



# Evolution of the Thoughts of Public Administration and Its Understanding Following the Perspectives of Political Science, Management and Law

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## Abstract

The article aims to understand, analyze, and explain the evolution of the understanding of public administration from the perspectives of political science, management and law. The paper begins to study public administration from its classical type, where three perspectives of it are studied synthetically, as well as its potential as an independent administrative science. The article answers why and how the field is considered, even at the level of defining the concept of public administration and how it differs from management, law and political science. Additionally, the work demonstrates the visions expressed by such authors as Max Weber, Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, Leonard White, Herbert A. Simon, Luther Gulick and Dwight Waldo.

## Keywords

thoughts of public administration, public administration evolution, public administration perspectives, politics and administration

## Introduction

Public administration is a mechanism for implementing the values or preferences of individuals, groups, social classes and/or the entire society (Frederickson, 1976), and more precisely, the definition depends on through which science and/or discipline we consider it (Shafritz et al., 2016). The dilemma of conceptualizing public administration begins when we realize that it refers to and includes issues such as the implementation of government policy, planning and administration of public policy courses, organization of state operations, enforcement of public law, administrative procedure, public management, organizational development, private and public sector coordination, finance, control and accountability.

Political science, law and management perspectives on public administration offer different definitions and approaches (Bouckhaert & Jann, 2020); at the same time, its potential to develop as an independent administrative science is noteworthy (Dzinic & Skarica, 2015). Academic rhetoric about public administration, its understanding, form, and conceptualization does not

lose its relevance in the theoretical and empirical discourse on which many works have been created by international academic authorities<sup>1</sup>: the evolution of public administration opinion gives us answers to why the field of different sciences has developed in perspective and how its understanding has been transformed from ancient philosophy to modern public administration thought.

## 1 The research aims and objectives

This article does not rely on empirical methodology and this paper has two goals: 1) to study the evolution of the understanding of public administration from the perspective of political science, management and law and 2) a systematic study of the thoughts of the main authors on public administration. Taking this into account, we can define the objectives of the research as the following: a review of the academic and scientific literature related to the issue; an overview of the concept of public administration, and a systematic description and analysis of public administration perspectives; an overview of the evolution of public administration thought and its different aspects.

## 2 Understanding public administration through the prism of political science, law, and management

Public administration from the perspective of political science is the process of governing public activities and the implementation/administration of public policy courses, while the field deals with planning, organizing, directing coordinating, and controlling government operations (Chapman et al., 2023). According to these visions, public administration cannot exist outside the political sphere, as previous definitions indicate its political nature.

In legal discourse, public administration is an activity of the state, and thus it is created by legal foundations and bounded by legislative instruments. According to this view, public administration in itself is the enforcement of public law, and thus the process of administration cannot exist without these legal foundations (Storing, 1965; Christensen et al., 2011). It should also be said here that the “juridification” process brings to the fore the rhetoric that the study of public administration raises questions without law and legal foundations (Hood, 1995).

The management perspective of public administration began to be discussed when the discipline became more applicable. That is why, in some cases, it obeyed the sirens of management (Chandler, 1991, 39), the actual result of which was the development of new forms of public management (Gruening, 2001). In this view, the public manager is responsible for the implementation and interpretation of management policies, as well as the daily work of various organizational units (Shafritz et al., 2016), therefore the study of public administration today is done using the components of management and organizational development. According to this rhetoric, public administration is an art, not a science – or vice versa. “Some people are born

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<sup>1</sup> Storing (1965), Nigro & Nigro (1970), Frederickson (1976), Chandler (1991), Rhodes (2000), Bogason (2005), Naidu (2005), Martinez (2009), Politt & Bouckhaert (2011), Christensen et al. (2011), Shafritz et al. (2016), Rosenbloom et al. (2017), Dahl (2018), Chapman et al. (2023), Bouckhaert & Jann (2020), Bustos (2021), Khuroshvili (2021), Nyadera & Dagba (2022), Overman & Schillemans (2022).

with a talent of administration, but an artist is useless without tools – technical skills (science). However, a master's degree or a doctorate in public administration or a related field does not mean that an official can be a high-level public administrator" (Shafritz et al., 2016, 16–17); with these observations, the authors confirm the importance of professional (managerial) skills on the one hand, and on the other hand emphasize the need for science, so we can say that the success of public administration activities is based on many factors, including innate talent, regarding both scientific and professional skills.

