



Politics-Administration and Public Policy: Some Explanations for Public Administration Community

Modupi.Selepe; M.M Mehlape

Department of Public Administration, University of Limpopo, South Africa

E-mail: Modupi.selepe@ul.ac.za, maryreneilwe2@gmail.com

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Abstract

The quality of the policy making, the consistency between policy intent and the impact of policies when implemented, and the effectiveness, equity, and efficiency of the administrative process can all be affected by the nature of the interaction and relative influence of politicians and administration. Politics and administration should be thought of as different elements of the same process of formulating and implementing public policy. It is therefore, against this background that this paper investigates the relationship between politicians and public administrators in policy making. This is because policy formulators should work together with policy implementers because non-cooperation between the two will only lead to the success of policy in writing but failure in practice. This paper is conceptual in nature and that it derives its contribution and argument from the existing literature. This paper, inter alia, recommends that it is vital for politics and administrations to complement each other than to have them separated. The paper further recommends that there should be procedures and possible measures directed at limiting the notion of politics-administration dichotomy as it is practical in theory than in practice.

Keywords: *Public Administration; Public Policy; Politics; Governance; Management*

1. Introduction

The quality of the policy making, the consistency between policy intent and the impact of policies when implemented, and the effectiveness, equity, and efficiency of the administrative process can all be affected by the nature of the interaction and relative influence of politicians and administration. Joensuu and Niiranen (2018:23) indicate that Marx Weber's classic model of bureaucracy is a simplified theoretical illustration of the roles of political leaders and public administrators, in which political leaders represent the people's opinions, whereas the public administrators administer impartially. Looking at the South African context, policies are typically successful in writing rather than practice thus raises a

question of the relation between policy formulators and policy implementers. Hence it was indicated by (News 24, 2015) that public policy is a fundamental aspect in the development of any country, however in countries such as South Africa, deeper concerns have emerged that public consideration in the formulation of public policy is skewed to the ruling elite only, making it difficult for non-state actors and other stakeholders in the society to democratically participate in the formulation of public policy.

Maluleke (2011) indicates that any democratic government cannot afford to turn a blind eye on the plight of the society it represents. There should be measures taken to improve the lives of its citizens and this could be done if the government has well-defined policies pertaining to each and every aspect of its intended actions. Additionally, (*ibid*, 2011) emphasises that the first phase in the policy cycle begins with public awareness of a problem or when office bearers and other interested groups identify an issue and make demands that the issue be addressed. This stage is then called policy formulation. Once the problem has been identified it then forms part of the political decision-making agenda. Maluleke (2011:95) further states that it could be concluded that the policy formulation process ends with policy creation; that is the laying down of a valuable authoritative assignment in the form of a law; a program or a provision. The law or program is then given to the administrative structures for implementation.

Furthermore, it is highlighted that the government has to acknowledge that public problems should be identified in order that an agenda in policy-making could be prepared (Maluleke, 2011). Tebele (2016) states that the political side of the public policy process is the role that government play with regard to how the country's resources are going to be utilised, where and how, and which societal issues are going to be addressed in the said public policy. On the other hand, the administrative side of the public policy process entails participation of 'executive governmental institutions' and the actions they take towards achieving the set out goals as determined by government. It is further highlighted that policy makers, administrators and bureaucrats must ensure that for that implementation to take place, they must persuade all the relevant stakeholders (politicians; interest groups; communities) that a particular policy is indeed necessary. It also highlighted by Hanekom (1987) and Toleikiene and Meskyte (2014) in Tebele (2016) that public policy is influenced by political party policy.

Furthermore, Joensuu and Niiranen (2018:26) highlight that the attempt to maintain distance between the roles of political leaders and public administrators is a phenomenon as old as separating politics and administration. It has been indicated that politics play a role in administration and that the relationship between the two groups is much more complicated than the ideal type model suggests. For example, Svava is opposed to the simple interpretation of clear roles, and has developed a complementarity model of politics and administration. Hence this model is considered by many researchers to be a more appropriate conceptualisation than dichotomy in understanding political-administrative relations. It is therefore, against this background that this paper investigates the relationship between politicians and public administrators in policy making.

2. Conceptualisation of Terms

It is critically significant to clarify and conceptualise some of the key concepts as they form part of the discussion at hand.

