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BASIC CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Administration can be aptly described as a fact of life, a universal practice and of immense universal importance. The coming together of two people in a co-operative effort to undertake a task, for instance, to move a stone which none of them can move alone marks the beginning of administration. Adebayo (1981, 2000) simply defines it as "the organisation and direction of persons in order to accomplish a specified end". This all important concept must exist in every organization that is set up to achieve an objective or fulfill a purpose. People are said to involve themselves in administrative behaviour as soon as they cooperate among themselves to accomplish such objectives as erecting community town halls, managing schools, churches, mosques, vehicles, assembly plants, mills or when they organize the distribution and sales of electronic and farm tools. Thus, administration is inevitable in any given situation where a piece of work has to be done and this piece of work requires the effort of more than one person to accomplish it. In this sense, administration takes place whenever people cooperate to achieve the goals of their groups and such achievements require planning, organization, command, cooperation and control. It requires the mobilization, deployment and direction of men and material resources to attain the specified objectives (Ogunyemi, 2002).

Administration is the oldest of all professions. But as an academic discipline, public administration is of recent growth and is still growing further with the change in the environment of public administration and also due to its inter-relationship with other disciplines. Moreover, change from a predominately rural, to a complicated urban civilization, the rapid developments in physical technology, and the consequent desire for more orderly processes in the public as well as private sectors were all factors in the emergence of administration as a "self-conscious" field of study. As a separate Management science, its existence has been recognized recently, however as an art, it has been practised from time immemorial. We can find traces of Administrative thought in the Hausa-Fulani Emirates, Yoruba Kingdoms, the Bini Kingdom and the Ibo traditional society.

However, in the modern context, the meaning and scope of public administration was defined for the first time by Hamilton in the Federalist papers, No 72, just close to the end of the eighteenth century in U.S.A. After that, in 1812, Charles Jean Bournin in France wrote a book titled "Principles of Administration". Following this, a number of writers jumped into the field and expressed their thoughts by writing on different aspects of administration (Ekhatior 2003).

CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The term administration is derived from two Latin words "ad" and "minister" which means, "to serve or to manage". It denotes something as administering a nation, or state or a group of people. The major strand in this definition is that administration deals with national service and with community interest at heart, as opposed to private affairs. Moreover, this type of administration has to be accessible to all members of the community. Let us consider some definitions of administration as conceived by different theorists.

A simple definition of administration, perhaps, is that given by Champman (1960) as the science and art of getting things done using material resources and cooperative efforts of people. Similarly, Adebayo ((2000) defines administration as the organization and direction of people in order to accomplish a specified end. He went further to elaborate. "when two men cooperate to roll a stone that neither could move alone, the rudiments of administration have appeared." On his part, Ikelegbe (1995) sees administration as a way of conceptual thinking for attaining predetermined goals through group effort. He posited that such concept must have universal application, should emerge with human race and will continue to be employed as long as mankind survives. This definition is in consonance with that of Sergiovanni et al (1980) who sees administration as "the means by which formal goals are achieved or efficiently accomplished through cooperative human efforts". In his own perception, Waldo (1967) considers administration as "a type of human effort that has a high degree of rationality, that which is characterized by organization and management". According to him, the most important aspect of administration is organization,

Organization itself is regarded as a pattern of ways in which large numbers of people, too many to have intimate face to face contact with all others, and engaged in a complexity of tasks, relate themselves to each other in the conscious-systematic establishment and accomplishment of mutually agreed purpose." Another way by which administration has been examined is by looking at the functions of an administrator. Two scholars, Luther Gulick and Lyndal Urwick provided the basic foundation which summarised what the work of an administrator should be when he decided to employ the art of administration. The principles, seven in number, are represented in an acronym, POSDCORB which means Planning, Organising, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordinating, Reporting and Budgeting. Furthermore, there is another sense in which the term administration may be used. This is the sense whereby the term administration is used to refer to senior personnel in the executive branch of government. It is in this sense that the term is employed when people speak of "Balewa Administration", "Obasanjo Administration", "Yar' Adua Administration", "Amali Administration", "Oloyede Administration", "Omede Administration" etc(Ogunyemi 2002:6). No matter from which angle it is being considered, what we have today as modern systems of administration have emerged, in one way or the other, from the old practices and experiences of the ancient Egyptians, Chinese, the Greeks, Romans and much later from the Christian church.

