

Efficiency as a Central Concept in the Science of Administration, Fact and Value-Contexts in the Administrative Processes, and Democracy

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Abstract

This analytical paper explores how efficiency becomes a key concept in a business organization, and its later migration into the public administration as a crucial element for professionalizing public administration. The attempt to professionalize public administration was intended to insulate it from the manipulative spheres of politics; however, as administration geared toward efficiency, differences in values and preferences that are characteristic of the complex human society become discounted. Moreover, the romance of administration with an econometric concept such as efficiency complicated its integration into democracy. It is thus argued in this analytical paper that if administration should be infused into democracy it must incline less to the values of efficiency, but establish structures that would enable a faction to counteract faction; it is through such arrangements that the varieties of organized political, economic, and social interests and values that are characteristic of the public could be represented in the administrative processes.

Keywords

Efficiency, Public Administration, and Democracy

1. Introduction

After the urban and machine revolution in 19th century, what follows was the emergence of business civilization where the right of property and the power of management were overwhelming. During this period, especially in the private large-scale manufacturing and commercial organizations, employees were seen as means and not as ends in the emerging structures of industries. Waldo (1952) described the spirit of administration at the time as “harsh paternalism”. How-

ever, this harsh paternalistic approach changed into a more benevolent paternalism following the [Elton Mayor's \(1933\)](#) Hawthorne experiments which emphasized the significance of treating workers as individuals with complex psychological and social needs, rather than simply seeing employees as cogs in a machine. It thus led to the development of human relations in industrial management. Similarly, in the late 1910s, the relationship between workers and managers was unhealthy; the focus was to get industrial workers to work hard to double their individual outputs.

However, the antagonistic work relationship between workers and managers of industries was not healthy to achieve increased production, and this unhealthiness of relationship was prompted by limited surplus and low wages; as such, the work-situation becomes compounded by workers' soldiering. [Taylor \(1912\)](#) in his "principle of scientific management" however indicated that the workers, managers, and owners of industries could all be happy, and their individual objectives could be achieved through delivery of large surplus and high wages. He indicated further that large surplus and high wages could only be achieved by revolutionizing the workmen's mindsets about soldiering through the application of scientific approach. The focus of the scientific management era was increased production and efficiency. Consequently, efficiency becomes a key concept in the business organization and was later migrated into public administration as crucial to the professionalization of public administration. This mathematical relationship between input and output becomes so prominent in public administration that the virtues of an organizational pattern become dependent upon the efficiency or inefficiency of such organizations ([Rosenbloom, 1983](#)).

The concept of efficiency, as a fundamental element in management science in economics, becomes a key factor in public administration after the civil service reform movements of the late 19th century. The civil service reforms were modeled after businesslike approaches, and the idea that means and measures of efficiency are the same in all administration was embraced in the public administration. The administrative processes thus become decentralized for effective and efficient delivery of services, policy decision making, and policy implementation. Moreover, the businesslike approach to administration was amplified by [Woodrow Wilson \(1887\)](#) in his essay on "politics-administration dichotomy". He suggested that the field of administration is a field of business which lies outside the spheres of politics. The assumption was that politics can set the tasks for administration, but it should not be allowed to manipulate the office of administration. [Woodrow Wilson's \(1887\)](#) essay whispered the need to professionalize public administration to insulate it from the manipulative spheres of politics. Similarly, [Waldo \(1952\)](#) envisioned administration as a separate and distinct body, and an important function of government charged with executing public policy. However, the acceptance and application of the business-like approach to city-manager charters prompted more scholarly interests, and the study of administration became dependent upon the support of business enterprises. This

dependency, at the heat of business civilization, furthered the adoption of the business variables “efficiency” and “cost and benefit” as measurement of organizational virtues in the processes of administration. Thereafter, the widespread acceptance of efficiency as a concept of administration study began to dim because efficiency is not entirely value neutral. However, in the wake of the 21st century, public administration began to adopt market-based management and resources allocation techniques that are learning toward efficiency by relying on private-sectors to deliver public services to the public. The adoption of market-based approach that is efficiency-oriented in the production of public goods and service has reduced government’s role as a direct supplier of public goods, and public policies and programs are increasingly administered through complicated webs of service delivery (Frederickson et al., 2018). Thus, this paper explores the concept of efficiency, its migration into public administration, and its impact on the democratic processes.

