

DECISION-MAKING: THE PROCESS CONTRIBUTING TO PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

This article analysis one of the main issues of public administration theory and practice, which is helpful in government functioning and policy-making. Research study includes the discourse on how to plan and make decisions on behalf of democratic attitude. Public administration is utmost outcome, and the success or failure of the government depends on it. Theoretical debate on decision-making process, accordingly, surveys the fundamental perception on rational and incremental decision-making processes. It refers basically to the administrative institutions. Decision making is important for organizational effectiveness because of its central role in the overall process of directing and controlling. Decisions do not automatically guarantee all programmed outcomes, but denoting actions with professionalism and public support. As a valuable process it is likely to be a central element of management and leadership. Comparative study of examples of developed democratic systems shows the high responsibility of public institutes and government as key actors. Particular attention is paid there to the professionalism of government, which is a vital characteristic of any democratic public administration and virtually a policy quality. Findings of current research shows that decisions are not based solely on laws and regulations. Moreover, as the study shows, many other appropriate skills of decision-makers are important that will be seen with the close linkages with strategic governance.

Keywords: public administration, Herbert A. Simon, incrementalism, decision-making process, organization theory, government's role, bounded rationality, strategic management, Armenia.

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Introduction

To name a phenomenon is not to explain it.
Herbert A. Simon

Research into decision-making process within the public administration springs from a practical desire: to help country (generally the government) achieve better outcomes. Accordingly, the paradigm of public administration has changed because it deals with the specific decision-making process. It is known that with the sudden emergence of new organization structures, capable of producing results, public administration helps create appropriate public organizations. At the same time, one of the core aspects, besides the structure and organization analyzing is the issue of decision-making process. Consequently, the study of decision-making is one of the palimpsests of public administration to call alternatives and better achievements.

Based on the above mentioned, it is critical to observe structure-organization-decision-making triangle for proposing practical suggestions on good governance and democratic government. As a rule, the structure and organization effectiveness depend on the environment, specific values and behavior of society and elites. Unlike the structure and organization, while a good decision does not guarantee a good outcome, it emphasizes the professional nature of public administration, which is one of the most important factors that impact on outcomes. Moreover, decision is a solution, and for better outcome, the government ought to outline problem and suggest solutions, but also be professional to explain the decision. Decisions must be subject to examination.

Decision-making process within the Public Administration Theory

The study of decision-making process began, roughly, in the public administration classical theories. Studies shows that public administration is defined as an extended decision-making process. This statement has been approved by those academicians, who discussed the topic using references to the leadership, management and team-building. From theoretic perspective, it is interesting to remind the opposite views of Follett and Drucker. In her “The New State: Group Organization – The Solution of Popular Government”, Follett wrote about the importance of team that made decisions. To use Drucker’s term, the country is an organization, and public administration is the specific function to make organizations capable of producing results (Drucker 2007a, 39). Approving former idea, Stein clarifies that the kind of structure necessary for organization, as a rule, is being analyzed by an academician, while an administrator focuses on the issue of how to build the structure (Stein 2010, 119-120). Contrary to Follett’s opinion, Drucker suggested that rather the management and how to use the team were important, than the team itself (Drucker 2007a, 2007b). Despite differences in the approach, both agreed that in its sense effectiveness introduces and enhances into the decision-making bodies.

Other theorists laid the foundation for the study of managerial decision-making. The research of early approaches revealed also two-direct practices, which relate to the persons at various levels in public administration who are making decisions. The

followers of the first direction state that the effective decisions are made by specific groups or levels. The followers of the second direction disagree with the former ones and insist that persons at all levels are constantly making decisions. The analysis of both finally allows us to conclude that regardless of whether the decision is made up by a person of any level or all the levels, demand is the following: to maximize utility as far as possible to understand the facts and situations, to weigh the values that seem relevant.

