

Is There A Philippine Public Administration? —(2)

RAUL P. DE GUZMAN*

Public Administration is discussed and defined from different perspectives, i.e., as governmental bureaucracy and as a field of study, and concludes that public administration is largely determined by the socio-cultural, economic, and political setting. However, it is observed that public administration as a science is yet to be realized.

Yes — there is a Philippine Public Administration as there is American Public Administration, French Public Administration and Thai Public Administration. But it is not enough to raise and answer that question. There is a need to ask and answer other questions such as: what is the reference when the phrase “public administration” is used? Is it to government in action and to the public bureaucracy? Or to public administration as a field of study? Or to the profession of managing the affairs of government?

If the reference is to the public bureaucracy, what are the structural features which are uniquely Filipino and which are common and shared with public bureaucracies in other countries? What are the behavioral characteristics or patterns of behavior presumed to be bureaucratic which are, again, uniquely Filipino and which are similar to bureaucratic behavioral patterns in other socio-cultural settings?

If the reference is to public administration as a field of study, are there models and analytical concepts which Filipino scholars have formulated to help explain the interrelated processes in politics and public administration as well as to assist in unravelling the potentials and complexities of these phenomena? Is there a body of literature in the field which could be used as teaching material?

This paper will attempt to answer these questions. It will describe and analyze the structural and behavioral characteristics of the public bureaucracy in the country and determine whether some features are peculiarly Filipino or are shared with other large public organizations. It will provide some illustrative cases of patterns of bureaucratic behavior in the Philippine bureaucracy. In the latter part of this paper, the changing emphasis in the content of public administration as a field of study in institutions of higher learning shall be described.

*Chancellor, University of the Philippines at Los Baños, and Professor, UP College of Public Administration.

What is Public Administration?

From a very broad perspective, public administration may be viewed to refer not only to those activities involved in carrying out or in implementing the policies and programs of the government but also the processes and contents of these policies and programs. From an even broader perspective, public administration may refer to cooperative human action whether within the public bureaucracy, the private sector, or in non-governmental organizations aimed at delivering services to the people.

Public administration is also a distinct field of study; it is considered both a professional and scholarly discipline. As such, it is concerned with public policies and programs, their formulation and implementation and the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors bearing on them. It deals with the systematic study of institutions and processes and the interplay of factors involved in authoritative decision-making on goals, in implementing them, and in achieving desired results.

Public Administration as Governmental Bureaucracy

Structural Features

There are several generally accepted organizational features common to all public bureaucracies. These are: 1) hierarchical structure of authority; 2) creation of sub-units based on differentiation of functions or specialization; 3) recruitment and promotion based on merit and competence; and 4) a system of rules and procedures to guide action in the organization.

The bureaucracy in the Philippines, exhibits these structural characteristics. The government is organized into ministries, bureaus, divisions and sections and into regional field offices and local governments which are hierarchical in structure. They generally perform sets of specialized functions based on responsibilities for particular programs (e.g. Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports or the Bureau of Plant Industry), geographical areas (development authorities and local governments), clientele (e.g. Ministry of Muslim Affairs) and processes/procedures (accounting/auditing office). The fundamental and other laws of the land have provided for the adoption of the merit principle as the main basis for recruitment of personnel in the bureaucracy. Policies, rules and regulations covering practically all aspects—both substantive and procedural—have also been adopted in government agencies to guide managerial decision-makers, program/project implementors, the rank-and-file and the general public.

While the Philippine bureaucracy may have these structural features—formally differentiated or specialized agencies, hierarchy of authority,

recruitment based on merit, and a body of rules and regulations, the norms or values appropriate to these new structures have not been fully accepted by public functionaries and the people in general. The traditional values have not been quite displaced by the new norms, and they continue to influence to a great extent the behavior of government officials/employees and the general public.

Moreover, family, kinship, religious, socio-economic, political and other groups continue to impinge on the performance of government agencies and personnel. In turn, public administrators and employees continue the search for flexibility in their operations within the restricting confines of a hierarchical bureaucratic structure and a body of policies, rules and regulations which define, beforehand, what they can do and what they cannot do. As a consequence, what may be formally prescribed in government may not be effectively practiced.

Behavioral Characteristics

While opinion may vary on what kind of behavior could be labeled as bureaucratic, one view is to emphasize "normal, desirable, functional traits associated with the attainment of the objectives of bureaucratic organizations." One author (Carl Friedrich) stressed traits such as objectivity, precision and consistency, and discretion.