2. Efficiency in Administration

At the backdrop of the managerial approach to administration was the ideas of efficiency as an instrument of administration that could be adopted in the processes of administration. Though, the concept of efficiency over the years has taken various meanings depending on the context in which it was used (Alexander, 2009). It is commonly applied to the economics of resources and welfare. Efficiency is a core concept of neoclassical economics that is enshrined in two main bodies of theory: production theory such as technical efficiency, and production efficiency, and welfare economics such as allocative efficiency, and intertemporal efficiency (Alexander, 2009).

Moreover, in recent years, efficiency as it pertains to public administration was at a point in time was just about increased output; thereafter, it was defined along the lines of pure business model that emphasizes profit maximization, and later on, it takes such meanings in terms of values that accounted for the expectation of citizens as the most significant element of public goods and services (Manzoor, 2014). For instance, Schachter (2007) sees efficiency as an intrinsic value in public administration by indicating that public organizations are structured as bureaucracies with the aim of providing a rational and efficient organizational structure in the public sector-level organizations. Moreover, in most cases bureaucracy is associated with efficient organizations (Denhardt & Catlaw, 2014). Thus, the public sector seeks dual goals; it seeks to be efficient and able to work within the parameters of accountability, sometimes even at the expense of productivity. The concept of efficiency as it applies to public administration is defined as a ratio between input and output, efforts and results, expenditure and incomes, and costs and resulting pleasure (Manzoor, 2014). While Simon (1976) sees efficiency as taking the shortest path, the cheapest means toward the achievement of desired goals, and Wilson (1989) defines efficiency as the act of obtaining the greatest output for a given level of resources. All these perspectives of ef-

efficiency emphasize achievement of maximum values with limited means.

Furthermore, [Max Weber \(1958\)](#) via his ideal-type bureaucracy emphasized the functional specialization as a tool for efficiency, while also stressing the hierarchy within the walls of administration as tool for an effective coordination. The assignment of personnel to specialized units is determined based on merit, and such administrators were to exclude themselves from spheres of politics in their competence. Max Weber's approach to installing efficiency in administration was tied to highly centrifugal, hierarchical, and formalized institutional structures where patterns of behavior in organizations are maintained and formalized in writing records. The implication is that the value of the individual person is discounted when administration is obsessed with such managerial values as efficiency, economy, effectiveness. Though the pursuit of efficiency is not a bad venture, moderation must be established to preclude administrations from becoming dehumanized and depersonalized.

Similarly, it is indicated that administrators try to achieve efficiency by applying cost and benefit analysis, minimizing the cost of activities, and maximizing accrued benefits ([Simon, 1978](#)). It is believed that efficiency in administration could be attained via rational decision-making by evaluating all alternatives and their costs and benefits, and thereafter selecting the alternative that could yield the greatest net benefit ([Simon, 1978](#)). Though, [Simon, H. \(1978\)](#) indicated the limitations associated with rational decision-making; he noted that rational decision-making is constrained by limited information, bounded rationality, and in most cases organizational politics. Hence, he admonished that organization should be conscious of these limitations, and should not seek for optimal decision, but instead strive to make decisions that are "satisficing".

Moreover, [Lindblom \(1959\)](#) also amplified the cumbersome task of rational approach to policy decision making, but he advocated against its full application in the process of administration. [Lindblom \(1959\)](#) instead argued for a less cumbersome approach to policy decision making because as human beings we are confronted with unlimited information and convoluted values, and there is limit to which our mental capacity can process all information that would have led to comprehensive analysis of policy issues. He characterized rational approaches into two types: rational-comprehensive and successive limited comparison approaches. The rational-comprehensive approach allows for clarity of objectives, explicit evaluation, and high degree of comprehensive overview, and finally under this approach values are qualified for mathematical analysis. It is the means-end approach; however, its application is limited in public administration because public administrators deal with complex social problems, and it is highly time consuming; therefore, it cannot be adopted in a social situation where there are requirements for a decision to be made timely to address abrupt social problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In a pandemic situation just like the COVID-19, information about virus was limited, and a lot of values are involved regarding prevention methods that were adopted. If the CDC were to process all pieces of information about the virus, and to qualify all the convo-

luted values for econometrical or mathematical analysis, it would have taken administrators years to produce the required policy decisions to curtail the spread of the virus. COVID-19 pandemic besides the ambiguity of its transmission was fraught with unprecedented circumstances, and in such social situation decision-making processes are all shrouded in an uncharted territory (Pappas & Glyptou, 2021). It is near-impossible to account for all alternatives and values before deciding a course of action in a pandemic situation where there is urgency of decision to curtail transmission of the virus. It is no doubt that decision-making in a pandemic situation such as the COVID-19 demands a holistic approach that embodies effective communication, data usage, interorganizational or agency collaborations, capacity building, and continuous improvement on all aspects of the process, but systematically analyzing alternatives, values, and preferences by considering their consequences with the aim of selecting the option that maximizes overall benefits in a crisis situation that is fast-paced, full of uncertainties and complexities, and subjected to political and public pressure for the sake of efficiency will ensue more damages than the efficiency it seeks to achieve. Thus, a more adaptative decision-approach that balances the need for efficiency while accounting for transparency, accountability, and public engagement is most appropriate.

