

A Critical Analysis of Public Administration Articles

Student's Name

College

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The Road to PPB

Schick (1966) introduces the then nascent budgeting approach—planning-programming-budgeting (PPB) system. The author cites the development of public budgeting into PPB from two previous models, namely: (1) central-controlled- (CCB) and (2) management-oriented-budgeting (MOB). According to Schick (1966), the need for the emergent PPB stems from the weaknesses of the previous models, which do not take into account how “decisions on how much to spend for personnel or supplies” (p. 243) should consider the intended purposes of those investments. In essence, Schick’s (1966) article presents an informative, albeit analytical; look into the pros and cons of the three budgeting approaches, with a predominant support for PPB.

Although in Schick’s (1966) introduction CCB and MOB are cast as budgeting techniques that do not put the requisite emphasis on how to accomplish planned objectives, he later on admits that the tenets of PPB (i.e. an incorporation of intended purposes in the budgeting process) feature in the three approaches. As a result, Schick (1966) sets the stage for distinguishing between CCB, MOB, and PPB through an unprecedented fine ‘toothcomb’. Then again, Schick (1966) reiterates that he only takes issue with the manner CCB and MOB do not put an explicit emphasis on the planning function, focusing instead on the control and management aspects respectively.

Thus, the author’s defense against the major criticism of PPB as “nothing very new” and a system that’s “hardly different from what we’ve been doing until now” (Schick, 1966, p. 243) falters from the onset of his analysis. What the author manages to argue as a better rethink of the budgeting process is therefore, a mere re-imagination of the process to focus on the planning factor at the expense of control and management. Ultimately, Schick (1966) fails to make a

convincing case for PPB as the better approach, mostly because his arguments do not borrow from experiential data but depend on his subjective analysis.

Public Choice

Ostrom and Ostrom's (1971) article is an espousal of how between 1963 and 1967, "the application of economic reasoning to 'collective,' 'political' or 'social' decision making" (p. 203) became the basis and predominant definition of Public Administration (PA). For that reason, the article assumes a review of the pertinent literature as its research methodology. From analyzing classic PA texts, such those by Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Simon, and Dwight Waldo—Ostrom and Ostrom (1971) do nothing more than track the evolution of the PA field over the years. However, by doing so, the researchers expose the link between management, economics, politics and sociology in PA.

Then again, the moniker, 'public choice' hides the true extent of convergence between the aforementioned distinct fields that scholars envisioned for PA. In fact, Ostrom and Ostrom's (1971) admittance that Public Choice (PC) was no more than a title for an emergent journal indicates the nascence of the subject area. Still, the authors indicate that the well-established setup of PA in governments, whereby technocrats serve under political department heads, was in need of retrospection with a view of improving on efficiency and pragmatism. Pointedly, Ostrom and Ostrom (1971) argue, "we contemplate the possibility that public administration can be organized in relation to diverse collectivities" (p. 212). As a result, the authors display their intentions to challenge the classic notion of Woodrow concerning PA uniformity across different government.

Overall, the authors do little to justify how their assumptions of PC as a different take on PA are substantial. By interrogating the economics, politics, and bureaucracy of public service,

Ostrom and Ostrom (1971) only manage to describe the significance of PA, but fail to paint a convincing picture of a distinct form of administration. Conclusively, the authors manage to define PA in all its various facets at the expense of introducing a new approach, which they set out to do through PC.

Mixed-Scanning

In decision-making, rational and incremental approaches present the two major established methodologies. However, because of the inherent weaknesses between the two techniques, Etzioni (1967) introduces a better-designed method in his aptly subtitled article, A “Third” Approach to Decision-Making. At the heart of public administration lies the decision-making function as the crucial but also the most complex and imperfect utility. Accordingly, as a contextual study, the article looks at the rationalistic and incremental decision-making techniques through the lens of descriptivism with the aim of achieving an evaluation of the third proposed approach—mixed scanning.

