
UNIT-3: DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF ADMINISTRATIVE THEORIES

Structure

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3.0 Learning Outcome

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Know the importance of a theory for the growth and development of a discipline.
- Explain need and importance of Public Administration theory.
- Explore evolution and growth of administrative theory.
- Evaluate theory building in Public Administration.

3.1 Introduction

Public administration is an integral part of a society. Its importance is pivotal in both developed and developing countries. Public administration as a specialised academic field deals essentially with the machinery and procedures of government as these are used in the effective performance of government activities. According to Nichlos Henry, “Public administration purpose is to promote a superior understanding of government and it relationship with society it governs, as well as to encourage public policies more responsive to social needs and to institute managerial practices attended to effectiveness, efficiency and the deeper human requisites of the citizenry”. Public administration is a part of the wider field of administration lends itself to two usages: it is an activity and it also refers to the discipline of intellectual inquiry and study. In simple, public administration is a combination of theory and practice. In this unit, an attempt is made to review the development and growth of administrative theories.

3.2 Theory : Importance and Characteristics

The word ‘theory’ and its meaning is derived from Greek word “Qewpux” meaning theoria, that is looking at, viewing or contemplation. Theory is a body of related principles dealing systematically with a subject. Its task is to tie together significant knowledge to give it a framework. Theory is a concise presentation of facts and a logical set up of assumptions from which empirical laws or principles can be derived. It is a generalisation applicable within the stated boundaries that specifies the relationship between facts. Development of a theory should be in consonance with adoption of scientific approach to analyse and understand a particular phenomenon. The process of scientific theory construction and confirmation can be viewed as involving the following steps.

- (a) The formulation of a problem or problems based on observation.
- (b) The construction of the theory to provide answers to the problem or problems based on inductions from observations.
- (c) The deduction of specific hypothesis from the theory.
- (d) The recasting of hypothesis in terms of specific measures and the operations required testing the hypothesis.
- (e) The devising of factual situations to test the theory.
- (f) The actual testing in which confirmation does or does not occur.

A good theory should have the following characteristics:

- It should contribute to the goals of science. This mean that better theories are more comprehensive in that they reduce a large number of diverse observations to a much lesser number of underlying statements. The more the theory can explain, the more useful it is.
- It should be clearly delineate the domain of the discipline.
- It should direct research efforts to important matters.
- It should have potential for yielding not just a few isolated facts, but powerful explanation and prediction across the whole domain.
- It should be a testable reality;
- It should not only be confirmed by research derived from it but should also be logically consistent within itself and with other known facts; and
- The best theory is the one that is the simplest statement. But Miner adds that what was a good theory at one time many not are so good some years latter.

Developing a theory is important more than one reason. It provides a perspective to the reality stimulates new visions from familiar scenes; and constitutes a base for further theorizing. Theory acts as a guide to action, to collect facts, to explore the new knowledge’s and to explain the phenomena that are being examined. Theories help us to understand, predict, influence or manage the future. This being the importance of theory building, one becomes an inevitable part of the growth and development of any discipline. Public administration is no exception.

3.3 Public Administration theory: Need and importance

Public administration is the action part of government for the fulfilment of the objectives of the political system. The machineries of government and their functioning have attracted the attention of scholars since the time of recorded history. Kautilya's "Arthashastra", Aristotle's "Politics" and Machiavelli's "The Prince" are important contributions to both political and administrative issues and ideas.

Administration as an activity and as an intellectual discipline attracted attention only since the later part of 19th century. The complex nature of the modern state resulted into enormous expansion of the functioning of government. Such expansion generated a compulsive need for an in depth study and comprehensive research into various facets of administration.

The functions of public administration called upon to perform everywhere have not only expanded in scale, range and nature, but also increasing in volume. Dynamic nature of society and complex nature of government activities, make it difficult for the public administrators to understand and realise their goals. There is a need for a broader understanding of the administrative phenomenon in its totality. One of the reasons for the failure of the administrator to realise his goals is his inadequate understanding of the administrative theory.

Theory building in public administration is not an easy task, as there are various kinds of public organisations, administrative structures and processes. The nature of the state, social relations, political culture etc. heavily influences the working of all public organisations. Any public administration theory that does not take this into consideration and ignores these factors would analyse the administrative phenomenon only partially. In such a case scientific validity of such generalisations would be doubtful. Therefore, there is need for a broader and deeper understanding of administrative theory, which would help the administrator to fashion the administration as per societal requirements and enable him to manage the administrative system effectively and efficiently.

