



## Meaning of Public Administration

Dr. S. B. M. Marume<sup>1</sup>,  
<sup>1</sup>BA, Hons BA, MA, MAdmin, MSoc Sc, PhD  
Zimbabwe Open University

Received 21 May, 2016; Accepted 07 June, 2016 © The author(s) 2014. Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

**ABSTRACT :** Public administration, which is an aspect of a more generic concept of administration, and that exists in a political system for the accomplishment of goals, and objectives formulated by the political decision-makers, consists of the activities of the executive branches of the national, state (provincial) and local governments. All these constitute the subject-matter of this article.

**Keywords:** public administration; generic concept of administration; political system goals and objectives, and political decision-makers.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Various writers and scientists define public administration variously for various reasons. For example, Leonard D. White defines Public Administration as consistency of all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy. However, a broad view suggests that scholars of public administration have expressed two divergent views on the nature of public administration, that is, (a) an integral view and managerial view; which views are the focus of this article.

### II. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

To define public administration according to various renowned scholars and to demonstrate the scope and nature of the discipline.

### III. MEANINGS, DEFINITIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Public administration is an aspect of a more generic concept of administration. Therefore, before understanding the meaning of public administration, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word 'administration'. The English word 'administer' is derived from a combination of two Latin words *ad* and *ministrare* meaning 'to serve' or 'to manage'. Literally, the term 'administration' means management of affairs – public or private.

#### 3.1. Administration Defined

The concept of administration is defined by various writers in the following ways:

**E.N. Gladden:** "Administration is a long and slightly pompous word, but it has a humble meaning, for it means, to care for or look after people, to manage affairs... is determined action taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose."

**Felix A. Nigro:** "Administration is the organisation and use of men and materials to accomplish a purpose."

**Herbert A. Simon:** "In its broadest sense, administration can be defined as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals."

**John A. Veig:** "Administration is determined action taken in pursuit of conscious purpose. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources, aimed at making those things happen which we want to happen and simultaneously preventing developments that fail to square with our intentions. It is the marshalling of available labour and materials in order to gain that which is desired at the lowest cost in energy, time and money."

---

\*Corresponding Author: Dr. S. B. M. Marume

<sup>1</sup>BA, Hons BA, MA, MAdmin, MSoc Sc, PhD  
Zimbabwe Open University

**Pfiffner:** “Administration is the organisation and direction of human and material resources to achieve desired ends.”

**L.D. White:** “The art of administration is the direction, coordination and control of many persons to achieve some purpose or objective.”

**Luther Gulick:** “Administration has to do with getting things done; with the accomplishment of defined objectives.”

**George E. Berkley:** “Administration is a process involving human beings jointly engaged in working towards common goals.”

**Brooks Adams:** “Administration is the capacity of coordinating man and often conflicting social energies in a single organism, so adroitly that they shall operate as a unity.”

**Keith Henderson:** “Administration is the arrangement of men and materials in the rational carrying out of purposes.”

**Ordway Tead:** “Administration is a variety of component elements which, together in action, produce the result of a defined task done. Administration, primarily, is the direction of people in association to achieve some goal temporarily shared. It is the inclusively process of integrating human efforts so that a desired result is obtained.” He further adds, “Administration is the central power house of the motivational impulsion and spirit which makes the institution drive to fulfill its purpose.”

**D. Waldo:** “Administration is a type of cooperative human effort that has a high degree of rationality.”

**James McCanny:** “Administration is the organisation and use of men and materials to accomplish a purpose. It is the specialized vocation of managers who have skills of organizing and directing men and materials just as an engineer has the skill of building structures or a doctor has the skill of understanding the human ailments.”

**F.M. Marx:** “Administration is a determined action taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making those things happen which one wants to happen and foretelling to the contrary.”

The above definitions make it clear that administration has two essential elements that is, a collective effort and a common purpose. Thus, administration means a cooperative effort of a group of people in pursuit of a common objective.

Administration is a universal process and occurs in diverse institutional settings. Based on its institutional setting, administration is divided in public administration and private administration. The former refers to the administration which operates in a governmental setting, while the latter refers to the administration which operates in a non-governmental setting, that is, business enterprises.