A management perspective enriches the field and provides civil servants with professional/managerial competencies and skills. The rise of liberal market economic policy and liberal-democratic political philosophy contributed to the development of "managerialism". A new and narrow definition of government has introduced business-style management practices (Kaul, 1997). In itself, "managerialism" is the opposite of "juridification", and we can consider these two as alternatives to each other in principle. Managerialist approaches have been rejected by the orientations emerging in the wake of "juridification" regarding such principles as formalization, process administration, sophisticated procedure, etc. (Hood, 1995), but this conflict between the "Confucian" and "legalist" approaches of the administrative school already existed in China 2,300 years ago (Creel, 1964).

Obviously, it is difficult to decide which of the above-mentioned sciences are part of public administration, although political science, management, and law have appropriate answers and statements for it. We can say that the nature of public administration is political on the one hand, because when we talk about the instrument of distributing power and resources, we talk about politics, and because of it this is the field of politics. When we talk about public activities and therefore the implementation of government policies, enforcement, and governance, we enter the boundaries of political science. However, is public administration only a part of political science? - No, because we realize that the field is really limited by the legal order and public law. It is clear that the process of public sector administration is not carried out without administrative law and procedure and, thus, public administration as an activity of the state cannot exist without the provision of legal instruments. So how do we relate it to management? - The process of administration and governance today is unimaginable without the participation of business and the public sphere because the public sector is not capable of providing public services independently, which is why the perspective of management enters the field. However, there is also the issue that different states have different public administration traditions and cultures, and therefore the perception of public administration as a discipline is related to their characteristic approach. It is clear that, where the legal perspective prevails in the field and teaching public administration started in university schools of law, public administration has become more closely related to the science of law. It is therefore not surprising that lawyers perceive the field of public administration as a part of the law and, accordingly, a discipline under public law. Where business-oriented management perspectives have entered and liberal market economic principles have prevailed, it is clear that public administration has become more like public management. That is why, where there is talk of management, we are talking about business administration, and that is why educational high schools train managers of the public sector. Finally, governance and politics have always been intertwined issues, the latter does not need scientific proof. Where public administration and the public sector are more closely related to power, the field becomes more political. In principle, this explains why there are different concepts in the field: public governance, public administration, public management and public policy.

When discussing the development of public administration, we have at hand the data for 1966, 1990, and 2014, which allows us to observe its evolution. By calculating and categorizing the published main works, books, reports, citations, and other tools related to public administration in the mentioned years, the percentage among the fields was as follows:

In 1966, 19% of new academic resources focused on core public administration, 34% on political science, 11% on social sciences, 8% on management, and 7% on economics, the share of the field of law was 1% (Shafritz et al., 2017, 26).

In 1990, 37% of academic works were on core public administration, 26% on political science, 5% on social sciences, 12% on management, and 9% on economics, and the share of the field of law was 2% (Shafritz et al., 2017, 26).

In 2014, 41% of academic papers were on Core public administration, 13% on political science, 6% on social sciences, 14% on management, and 11% on economics, the share of the field of law was still 1% (Shafritz et al., 2017, 26).

We can interpret and explain the given results as follows: initially, the potential of the field as an independent science was unclear, because 15% more was written on public administration in political science than on public administration itself. The results show that the social and political sciences are the actual basis for the development of public administration to begin with, which in 1966 accounted for 45% of the total. This share is quite high, even in 1990 when the share of social and political sciences was 31%. According to the data of the same year, the specific share of management and economics has increased, which together is equal to 21%, although according to the data of 1966 and 1990, the specific share of the field of law was 1% and 2%, which is too low conclude that law has an important role in the academic development of the field. It should also be noted here that in 1990, 37% was already written on separate public administration, which implies that the field was developing and its independent scientific potential growing.

As for the data of 2014, public administration is already at the forefront here with 41%, followed by management with a share of 14%, and then political science with 13%. What is interesting here is that the share of political science has significantly decreased, and the share of social sciences has also decreased. Instead, the potential of management and economics in the field is increasing. This data allow us to see directly what the basis of public administration development was years ago and how the trend is changing now.