Administrative theory will help the administrator to conceive proper reasoning and sound arguments. It will add to the richness of his mind. It adds to his ability to comprehend the phenomenon and provides self-confidence. Administrative theory educates the administrators scientifically, as theory is the conceptualisation of experience.

3.4 Administrative theory – Evolution and growth

Traditionally, administrative theorizing has been the work of practitioners and reformers particularly in the United States of America. In the part of the twentieth century American Universities began to take active interest to bring reforms in government. In 1914 the American Political Science Association published a report, which delineated the objectives of the teaching of political science. One of the objectives stated was to "prepare specialists for governmental positions". Thus, public administration was recognised as an important sub-area of political science. The subject began to gain increasing recognition in the American Universities and its study was steadily spreading. In other words, public administration as a discipline was born in the United States, and that country continues to enrich it even today. The single most important source of literature in the field of public

administration is USA. The discipline has learnt to reflect the American concerns, and in the process they tend to become universalised.

A systematic and scientific study of public organisation can be traced to the 19th and early part of the 20 centuries. A powerful movement at the empirical plane was the scientific management movement by F.W. Taylor. The movement had a resounding impact on the governmental reforms in the United States. Thus, the early American administrative thought developed at a time when the Industrial Revolution was entering a state of maturity. Then, large-scale complex organisations were responding and adjusting to the demands for greater and better production in a rapidly moving competitive world. Concepts like economy and efficiency had become fairly prominent in administrative theory because of their eminent relevance to the process of capacity building of an administrative system. Limited resources and growing demand of public services led to pressure for more efficient and economical operations in the government. Much of the discussion in administrative theory during this period focused on the internal administrative environment of an organisation. It became the prime thrust of the classical school of thought. Taylor and Fayol were almost the first to formulate certain postulates, which were later synthesised as “Principles” that form the basis and substance of classical approach to the study of organisation. The aim of each principle is to raise the level of efficiency of the organisation. But from the public administration point of view several doubts arise pertaining to validity of these principles in political setting. The principles have situational relevance. Herbert Simon criticised these principles as proverbs. Despite such criticism, classical theory has its importance in the history of administrative thought.

In the study of administration themes, Max Weber conceptualisation of bureaucracy provides an influential conceptual framework in public administration. If Wilson is the pioneer of the discipline, Max Weber is its first theoretician who provided the discipline with a solid theoretical base. His “Ideal type of Bureaucracy” continues to remain fundamental in any conceptualisation of organisation. For Weber, bureaucracy was a control system based on rational rules, which regulated the organisation’s structure and process according to technical knowledge and maximum efficiency. At a time when Taylor and Fayol were pursuing an engineering approach to the analysis of administrative phenomena, Max Weber was engaged in the examination of the process of evolution of modern civilisations, with bureaucracies constituting an integral part of this evolutionary process. Weber’s bureaucratic model, which operated in the framework of an ideal typical legal-rational authority system was based on the accentuation of certain logically interrelated characteristics of an advanced administrative system. Even though Max Weber’s bureaucratic theory developed independently of the early American administrative thought, it shared many of the premises of management thought of structuralists such as Taylor and Fayol. Weber emphasised the importance of rationality in administration in order to facilitate the achievement of the implicit goal of efficiency in the solution of complex and specialised problems.

The major form of public administration in modern society is the bureaucratic organisation. Contemporary bureaucratic analysis focuses largely on the functional and dysfunctional aspects of bureaucratic administration, the cultural environment of bureaucracy, bureaucratic power and the bureaucratisation of the administrative culture. Weber’s bureaucratic model is the key conceptual construct in administrative analysis. It was one paradigm in public administration.

