

**Subject:** Public Administration  
**Course:** Public Administration: An Introduction  
**Title of the Module:** Evolution of Public Administration

The module describes the study of public administration as an activity and as an academic discipline. Public Administration as a field of inquiry is comparatively of recent origin. Since inception, it has passed through various stages of evolution to reach in its present form. Broadly, five stages viz. the Politics/Administration Dichotomy, the Principles of Administration, Criticisms and Challenges, Crisis of Identity and Public Administration as an Independent Discipline have been identified. An attempt has been made to understand the present status of discipline. A critical discussion of these phases and issues arising as a result of the on going evolution is important as it will help in understanding the futuristic direction of the discipline.

**Keywords:** Renaissance era, Administrative codes and manuals, Liberal democratic traditions, Comparative studies, behavioural revolution, Comparative administration group, Neo Liberalism.

### **Introduction**

Public Administration generally means service to the people rendered by a government agency. It is the result of evolutionary process which can be viewed from two distinct perspectives – as an activity and as a subject of study or intellectual discipline. As an activity, it is as old as social life. A peep into the history reveals that Public Administration as a distinct activity can be traced from the ancient river civilizations of Egypt, China, India and Mesopotamia—the earliest cradles of civilization. The system of centralized bureaucratic administration evolved by Egypt and the adoption of system of civil service recruitment through competitive examinations by China are evidences in this direction. In ancient times, the city states of Greece and republics and kingdoms of India also evolved their well-developed systems of administration. However, the chief feature of medieval feudal society was the anarchic decentralization in administration. It was followed by the rise of national monarchies in France, England, and Russia. Their expansionist and war-like policies led to the increase in the size of

establishments which in turn resulted into ministries and departments. Further, growth of democracy changed the very nature of the administrative set up along with increase in its scope. At the same time, resolution of issues arisen in the wake of industrial revolution, made the organization and methods of administration more complex. Subsequently, the upheavals caused by World War I and II gave rise to problems of reconstruction and rehabilitation and it became imperative for the administration to solve them. Moreover, the economic crisis such as depression and inflation necessitated remedial measures by the administration. All these developments necessitated administrative interference in the entire life of the society and thereby increasing the field of its activity. It would not be out of place to mention here that before World War I the administration was basically national in character but after that it became international mainly due to the advent of rapid means of transport and communication.

### **Rise of the Study of Public Administration**

Public Administration as an activity is as old as civilized life. But as a field of study it is of recent origin as it emerged during the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A pertinent question arises in this regard that can such an important activity continue for a long time without having substantial theoretical base? The answer lies in the close examination of the facts which reveal that it did had a theoretical base as a part of related branches of knowledge like politics, ethics and law in different societies and remained so for a considerable long time. For example, ancient Hindu epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* deal with administrative ideas along with political. Similarly, *Samritis* present a vivid exposition of judicial administration. So far as Hindu treatises on politics, like the one *Kautaliya's Arthashastra*, are concerned, these deal more with administrative problems than the theoretical basis of the State. Not only Indian but in other societies too one can see a similar phenomenon. Teachings of **Confucius**, the great ancient Chinese philosopher, contain many administrative principles. Aristotle, the Greek's scholar, who is regarded as the father of political science, also discussed some aspects of administration in his famous book **The Politics**. During the middle age which is dubbed as dark period in the human history, nothing substantial happened in this regard. However, in the renaissance era there appeared Machiavelli's **The Prince** which

is considered as a treatise on the art of government and administration. In modern times also many scholarly works on Political Science and memoirs of statesmen deal extensively with administrative matters. But despite all this, there has not been clear recognition of Public Administration as a separate and distinct subject of study. Even the term 'Public Administration' was used for the first time in the closing years of 18<sup>th</sup> century when Hamilton contributed a paper defining the meaning and scope of the discipline. Likewise, the first book on public administration was '**Principles d' Administration Publique**' written by Charles Jean Bounin, a French scholar in 1812. However, literature on this subject remained scanty so it can't assume the status of an independent discipline. The main reason which can be attributed to this was the lack of sufficient specialization and technicality to merit its separate and independent consideration. But industrial revolution has extended the scope of public administration by opening new vistas and that too in the highly technical fields. As a result administrative processes became too complex to be dealt only by professional and skilled civil services. This gave rise to professional civil servants and the need to systematize their skill and experience into administrative codes and manuals led to the emergence of theoretical and academic discussion of public administration as an independent discipline.