The World War II brought large numbers of scientists trained in the use of mathematical tools into contact for the first time with operational and managerial problems. By the end of the 1970s, the socio-political and economic issues challenged the classical model of "Old Public Administration". Many of the new public administration and management issues stem from the need for government to evolve and innovate the process of decision-making. The most widely used one is bounded the rational model that was cultivated by Herbert A. Simon. In his book, Simon wrote that "managing" and "decision making" are synonyms. Managing is decision making to the conclusion that the important skills for an executive are decision making skills. These include habit, memory, simple manipulations of things and symbols, which are relatively simple psychological processes understood at the practical level (Gow 2003, 120-127). As we see, making decisions depends on psychological processes that, until recently, have not been understood at all. But for rational (programmed) process, decision making comprises three principle phases: *finding occasions for making a decision; finding possible courses of action; choosing among courses of action*. Each of these phases illustrates rational skills of decision makers. For example, the first phase of decision-making process - *searching the environment for conditions calling for decision* – is called by Simon as intelligence activity. The second phase – *inventing, developing and analyzing possible courses for action* – called by him as design activity. The third phase – *selecting a particular course of action from those available* – is a choice activity (Simon 1960, 1-2). Simon's approach was inspired by pessimistic view of rationality. He focused on studying the processes of the cognitive system in order to develop a bounded-rationality theory of decision-making.

Additionally, Simon gives another definition of decision-making process. It is pictured as a three-layered cake. In the bottom layer, we have the basic work processes. In the middle layer is the programmed decision-making processes, that governing the day-to-day operation of the distribution system. In the top layer, we have the nonprogrammed decision-making processes that are required to design and redesign the entire system, to provide it with its basic goals and objectives, and to monitor its performance (Simon 1960, 40). Making decisions within the framework of a rational model implies that the subject excludes the unpredictable situation by modeling decision options and developing ways to solve problems. And when the probability of an uncertain situation is high, in that case, governing bodies often use the concept of bounded rationality of Simon. According to professor Gobet Fernand from the London School of Economics and Political Science, Simon's approach to decision making essentially consisted of the following assumptions. Decisions are not performed by agents with perfect rationality, they are made by agents with bounded rationality. The quality of decisions varies as a function of the expertise of a decision maker. And the last assumption is that if you want to understand decision making, it is paramount to

investigate the cognitive processes involved, and the analysis based on performance only is not efficient (Campitelli and Gobet 2010, 3).

Here again, there is a need to state that the New Public Administration theory provides an important system of principles that helps in guiding decisions calls policy. The policy can assist in objective decision-making and they are usually operational in nature. Public policy is the principle guide to action taken by the executive branch of the state with regard to a class of issues, in a manner consistent with law and institutional customs. Public problems can originate in endless ways and require different policy responses (such as regulations, subsidies, quotas, laws). Generally speaking, the public policy exists for creating a successful state building strategy and doing this mostly with three approaches, which are good governance, the New Public Management (NPM) and decentralization. The NPM represents a reform attempt that emphasizes the professional nature of public administration. It advocates the aim to replace the academic, moral or disciplinary emphasis of traditional public administration with a professional focus. As a market enhancing process, which emerged in the 1990s, good governance used successful ways to create the institutions protecting people's rights (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). At the same time, the NPM provides the government with the necessary power to implement a development plan on the economy while also using competitive market-based techniques to enhance public sector production. As for decentralization, it seeks to reduce rent-seeking behavior and inefficient resource allocation associated with centralized power by dispersing such power to lower the government levels. A close look at literature on the policy effectiveness shows that there are six contemporary dimensions to policy analysis. The first dimension is effects – effectiveness, unintended effects and equity. The second dimension is implementation – cost, feasibility, acceptability etc.