The classical theorists from Taylor to Weber laid emphasis on the physiological and mechanistic aspects of public organisations. The next historical stream of administrative thought is described as neo-classical or human relations approach to the study of administrative process. The Human Relations researches of the late 1920s and early 1930s paved the way for transformation of the study of organisations. The identified variables like informal organisation, leadership, morale and motivation, human groups and their dynamics had a noticeable impact on initiating a movement for humanising administrative analysis. Human Relations approach was considered pertinent and functional to facilitate maximum utilisation of human resources in organisations after the Second World War. Gradually the scope of the human relations approach has extended from the early studies of work norms and incentives to applied behavioural science. From the Hawthorn experiments of the 1920s onwards-chemical investigations into human behaviour in organisational settings opened up new vistas of administrative behaviour studies that led to substantial modifications in the concepts and methodologies of public administration. The works of Follett, Barnard and Simon resulted in a significant change in direction of administrative theory.

During the late 1930s and 1940s decisional analysis was introduced in administrative theory through the writings of Chester Bernard, Edwin.O. Stene and Herbert Simon. The behaviour school, which evolved first in Chicago University, entered the public administration domain through decisional analysis and the main credit for this goes to Herbert Simon. Attacking the traditional principles as unscientific “Proverbs”, Simon claims that it is the decision-making that is the heart of administration. He further says that decision-making process alone can reflect the actual behaviour in an organisational setting. Stress on the behaviour of an individual in organisational setting is the crux of Herbert Simon’s analysis of administrative behaviour.

R.K. Arora stated that, although the human relations researches were the first” behavioural researches in organisational analysis these could not get the credit for being so, primarily because their appearance was too early to be noticed by the acknowledged behaviouralists. Nevertheless, human relations approach was an authentic precursor to behaviouralism in administrative studies. Multidisciplinary nature of public administration strengthened the base of behavioural approach to the study of administrative systems. This approach continued to be the centre of many a profound debate in the discipline of public administration.

Since World War-II there has been a growing consciousness that the quality of administration is important to modern life and it must improve. Analysis of various studies has indicated that a high percentage of administrative failures have been due to administrative incompetence and inexperience. In its post Second World War phase of growth, the discipline of public administration continued to be influenced by various disciplines of social sciences. As a result, there was a discernible stress on conceptualisation in relation to various facets of administrative behaviour. The writing of Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Chris Argyris, Rensis Likert and Warren Bennis, among others had a perceptible impact on the researches and writings in public administration.

Another notable transformation in the field of public administration after Second World War came through the emergence of a host of developing nations in Asia and Africa. These phenomena led to a significant emphasis on the study of administrative systems in cross-national and cross-cultural analysis. The emergence of comparative administration and development

administrative concepts as important facets of public administration focused on the centrality and complexity of achieving the externally induced progressive socio-economic goals by the administrative system.

The ecological approach to the study of administration originated in the wake of the emergence of the Third World and increasing realisation of irrelevance of most of the Western organisation theories to the study of administration. F.W. Riggs and the Comparative Administrative Group of the American Society of Public Administration pioneered a new administrative vocabulary to describe different societal typologies, administrative cultures and administrative systems. Among all the conceptual concepts thrown up by the comparative administration movement, F.W. Riggs's Prismatic-Sala model has been the most prominent.

In nineteen sixties, United States of America was experienced a series of crises. But the established institutions of government and knowledge of traditional public administration were failed to provide answers to the crises. The conventional or conservative public administration measures failed to resolve these crises and necessitated fresh insights and initiatives in public administration to tackle those problems. This recognition led to the initiation of a new movement in public administration during late 1960s and early 1970s and resulted "New Public Administration". The credit for this movement goes to Dwight Waldo, who organised a conference of young public administration scholars and practitioners at the Minnbrook Conference Centre. The conference highlighted in an effective manner the lacunae of traditional public administration. New public administration stressed upon the social relevance of knowledge. George Fredrickson called the new public administrationists as second-generation behaviourists who held that bureaucracy ought to be committed to progressive values and take active interest in the formulation and implementation of the programmes designed to actualise these values. New public administration movement has strengthened the policy science perspective and developed public policy approach in public administration. This movement pushed the discipline towards greater relevance and strengthened client-orientation in administration. This movement also supported democratic humanism in public organisation and produced greater awareness for internal democracy through real participation in public systems. The public policy approach has been a major break through in the growth of public administration.