### **Evolution of Public Administration**

Public Administration as an independent and separate subject of study began in 1887 and the credit for this goes to Woodrow Wilson. In order to understand the present status of the discipline as a field of inquiry it becomes essential to study its evolution. Many scholars and academicians dwelt upon this aspect from different perspective. Some of them have discussed it from the point of view of traditions such as Absolutist, Liberal - Democratic and Marxian while to Golembiewski it may be understood in terms of *locus* and *focus*. To him locus is the institutional 'where' of the field while focus is the specialized 'what' of the field. On this basis, he has outlined the following four developmental phases of Public Administration:

Phase I: The analytic distinction of politics from administration.

Phase II: The concrete distinction of politics from administration.

Phase III: A science of management.

Phase IV: The pervasive orientation toward public policy.

Likewise, Nicholas Henry in his book entitled “**Public Administration and Public Affairs**” has explained the evolution of the discipline keeping in view its definitional crisis into following five successive paradigms:

Paradigm I: The politics/Administration Dichotomy, 1900-26

Paradigm II: The Principles of Administration, 1927-37

Paradigm III: Public Administration as Political Science, 1950-70

Paradigm IV: Public Administration as management, 1956-70, and

Paradigm V: Public Administration as Public Administration, 1970-

However in a more logical sense the development of Public Administration as an academic field can be discussed through the following five successive phases:

Phase I: The Politics/Administration Dichotomy (1887-1926)

Phase II: The Principles of Administration (1927-1937)

Phase III: Criticism and Challenges (1938-1950)

Phase IV: Crisis of Identity (1950-1970)

Phase V: Public Administration as an Independent Discipline (1970 Onwards)

### **Phase I: The Politics/Administration Dichotomy (1887-1926)**

Woodrow Wilson was the first scholar who mainly set the tone for the early study of Public Administration through his essay entitled ‘**The Study of Administration**’ appeared in 1887 in which he emphasized the necessity of developing the scientific foundations of the discipline. He originated the ‘politics/administration dichotomy’- the distinction between political activity and administrative activity in public organization by observing that it “is getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one”. However some scholars like Richard J. Stillman II differ with this contention arguing that Wilson

was well aware that public administration was innately political in nature. In fact, while formulating his politics/administration dichotomy, Wilson apparently misinterpreted some of the German literature that he read on Public Administration which made him ambivalent about the discipline. To quote Stillman, Wilson failed “to amplify what the study of administration actually entails, what the proper relationship should be between the administrative and political realms....” However, this dichotomy has paved the way for the study of evolution of Public Administration.

Wilson’s view was further continued by Frank J. Goodnow, who in his book **‘Politics and Administration’**, published in 1900 contended that there were two distinct functions of the government viz. ‘politics’ and ‘administration’. According to him, “politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will while administration has to do with the execution of these policies”. He explained, further, that the heart of his distinction lies in the classic separation of powers, which prescribes the desirability of entrusting “in large measures” the expression or formulation of the “will of the sovereign” to “a different organ” than is charged with executing that will. However, Goodnow’s basic distinction is not as crude as many understand. In this regard Golembiewski has rightly pointed out that Goodnow’s distinction is not monolithic, either in locus or focus. The two functions are not performed in different loci.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Public Administration started gaining popularity mainly because of the keen interest taken by scholars in the public reforms movement going on in American universities. Resultantly, a Committee on Practical Training for Public Service was established in 1912 by the American Political Science Association which recommended that professional schools were needed to train public administrators. This committee became the forerunner of the American Society for Public Administration, set up in 1939.