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The nature of public administration for sometimes has generated some controversies. While some hold the view it as that public administration is an art, some believe that it is a science and still others view it as both science and art. Some writers hold the view that public administration is essentially an art. (Aghayere in Ikelegbe 1995, Tonwe 1994). According to them, art is skillful and involved systematic practice which is partly inborn and partly acquired and every art expresses itself through certain avenue. An art possesses these three characteristics. The question that arises from this, therefore, is whether public administration possesses these elements. It has been proved that as an activity, it requires a skill for efficient performance. Administrative skill is partly inborn and partly acquired. The third characteristic of an art is that there must be an avenue through which it must be expressed. Public administration as an art is expressed through three avenues: (a) the organization, (b) the people who work in the organization and (c) the social and cultural environment of the people for whom it functions (Henry 1992, Breadbury 1996). When public administration is viewed from this dimension, it can be said to be an art because it has the characteristics of an art.

The other view of the nature of public administration is that it is a science. Scholars who hold this view believe that public administration is a science like any other social science. They argue that like any other science, public administration is a well-defined discipline from which a lot of data have been gathered which are being subjected to scientific method of enquiry. Science is the systematic investigation, observation, tabulation, classification and correlation of a social phenomenon (Simon 1957, Tonwe 1994:45-46). If this is the definition of science, one can with some degree of certainty say that public administration qualifies to be a science. Experience has shown that the rules and principles that have been developed in public administration have enabled administrators to make predictions based on observation. This is the goal of science. In view of these two positions, scholars have come to a consensus that public administration qualifies to be called both a science and an art.

Unlike the nature of public administration, there is no doubt as to the scope of public administration. Its scope in all modern societies in broad form include policy analysis, the identification of options, programme implementation, and a constant preoccupation with efficient allocation of resources (Aghayere in Ikelegbe 1995:100). Specially, the scope today covers a variety of activities. In most societies, governmental work is carried out within the following categories of public organizations; the federal civil service, the state civil service, the local government, statutory corporations of both federal and state governments, companies and enterprises of both state and federal government, authorities, commissions, or boards established by the federal and state governments, educational institutions established or financed mainly by federal and/or state government, the police force, the armed forces and the judiciary (Ogunyemi 2002:16, Ackah-Nyamike 1986).

However, Ighauyere (in Ikelegbe 1995: 101) identified four views relating to the scope of public administration. These are: (1) the service delivery view (2)

the managerial activities view (3) the subject-matter view (4) the central concern view. The service delivery view argues that the scope of public administration covers all the service areas of government. Government agencies exist for the interest of effective and humane delivery of public services. The managerial view also holds that the scope of public administration covers managerial functions or activities. This line of thought contends that the scope of public administration is limited to managerial techniques which is represented by the acronym POSDCORB which stands for Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordinating, Reporting and Budgeting (Gullick and Urwick 1937 in Adebayo, 1982). This acronym represents the functions of public administration today.

The subject-matter line of thought of the scope of public administration is a reaction to the POSDCORB or managerial activities view. The subject matter view argued that managerial activities cannot be regarded as the only scope of public administration which extends to various line functions or services which government is required to provide. The central concern view of the scope of public administration covers those issues which, according to Aghayere in Ikelegbe (1995: 101-102) are of major concern to all students of public administration. These include:

1. The characteristics and behaviour of public administration. This include the motivation and conduct of participants in the process of administration
2. Institutional arrangements for the conduct of government administration, and
3. The environmental factors which affect the relationship between the administrative branch of government and the political branch and the society in general.