On the other hand, other authors (Vicor Thompson, Fred Riggs, and Robert Merton) highlighted dysfunctional behavioral traits which develop from the rationalistic orientation of the bureaucracy and the structural features designed to maintain it. These negative behavioral patterns tend to frustrate the realization of the goals towards which administrative agencies are supposed to be working. For example, strict adherence to rules and regulations induces conservatism and extreme caution, even timidity, on the part of administrators. Emphasis on impersonality may lead to conflict in relations with the general public transacting business with the bureaucratic organizations. Other negative traits include lack of initiative, unwillingness to delegate, rigidity and inflexibility, red tape and buckpassing.

To illustrate the conflict between what is formally prescribed and actual practice, some case reports will be presented. The cases will show also what is being done by public administrators to achieve some degree of flexibility within a bureaucratic system that emphasizes accountability through its body of rules and regulations.

The "50-50" Agreement. The "50-50" agreement was a scheme devised by members of the House of Representatives in the Old Congress whereby the filling up of all new positions in the 1959 budget would be divided on a 50-50 basis between the Executive (Malacañang) and the Congress. The plan was arrived at, after newly-elected congressmen from the

majority party complained that their recommendees for the new positions in the budget they had approved were being ignored or not acted upon by the department heads and bureau directors. Instead, preferential treatment was given by the department secretaries and directors to recommendees of the President and/or the veteran and more influential members of Congress. The neophyte Congressmen felt that their inability to place their constituents in jobs had affected their credibility and reputation. The 50-50 plan would allow for a more equitable distribution of vacancies to new positions on a regional or geographical basis. While the Congressmen were asked to submit their recommendees, they were requested to observe the qualification requirements for the vacant and new positions.

This case described the implementation of the merit system in our country and showed how partisan politics, geographical ties, the *compadre* system, familial obligations and the personal factors influenced public officials. It showed also how they had attempted to reconcile the formally prescribed norms with the apparently conflicting demands of particularistic interests and the traditional values in society. This case may be considered typical of what had happened in the Philippine bureaucracy in regard to the merit system. Administrators generally accept civil service eligibility as a minimum requirement, but between two or three civil service eligibles, they could then choose the one recommended by a politician, a *compadre*, or a relative.

Cases on the implementation of merit system under the new political leadership may reveal, however, different results. In a number of cases, there may even be a complete disregard of the civil service eligibility requirements.

Change Order No. 1. Change Order No. 1 was a modification of a counterpart project in the old Bureau of Public Works of the Department of Public Works and Communications. It would have used savings in the amount of P4,143.44 from a P108,880 NEC-AID project for the construction of twenty observation wells. The Change Order went through a series of nineteen clearances in four agencies and took 273 days to secure the final approval; the construction of the wells was finished in twenty-one days.

This case illustrated the problem of delay in processing paper work in government. The document that was needed to implement the change order was held up for long periods awaiting review and signature of certain officials. As brought out in the case report, it seemed nobody was sufficiently interested in the Change Order to follow up on the officials who were supposed to approve it.

In Philippine public administration, one has to speed up the process of getting permits and licenses or approvals of project proposals, appointment papers and customs release documents by personal follow-up or by contacting friends, relatives, military officers, politicians, religious leaders,

and/or other influential persons. Or one has to give a bribe to secure prompt action on the papers.

There are many other cases before and even now to show that one cannot rely on policies, rules and regulations to get some action on one's request from government agencies. One must know whom to approach and how and what is the price for quick action.

Views on Graft and Corruption

There are two prevailing points of view on graft and corruption. The first which is generally followed in Western countries is the public office centered definition. This means that an action, a decision or a behavior is judged using the norms or standards of the public office as a basis. As stated by Heidenheimer, the core of this definition is "the concept of public office and the norms binding on its incumbent."

The second point of view which is dominant in developing countries including the Philippines is the public interest centered definition of graft and corruption. This means that the public official's action, decision or behavior is judged on the basis of whether the power of authority is used to promote the public interest or the personal gain of the public official. According to Heidenheimer, this line of thinking uses the compatibility of an act with public interest as a decisive element by which it could be judged as corrupt.

In the Bureaucratic Behavior Project conducted by the UP College of Public Administration, practices were studied in several government offices. In some offices, the approving authority and subordinate officials did ask for straight ten percent commission. In other offices, the agency heads who approved the contracts or the purchase of supplies, materials and equipment did ask also for a ten percent commission. But the commission money went into an office fund to be used for payment of overtime services of employees who otherwise could not be compensated properly for their extra work in view of stringent government rules and regulations on the matter. And in some cases, the agency heads asked for donations in the form of equipment, e.g., typewriters, airconditioners, and micro-computers which could not be bought for lack of funds for the purpose or because of government prohibitions, but which are badly needed for efficient operation of the office.

Public administrators in the Philippines generally would see nothing wrong with the latter example. From their point of view, as long as one does not use the commission money for one's personal gain, then it is acceptable or at least tolerable. One is able to acquire resources needed for the attainment of agency goals.