2.1 Politics

Politics is defined by Heywood (2007) as the activities through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. It is regarded as the activities, actions, and policies that are used to gain and hold power in a government or to influence a government (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Furthermore, Zittoun (2014) defines politics as all activities that seek to order, govern, resolve social conflict, and re-establish order within society. According to Spicer (2010:1) politics provides us with a means of settling, at least for a time, the inevitable conflicts of interests and values or conceptions of the

good that seem to arise among us without having constantly to take up arms against each other. Mandal (2007:380) indicates that politics is the process by which groups make decisions.

2.2 Administration

Basu (2004:3) states that administration is the organization and direction of human and material resources to achieve desired ends. Administration is further defined as a cooperative effort towards achieving some common goals (Pruthi, 2005). It is also emphasised by Basu (2004:2) that administration is a 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 one wants to happen. Administration can also be defined as the process or activity of running a business or the organization. Administration is defined as organising and maintaining human and fiscal resources to attain group's goals (Khan, 2008:1). It means getting things done. Thornhill (2005:180) states that administration primarily concerns the establishment of an enabling framework for the performance of duties.

2.3 Public Administration

It is highlighted that in order to understand public administration, there is a need to first understand what is public and administration separately. Public means government and administration getting things done. Therefore, public administration is defined as the management of government affairs (Khan, 2008). According to Massey & Johnston (2015:14) public administration is a multifaceted concept with some key features at its core. Bayat & Meyer (1994:4) further define public administration as that system of structures and processes operating within a particular society as the environment, with the objective of facilitating the formulation of appropriate governmental policy and the effective and efficient execution of the formulated policy. Additionally, Khan (2008:1) highlights that it is the management of government affairs. Denhardt & Denhardt (2009:2) agrees that public administration has to do with the management of public programs. It has to do with managing the realm of government and other public activities.

2.4 Public Policy

Maseng (2014:1) defines public policy as all formal and publicly known decisions of government that come through predetermined channels in a given administration. It is indicated by Howlett and Mukherjee (2016) that public policy emanates from societies' efforts to affect changes in their own institutional or public behaviour in order to achieve some end goal key policy actors consider to be important. Additionally, Roux (2002:421) emphasises that it is important to note that no administrative action can take place if specific goals and objectives have not been set. In practice, this implies that objectives will be set for each government institution. Furthermore, Howlett and Makherjee (2016) highlight that some policies are said to be determined by governments but involve other actors and institutions- private, commercial, family and others. It is further indicated by (Roux, 2002) that once policy-makers have formulated a policy, the policy must be authorised. It can be argued that a policy because significant for the purpose of public administration only after legislation has been passed. There are various authors who seeks to define public policy as indicated in the study of Roux (2002). The definition of policy as a function should be considered in more concrete terms. According to Dye (1995:4), a public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do. In reading this definition, Dye (1995:3) acknowledges the contributions made by:

- *Political scientist David Easton, who defines public policy as “the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society”, and*
- *Political scientist Harold Lasswell and philosopher Abraham Kaplan, who define policy as “a projected programme of goals, values and practices”.*

- *Fox and Meyer (1995:107) define policy as “authoritative statements made by legitimate public institutions about the way in which they propose to deal with policy problems.*

Furthermore, Roux (2002:425) highlights that public policy can also be referred to as a proposed course of action of government, or guidelines to follow to reach goals and objectives, and is continuously subject to the effects of environmental change and influence. Public policy, indeed, is also an authoritative statement on what government chooses to do or not to do and incorporates, or implies, the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society. According to Casula (2017:1124) a public policy can be defined as the set of measures that a policy maker decides to adopt in order to solve a problem that has a collective interest.

3. Politics Administration Dichotomy: The Discourse

According to Naidu (2005:55) the foundation of public administration is those deep and permanent principles of politics. It is emphasised that public administration comes from politics however other authors view it differently. To Wilson Woodrow, public administration was much more than technical detail, and it was to be conducted in a political context. Administrators are involved in politics in so far as politics relates to the process of policy-making. Since public administration was viewed as distinct and separate from politics, it led to the concept of politics administration dichotomy which was proposed by Woodrow Wilson in 1880s. Politics administration dichotomy divides politics and policy making from policy implementation and public administration (Milakovish and Gordon, 2013). This model of dichotomy makes sure that politics and administration are separated so that performance of functions cannot be complicated and it will be clear which component plays which role in the public.