As a body of knowledge, public administration is directed towards understanding of governmental administration. And to paraphrase David Easton (in Varma '1775:1951), it is the objective of accomplishing the authoritative "purpose" of the state.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

There are certain basic, fundamental and governing principles of each subject. These principles are determined by the nature of the work each subject has to perform. These principles emerge as a result of long practical experiences faced by generations. Administration, being a rational activity, has also developed certain principles based on vast and varied experience of people that have administered the public affairs of several nations in the course of history (Ekhaton, 2003:63). As Ruthnaswamy rightly observed, "all efficient systems of administration conform to ascertainable principles. Such principles are independent alike of forms of government or the nature of undertakings and of the extent of the monetary transactions involved. They are external, their violation inevitably entails disorganization, inefficiency and waste" (Ruthnaswamy 1956). These principles may be expected to serve the practical purpose of providing an essential connectional framework to facilitate the study of the subject. It cannot be stated that

these principles equate to scientific laws in any respect or serve as a means of prediction. Rather, they are the statements which succeed in showing the broad dimensions of a subject and at the same time map out its main features. And it will be desirable to give these statements the name "principles" because they provide clues to the cause of any phenomena or elements. As a result, the following principles of administration can be identified.

Division of Work/Departmentalization: The administration of a country is a many sided business, because a country and its government are always engaged in multifarious activities. Thus, in order to ensure efficiency, it is desirable to develop specialization in administration. For this, Weber's first point is that the organization is divided into specified jurisdictional area, that is area of responsibility and this area was officially established by administrative regulations. Thus when the company president or Board of Directors decide to establish a new manufacturing operation, a memo is properly prepared for an official signature. It sets up the organizational units, describe its area of responsibility and how to relate to other existing organizational units. And name one or more of the key people who will be assigned to that unit. This form of division of work is very important to the functioning of the modern administration for it will bring about dramatic increase in productivity (Ekhaton 2003:71, Ogunyemi 2002).

Principle of Hierarchy: Hierarchy means grouping of units into a large unit for direction and control of activities. It is the method by which the efforts of many different types of individuals are coordinated (Ekhaton 2003:71). Weber (in Pugh 1984:24), suggested that the co-ordination would only be accomplished through office hierarchy and levels of graded authority, which means that each lower level is supervised by higher level. Ekhaton (2003:72) reinforces Weber's position when he declared that:

No large-scale organization can successfully work unless there is proper hierarchy in which some receive commands from their superiors while others give orders to their subordinates.

He observed that though 'equality' may be an attractive slogan, yet in practice, in a department there must be persons of different grades and cadres. Nevertheless, he recognizes the importance of hierarchy as a catalyst for free flow of information upwards as well as downwards and is also an essential channel of command and communication. Ogunyemi (2002:9-10) agrees with the above position when he asserted that, when plans are drawn up by the top of the organization, it will then be passed down the chain of command for action. The performances of the lower level he observed, can properly be monitored and controlled so that they function harmoniously. And, as Ekhaton rightly concluded, hierarchy has come to stay in public administration as an accepted principle and it is essential that it should be logically strengthened.

Principle of Organization: Organization is a means of achieving the best result from concerted effort. This principle focuses on the need for proper structuring of the administrative machinery. Upon this principle depends in large measure the value of the contribution public administration can make to social well-being. Though the organization must be economical, yet it should not lack. "Co-ordination", "correlation" and "integration" are blessed words covering a multitude of administration virtues. Every department of a public administrative setting must be correlated with each other. There must not be a water-tight separation amongst the various departments. The government is an entity and must be run as an entity. The application of this principle results in hierarchical grading of the staff employed, each specializing in a particular function or group of related functions (see Koontz and O'Donnel 1968, Nwachukwu, 1992 Atuahene 1983 and Ekhatior 2003).

Principle of Authority: We may define authority as the right to make decisions and the power to ensure that people comply with the decision. In other words authority means taking decisions and seeing to it that they are carried out. Administration involves establishing authority relationships among members of the organization. Authority flows from the top in the organization. However, the extent to which one has authority depends on the acceptance of his instruction by colleagues and subordinates. When the administrator delegates authority down the organization, the subordinates accept his authority if they accept the instructions. As much as practicable, authority should be granted to people to ensure efficient administration, in the absence of which they shall have no power over their subordinates and of getting work done by them (see Ikelegbe 1995), Egonmiwa (1991).