The question of how public administration thought developed and what conclusions we can find and interpret in the theoretical discourse are discussed in the next chapter.

### **3 Public administration evolution from the classical type to modern times**

When we study the evolution of public administration and its foundations, it is essential to study and review the thoughts of such authors as Max Weber, Leonard White, Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, Herbert Alexander Simon, Luther Gulick, Dwight Waldo, and others who put forward such perspectives of public administration and governance that are still the subject of practice and rhetoric. Ther the study of and research into the evolution of public administration and thoughts on it are actively continuing, and the list of authors who today present the field from a completely different perspective is not exhaustive (Ventriss, 2015; Whetsell, 2018, Fox, 2019).

Max Weber is a central author for public administration, and despite his ups and downs, he is at least the most important thinker in the field of his time (Drechsler, 2020). Weber is often

associated with the theory of rational bureaucracy or the ideas of the Weberian state, which itself predicates a strict hierarchical structure, the need for qualified personnel, the documentation of bureaucratic procedures, a strict separation of competencies, and a focus on career progression. In itself, Weberian ideas were reflected in deterministic systems, but we can say that “Weber was a Weberian as much as Martin Luther was a Lutheran or Marx a Marxist”. From this point of view, we can say that Weber was not a supporter of the ideas we understand today as “Weberian bureaucracy” (Drechsler, 2020, 1).

According to Max Weber, bureaucracy is a set of structural arrangements: consequently, for him, it represents a set of variables, concepts, and principles that are characteristic of bureaucracy. He introduced into the field of public administration an “ideal type” of bureaucracy, a combination of different values and preferences that itself comprises the Weberian model. According to him, bureaucrats should be free as individuals, but the system should be strictly hierarchical. It is a kind of scalar chain, where each bureaucrat has their place and they are aware of/ the importance of this place. For Weber, the process must be written and documented; career development is based on qualifications and competencies, and the latter is confirmed by an exam/certification. He was in favor of meritocratic values, although the person who must judge and determine who deserves what in the sector is hierarchically superior. According to his vision, public service should be the only and/or main activity of a bureaucrat and, along with this, the bureaucracy is not allowed to appropriate public resources, and finally, the behavior of the bureaucrat should be subject to systematic control and strict discipline. In addition, Weber’s ideas emerged in the “Neo-Weberian” model of the state. This recovered certain values and approaches from the “rational bureaucracy theory”, which includes the return of the role of a strong state and, in this sense, a regulated, centralized system, which opposes the principles of “new public management” (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Taking this into account, Weber’s ideas are still relevant, problematic and sensitive issues for the field of public administration, which is confirmed by the fact that the author is still constantly discussed in the academic discourse.

Frank Goodnow and Woodrow Wilson are the two central authors of public administration that should be reviewed in parallel. The reason for this is the politics-administration dichotomy, about which the rhetoric began as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and we find the first essays on the subject (Guo, 2019). Goodnow proposed two functions of government, expressing the will of the state and implementing the will of the state, respectively: “politics” and “administration”, which are characteristic of all governmental systems (Goodnow, 2003). Unlike Goodnow, Woodrow Wilson directly approached political and administrative science as an independent discipline (Wilson, 1887). He believed that the field of public administration was broader than the political and thus public administration crossed the boundaries of politics and became the field of business. With this view, the author promotes the development perspective of “managerialism”.

Wilson believed that public administration meant the detailed and systematic enforcement of public laws, thus approaching the political and legal logic of public administration. Also, this was the structure of activities of government bodies for him. Interestingly, the author was in favor of decentralization on the one hand, but at the same time emphasized the daily growth of government functions and believed that the distribution of responsibility to many people led to the absence of determination, which led to irresponsibility. This in itself is against the logic of decentralization. Also, for Wilson, it was much easier and more effective for one ruler to make a decision than relying on the intervention of the people in the process and the war of ideas; he therefore concluded that in a state where the government takes public opinion into account, reforms were carried out a slowly. In the wake of all this, his work contributed to



the discussion and development of the management perspective of public administration, and this was in the background when Wilson became very skeptical and critical of the continental European public administration systems, accusing them of despotism. Wilson believed that the role of public administration was to implement the activities of government bodies, and at the same time, its function was to make public officials have a sense of executive obligations. On the other hand, he considered public administration as an organized form of state activity, which concerned all areas. With such pronouncements, sometimes Wilson seems a very contradictory and ambivalent author.