In 1926 Leonard D. White’s **‘Introduction to the Study of Public Administration’** was published which is regarded as the first book entirely devoted to the discipline. The main thrust of White’s text book was ‘Politics should not intrude on

administration. ....Public Administration is capable of becoming a value –free science in its own right and the mission of administration is economy and efficiency.” Thus, White strengthened the notion of a distinct politics /administration dichotomy. Accordingly, whatever Public Administration scrutinized in the executive branch was regarded as factual and scientific; while the study of public policy making and related matter was left to the political scientists. It was mainly because of the emphasis on science and fact in Public Administration, a foundation was laid for the later discovery of certain scientific principles of administration.

## **Phase II: The Principles of Administration (1927-1937)**

During this phase, scholars believed that Public administration is a separate activity with its own well marked field and principles. In 1927, W. F. Willoughby’s book **‘Principles of Public Administration’** was published in which he asserted that “in administration there are certain fundamental principles of general application analogous to those characterizing any science.” They could be discovered and administrators would be expert in their work if they learned how to apply these principles. Further, efficiency in administration would be increased if these principles are applied. By the very fact that the principles of administration were principles, it therefore, followed that they could be applied successfully in any administrative setting.

Among the most significant works relevant to this phase were M. P. Follet’s **‘Creative Experience’**(1924), Henri Fayol’s **‘Industrial and General Management’** (1930) and James D. Mooney and Alan C, Reiley’s **‘Principles of Organization’** (1939) all of which delineated varying number of overarching administrative principles. However, the landmark study in the field which enhanced the prestige of the discipline was the publication of Luther Gulick’s and Lyndall Urwick’s **‘Papers on the Science of Administration’** (1937). According to these scholars, the general thesis of this paper is “that there are principles which can be arrived at inductively from the study of human organization which should govern arrangements for human associations of any kind.” Further, they propounded the famous concept of **POSDCORB** – final expression of these principles. Resultantly, Public Administration touched its zenith and this phase is regarded as a golden era in the evolution of the discipline.

Organizational theorists often dub this school of thought Administrative Management since it focused on the upper hierarchical levels of organization. A related literature that preceded the work in administrative management was under continuing development in business schools, often called Scientific Management. The most notable contribution to the literature was F. W. Taylor's '**Principles of Scientific Management**' (1911). However, Scientific Management had less effect on public Administration during its principles phase because it focused on lower level personnel in the organization. Speaking in terms of locus and focus Mohit Bhattacharya has rightly pointed out that "the 'public' aspect of public administration was virtually dropped at this stage and the focus was almost wholly on efficiency."

The lack of locus, if not, perhaps, the sharpening new focus of public administration during this period, made itself evident within the university community. Scholars who identified with the study of Public Administration nonetheless found it useful to establish **American Society for Public Administration** which continues to function as the nation's primary association of scholars and professionals of Public Administration, and as the sponsoring organization of the field's premier Journal **Public Administration Review**. It symbolized Public Administration's conscious need to become a profession and a discipline.

### **Phase III: Criticism and Challenges (1937-1950)**

In the very next year (1938), the mainstream Public Administration was challenged with the publication of Chester I. Barnard's '**The Functions of the Executive**'. The challenge came basically in two forms: first, rejection of the idea of politics administration dichotomy and second, principles of public administration lacking in scientific validity.

A book entitled '**Elements of Public Administration**' edited by Fritz Morstein Marx (1946) was one of the first major volumes to question the assumption that politics and administration could be dichotomized. It was argued that administration cannot be

separated from politics because of its political nature. Further, administration is not only concerned with implementation of political policy decisions but also plays an important role in their formulation. According to Nicholas Henry, the rejection of the politics/administration dichotomy was a huge intellectual shift that fundamentally changed the nature of the field for decades and, in a way, also diminished it.