Principle of Obedience and Discipline: According to Ekhatior (2003:70) authority becomes real and is realised only when its exercise is followed by obedience. Unless persons in authority secure obedience from those to whom the commands of authority are issued, authority becomes meaningless. He however, cautioned that both authority and obedience have to be based on the dictates of reason. Similarly, just as obedience is important to give effect to the command of authority, discipline is also necessary for the successful running of an organization. Both obedience and discipline can be achieved if the people from whom it is expected are convinced of the reasonableness of the command and authority.

Principle of Co-ordination: Administration as a whole comprises different parts and to achieve the desired ends, these different parts have to work harmoniously with one another (Tonwe 1994:10, Ekhatior 2003). Hence, an administrator, according to Sharma (1985:23), Adamalekun (1983:3), Sanda (1991-7), Ikelegbe (1995:105) and Ogunyemi, (2002:5) must continually ensure that the various branches of the organization are working smoothly, that the interrelated task being performed in the various sub-divisions and sections of the organizations are harmoniously co-ordinated.

Principle of Efficiency: It is increasingly realized that efficiency is rather the sole standard of judging success or failure of an institution and public administration is not an exception to the rule. Efficient public administration is most essential for the development of the growing complex of social, political and economic set up. Thus, a public administrator should work with clear idea of bringing more and more efficiency. This can be brought in many ways but it is essential that target fixed or set for achievement should be rational and reasonably achievable with available resources. Neither religion nor sex but ability of the person should be the sole criterion for making all appointments. Staffing should be on scientific lines and as far as possible there should be division of labour on every sound footings. Administrative and policy changes should not be frequent, they should be made only when they are absolutely necessary. At the same, time there should not be too much rigidity. The employees should be given reasonable and proper promotion opportunities and initiative should be encouraged and properly rewarded. There should also be refresher courses and other training facilities should be given to the employees so that they can be fully well-informed about latest administrative techniques and methods (see Olowu 1991, Anifowose and Enemuo 1990, Nwachukwu 1988, Bello 2005, Ekhatior 2002).

APPLICABILITY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

These principles are very much applicable to administration in developing countries. For instance, Ekhatior (2003:72) observes that the National Assembly in Nigeria gives broad principles and policies which are put into practice by public administrators. Directives given by ministers, who are political heads are honestly carried out by public administrators. Public servants are required to remain disciplined and for this purpose, in Nigeria we have public service conduct rules which must be obeyed under all circumstances. Public servants at all levels have certain fixed responsibilities. Those who fail to discharge them are punished by stoppage of their salary increment or promotions, suspension or even dismissal from service. A high degree of efficiency in public services must be ensured. To this, end, civil servants are given "in-service" training and opportunities to acquire further knowledge so that they become efficient. In Nigeria, also. The principle of division of labour is operational. Empirically, at the national level, the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary are working separately from each other.

However, it is pertinent to note that all these principles cannot be taken as final word to administrative activities. The basic limitation of these principles is that they laid emphasis on the internal structure of the organization whereas different theories developed by prominent administrative and social scholars have proved that administrative act cannot be studied in isolation. The administrative activities are affected and also affect in their turn various other ecological factors such as social, political, economic, cultural and so on. Thus, whatever the principles that are to be developed, they must take broader perspective in view.

Another limitation of the principles as developed by traditional thinkers is that they are more ideological principles which reveal what administrative activities

should or ought to be. Ekhafor (2003):73) rightly noted, that they lack empiricism and do not talk about administrative reality. Modern theories, again, give more importance to empirical studies rather than the ideological generalizations.

In conclusion, it would be safer to agree, with Ekhafor when he asserted that no rigid set of principles can be said to be of universal acceptance. According to him, principles if necessary at all, have to be reviewed from time to time in the context of changing times and places.

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