

What is public administration



What is Public administration Public administration (PA) is the synthesis of several disciplines like political science, administration and public finance. This subject has several definitions though the general understanding signifies some kind of policy making and implementation which, is for public good. Both Public and private entity administrations are included in this discipline in recent times. This is considered as much as a science as per Fayol's principles as an art.

In an organizational perspective Public administration is the co-operation of several individuals to achieve a common goal. Though administration in regular life is mostly involuntary, it is possible to control and co-ordinate such activities for common good. Hence the administration aspect is combined with management to optimize its benefits. Inclusion of management has given an ethical and social angle to the PA portfolio.

In the traceable beginnings of this complex discipline the areas of politics and administration were separated vaguely. As times passed by, the political nature of administration made it complex to keep the two disciplines associated. Hence in recent times, political scientists study the organizational behavior of governments at all levels and provide inputs to the administration wing to act on the suggestions. This process evolution has removed the political influence on administration aspects to a large extent. In the symbolic front bureaucracy is still a synonym for public administration, reflecting the initial influence of politics on PA.

The face of public administration has changed drastically over centuries. The rudiments of this discipline can be found in different parts of the world in different cultures aiming to achieve similar public interest objectives. In the earlier set up, public administrators were considered only as implementers of

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law. This idea ignored the human element involved in administration. Later as the industrial revolutions took place in different parts of the world and organizational structures changed, PA started taking the shape of an integral solution influenced by various interdisciplinary fields. Public administrator was always regarded as one of the most powerful positions. Recent developments have added various other functionalities like change manager, public relations officer, negotiator, strategist etc. to a public administrators portfolio. All these changes have enriched the content of PA and have left it nothing similar to, what it was a few decades ago. The diversity in responsibilities in PA has created a need for professionals from all the leading walks of life. Conversely the PA matters that proliferate in private sectors like environment management, compliance issues etc have necessitated the reverse movement of professionals. With such manpower and knowledge exchange in industry circles, both public and private sectors can aim at the benefits of learning from each other.

The understanding of PA is not complete if the pain areas involved in this field are not discussed. PA is a vast area working towards stabilizing social values and improving the quality of life for public in general. In such an organizational stature, the dilemma between social objectives and economic objectives always prevails. It has been proven time and again in history that social objectives rule the decisions of public administrators when the dilemma arises. As things have changed, in recent times all the organizations are run as profit/cost centers. Maximizing efficiency is the only acceptable way of work, if PA offices have to compete with private firms/sectors of their own or any other country.

One of the offshoots of this efficiency argument is the accountability factor

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for public resources which, until recently laid in the hands of bureaucrats. This drawback has been rectified by several forward thinking countries by implementing the New Public Management (NPM) models of accountability (Vigoda, 1999). This differs from the traditional PA models as the accountability for results is included. The focus of public administrators in this model lies equally on process accountability as well as result achievement.

Conclusively Public administration is a continuously evolving field. Innovation is constant in this field as it is related to the well being of the society. The scope of PA cannot be clad in an iron box as its offshoots proliferate to other disciplines as a characteristic of human involvement/ intervention. Achieving common good is the vetoed end, but the means for doing so, comprises of a gamut of possibilities.

References:

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