The second challenge to the field was that there could be no such thing as principles of administration. In 1946, Herbert Simon gave a foreshadowing of his Administrative Behavior in an article entitled '**Proverbs of Administration**' published in **Publication Administration Review**. However, the most formidable dissection of the principles notion appeared in 1947 when Simon's '**Administrative Behaviour: A Study of Decision-Making in Administrative Organization**' was published. In this book Simon showed that for every principle of administration there was a counter principle, thus rendering the whole idea of principles redundant. He advocated the behavioral approach to public administration to make it a more scientific discipline. He focused upon decision-making as the alternatives to the principles approach.

In the same year, Robert A. Dahl also countered the claim of principles of public administration as a science in his article entitled '**The Science of Administration :Three Problems**'. He observed: "We are a long way from a science of public administration. No science of public administration is possible unless: (a) the place of normative values is made clear; (b) the nature of man in the area of public administration is better understood and his conduct is more predictable; and (c) there is a body of comparative studies from which it may be possible to discover principles and generalities that transcend national boundaries and peculiar historical experiences." The same theme was reflected by Dwight Waldo's in his book "The Administrative State" (1948) when he 'attacked the notion of unchanging principles of administration, the inconsistencies of the methodology used in determining them, and the narrowness of the values of economy and efficiency that dominated the field's thinking.'



The ultimate effect of Simon's and related critiques appearing in the late 1940's was to bury the belief that principles of administration, public or otherwise, could be discovered in the same sense that laws of science and nature could be. Thus, by mid-century the two defining pillars of Public Administration – the politics/administration dichotomy and the principles of administration – had been abandoned.

#### **Phase IV: Crisis of Identity (1948 – 1970)**

The discipline was in quandary and suffered from the crisis of identity due to the abandonment of politics-administration dichotomy and the principles of public administration. So the scholars of public administration reacted to this crisis by reestablishing the linkages of Public Administration first with Political Science and then with the Management. Speaking in terms of Political Science, it can be said that most of the writings on Public Administration in the 1950's spoke of the field as an 'emphasis,' 'and area of interest' or even as a 'synonym' of Political Science. John Gaus, for example, in his famous article '**Trends in the Theory of Public Administration**' (1950) observed that "A theory of public administration means in our time a theory of politics also." However, they were not liked and encouraged by political scientists.

During this period two developments took place –the growing use of the Case Study Method and the rise and fall of Comparative and Development Administration. The emergence of the case study method reflected the response of Public Administration to the behavioral revolution going on in that time in social sciences. So far as the rise of Comparative and Development Administration is concerned, it may be pointed out that prior to the abandonment of the principles of administration, it was assumed that cultural factors did not make any difference in administrative settings. But, later on, scholars like Robert Dahl and Dwight Waldo pointed out that 'cultural factors could make public administration on one part of the globe quite a different ....on the other part.' As a result of this revised thinking, the study of Comparative Public Administration started in Universities and Colleges. However, the real impetus came in 1960 when Comparative Administrative Group was founded which received liberal grants from Ford Foundation. The Foundation's emphasis on the Third World led to a semi-autonomous sub-field of the

Comparative Public Administration called the Development Administration. The most notable contribution in this sphere was that of F. W. Riggs. But Comparative Public Administration from its very origin emphasized upon theory building and to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. The purely scholarly thrust of Comparative Public Administration led to its downfall so much so that in 1973 the Comparative Administrative Group was disbanded.

Due to their second-class status in the discipline of Political Science, some scholars of Public Administration began to search for an alternative and they found the same in management which sometimes is called administrative science. They argued that 'organization theory was, or should be, the overarching focus of public administration.' A number of developments led to the selection of management, with an emphasis on organization theory, as the paradigm of public administration. In 1956, the important Journal **Administrative Science Quarterly** was founded on the premise that the distinction between business and institutional administration is false and that administration is administration. Further, such works as James G. March and Herbert Simon's '**Organizations**', Richard Cyert and March's '**A Behavioural Theory of the Firm**,' March's '**Handbook of Organizations**' and James G. Thompson's '**Organizations in Action**' gave solid theoretical reasons for choosing Management as the paradigm of Public Administration.