Nevertheless, Lindblom (1959) argued for the adoption of the branch or successive limited comparison approach in the processes of policy decision making especially in the public sectors because it is impossible to process every bit of information and values in policy environments that are time constrained. It thus indicates that as human beings we cannot process all information and policy issues in our decision making, we can only meddle through (that is building out from the current situation by small degrees). To Lindblom (1959), the means and ends are closely intertwined, so there is no need for means-end analysis because as administrators we choose among values and policies simultaneously. This assumption aligns with Waldo's position that facts and values are tied together in one operation, and as such cannot be separated by logical means in terms of efficiency. Nonetheless, Simon adopted efficiency for its instrumental value in administration, not as an end. Waldo (2006) criticized him for insinuating efficiency as value-neutral and for proposing it to be used as a concept in a science of administration as instrument of decision making. He believed that facts and values are not mutually exclusive; as such, values cannot be excluded from the realm of factual decisions.

Decision making in the processes of administration does not start and end at the level of policy formulation and passage in the legislature. Likewise, it is argued that a thing could only become a science of means in a stable social environment where all the political actors accept a common ideology and observe a common scale of values. In political environments where there is complexity of values and preference, it is almost impossible to have a socially constructed concept that is value-neutral and to be taken as a means for a science of administration. Herbert Simon though did not indicate in a strict sense there is dichotomy

between politics and administration as proposed by Woodrow Wilson, but he opined that value decision and factual decision can be made in terms of efficiency. To Waldo, any proposition to create a logical divide between valuational decision and factual decision under such concept as efficiency is like attempting to create a logical division of reality to replace existing institutional one. To him, factual and valuational decisions are tied together in the actual practice of administration. For instance, in policy-decision making, a lot of policy streams are involved in the process, and all these streams bring to the policy arena different preferences and values competing for acceptance; usually, how selection is made from the lists of options is of greater concern because what the different streams bring to the table as premises upon which a policy decision is reached are subjected to influence. That is, policy decisions are conclusions drawn from premises, and premises are product of influence, and influence operates asymmetrically in a structure of hierarchy; as a mode of interaction between participants, it operates in a superior-subordinate relationship. Though, in Simon's estimation, behaviors of individual members of administrative organizations are purposive, and are directed toward set goals. It is this purposiveness that integrate the patterns of behavior, and without such purposiveness, the hallmark of administration which is "getting things done" by group of people, and the act of selecting principal criterion in determining what "things are to be done" would be meaningless. The indication is that a decision for specific actions is emanated from an application of a broader decision oriented toward the attainment of set objectives. This means that any decision taken in an administrative setting involves selection of goal, and behavior relevant to the actualization of that goal; on the continuum, this goal could be negotiated for future goals, and the process continues until a final purpose is achieved. On this note, Simon indicated that since decisions are directed toward selection of final goals; the determination of a choice of among goals is based on "value judgment" and the discharge the selected goal is based on "factual judgment" because at that level the process has gone beyond the stage at which relative analysis of values are taken.

Similarly, Lindblom (1959) indicated that the ranking of policy values, preferences, objectives based on relative importance for the sake of clarification is significant, however it is impossible in complex social relations and policy issues because social objectives do not always have the same relative values. Herbert Simon was much aware of the social complexities; that was why he emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration as steps to overcome the constraints of limited information, bounded rationality, value issues, and that the establishment of effective communication channels and collaborations in the administrative process would enable administrators to make better policy decisions. To Simon, the goal of administration is to be efficient in its operation through rational decision-making while leveraging communication and collaboration to account for the constraints. Nevertheless, what happens after a given policy is passed is also at the center of concern because the value issue does not end at the level of policy making, it also surfaces at the level of implementation