Thornhill (2005:182) states that the political/ administrative interface is where the tyre hits the road. This is the grey area within which politics has to be distinguished from administration and management. The politics-administration dichotomy stands as one of the oldest among this type of models. The politics administration dichotomy is a particular conceptualisation of politics-administration relationship resting on the assumption that each function works best as an independent variable, and capable of being improved in isolation without endangering or interfering with the other side (Martin, 1988 in Demir, nd:9). According to Uwizeyimana (2013:171) there is ample evidence to show that the politics-administration dichotomy envisaged by Wilson and his supporters is neither practical nor possible in a real organization (both government and private). Politics cannot be separated from the policy implementation process due to the fact that: policies are made and implemented through political institutions. Uwizeyimana further holds that the way forward is to strike a balance between the two equally important and inseparable aspects of any organization and of government in particular

4. The Role of Politicians in Public Policy

Nemaue (2011:3) states that without conflict there is no need for policy to be made, thus no need for governance. The nature of conflict is the very essence of politics: who gets what, where, when, why and how. Politics is born out of conflict. According to Howlett and Mukherjee (2016:03) the formulation of policies, or the matching, and often mis-matching, of goals and means, or policy aims and instruments, occurs through the interplay of knowledge-based analytics of problems and solutions with power-based political considerations.

4.1 Policy Formulation

According to Howlett and Mukherjee (2016:3) policy formulation is part of the process of developing public policies and involves government and other policy actors asking and answering questions about how societies can deal with various kinds of problems and conditions affecting citizens and organizations in the pursuit of their goals. Additionally, Howlett and Mukherjee, (2016) further

indicate that policy formulation in general or the activity of finding, devising and defining problem solutions, takes place once a public problem has been recognized as warranting government attention. It is further indicated that formulation activities are distinct from other aspects of policy-making that involve authoritative government decision-makers choosing a particular course of action, or the actual implementation of the policy on the ground.

As indicated that formulation is the stage of policy-making whereby a range of available options is considered and then reduced to some set that relevant policy actors, especially in government can agree may be usefully employed to address a policy issue. This generally occurs before the issue progresses onwards to official decision-makers for some definitive determination, although those decisions-makers may have in their public pronouncements or electoral platforms and other statements already signalled which kinds of efforts they might countenance and which they would not.

It is important to know that before policy formulation there is agenda setting /problem identification. Public policy formation is a step that involves the approach (es) needed to solve the issue. There can be several competing proposals depending on the agendas of stakeholders involved. This may involve considering alternative courses of action and forecasting and modelling the impact of future situations. This process may be long drawn out. The definite endpoint to this step falls along the lines of actions such as when congress considers a bill or a regulatory agency proposes rules (Anna-Maria College online Program, 2018).

5. The Role of Public Administrators in Public Policy

It is important to note that public administrators are there or exist to ensure that policies are implemented. Nemaue (2011) indicates that if it is the job of a public administrator to establish and implement policy, then according to the traditional political belief, these tasks cannot be separated from politics, nor should they be. It is further states by (Demir, 2001) that the role of public administration in the political process has been great concern since the emergence of public administration as an academic field in the late 1880s. Khan (2008:3) indicates that the main task of public administration is to implement public policy adopted by the policy makers. Its task is to translate the point of state books into action, form into substance, to deliver promised benefits to the intended beneficiaries. Olumuyiwa (2015:15) indicates that the task of civil/public servant or administrator is to assist in the formulation and execution of policy as directed by the minister or commissioner. It is therefore his duty to supply his political boss with all the information necessary to arrive at a right decision.

5.1 Policy Implementation

According to DeGross and Cargo (2009:47) policy implementation reflects a complex change process where government decisions are transformed into programs, procedures, regulations, or practices aimed at social betterment. Lester & Goggin in DeGross and Cargo (2009:48) further indicate that implementation has long been recognized as a distinct stage in the policy process, unique for representing the transformation of a policy idea or expectation to action aimed at remedying social problems. Policy implementation can be considered the process of carrying out a government decision. In defining policy implementation, it is useful to make the conceptual distinction between the policy implementation process and policy outcomes, even though these are interactive in practice (O'Toole, 2000). The process involves action on the behalf of the policy, whereas policy outcome refer to the ultimate effect on the policy problem.

Ottoson and Green (1987) suggest that 'implementation' is an interactive process in which ideas, expresses as policy, are transformed into behaviour, expressed as social action'. The social action transformed from the policy is typically aimed at social betterment and most frequently manifests as

programs, procedures, regulations, or practices. It is further indicated that carrying out a new policy often falls to entities that were not the ones that formulated or adopted it. (Anna-Maria college online programs, 2018). Roux (2002:425) emphasises that in order to understand public policy abstract, thinking is required. Policy, in itself, is not discernable unless written or contained in a document. It is further indicated by Roux (2002:435) that demands presently placed on political office bearers and public officials, especially those involved in the decision-and policy-making processes are exceptionally high, and would a better understanding of the process of policy formulation and the necessity for policy implementation and etc. of such policies be of paramount importance.