But public administrators in Western countries would have no doubt that the above examples constitute acts of corruption. If one needs an air-

conditioner in the office, one must present that as a separate request and not get it through bloated pricing for certain supplies and materials. One must secure the lowest price for these items and rebates should properly be entered in the books.

Foundations and Other Similar Arrangements

One recent phenomenon in Philippine public administration is the increasing number of foundations which have been established and attached to government agencies and to universities and colleges. In the University of the Philippines alone, easily there are more than twenty-five University-College- or department-based foundations. Even the Commission on Audit has established one.

The foundation serves as a mechanism to provide some flexibility in the receipt and disbursement of funds without observing all the accounting and auditing rules and regulations of the government which impede the efficiency and effectiveness of agency operations. In some cases, the foundation mechanism has been used to privatize or "launder" public funds. The search is for flexibility in the handling of funds, and consequently easier management and implementation of programs/projects.

In other cases, one does not need to resort to a foundation mechanism. One needs only a special Presidential Decree (PD) or Executive Order to set aside all Office of Budget and Management (OBM) and Commission on Audit (COA) regulations on the operation of the project, the Task Force, or of a new agency.

Public Administration as a Field of Study

As mentioned earlier, public administration is considered both as a professional and scholarly discipline. It is generally offered in the Philippines at the graduate level and serves as a second field of specialization. More than sixty universities, colleges, and schools now offer degree programs in public administration. But what is being taught to the students — American or Philippine public administration? Reference is made to the Americans because many books still used are on American public administration, and, at one time, in the College of Public Administration there was even a course on "State Governments in the U.S." but no course on the Philippine Administrative System.

Additional questions could be asked: Would curricular programs in public administration enable the students to acquire a broad understanding of the process of social change and the various cultural, social, economic and political factors which influence the development effort in the country? Would the program equip the students with the specialized knowledge on

and the analytical ability to understand the development goals, the structure and dynamics of political and administrative institutions, policy issues, and programs/project implementation problems? Would the programs and the component courses be too "theoretical," academic, and prescriptive in approach? Would there be discussion on ethical issues and questions?

Some colleagues in the College of Public Administration who are actively involved in the Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines (ASPAP) may have more knowledge about curricular programs in the different schools, their faculty, teaching materials and the teaching methods and techniques being used.

During the early years (the 50s and the early 60s) in the then Institute of Public Administration, the emphasis in the curricular program was on internal management — and the staff functions in government — organization and management, personnel and fiscal administration — with some courses in local government. Later on, courses on public administration and politics, the economy, and social change were introduced to give students a better understanding of the ecology of public management in the country and of the dynamics of social change.

In the seventies, courses on program administration and public policy were added to give students better acquaintance with at least some major policy area or program, e.g., health, agriculture, education and housing and a feel of problems in "line" or program/project management. In the eighties there is renewed concern about accountability in government which resulted in the reintroduction of a course on ethics in the public service.

More recently, there has been a reexamination of the concept of "public" in public administration. For a long time, that has been interpreted to mean "governmental" and therefore teaching and research efforts have been focused primarily on problems of the public bureaucracy and on the issue of increasing its administrative capability. Now, "public" is being interpreted to refer to "people" — public administration is administration or delivery of services to the people. If this interpretation is fully accepted, then the students of public administration could rightfully look into alternative delivery channels, e.g., the private sector, non-governmental organizations and cooperatives and on how to strengthen the capability of receiving systems in benefitting from the services.

There is still the continuing problem of achieving relevance and realism in the teaching of public administration in the country. The needs are the following: (1) getting faculty members who have both the academic qualifications and administrative experience; (2) the production and use of indigenous teaching materials; (3) the use of innovative teaching methods and techniques, and (4) the formulation of more relevant models and analytical concepts.

Concluding Statement

It has been observed that public administration is inevitably ethnocentric or culture-bound. The socio-cultural, economic and political setting in which public management operates has long been recognized as a major determinant of the patterns of administration that evolve. Similarly, the influence of the environment of public administration is an increasingly strong determinant for changes in the system. Consequently, in each country, the patterns of public administration that develop is in some degree distinctive.

In 1947, Robert Dahl published in the *Public Administration Review* an article on "The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems." He wrote:

"...Conceivably there might be a science of American public administration and a science of British public administration and a science of French public administration, but can there be a 'science of public administration' in the sense of a body of generalized principles independent of their peculiar national setting?"

In 1956, Cornell University started a quarterly publication called *The Administrative Science Quarterly*. The lead editorial then expressed the hope that within a ten-year period, administrative science would be recognized and accepted.

At this stage, that goal is still far from being realized.