where Simon sees it to be factual in terms of efficiency. This is because most laws, regulations, or policy programs are written in general language without spelling out the conditions upon which they could be enforced or implemented. Hence, it offers bureaucrats or administrators the chance to make discretionary decisions that are infused with values at the level of implementation in the administrative processes. For instance, the 10th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution is stated in more general language, and the condition upon which it should be enforced is unclear, thereby resulting to a tussle over balance power between the federal government and states. It thus gives bureaucrats room to instill their preferred values as to how it should be interpreted. Because of this, over the decades the legal pendulum has swung back and forth between cooperative and dual federalism. I thus concur to an extent that values and facts are not entirely exclusive concepts because decisions are made from facts, and facts are product of values. On this note, it is safe to indicate that efficiency as a means of a science of administration is more of an abstract science to create logical division between administration and politics (facts and values).

3. Efficiency and Democracy

The adoption of efficiency during the period of business civilization as means for a science of administration created tension between administration and democracy. Administration is thought to be the core of modern governmental arrangements; that is, it is the art of getting things done, and the art of determining principal criterion for selecting what tasks to perform (Simon, 1997). Administration is equally important for effective governance, as it provides the expertise capacity needed for the effective implementation of policy programs. However, the attempt to have business in governance introduces core values of management sciences into public administration. It was at this point that concern is placed on what government can do properly and effectively, and how those tasks could be done with the most possible efficiency at the least possible cost.

Moreover, as administration begins to gear toward efficiency, differences in values and preferences that are characteristic of the complexity of human society become discounted. The romance of administration with econometric concepts such as efficiency complicated its integration into democracy. Even the founding fathers of public administration envisioned this tension between administration and democracy; as such, democracy for them was thought to be a political principle external to the field of professionals in public administration. It was not only regarded as something outside of professional interests in administration, but it was also seen as something that is hostile to what they regarded as the central principle of administration (efficiency). In management science, efficiency is represented by a mathematical relationship between inputs and output; a relationship where the input is minimized, while the output is maximized. However, this sort of mathematical relationship cannot be obtained in an administrative democracy because political values are infused into administration. For instance,

a public service system that is representative of the social norms and values of the public cannot be the most efficient; because for a public service system to be representative of the people it serves, it must put in place channels that would allow its administrators to interface with advisory committees on policy programs, and must ensure inclusiveness in terms of citizens' participation. A process of this sort establishes legitimacy and accountability, but it is very time consuming, and as such can be the most efficient.

Hence, for decades reformers sought to advance democracy as a political ideal but refused to accept its relevance to the administrative process (Waldo, 1952). This sort of position was informed by the fact that administration was confronted with conditions of disorganization, amateurism, dishonesty, and inefficiency especially during the era of Jacksonian democracy that is characteristic of a vigorous government and majoritarian tyranny. The indication was that it is not the philosophy of government that accounts for the flagrant misgovernance, but the interpretation and institutionalization of the philosophy of democracy. They disapproved of democracy in administration because its interpretation and institutionalization were centrifugal as opposed to a philosophy of democracy in administration that is centripetal. Hence, decentralization was taken as a panacea to flagrant misgovernance, and it was intended to instill the concept of efficiency in administrative democracy. This is why even within the wall of formal organization structure, chain of command is flattened to include people at the lower chain of command to participate in the process of administration, and to open channels of feedback. The fact is that the moment parameters of public administration are approximate within the walls of politics, it is on a path to a set of values different from the econometric values of costs and benefits.

Comparably, Waldo, D. (2006) argued that administration is a threat to democracy because it is unresponsive to public opinion, thereby lacking in accountability. Though, this does not negate the fact that administration is essential for effective governance. The challenge about the integration of administration into democracy is intensified by the challenge of legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness. These are some of the key values of democracy, without the satisfaction of these values, any attempt at democratization of administration would amount to efforts in futility. The shortfall of administration on issues about accountability, legitimacy, and effectiveness is tied to its exercise of discretionary authority. Traditionally, public administrators' operational domain was domiciled in the aspects of administration that emphasized policy implementation and enforcement. Nonetheless, these seamless functions evolved over time and allow bureaucrats through the processes of policy implementation to stimulate, and create new policies on who gets what, when and how. Exercising their discretion allows them to influence politics and the policy environments. Though, bureaucrats exercise of discretion is not entirely a dreadful thing for democracy because if it is rightly utilized, it could be used to promote objectives of social justices through representative bureaucracy.

