

What challenges does the traditional public administration

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WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ENCOUNTER IN A CHANGING PUBLIC SECTORENVIRONMENTThe traditional model of public administration (TPA) remains the longest standing and most successful theory of management in the public sector which pre-dominated for most of the 20th century.

The TPA can be characterized as an administration under the formal control of the political leadership which was based on a strictly hierarchical model of bureaucracy, staffed by permanent, neutral and anonymous officials, motivated only by the public interest, serving any governing party equally, and not contributing to policy but merely administering those policies decided by the politicians. Its theoretical foundations were mainly derived from Woodrow Wilson and Frederick Taylor in the United States, Max Weber in Germany, and the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854 in the United Kingdom.

It is now being replaced by the New Public Management (NPM) due to the fact that the traditional model has been discredited theoretically and practically. The adoption of new forms of NPM means the emergence of a new paradigm in the public sector. This new paradigm poses a direct challenge to several of what had previously been regarded as fundamental principles of TPA. The aim of this presentation is to discuss the challenges that TPA encounters in a changing Public Sector environment. The discussion will focus on hierarchical structures, bureaucracy, political control, rigidity, one best way, meritocracy and technological change.

The term administration is narrower and has a more limited function than that of management and in consequence, changing from public
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administration to public management means a major change of theory and of function. According to Hughes (2003: 6), “ public administration is an activity serving the public, and public servants carry out policies derived from politicians. ” The Oxford dictionary defines administration as, “ an act or process of organising the way that something is done. According to Coulter (1996: 8) “ management refers to the process of getting activities completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people. From these various definitions it is argued that, administration essentially involves following instructions and providing service, while management involves the achievement of results and personal responsibility by the manager for results being achieved. The terms administration and management are not synonymous, neither is their application to the public sector. These two elements were not necessarily present in the traditional administrative system. Public administration focuses on processes, procedures and rules of etiquette, while public management involves much more.

Instead of merely following instructions, a public manager focuses on achieving results and taking responsibility for doing so. It is this paradigm shift from Traditional Public Administration to the New Public Management which has exposed the weaknesses of the Traditional Public Administration Model as discussed below. The use of hierarchical structures which were not necessarily the best or efficient forms of organisations if comparing output and input was one of the problems or inadequacies of the Traditional Public Administration model.

However, the hierarchical system meant that everyone knew his or her place and extent of authority. Someone is always technically accountable for all

actions, from the lowest level to the highest. The system was reasonably efficient and effective in a narrow sense and meant instructions were carried out, especially when given clearly. It was also reasonably free from the temptations of diverting, eg, public funds for the personal use of the bureaucrat. When tasks were administrative and relatively simple, when the environment was stable, the system worked well.

On the contrary, this system is not workable in big organisations. Many strata in a hierarchical structure have a potential of slowing down work progress. The results or output take long to be realised. The Kavran Report of (1989: 16) reported on hierarchical delays in the public service especially when processing business documents, water and electricity bills requests and others. According to Vecchio, (1991: 510), to change the existing public system into one that is speedy, risk-taking, output-oriented, innovative and efficient requires a total change in organizational culture.

The focus of subsequent reforms in the public service has been to move away from the idea of a rigid and bureaucratized career service, towards a more fluid structure. An example is that Foreign Direct Investment into Zimbabwe has been put under one roof to speed up processing and approval of projects. Bureaucracy is another problem associated with the TPA model. In small organisations like Civil Aviation of Zimbabwe, bureaucracy is ideal for control of human resource due to its defined reporting and communication channels, it allows for certainty.

Work is standardised due to laid down procedures, rules and regulations. The processes of control are scientifically calculated. However hierarchical structures are not good for management, is usually slow in moving, that is, work takes long

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to be accomplished and innovations are almost nonexistent. Any deviation from the norm through innovation can be punishable by law if ever anything goes wrong and investigations indicate that there was a deviation from the stipulated regulations or work procedures.

However, Weber, in Hughes(2003: 35) noted that, “ every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intensions secret”, adding that the concept of official secrecy is the specific invention of bureaucracy. This concern still exists today, for example, in the ZRP any press release is done through their spokes persons. The Kavran report of 1989: 17 reported that there were difficulties in obtaining information from the government. The same report indicated that one had to make innumerable visits and memorandum to get information even on a simple matter.

There are now marked changes in the external environment functions with the greater external focus on NPM, through both strategy and managing of external constituencies, than was ever the case with TPA. Public service anonymity has certainly declined. Public servants are much freer to speak out in public, to appear at professional forum, to write articles in journals and generally to be visible and be public figures. The problem of political control or interference in public administration was also found to be one of the of TPA model challenges.

Politics and administration are interlinked. Politicians make policies and administrators implement the policies. However, politicians are not necessarily administrators whereas public administrators are professionals in their work and are supposed to be apolitical; hence they need to be <https://assignbuster.com/what-challenges-does-the-traditional-public-administration/>

separated. Dahl (1998: 59) argues that, “ politics is ubiquitous”. This means that politics cannot be completely separated from administration. Hughes (2003: 32) argues that, “ The reform movement in the United States was not able to separate policy from administration, or politicians from administrators.