Above we have discussed Simon's approach to decision-making process, while the public administration theory's study emphasized the importance of analyzing the interests of those who make decisions. Here is the incremental model, which is a subject of special interest. Basically, the decisions impact on the society in terms of purposefulness, social significance and managerial influence. Decision-making with the incremental model assumes that the decision maker is maximally practical. The practical nature is insured by the possibility to define goals not so clear and correct, to change the existing situation or transform it by step-by-step approach. One of the main privileges of incrementalism is the following: with a rational and bounded-rational approaches, it is possible to develop a good policy without reaching a broad consensus, which can delegitimize the decision and policy. As an alternative to this possibility, incrementalism suggested a compromise, to get the desired rather step by step than at once. Because of rational model the compromise cannot be reached and the situation can be blocked, and incrementalism provides the best solution. In the famous article of Lindblom, entitled "The Science of muddling through", the latter criticized Simon, saying that it dealt with a mythical world. In the real world, values and means are examined together, policies are agreed without agreement on basic objectives, a limited number of policy alternatives are considered and policy is made or remade by the endless adjustments (Lindblom 1959). According to him, the values are the object of disagreement, difficult to rank and change over circumstances. Political pressures cause policies to be adjusted without great comprehensive examination. Lindblom's later works made it clear that there is no logical

way to say whose interests are relevant to an important decision, nor what kind of time-frame should be adopted when evaluating the consequences of different alternatives. He gave more attention in the future to different types of decisions, trying to distinguish among them one-of-a-kind (Lindblom 1959; Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993, 24-25).

The comprehensive research of decision-making process revealed that its study is based also on concrete methodology and mechanisms. A special interest presents Martin's *strategic decision-making* research, who systematically introduced components of process. For example, as the notion of problems expanded, opportunities and other issues requiring decisions are now being labeled as "challenges". The next component is the necessity to utilize consequences analysis in all the steps of the decision-making process. One of the most important components is requiring a thorough and comprehensive feedback looping effects analysis, whether single-loop, double-loop, or triple-loop feedback analysis, in each step of the decision-making process. Finally, Martin finished with the component that require continues application of the '5 Rs' approach (reanalyze, redevelop, refine, re-sort, and reprioritize) in all remaining thinking elements after a convergent list has been established (Martin 2016, 34). Making decisions is a work, where objective analysis, methods and means, in-depth study of the situation in accordance with the overall strategy is carried out. The goal is the ideal manifestation of the desired.

Professional Nature of Public Administration

The close eye on public administration bibliography reveals that it has everything to do with the common sense of the decision-making process. Public administration benefit is based on a complex formula derived from the theories, concepts and practices of decision-making. According to Simon, as we have not understood them at all, due to its psychological aspects, our theories have been rather empty and our practical advice is only moderately helpful. One thing we have known about decision making is that it can be programmed and not programmed, and improved by training in orderly thinking.

Although people make decisions both with thought and on emotional basis, anyway, they are maximizing utility in both cases. Surely, those, who form the government, exercise in a different logic. *First* of all, decisions of government are based solely on legal analysis. *Second*, they make decisions having relevant facts and information. To claim that it is possible to provide maximum utility through legality and information seems naïve, because laws are imperfect, capacity to learn facts varies from individual to individual, and information is bounded (has limits). *Third*, the government must be able to balance multitude of competing public and personal interests and/or values.

The ability to understand, as a practical function of executive power, shows that the institutional linkages between public and private sectors are blurred. For example, while executives try to reduce program costs, the private sector wants gain monetary advantage. So, how to make good decisions! In this sense, according to a number of researchers, since decisions can be challenged, the government should consider how it will defend its decision (Stewart, Langer and Erasmus 2019; Zekos 2022; Naarttijärvi

2023). And since public administration is the practical functioning of the executive branch, decisions affect professionalism.