Leonard White is one of the most important authors in the field of public administration. His work “The Study of Public Administration” was published for the first time in 1926, wherein the author considers public administration primarily as a research field, the basis of which he sees in management (White, 1928). For White, administration includes all those operations aimed at achieving some goal or task (Storing, 1965). The complex discussion of the field shows us that public administration was above all a field of study (White, 1928). The latter has become more visible today, when the word administration has appeared in many fields. When we talk at the sectoral level, we often use such word conventions as education administration, healthcare administration, security policy administration, and others. This implies that administration, as a process, can characterize any sector, policy or course. For the author, the process of administration is unified, which is why he does not differentiate between federal, state, and municipal levels, and he does not give us sharp differences between private and public administration. However, when we talk about the administration described by White, we should highlight the following four of his conclusions: 1) administration is a unitary, unified process that can be studied at different levels; 2) the basis of administration is management, not law; thus, White is a theorist who supports the managerial approach to public administration and shares the perspective; 3) for him, administration is an art, although it has scientific potential and is therefore in the process of transformation with science; and 4) administration will always be the central problem for modern government.

White is also an outstanding author because he discusses the problematic methods of measuring the effectiveness of public administration. He thought he was pointing out that the measurement of a subject as complex and ambiguous as public administration itself would be the work of many years. At the same time, he emphasized the problem of achieving the latter, although he noted that, despite all this, judging institutions and talking about their success or failure was a kind of attempt to measure this effectiveness (Storing, 1965). From today’s perspective, measurement tools and indicators have been significantly refined, and when we talk about the effectiveness of governance and policy implementation/administration, there are various indices, normative principles, and tools to evaluate them one example of which is OCED SIGMA/PUMA (Torma, 2011).

In reviewing the evolution of public administration thought, we must consider Herbert Alexander Simon. The author wrote two outstanding works, “The Proverbs of Administration” (1946) and “A Comment on The Science of Public Administration” (1947), and it is characteristic of him to review issues in the discourse of counter-criticism. Herbert A. Simon was critical of the thinking of Luther Gulick, Robert Dahl, and other authors. Simon wrote in the last part of Gulick’s criticism that Even “art” cannot be founded on proverbs (Simon, 1946, 67). He created the image that Gulick and other authors seemed to write their thoughts without thinking or understanding (Meier, 2010, 284). Controversial and critical issues for Simon included the unity of command, specialization the span of control and organization by purpose and process.

As already mentioned, what distinguishes him is his style, that he was critical of both other authors and criticism of the field itself.

It is known that Robert Dahl reviewed public administration from a positivist perspective, where he relied on the position that value propositions in the field were not revealed by the scientific method. A continuation of the same logic was that recommendations in the field of public policy and administrative issues could not be purely scientific and substantiated empirically because of its normative narrative. In contrast, Simon developed the view that the applied scientist does not have the same freedom to limit the specific spectrum of the phenomenon as the exact scientist and this is because the administrative scientist deals with all phenomena and, in this direction, the research of the applied scientist is not only to prove which organizational form is more efficient, so their opinion is not just a value judgment.

In Simon's view, the problem lies in the wording of the questions and the perceptions of the issue. So, for example, if we ask the question "What factors determine the degree of efficiency achieved by the organization?" and "Under what circumstances is public responsibility ensured in a government agency?" (Simon, 1947, 201) the answers will not depend on the value system and they cannot be considered normative. Today, even to measure the degree of effectiveness and to investigate the circumstances and factors that lead to the delegation of responsibilities and influence, we will need a complex research methodology, operational definitions, and measurement indicators. Dahl believed that there was no need for a student of public administration to become a psychologist, since the student themselves could use the research findings of a psychiatrist or a sociologist, but here Simon counters the idea that public administration can in no way be considered a passive field, which accepts the findings of psychiatrists or even sociologists on the nature of people and then applies them to the field of organizational behavior (Simon, 1947). Simon believed that there could not be an applied science of public administration any more than there could be an applied science of aerodynamics. If an engineer faces the problem of designing an airplane, of course, they can study the characteristics of the airplane from other sciences: speed, maneuverability, and cruising range, but they will still have to create the design himself - this is the public administration perspective of Herbert Alexander Simon.