It was only able to clarify the point where political appointments to the public service were to be separated from career appointments. ” According to (Hughes 2003: 26) “ politicians should rule while public officials should do their bidding. Political offices should be filled competitively in the political arena whereas; bureaucratic offices should be filled competitively in the bureaucratic arena. Political officials should be selected on the basis of their political competence; bureaucratic officials should be selected on the basis of their bureaucratic competence.

The separation of political and career routes should be institutionalised by legal or constitutional prohibition on concurrent office holding and interchange. Politicians should be judged by the electorate or their political peers whereas officials should be judged by their political overseers or their bureaucratic peers. Political office should be of limited tenure and subject to frequent elections and bureaucratic office should be of unlimited tenure, subject to good behaviour. According to the Zimbabwe Public Service Act, the Public service functions independently and is not answerable to the minister, however the minister can direct the commission on certain issues. Political interference has raised its head in a number of areas of the Zimbabwe Public Services like, the mining sector (ZISCO) where ESSAR was awarded a tender to run the mine and politicians interfered resulting in the

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withdrawal of the tender. The TPA model was rigid and bureaucratic, narrowly focused and preoccupied with structures and process..

Rigidity to rules, regulations and order of doing work has a tendency of stifling innovation which is necessary for work effectiveness and efficiency. Robert Merton (1968: 260) argued that, " rigid adherence to rules could have unanticipated consequences, including a reduction in efficiency. The rigidity and bureaucracy of the system posed a problem to the NPM system which is result based and managers are accountable for their action. To maintain one's job, is now dependant on one's performance. The new public management encourages flexibility which is intertwined with innovation and increased output.

The TPA model assumed there was ' one best way' of administering. Gulick's POSDCORB and Taylor's scientific management were ' popular manifestations of this one best way theorising. ' According to Stillman, (1991: 9) in Hughes (2003: 25), the one best way, " is a methodology by which a few simple nostrums/remedies were followed in all circumstances. " Hughes (2003: 33) argues that, " the one best way was determined by examining all the steps involved in a task, measuring the most efficient and, most importantly, setting out this method as a set of procedures.

In the public services, the procedure manuals became ever larger with the method for dealing with every conceivable contingency spelt out in great detail. Once this was done the task of the public official was purely administrative, merely involving consultation of the manual and following the procedures laid down. There was little thought involved and no creativity other than that of finding the right page of the manual. Administrators by <https://assignbuster.com/what-challenges-does-the-traditional-public-administration/>

definition have no responsibility for results; one best way thinking allowed them to evade responsibility altogether. The results or output was also ignored by this notion of one-best way.

This is prevalent in most government departments of Zimbabwe especially the military where things are done according to the book. There is very little room for innovations and accountability as demanded by the new public system. Meritocracy/Professionalism. The TPA was based on non professional ways of recruitment. It was once common for those aspiring for employment by the state to resort to patronage or nepotism, relying on friends or relatives for employment, or by purchasing offices. This is still prevalent or being practised in most developing countries Zimbabwe included.

This compromises standards, affects output and de-motivates professionals resulting in high labour turnover. The Zimbabwe Public Service Act requires that people be employed according to their professional qualifications or their merit. For example in the health sector, for a doctor to practice must be licensed, the same applies with lawyers. Weber formulated the theory of bureaucracy, the idea of a distinct, professional public service, recruited and appointed by merit, politically neutral, which would remain in office throughout changes in government.

One of the major challenges of TPA was that it was manual based hence slow moving. According to Muid, (1994: 125). Technological change affects management, including the management of government. This should be regarded as one of the main driving forces both towards new forms of public management and away from traditional bureaucracy. With the adoption of

forms of e-government (electronic government) technologically driven change is likely to accelerate.

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as distributed computer systems, Internet linkages, new databases could lead to a re-conceptualization of the very way that bureaucracies work. The changes have the potential to be beneficial, even though there are issues of privacy and security yet to be dealt with. It is inarguable that management of the public sector changes with the kinds of information technology currently available. In Zimbabwe the Presidential Computerisation programme is a typical example of public sector effort.

In conclusion, the traditional model of administration was an outstanding and widely emulated by governments all around the world . However with passage of time the TPA has been increasingly superseded by the NPM. The new model is not fully in place, there is now a greater focus on results rather than process, on responsibility rather than its evasion and on management rather than administration. This transition has its own challenges that it encounters during the process. The challenges include bureaucracy, political interference, meritocracy/professionalism and one best way and technological changes.

It was only later, when NPM come into existence and managers became responsible for results, that there was any real thought that different methods could lead to different results and those methods and actions should be tailored to circumstances. According to Behn (1998: 140), in reality there is no one best way but many possible answers. | Nostrum ineffective remedy: a remedy for a social, political, or economic problem, <https://assignbuster.com/what-challenges-does-the-traditional-public-administration/>

especially an idea or plan that is often suggested but never proved to be successful
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