The Weberian paradigm has dominated the public administration discipline since its inception, despite a variety of criticism against it. A historical perspective would reveal that bureaucracies throughout the world have rarely responded effectively to environmental challenges on their own. They have lagged behind the times. In recent times, there have been some noteworthy contributions to both the theory of bureaucracy and the debate over bureaucracy-democracy relationship. The collapse of Soviet Union appears from causing a retreat of Marxism, led to a resurgence of the old and new alternative theories. One among them is post-modern or post-Weberian theory of public administration. The post-modern theory of public administration is located in the moral principles of democratic and equalitarian polity. It disputes the possibility of universal theory of public administration. Post-modern public administrationists reject the trilogy of Wilsonian political-administrative dichotomy, the scientific management paradigm of Taylor and ideal type bureaucracy of Weber.

Another conceptual construct in public administration is the public choice theory. The approach has been able to explode the myth of neutral and rationale bureaucracy. The bureaucrats have been regarded as utility

maximisers and budget maximisers always exercising a rational choice while choosing among alternatives. Their rationality is determined by and limited to their knowledge of the situation. The explanations of public choice theory, its methodology, its ethical benchmark and its recommendations challenge and contradict the basic premises of classical as well neo-classical public administration.

The other post-Weberian development of great significance is the impact of critical theory on social sciences in general and public administration in particular. Jurgen Habermas is a major exponent of the stifling effect of techno administrative domination of the bureaucracy. Critical theory of public organisation would plead for debureaucratisation and democratisation of administration through free flow of communication and exposure of inherent contradictions in hierarchical relationship.

Discourse theory, propounded by Charles J. Fix and Hugh T. Miller is most radical of the post modernist public administration. Discourse theory while rejecting policy-administration dichotomy subscribes to the view that both policy and administration may better be graspable as public energy field. This field encompasses a variety of actors engaged in the policy process viz., organisation institutions, voluntary agencies, and the fourth estate and citizen groups. The discourse theory of public administration is a significant addition as well as a contribution to public administration theorization in general and post-modern public administration particular. All post-modern public administration theories give importance to people in the organisations than to the formal structure of organisations.

Management science has its penetrating effect on the intellectual development of public administration. The core public administration has always been its external political context as well as internal managerial dynamics. What is internal to a public administrative system is its process of management and what is external to it is its political environment in which it functions. It is universally acknowledged that most maxims, principles, guidelines and dictums of efficiency and effectiveness have emanated from the writings of management thinkers. In other words, scholars of management have offered remedies to bureaucratic ailments and the scholars of public administration have adopted them.

The scholars of public administration in 1980s highlighted the need for adopting in an effective manner sound management practices in government systems. New Public Management (NPM) is one such manifestation in public administration. New Public Management is a contemporary paradigm of public administration. This paradigm emerged on the heels of the movements of re-inventing government and good governance. American scholars, David Osborne and Ted Gabler popularised the concept of “Re-inventing Government” in 1992. The World Bank develops the concept of good governance. The former was designed to be universalistic in its relevance and application, while the latter has been considered more appropriate to the countries of the Third World having democratic form of government. The movement of reinventing government had a startling influence on the governance system throughout the world. New Public Management and good governance philosophical concepts have reoriented public administration toward the multiple actors in governance beyond the traditional organs of formal government. In this scenario public administrator’s new role is thus of facilitator and stimulator. Now administrative theory has to be a vital part of the state theory. The changing complexion of administration has to be contemplated in the context of the changing nature of state.

The above survey of administrative theories shows that the field of public administration is being continually transformed. Traditional public administration assumptions are frequently shattered by contemporary happenings. The subject matter of public administration is exploding in all directions. New types of public organisations are being created. New concepts, techniques and processes for improving the performance of public service delivery are being searched. The result is development of different paradigms in public administration.

3.5 Theory building in Public Administration-An evaluation

Theory building is a complex exercise in public administration due to its diversified nature. Administrative theory is based on conceptualisation of experience administrators or observation of the operational situations in administration. It may be derived or reinforced from the comparative studies or they may be ideas and opinions of intellectuals. The seminal contribution of academics and practitioners to the development of various facets of administration and dissemination of knowledge pertaining to it caused the germination of various theories. Theoretical and practical development in other social sciences do influence theoretical base of public administration and vice-versa due to integrated nature of the social science.

Public administrators have borrowed ideas, methods, techniques and approaches from other disciplines and have applied them with varying degrees of success to public administration. People trained in other disciplines have applied their ideas to the largest and most obvious organisations in society, namely the military, industrial, the public bureaucracy, social service agencies, and public sector which are conceptually, institutional and functionally within the discipline of public administration.