Following in Simon's footsteps, Luther Gulick must be mentioned. His impressive work is "Politics, Administration, and the "New Deal" (Gulick, 1933). The author begins his review of the issue with the question that the main goal of the American government reform was to "Take administration out of politics" and asks the question "How do we proceed to take administration out of politics?" (Gulick, 1933, 55). As Gulick explains, America had a simple answer to this question: prohibition and isolation. The author makes it clear that legal designs, prohibitions to take politics out of administration are useless. This can only be considered useful when the policy is pursued by a positive administration and when a rising administration implements the program/policy/course. He believed that good organization and improved schemes of fiscal/administrative control worked much more effectively than regulations dictated by criminal codes or laws dealing with matters of tax collection and licensing. That is why he concluded that sometimes organizational changes could be more effective than banning something. Therefore, for him, the effective tool for fighting corruption was not the prohibition of corruption, but internal organizational changes. Because of it, some authors called him a supporter of what we today call Good Governance when we talk about politics and the administrative process (Lynn et al., 2001). However, in addition to political perspectives, Luther Gulick developed a management perspective in the field. The author believed that integration where necessary represented a significant advantage in the field of management, because when several government

services were integrated and operated as a single unit, administrative mechanisms became more efficient. The author himself defined the advantages of integration as the following: it was the basis of an effective monitoring system, it provided the opportunity to eliminate duplication and to establish cooperative relations between different services, it helped to avoid conflicts and overloaded legalization.

Gulick advocated a unified system that had three advantages, first that government activities were combined into one large body and therefore a larger-scale “enterprise”. The second was the issue of independence of oversight functions among agencies, and the third factor was that integration recognized the principle of economy of citizen attention (Gulick, 1933, 58). Interestingly, Gulick was opposed to the processes of involving citizens on a permanent or extended basis. This is because citizens often do not have the appropriate knowledge and intellectual abilities to solve complex issues. For the author, it is unacceptable for citizens to participate in the intricacies of policy planning, as this is a process that should be handed over to professional administrators.

The author’s view of the issue of politics is an essential part of his thesis, and in this direction, Gulick distinguishes between Politics and “Politics”. According to the author politics is the sphere of controlling governance and rulers. In contrast, the second understanding of “politics” gives rise to the phenomenon of anti-politics, where individuals or groups express strong disapproval, disillusionment, or distrust of traditional political processes, institutions, and politicians. It represents a growing skepticism or rejection of established political systems and practices. As the author explains, until now they were dealing with “politics”, that is, with the vulgar understanding of true politics, which is part of the corruption of the system. However, this “politics” was not the scientific and important understanding of the word, and Gulick considers true politics to be the action related to controlling the rulers, and therefore politics was the control in the direction of the government and the supreme stake of the reform. In such politics, the government serves the common people and there is a concept of “self-government” (Gulick, 1933, 59), so when we talk about the true understanding of politics, it cannot be outside of the administration, just as administration cannot be outside of politics. However, since true politics is part of democratic control, and “politics” is the very author of the system breakdown, the difficulty of distinguishing this is when and how can we measure which is politics and which is “politics”. As examples, Luther uses specific cases. He asks the questions if the government raises aluminum tariffs, or if Congress decides to bail out the Philippines, or if the issue is about sales regulations and mortgage moratoriums – how are we to know which is politics and which is “politics” in these political processes? In principle, this is a question that is still a matter of complex study and assessment. It is different from how we evaluate the phenomena of “good and bad” politics from today’s perspective. However, we understand that the effectiveness of the political process is already measurable today, and this measurement has appropriate methods and indicators to assess what has yielded results and what has not.