As a paradigm, Management provided a focus and not a locus. It offered techniques, often highly sophisticated techniques, that require expertise and specialization, but in what institutional setting that expertise should be applied is undefined. Regarding the relative impact of political science and management on Public Administration, Nicholas Henry has observed that 'if political science was profoundly influenced on the evolution and underlying values of public administration, management was less so. But, in many ways, the impact of management on public administration was also more positive.' But in both the situations i.e. its linkages either with Political Science or Management, the essential thrust was one of Public Administration losing its identity.

That is why this phase known as period of identity of crisis for the discipline of Public Administration.

### **Phase V: Public Administration as an Independent Discipline (1970 Onwards)**

However, even when the discipline of Public Administration was at its lowest ebb, it was sowing the seeds of its own renaissance. Couple of factors, complimentary to each other, contributed in this process. The first was the development of interdisciplinary programs focusing upon policy science. In this regard three distinct inter-theoretical linkages – a) politics-administration union, b) Economics-administration confluence, and c) organization theory-administration intermixing -- can be identified. The second was the emergence of New Public Administration (NPA) – an outcome of first Minnowbrook Conference held in 1968 sponsored by Dwight Waldo -- which put more emphasis on values replacing the traditional goals of efficiency and effectiveness. Besides, it laid stress on relevance, social equity and change. The overall focus of NPA movement was to make administration less generic and more public, less descriptive and more prescriptive, less institution-oriented and more client-oriented, less neutral and more normative, but it should be no less scientific all the time. The above twin intellectual currents compelled the scholars of public administration to think in terms of academic autonomy by severing their ties both with political science and management. These, in turn, made the public administrators proud as they started asserting that their profession is useful to the society. All these developments led to the rise of an independent field of public administration.

In this backdrop, in 1970 National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) was established which comprises of institutions of higher learning of different countries offering courses on major public administration programs. It is worth mentioning that over the years, the efforts of NASPAA has led to the increase in the number of separate departments of public administration considerably. Even more and more political science departments are joining this association. Likewise, the number of public administration programs which are housed in department of management or school of business administration has declined noticeably. Thus, the formation of

NASPAA represented the development of public administration as an independent area of study.

On theoretical side also, due to the impact of NPA, normative questions were being reassessed in this newly emerged discipline. The philosophy of 'neo-liberalism' provided a powerful base for the setting up of public administration in 'public interest,' thereby adding an ethical dimension to it. The system theory originated from natural sciences and ecological approach also strengthened the theoretical base of public administration. The '**Sala Model**' of Fred Riggs has proved an important milestone in this direction. Likewise, Yehezkel Dror's contribution in the field of Policy Sciences is providing new directions to the discipline. Increasingly, public policy academics and practitioners have utilized the theoretical concepts of political economy to explain political outcomes such as the success or failure of reform efforts.

In the late 1980's New Public Management (NPM) theory advocated by David Osborn and Ted Gaebler in their book **Reinventing Government** emphasized the use of private society style models, organizational ideas and values to improve the service and service orientation of the public sector. It treated individuals as "customers" or "clients", rather than as citizens. Some critics consider it inappropriate because people are viewed as economic units and not democratic participants. Nevertheless the model is still widely accepted at all levels of governments. Further, in the late 1990's, In response to the dominance of NPM Janet and Robert Denhardt proposed a new public service model known as digital era governance. It focused on themes of reintegrating governmental responsibilities, and digitalization exploring the transformational capabilities of modern IT and digital storage.

The Public Choice Approach of Vincent Ostrom underlined the fact that an era of State Minimalism has started in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which demand small but effective government from public administration. Another trend which one can observe is that the distinction between administration and management is becoming irrelevant. Traditionally, management is broadly concerned with industries and private enterprises

while administration refers to government machinery. Now when government itself is conducting industrial and commercial activities through public enterprise and private enterprises, in turn, are adopting more and more bureaucratic system; and public and private sectors are collaborating with each other in the wake of privatization, the difference between administration and management becomes meaningless. Evidently, 'government' is an important element of the state and the concrete form of 'government' is 'administration'.