### **3.2. Public Administration Defined**

Public administration is an aspect of the larger field of administration. It exists in a political system for the accomplishment of the goals and objectives formulated by the political decision-makers. It is also known as governmental administration because the adjective ‘public’ in the word ‘public administration’ means ‘government’. Hence, the focus of public administration is on public bureaucracy, that is, bureaucratic organisation (or administrative organisation) of the government.

Public administration is defined by various scholars as follows:

**Woodrow Wilson:** “Public Administration is detailed and systematic execution of law. Every particular application of law is an act of administration.” He further says: Administration is the most obvious part of government; it is the government in action; it is the executive, the operative, the most visible side of the government.”

**L.D. White:** “Public Administration consists of all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy.”

**Luther Gulick:** “Public Administration is that part of the science of administration which has to do with government and thus concerns itself primarily with the executive branch where the work of government is done, though there are obviously problems in connection with the legislative and judicial branches.”

**H.A. Simon:** “By Public Administration is meant in common usage, the activities of the executive branches of the national, state and local governments.”

**Pfiffner:** “Public Administration consists of doing the work of the government whether it be running an X-ray machine in a health laboratory or coining money in the mint... Public Administration consists of getting the work of government done by coordinating the efforts of the people so that they can work together to accomplish their set tasks.”

**E.N. Gladden:** “Public Administration is concerned with the administration of the government.”

**H. Walker:** “The work which the government does to give effect to a law is called Public Administration.”

**Willoughby:** “The term administration may be employed in Political Science in two senses. In its broadest sense it denotes the work involved in the actual conduct of governmental affairs, regardless of the particular branch of government concerned. It is, thus, quite proper to speak of the administration of the legislative branch of the government, the administration of justice or judicial affairs, or the administration of the executive branch as well as the administration of the affairs of the administrative branch of the government, or the conduct of the affairs of the government generally. In its narrowest sense, it denotes the operations of the administrative branch only. As students of Public Administration we are concerned with the narrowest meaning of the term.”

**D. Waldo:** “Public Administration is the art and science of management as applied to the affairs of the State.” He further observes. “The process of public administration consists of the actions involved in affecting the intent or desire of a government. It is thus, the continuously active, ‘business’ part of a government, concerned with carrying out the law as made by legislative bodies (or other authoritative agents) and interpreted by the courts, through the process of organisation and management. The field of study – putatively a science or discipline – of public administration focuses upon public administration as a process.”

**M. E. Dimock:** “Public Administration is the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. It deals with the problems and powers of the organisation and techniques of management involved in carrying out the laws and policies formulated by the policy-making agencies of government. Public administration is the law in action. It is the executive side of a government.”

**John A. Veig:** “Administration signifies the organisation, personnel, practices and procedures essential to effective performance of civilian functions entrusted to the executive branch of the government.”

**P. McQueen:** “Public Administration is administration is administration related to the operations of Government whether central or local.”

**Merson:** “The administrator gets things done, and just as the science of is an enquiry into the best means whereby the will of the people may be organized for the formulation of policy so the science of Public Administration is an enquiry as to how policies may best be carried into operation.”

**Corson and Harris:** “Public Administration is the action part of the government, the means by which the purposes and goals of the government are realized.”

**F.A. Nigro:** “Public Administration (i) is a cooperative group effort in a public setting; (ii) covers all the three branches – executive, legislative and judicial, and their inter-relationship; (iii) has an important role in the formulation of public policy and is thus part of the political process; (iv) is different in significant ways from private administration; and (v) closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community.”

**J.S. Hodgson:** “Public Administration comprises all activities of persons or groups in government or their agencies, whether these organisations are international, regional or local in their scope, to fulfill the purposes of these governments or agencies.”

**James W. Fesler:** “Public Administration is policy execution and policy formulation, public administration is bureaucracy and public administration is public.”

**James W. Davies:** “Public Administration can be best identified with the executive branch of a government.”

**Frank Goodnow:** “Administration includes the function of executing the law as well as the semi-scientific, quasi-judicial and quasi-business or commercial functions.”

**Ridley:** “Public Administration in the public sector...It is administration by the state...Public Administration is governmental administration...It is administration by public authorities...Public authorities are authorities which administer according to the rules of public administration. Public administration should be the study of administration, descriptive, theoretical and normative.”