It is vital to mention that with the emergence of the NPM, the measurement of professionalism by the criterion of decision-making is emphasized even more. The government no longer gives priority to its direct functionality (as it was in public administration's classical perceptions), it gives priority to the development of competences necessary for making decisions, such as thinking objectively, reasoning, teamwork etc. This new approach was demonstrated firstly in the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand, partly in Australia, the United State of America (USA), the Scandinavian Countries, Germany etc. More detailed study of country - cases will help analysis the issue. The government has always been a supreme institution that makes decisions in the UK public administration system. For the XX century, as a result of many challenges of the era, up to now government's role is permanently rising. The mechanism of party democracy has played a decisive impact, especially when the legislative activity begins to be managed by the government. It means that since the government formed by the leaders of party, who had majority in the House of Commons, it allows the government to lead the public administration system. Beside the political reasons, the various spheres of public life have changed as a result of a new division of labor market (between public and private), reintegration and reorganization (hard rulers came to replace mandarins), which were the results of influence and pressure on government and public administration bodies (Cloarec 2018). Even Prime Minister of the UK Margaret Thatcher¹ resigned under public pressure on her wave of reforms (Spencer and Forest 2023). Another case for research is the USA, that is known as a country with powerful presidents and government, especially in the 50s and 60s of the XX century. Probably the most influential author in the American public administration after the World War II was Simon, who proceeded to propose a new approach based on decision-making with the emphasis on the efficient use of resources in pursuit of well-defined goals. After analyzing the Watergate scandal and the war in Vietnam, Simon sought to replace the highly simplified classical approach to economic modeling based on a concept of the single decision-making, profit-maximizing entrepreneur with an approach that recognized multiple factors contributing to decision-making. Both cases discussed above illustrate that the law effectiveness of public administration is caused by the decisions of government. The logic of American practice is based on the perceptions of the "Mother of Modern Management" of Follet, who recognized the holistic nature of community and advanced the idea of 'new state'. Follet advocated the principle of what she termed 'integration,' or noncoercive power-sharing based on the use of her concept of 'power with' rather than 'power over'. The new state proposed by her is rooted in coactive power, jointly developing power, power of the sort that grew out of the groups and neighborhood associations. Power usually means 'power-over', the power of some person or group over some other person or group, which is linked usually to domination and control (Kariel 1955; Althans 2005). While 'power-with' is social, and introduces the consultative style of leadership (Héon, Damart and Nelson 2021). Having in mind these perceptions, Follet mentioned in her writings that all the Americans

¹ Margaret Thatcher Foundation. 2023. "Speeches, interviews & other statements." Accessed May 30, 2023. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches>.

need a government as a directive force of consciously integrated thought and will (Follet 1998, 8).

For a period of time, governments, particularly in the developed countries, enjoyed the high prestige and importance, while under the influence of reinventing philosophy, even they were criticized for being inadequate and inefficient. The leading role of the government in promoting social changes and economic transformation come under fire because of the financial crisis and a number of limitations were underlined and pointed as a main cause of the financial shortage of governments. These include, market regulation, production rules, universal provision of public services. Also, the absence of any accountability of both politicians and managers, the authoritative power of bureaucracy and the spreading corruption of political parties, were identified as determinants for the poor performance of public institutions. According to the modern role, governments are with individualistic culture and pro-business attitude, which is reflected in the prevailing ideology of the public interest view of the government. This explains why they 'all think in terms of 'the government' rather than 'the state'. However, in developing world still theorists and practitioners are continuously searching methods and policies to stimulate people to join the government. The unsolved problem of the new public administration, as studies shows, is the integrity research of regulatory links between changing role of government and decision-making process.