Economically speaking, the South African Government cannot afford miscalculations when comprehensive executive programmes are embarked upon, given the large section of the population who lives in poor conditions. However, mistakes can be avoided if those involved in the policy- and decision-making processes are fully conversant with the theory and practice of policy related issues. Training and education in policy management at selected tertiary institutions in South Africa should continue being an option to further develop personal capacity and critical mind-set, so necessary when costly decisions have to be taken (Roux, 2002). In the attempts to strengthen theoretical and practical relationship between politics and administration, Mafunisa (2003) have indicated and explained a variety of models that seeks to explain the dichotomy discourse. Amongst other models the complementarity model was then perceived as the best user-friendly and can create harmony between politics and administration.

6. Complementarity Model

According to Mafunisa (2003:89) the complementarity model is a strong foundation for public administration at all spheres of government. According to Svava (2001) in Mafunisa (2003) the complementarity of politics and administration is based on the premise that political office-bearers and administrators join together in the pursuit of sound governance. Complementarity stresses interdependence along with distinct roles; compliance along with independence; respect for political supremacy along with a commitment to shape and implement policy in ways that promote the public interests; deference to elected incumbents along with adherence to the law and support of fair electoral competition; and appreciation of politics along with support for professional standards. Ndudula (2013:17) holds that the complementary model implies that politics and administration exist as separate and distinctive parts, however recognizes the role each can contribute in the entire organizational framework. (2013:47) states that elected officials and administrators have extensive interactions, and there is a growing complementarity between them.

The complementarity model is similar to the interaction because they explain more or similar things. The interaction school acknowledges the differences between politics and administration in a number of ways such as logical and psychological differences between politics and administration. The school emphasise a high degree of collaboration between elected and administrative officials while maintaining each one's traditional roles and unique perspectives (Demir, Nd:6). In other words, the interaction school and complementarity model are in the middle of the politicised and dichotomy model. Mafunisa (2003:89) further states that complementarity reconciles what have seemed to be contradictory aspects in public administration. How can politicians maintain control and, at the same time, allow senior public servants to maintain their independence, adhere to professional values and standards and be responsible to the public? Political office bearers could, in theory, dominate administrative practice, but they are constrained by a respect for administrative competence and commitment.

7. Relationship between Politicians and Public Administrators

It is indicated that there is a difference between administrators and politicians, hence Reily (2015) tend to view administrators as being not leaders but on the other hand it can be said that politicians can be regarded as leaders. Therefore, it is evident that administrators do things right and on the other hand

leaders do the right things. Politicians can be regarded as those authoritative decision-makers that are found in government and they can be regarded as leaders because they do the right things by making decisions. According to Hansen and Ejersbo (2002) the relationship between politicians (elected officials) and administrators (appointed officials) is the cornerstone to understanding the governing process and has always been highly debated in the public administration literature.

However, Miller & McTavish (2009:80) argue that administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics and administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the task for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. Fatima (2010:21) holds that there is a relationship between politics and administration, in particular, between municipal managers and mayor by indicating that while the mayor is responsible for the management of the processes, the municipal manager is yet responsible for the implementation and monitoring of progress with the implementation of the IDP. Der Visser (2010:94) cited that in practice, however, the political-administrative interface has become the 'achilles heel' of many municipalities. According to Olumuyiwa (2015:17) the politics and administration interface does not always produce negative outcomes and consequences. If the interactions between politics and administration are better managed, they would likely lead to efficient and effective policy development in government.

Conclusion

It is clear that separating politics from administration in the public sector is impossible in practice, thus the public sector was, is and will forever remain a politicised system. Politics and public administration do co-exist on the same social continuum, but as separate and distinct constellations of logic whose activities sometimes overlap. At far ends of that continuum, political acts (such as appointing to government jobs unqualified nephew) can be distinguished from administrative acts (such as appointing to government jobs the most qualified applicants drawn from a competitive pool) and easily so. A clear separation of powers between political office bearers and public servants is not clear or rather strict enough in outlining the distinction in the roles and responsibilities needed to be carried out by these two parties. However on the other hand, inappropriate political involvement in administrative activities also contributes to the contradiction of mandates between the political office bearers and senior public servants, since it is not clear on who does what in the public sector, as such it can be suggested that the interface to be reviewed as it is regarded as a way of giving out the relationship between politics and administration which has been traced even before 1994 in order to eliminate the challenges not excluding the criticism against the interface.

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