**M. RuthnaSwamy:** “When administration has to do with the affairs of a state or minor political institutions like a Municipal or County Council, or District Board, it is call Public Administration.”

**Dimock and Dimock:** Like the study of politics, the study of public administration is a study of what people want through government and how they go about getting it. In addition, administration is the area of study and practice where law and policy are recommended and carried out.”

**J. Greenwood and D. Wilson:** “Public Administration is an activity, a set of institutions and a subject of study.”

**Rosenbloom:** “Public Administration does involve activity, it is concerned with politics and policy-making, it tends to be concentrated in the executive branch of government, it does differ from private administration, and it is concerned with implementing law.” He further adds, “Public Administration is the use of managerial, legal and political theories and processes to fulfill legislative, executive and judicial governmental mandates for the provision of regulatory and service functions for the society as a whole or for some segments of it.”

**Eugene McGregor:** “The term public administration is reserved to denote the generation of purposive public action whose success depends on reconciling the competing demands of administrative operations, democratic governance and public solving.”

**F.M. Marx:** “Public Administration has come to signify primarily the organisation, personnel, practices and procedures essential to effective performance of the civilian functions entrusted to the executive branch of government.”

### **3.3. An Analysis of the Various Definitions**

An analysis of the above definitions indicates that the term public administration has been used in two senses, namely, wider and narrower senses; which senses are not exhaustive as there are other different schools of thoughts, for example, the generic view, the open systems view, and so on, which have not been dealt with by the above scholars. However, for the purpose of this article, discussions will be restricted to briefly analyzing the wider and the narrower senses as follows:

- a) In the wider sense (broader sense), public administration includes the activities of all the three branches of the government, that is, legislature, executive and judiciary. This view has been taken by Woodrow Wilson, L.D. White, Marshall Dimock, F.A. Nigro and Pfiffner.
- b) By contrast, public administration in the narrower sense includes the activities of only the executive branch of the government. This view has been taken by Simon, Gulick, Ordway Tead, Fayol and Willoughby.

It must be noted here that Willoughby even made a distinction between executive power and administrative power and restricted the use of the term ‘administration’ to the activities of the administrative branch only. In other words, he has given administration the status of a ‘fourth branch’ of government (other three being legislature, executive and judiciary). Albert Lepawsky remarked: “Willoughby’s recognition of administration as a fourth branch of government is the most extreme, but probably the most logical result of the strict separation of administration and politics initiated by Wilson.”

### **3.4. Nature of Public Administration**

On the basis of the foregoing discussions, it is observed that these scholars of public administration have expressed two divergent views on the nature of public administration, namely, integral view and managerial view which are briefly discussed as follows:

### 3.4.1. The integral view:

According to this view, public administration encompasses all the activities which are undertaken to accomplish the given objective. In other words, public administration is the sum total of managerial, technical, clerical and manual activities. Thus, administration, according to this view, constitutes the activities of all persons from top to bottom. L.D. White and Dimock subscribed to this view. Administration, according to this view, depends upon the subject matter of the concerned agency, that is, it differs from one sphere to another sphere.

### 3.4.2. The Managerial View:

Public administration, in this context, encompasses only the managerial activities and not the technical, clerical and manual activities which are non-managerial in nature. Thus, administration, according to this view, constitutes the activities of only the top persons. Simon, Smithburg, Thompson and Luther Gulick adopt this view. Administration, according to this view, is same in all the spheres as the managerial techniques are same in all the fields of activities.

Luther Gulick says, "Administration is conceived as the necessary activities of individuals (executives) in an organisation who are charged with ordering, forwarding and facilitating the associated efforts of a group of individuals brought together to realize certain defined purposes."

Similarly, Simon, Smithburg and Thompson write: "The term 'administration' is also used in a narrow sense to refer to those patterns of behaviours that are common to many kinds of cooperating groups; and that do not depend upon either the specific goals towards which they are cooperating or the specific technological methods used to attain these goals."