Gulick himself distinguished the two policies based on the purpose of the person acting and also believed that “politics” was related to selfish advancement and the advantages that rulers obtained through control. For example, if the senators supported the issue of liberating the Philippines because of personal interests then he considered it “politics”, and if behind it was the belief in the liberation of the people then it was politics. However, if one part of the political course (policy) was supported by public interests and the other was guided by personal interests, then what would happen here? Gulick therefore, appears here as a rather contradictory author and says that, taking this into account, there is no objective method of distinguishing between



politics and “politics”. Still, the author defined politics as actions related to the control of rulers. He equated the rulers with the government, who exercised effective power to provide various public services, and what these rulers do, that is, the work of the government, the development and enforcement of control, the creation, and management of services - all these things taken together constitute public administration for Gulick. And yet, the author is also a very important figure because, despite the normative narrative for which he is criticized, as if Gulick was a non-scientific author, he closely saw the necessity of participatory politics in public administration. It was he who believed that the process of policy planning and implementation was difficult to imagine without a deliberative and representative council of advisors, political parties and civil groups, new types of government agencies, and the legislative body of the future, where the parliamentary agency has two main powers: first, the veto on major policies and second, the right to audit and investigate. This is also very close to the principles of what is today called good governance (Nanda, 2006).

Finally, we should consider Dwight Waldo, because he is also in the category of actors whose visions and principles are still relevant today. It focuses on the responsibility of public administration in the context of modern revolutions. With this, he connects administration with the phenomenon of power and asks questions in the context of revolutions: did public administration help cause them? Or should public administration do something about them? (Waldo, 1968, 364). For him, the state administration bears some responsibility for revolutions: this is because revolutions cannot be separated from their causes, effects, and nature. Public administration is therefore a revolutionary agent, but the cause of revolution in this case can be either ignorance and/or enforcement of the law itself. In this discourse, he develops the idea that the effectiveness of the public service depends on how well the organization will adapt to the revolutionary, rapidly changing environment and how well it will be able to fulfil its goals and objectives. Thus, the one who cannot cope with change is doomed. Nevertheless, the author believed that civil service, by responding to the revolutionary ground in their midst, could help society change and adapt to maximize the potential for “good” and minimize the potential for “bad” (Waldo, 1968).

And yet, where are Dwight Waldo’s ideas in modern public administration today? It introduces the idea of neutrality in the public service system, which remains a problematic issue in many democratic regimes (Asmerom & Reis, 2016). The author considered it right if he had been a public servant, apolitical, and far from party politics. That is why the idea of public service goes with independence, professionalism, and faithful activity of the state. It is worth noting here that the author himself emphasized the difficulty of separating politics and administration because the discipline and/or profession of “public administration” decided that the administration should be closely involved in the political process. As such, the administration had/has its role in making policy decisions and subsequently implementing them mechanically.

#### **4 Conclusion**

A review of public administration thoughts shows us the formation of the field and its classical form began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was initially also carried out in the discourse of political science.

One of the reasons for its tendency to be first discussed primarily in governance/politics discourse is that administration and politics were not separated from each other and thus public administration itself was a part of politics. Here is also the fact that management and

administration are new sciences compared to politics and law, which had discussions in the field about whether these two were science or art. Here, it should be said that no author used the concept of public administration until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the work reveals that, from the period of the development of the field to the present day, it is very difficult to put a sign of equality between public administration and one any other discipline because, on the one hand, it represents political science, the synthesis of management and law, and on the other hand an independent administrative science, the potential of which is growing every day.

The overview shows that modern authors look at the evolution of the field and its potential in different ways. In the authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is a dichotomous discussion of issues, and a tendency to criticize and counter-criticize each other, which further develops academic rhetoric.

All three perspectives of public administration have their supporters; however, we find authors of legal science the least in the field, thus, teaching under public law cannot be linked to theorists and authors, but to the traditions of the state itself, lawyers, and law schools, which took responsibility for the development of the field and its teaching. As for the management part, it is developed and facilitated by reality, time change, innovation, and technological progress. Today, to a large extent, the public service and the public sector cannot function without public management principles, because it is the business sector that implements the latter on the order of the state, and it is clear that the rise of “new public management” has further strengthened the perspective of management in the field. And although the nature of public administration is political and it is still so difficult to separate it from politics, because government policy planning, implementation, and public political process are the subjects of political science, it has the great potential of an independent administrative science that will eventually transform into an occupational field.

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