However, bureaucratic discretion when exercised within the domain of democratic governance spells negative implications by defiling the norms and values that stand as the central principles of democratic governance. This is so because public administrators, an unelected body, share in the task of determining distribution and allocation of government benefits. The fact is that such allocation of governmental benefits by public administrators are usually processed through personal moral judgement, and via intentional behaviors; hence, certain benefits could be restricted from some groups of the society, or it could lead to disenfranchisement of people thereby resulting in an ineffective and inequitable policy implementation. It was on this note that the New Public Service (NPS) was initiated to account for responsiveness and legitimacy of administration through increased engagement with the public in the processes of policy designs, and by availing themselves in direct pursuit of the public interests. Through this process of accountability, bureaucracy or administration in a democratic governance could be legitimized. Nevertheless, Waldo indicated that the drawbacks of administration in a democracy could be diminished through such mechanisms as transparency, public participation, and establishment of effective communication channels between administrators and elected officials.

Moreover, Waldo (2006) maintained that efficiency is to effective delivery of services, but it must be balanced with accountability to ensure that the administrative state remains responsive to the needs and concerns of citizens. This thus indicates the fact that something is done efficiently, does not mean that it is effective, and relative to the number of citizens. For instance, if a highway road is to be constructed to connect point A to C, and for the sake of efficiency, it is constructed in such a way that people in point B are cut off from the benefits of this road project. The question then, is the process efficient in terms of cost? Yes! But was it effective and accountable to all the citizens in that area? No! This is one of the reasons why administration in a democratic governance must not be too inclined to adopt efficiency as means of a science of administration. However, to create a balance between efficiency and accountability in the administrative state, administrators, elected officials, and civil society must engage themselves in a dialogue or cooperative discourse (Waldo, 2006). Administration is the vehicle upon which governance, and governmental services are conveyed to the people in any system of government; however, if administration is to be infused into democracy it must incline less to the values of efficiency to establish structures that enable factions to counteract factions, and through such arrangements the variety of organized political, economic, and social interests and values that are characteristic of the public would be represented in the administrative process. Rosenbloom (1983) similarly emphasized inclusion of the overall socioeconomic and political values and interests that are representative of the larger society in administrative processes in such a way and manner these different values become antagonistic to one another in such a way that resolution is reserved to the legislature, the office of the chief executive, interagency committees, or the courts. Simply, if the pursuit of administration is efficiency in the

democratic setting, organized values and interests would be discounted, and priority would then be placed on the most efficient thereby leading to marginalization and political alienation of certain interests and values.

4. Conclusion

The adoption of efficiency as a means of a science of administration is to an extent good for administration only when the focus of an organization is maximization of production output just as it is implied in business organization. Though, the scholars of management science seek to achieve efficiency in realizing organizational objectives through such principles as division of labor, unit of command, span of control, and specialization. Eventually, efficiency becomes a measure on which organizations' virtues are estimated. Though, the period of business civilization migrated concept of efficiency into administration in government, and scholars begin to estimate that measure of efficiency in one administration is the same in all other administration. At this point, the assumption was efficiency is value-neutral, and as such could be adopted at the level of implementation because it is based on factual judgement. This argument sets a logical division between facts and values; that values only come into play at the level of agenda setting and policy formulation. This was a logical position for Simon but was countered by Waldo who indicated facts and values overlap, therefore they cannot be separated from all levels of the administrative processes. Indeed, it is a hard nut to crack when attempting to make logical delineation between two concepts that are tied in their definitional features. Some values are involved when administrators are implementing policy programs because oftentimes regulation guiding program implementation are written in general language to avoid outright alienation of certain groups or social blocs in the society, and the determination of the conditions upon which such policy programs or regulation are enforced or implemented are subject to the bureaucratic discretion or the courts. Even if we assumed efficiency in administration to be instrumental, it does not suffice to say that a particular way of doing thing is most efficient because such a judgment is subject to the question of value. Besides, doing something efficiently does not equate to effectiveness; we could be performing a task of implementation efficiently, but could eventually end up doing the wrong thing.

Finally, Administration is the vehicle upon which governance and governmental services are conveyed to the people in any system of government; however, if administration is to be infused into democracy it must incline less to the values of efficiency, but establish structures that would enable a faction to counteract faction; it is through such arrangements that the varieties of organized political, economic, and social interests and values that are characteristic of the public would be represented in the administrative process. If this could be done, and some level of balance between efficiency and accountability is established, administration could be integrated into democracy. The New Public Service sets

the path for the integration of administration into democracy as it is more leaned toward grassroot participation; it allows administration to be efficient without having to trade off the core defining values of democracy.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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