Public policy makers and administrative practitioners complain that they can find little theoretical guidance relevant to their current concerns. They claim that theorists have in mind some mythical world or they use such abstract and rarified language that they cannot be understood. In response, the theorists complain that the practitioners, steeped in pragmatism do not make the effort to understand or cannot be bothered with any theorists that do not rationalise what is currently happening in the practice of public administration. Stephen Bailey believes that, the objectives of public administration theory are to draw together the insights of the humanities and the validated propositions of the social and behavioural sciences and apply these insights and propositions to the task of improving the processes of government and aimed at achieving politically legitimated goals by constitutionally mandated means.

Caiden, Martin Landu and Lepawsky have critically commented on the state of public administration theory. Caiden pointed, “the abundant theories in public administration deal with things both bigger and smaller than public administration, but not with public administration itself. On the one hand, they deal with all administration, all organised cooperative effort, all social organisations, and all human behaviour of which public administration is part. On the other, they deal with unique practices, specific organisations, special administrative case studies and particular administrative sub-processes that constitute parts of public administration. Few of these theories deal with the nature of public administration itself”. As Martin Landau comments, “administrative theory is marked by a plethora of competing schools, a

polyglot of languages, and as a result a confusion of logic. There is neither a common research tradition nor the necessary consensus for a common field of inquiry. Each of the competing schools questions the others, adventurism is rampant and commonly accepted standards of control do not exist. Consequently the whole field is confused. The core concepts need clarification". Lepawsky openly stated that the theorists have not contributed much of their own. Too little relevant public administration theory exists.

The most important priority in theory building is to increase awareness generally of the philosophical issues behind problem solving in public administration. In Stephen Bailey's words public administration theory must attempt to fashion descriptions of reality, postulates of betterment, sophisticated assumptions about the capacities of men and institutions, and workable tenets of instrumentation which can improve both the ends and means of democratic government.

New paradigms in public administration do not look at the discipline from a fresh perspective but merely rehash the old concepts. There is a marked continuity in the administrative approaches with the past. Each new development in the discipline, even while critiquing an older concept, simply builds on the same. Incrementalism appears to be at the very basis of the growth of the discipline. Caiden stated that one of the most compelling reasons why public administration is denied the status of an academic discipline in the other seats of learning is that it has yet to develop a systematic body of theory.

Two major streams today influence the perspective of public administration:

- (a) the general system seeking universal validity for theory, and
- (b) efforts to evolve a theoretical model with a specific reference to the Third World experience. The Third World experience should be the basis for developing a new perspective on the discipline of the public administration.

It is very difficult to evolve a general theory of public administration due to cross-cultural nature of the discipline. Public administration as discipline has to go beyond the forms and processes of administration and look for explanations in social structure, class hegemony, and the dominant forces shaping the character of the state. The goal of theory-building in public administration is need not be to develop a theory of administration but to formulate a series or a set of theories and paradigms which can contribute to better understanding of the complex administrative reality in a different settings – institutions, national, cultural and temporal.

3.6 Conclusion

Theory is a body of related principles dealing systematically with a subject. It is a concise presentation of facts and a logical set up of assumptions from which empirical laws or principles can be derived. Therefore, theory building becomes very important for the growth and development of any discipline, public administration is no exception. Administrative theory will help the administrator to conceive proper reasoning and sound arguments. It educates the administrators scientifically as theory is the conceptualisation of experience.

Public administration as a discipline was borne in the United States and that country continues to enrich it even today. Theory building in public administration is a very complex exercise due to its diversified nature. A brief survey of development and growth of administrative theories brings forth the contributions of various schools of thought are analysed in this unit. The survey identified that too little relevant public administration theory exists. In other words, public administration is yet to develop a systematic body of knowledge.

3.7 Key Concepts

Constituent Policy: Policy designed to benefit the public generally or to serve the government.

Environmental Sensitivity: Tuned into agency and its environment; awareness of importance of non-technical factors.

Political Economy Approach: Focusing on politics and economies as categories for analysing organisational behaviour.

Redistributive Policy: Policy designed to take taxes from certain groups and give them to another group.

3.8 References and Further Reading

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3.9 Activities

1. Explain the importance of a theory for the growth and development of a discipline.
2. Discuss the theory building in Public Administration.