emphasises that no organisation can exist without a combination of these two types of incentives.

- **Concept of authority**

Barnard defines authority as “the character of a communication (order) in a formal organisation by virtue of which it is accepted by a contributor or ‘member’ of the organisation as governing the action he contributes”. This indicates that for Barnard authority consists of two aspects; first, the subjective aspect, the personal aspect, the accepting of communication as authoritative and second, the objective aspect – the character in the communication by virtue of which it is accepted.

Barnard further argues that if a directive communication is accepted by one to whom it is addressed, its authority for him is confirmed or established. A person can and will accept a communication as authoritative only when four conditions simultaneously obtain:

- (a) he can and does understand the communication;
- (b) at the time of his decision he believes that it is not inconsistent with the purpose of the organisation;
- (c) at the time of his decision, he believes it to be compatible with his personal interest as a whole; and
- (d) he is mentally and physically able to comply with it.

Chester Barnard’s comments on authority are original and have profound values. Authority in administration is generally viewed as originating at the top. It was Barnard who asserted that authority rested on the acceptance or consent of

subordinates. The decision as to whether an order has authority lies with the subordinate to whom it is addressed.

- **Zone of indifference**

Authority is surrounded by a 'Zone of indifference'. Chester Barnard calls the zone of action in which the superior is free to act "the zone of indifference". He used the term to refer to employees' disposition to accede to authority within a sphere of action. The size and nature of this zone will be wider or narrower depending upon the degree to which the inducements exceed the burden and sacrifices that determine the individual's adhesion to the organisation. The zone of indifference can be expanded depending on the effectiveness of greater inducements. If the inducements are not adequate, the range of orders that are likely to be accepted by the members of the organisations would be limited. Therefore, the executive should be conscious of the zone. He should issue only those orders, which would fall within the zone and are acceptable.

- **Informal organisations**

Chester Barnard's contribution to the concept of organisation becomes all the more marked by his exposition of informal organisation. He defines informal organisation as, "By informal organisation I mean the aggregate of the personal contacts and interactions and the associate grouping of people.....".

Informal organisation is structure less in form and transitory in character and involves interactions and relationships that take place without any joint purpose and are thus not a part of any formal organisation. Barnard argues that it serves an important function by establishing general understanding, customs, habits and institutions; it

creates conditions favourable to the rise of formal organisation. He believes that the formal organisation and the informal organisation necessarily coexist.

- **The Functions of the Executive**

The essential executive functions, as stated by Barnard, are first, to provide the system of communication; second, to promote the securing of essential efforts, and third, to formulate and define the purposes.

The first function of maintenance of organisational communication has two phases. The first is definition of organisational positions and the second is maintaining a personnel system. The former requires organisational charts, specification of duties, division of work, etc. The latter includes recruiting men who have appropriate qualifications, offering incentives etc. These two phases are complementary and depend on each other.

The second function of securing essential services from individuals also has two main aspects. The first is brining persons into cooperative relationship with the organisation and the second is eliciting services and contributions from such people. These can be achieved, according to Barnard, by maintaining morale, education and training, incentives, and supervision and control.

The third executive function is the formulation of organisational objectives and purposes. These purposes must be widely accepted by all the members of the organisation.

The above three functions arise basically from the need for cooperation among various human beings as every organisation is basically a cooperative system, the cooperative effort requires to be consciously coordinated. It is in this area of

organisational process the executive has to perform the role in realising the goals and purposes of a cooperative system.

15.6 Conclusion

A modern organisation witness vast growth in size, complexity and scale of operations. To analyse the modern organisations systems approach is more appropriate and relevant. Systems approach marks a departure from the earlier approaches of organisation. It places emphasis on studying organisation as a open system.

Systems approach to organisations provides a useful framework for understanding how the elements of an organisation interact among themselves and with their environment. In today's dynamic environment systems approach is more relevant for organisational analysis. David Easton and Chest Barnard have adopted systems approach to analyse political and administrative systems respectively. David Easton adopted this approach to analyse public policy marking in a political system, whereas Chester Barnard adopted it to analyse processes of administration in an organisation. The contributions of these theorists are presented in this unit.

15.7 Key Concepts

Cohesion: Degree to which members of a group are uniformly committed to the group and its goals.

Cooperative Federalism: Greater sharing of responsibilities between federal and state governments.

Intergovernmental Relations: A term encompassing all the complex and interdependent relations among those at various levels of government.

Interorganisational Networks: Pattern of relationships within and among various groups and organisations working in a single policy area.

Utilitarianism: Philosophy of the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

15.8 References and Further Reading

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15.9 Activities

- Q.1 Discuss the David Easton's application of systems approach to analyse political system.
- Q.2 Explain the Chester Barnard's application of systems approach to understand administrative processes of an organisation.