However, neither the integral view nor the managerial view is without any flaws. The correct meaning of the word 'administration' would depend upon the context in which it is applied. M.E. Dimock, G.O. Dimock and L.W. Koenig have summarized the position in this way: "As a study, public administration examines every aspect of government's efforts to discharge the laws and to give effect to public policy; as a process, it is all the steps taken between the time an enforcement agency assumes a jurisdiction and the last brick is placed (but includes also the agency's participation, if any, in the formulation of the programme in the first place); and, as a vocation, it is organizing and directing the activities of others in a public agency." They further observed: "In developing countries like India, public administration has to be studied with the integral approach as 90 per cent of the work originating at the clerical level is okayed at the top level – that is why the 'clerk' or 'babu' is considered as the kingpin of Indian administration."

## IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above-mentioned overseas, lofty scholars public administration can be viewed on two basis, the integral view which is comprehensive and encompasses all activities of government on the one hand, and on the other hand, the managerial view, which appears narrower and possibly manageable. These approaches will be a subject of another article.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1]. John Adair: Training for leadership: MacDonald; New York, 1968.
- [2]. Chester I, Barnard: The functions of the Executive. Harvard University Press; Cambridge: Mass, 1964.
- [3]. E. P. Hollander; Leaders, groups and influence. Oxford University Press; New York: 1964.
- [4]. Kurt Lewin, R. Lippitt, and R. K. White: Patterns of Aggressive Behaviour in Experimentally Created Social Climates, Journal of social psychology 10, No. 2: May 1939; 271 – 301.
- [5]. S. B. M. Marume Life –work skills: Experiential Learning: Academic work No. 1: unpublished PhD degree programme: California, United States of America; March 31, 1988; chapter 2: Administrative leadership.
- [6]. F. A. Nigro: Modern Public Administration; New York: 1970.
- [7]. Catherine Seckeler – Hudson: Organisation and management; theory and practice: The American University Press, Washington, D. C., 1957.
- [8]. J. M. Pfiffner and R. V. Prethuis; Public Administration 5<sup>th</sup> edition; The Ronald Press Company, New York, 1967
- [9]. H. A. Simon, D. W. Smithburg and V. A. Thompson: Public Administration; 12<sup>th</sup> edition; A. A. Knopf: New York, 1971.

### Profile of contributor and photograph



**Samson Brown Muchineripi Marume:** a former senior civil servant for **over 37 years** serving in various capacities of seniority and 10 years as deputy permanent secretary; **thirteen years** as a large commercial farmer; well travelled **domestically** within Zimbabwe; **regionally** [SADC countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and DRC]; and **Africa** [Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Libya, and Uganda]; and **internationally** [Washington, New York and California in USA; Dublin and Cork in Irish Republic; London in England in United Kingdom; Netherlands, Frankfurt in Germany; Lisbon in Portugal; Spain (Nice), Paris in France, Geneva in Switzerland, Belgrade in former Yugoslavia-; Rome and Turin in Italy; Nicosia – Cyprus; Athens – Greece; Beijing and Great Walls of China; Singapore; Hong Kong; Tokyo, Kyoto, Yokohama, and Osaka, in Japan]; fifteen years as management consultant and part – time lecturer for BA/BSc and MA/MBA degree

levels with Christ College- affiliate of Great Zimbabwe University and National University of Science and Technology; six years as PhD/DPhil research thesis supervisor, internal and external examiner with Christ University, Bangalore, India [2011 – 2016]; and Zimbabwe Open University 2012-2024 [as part-time supervisor]; external examiner of management and administrative sciences at Great Zimbabwe University (2016 – 2019); currently full-time senior lecturer and acting chairperson of Department of Public Administration in Faculty of Commerce and Law of Zimbabwe Open University; a negotiator; a prolific writer who has published five books, prepared twenty five modules in public administration and political science for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and published over sixty referred articles in international journals [IOSR, IJSR, ISCA – IRJSS, IJESR, MJESR, IJESI, IJBMI, IJHSS and Quest Journals] on constitutional and administrative law, public administration, political science, philosophy, Africa in international politics, local government and administration, sociology and community development; vastly experienced public administrator; and an eminent scholar with specialist qualifications from University of South Africa, and from California University for Advanced Studies, State of California, United States of America: BA with majors in public administration and political science and subsidiaries in sociology, constitutional law and English; postgraduate special Hons BA [Public Administration]; MA [Public Administration]; MAdmin magna cum laude in transport economics as major, and minors in public management and communications; MSocSc cum laude in international politics as a major and minors in comparative government and law, war and strategic studies, sociology, and social science research methodologies; and PhD summa cum laude in Public Administration.