Etzioni (1967) defines mixed scanning as a strategy that “combines a detailed (‘rationalistic’) examination ... with a ‘truncated’ review” (p. 389). In essence, by picking the desirable features of rationalization and the incremental approaches, the author creates an amalgam of the two, which he assumes to be better armed to cut across diverse administration types. The major weakness with Etzioni’s (1967) proposal is that it assumes totalitarian and democratic administrations have a need for a singular decision-making model. The author already notes that rationalization works well for totalitarian governments—same as the incremental strategy does for democracies. It is therefore confusing why Etzioni (1967) would wish to establish a ‘middle-ground’ approach while administrations are either totalitarian or democratic, with a sizeable number being in transition from one form to the other.

Then again, the author's efforts at creating a new decision-making approach are telling of the function's complexity. Competing interests and poor information might be at the core of the decision-making intricacies—but a mixed scanning strategy that embraces, and ironically, distances itself from the earlier approaches only serves to complicate the decision-makers' work. Pointedly, Etzioni (1967) claims his proposal is not, "as rationalistic as that which the totalitarian societies attempt to pursue and not as incremental as the strategy democracies advocate" (p. 392). However, by doing so, he shrouds the gist of his strategy in the yo-yoing between the weaknesses and strengths of the two administration types.

The Science of "Muddling Through"

Lindblom (1959) contends that "decision-making, policy formulation, planning, and public administration" (p. 80) are imperfect fields with overly theoretical problem-solving techniques. In addition to that, the author bemoans the constricted support from requisite policies that practitioners receive despite the heightened expectations bestowed on them to set the path for solving social, economic, and bureaucratic problems. The author elucidates the dilemma through an evaluation of the application of root and branch problem-solving strategies. Lindblom (1959) points out that in theory, the root approach seems appropriate for solving problems, but its constituent requisites are impractical to real-life, multifaceted, and complex problems. To the author, the branch strategy can provide practical solutions. However, he wonders why existing policies confine practitioners to the root approach despite limited reports of its pragmatism.

Then again, the author goes on to describe how the branch technique is a subset of the root strategy. For instance, he admits that while both techniques contain problem analysis in their toolsets—the root method is comprehensive compared to the "drastically limited" (p. 81) analyses of the branch strategy. The title of the article, " *Muddling Through* ", is therefore, an apt

label for why practitioners find it hard to decide on which strategy is suitable for a given problem. In the kaleidoscope of problem-solving demands, the author does well to desist from nominating one technique over the other—because ultimately, his assertions of public administration as a complex field bear the most significance.

Still Muddling, Not Yet Through

Twenty years on, Lindblom (1979) expands on his earlier article on incremental problem-solving techniques, *The Science of “Muddling Through”*. The author continues to admonish decision-makers and problem-solvers due to their fixation to synoptic analysis as opposed to strategic analysis. Lindblom’s (1979) model suggests that instead of “meeting all conventional theoretical requirements”, analysts/decision-makers should make “informed and thoughtful choice of methods of problem simplification” (pp. 518-519). In doing so, the author displays his mastery of the incremental problem-solving technique. This is in contrast to Etzioni’s (1967) earlier stance with the mixed scanning theory, which failed to convince due to the coarseness of examination that he offered to all the major decision-making strategies.

Lindblom (1979), nevertheless, highlights the role that politics plays to cheapen the technical outcomes of an incremental problem-solving tactic. The author reiterates that because public administration is enjoined to politics due to the symbiotic disposition that governance creates, a perceived failure in either field is enough to occasion crosscutting criticisms. Therefore, Lindblom (1979) suggests that politics should assume an incremental-like approach for its inherent complexities and competing interests. Still, considering that Ostrom and Ostrom (1971) had earlier made a case for Public Choice as an amalgam of both public administration and politics, it seems unnecessary for Lindblom (1979) to make the repetitive relation of how decision-making/problem-solving techniques could be applicable in the fields.

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