By the end of the 1990s, public administration is moving forward the organizational theory, the governance theory. Evidently, many issues of public administration are strongly connected with the theory of organization. For example, capitalism refers to a system in which the society's means of production are held by organizations. But many authors' post-capitalist approaches gave birth to the modern structure of organizations re-evaluating the meaning of governance and government's role. Accordingly, Khan see no difference between governance and public administration, emphasizing that governance is a broader term and covers all aspects of the society (Khan 2018, 6-8). While Drucker explains that the government plays the role of a manager, a policy maker and negotiator (Drucker 2007a, 25-26). Along with globalization government need to develop capacity of 'striving'. Striving means better conditions in economic and social environments, standards of living, opportunities for sustainable growth in science and technology. Studies show that organizations mostly have the same structures both in public and private sections. For example, according to Mintzberg, every organization has five parts: (1) *technical core*, which includes people, who do the basic work; (2) *technical support*, that helps the organization adapt to the environment; (3) *administrative support*, that is responsible for the smooth operation and upkeep of the organization, including its physical and human elements; (4) *management*, that is responsible for directing and coordinating other parts of the organization. Another scholar, Gulick developed a comprehensive, generic theory of organization that emphasized the scientific method, efficiency, professionalism, structural reform, and executive control. He summarized the duties of administrators with an acronym; POSDCORB, which stands for planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. The latter consists of two parts: top and middle management (Daft 2019, 56-57; Kalani and Kamrani 2017). We can find the same in public administration system. A government is the system or group of people governing an

organized community. The study of governmental structures must always proceed hand in hand with an investigation of the actual facts of the political process. Governments develop the organizational capacity characteristics also as a result of the rapid spreading of bureaucracy. Public administration has traditionally been somewhat synonymous with the government bureaucracy (Osborn and Gaebler 1993, 5-8).

Brief Overview on Decision-Making Process within the Armenian Public Administration System

In the wide sense, public administration and management is the activity of authorities of the Republic of Armenia (RA). Consequently, the qualitative development of decision – making process within the public administration system, in general, realized through the national reform program and normative framework for its successful implementation (Altunyan and Kalantaryan 2019, 17-26).

The overall process of public management reforms¹ according to several studies in Armenia consists of three stages. The first stage (1999-2003) was known as the period of government reconstruction. During the second stage (2003-2008) all the government programs focused on service delivery, mechanisms of civil participation and effective, transparent public relations. Finally, the third stage (2009-2014) aimed to introduce international (mostly European) standards of effective governance. In the 2000s, a group of Armenian scholars and public figures published recommendations to improve the public sector and reorganize the government (Khudaverdyan 2008, 15-17).

According to another classification, the first phase from 1991 to 1999 is marked by building the public administration system, which included the creation of institutions, administrative-territorial division, privatization, land reform, budget-treasury, tax-customs, and statistical systems. In the second phase, from 2000 to 2009, a number of new institutions were introduced, such as civil service and remuneration systems, public procurement, local government and community service, debt management etc. Finally, in the third phase, from 2010 to 2020, the institutional priorities² were proclaimed, such as e-Government, program budgeting, auditing, strategic planning etc.

Analyzing the Armenian processes after the revolutionary elite came to power within the context of these scenarios, it should be stated that the bureaucracy reacted sometimes negative, which was assessed by the political authorities as sabotage. As a response, in September 2019, the Prime Minister signed a decision to establish a Council for the Development of Public Administration Reform Strategy and to approve its Action Plan. As of 2019, several public administration reform strategies have been adopted in parallel, particularly the e-Government, the Anti-Corruption, Public Financial Management Reform Strategy, which have huge influence, but not qualitative impact (Altunyan 2021, 131). From the beginning of the 1990s, the Armenian people wanted the state and its public administration to act as a social and economic promoter, capable of ensuring

¹ Public Administration Reforms in Armenia: An Evaluation Report. 2015. “Protection of Rights without Borders” NGO. Accessed May 30, 2023. <https://prwb.am/en/>.

² “On the adoption of a package of strategies for reforming public administration until 2030.” Accessed May 30, 2023. <https://www.e-draft.am/en/projects/3438/about>.

equitable distribution of opportunities, sustainable management of resources and equitable access to opportunities, but many factors, including the absence of strategic decision-making prevented the process of rapid modernization. Although many reforms have been implemented since then, however, several have been irrelevant and limited in scope. The logic of public administration system changed from a semi-presidential system to a pure parliamentary system in 2015 conducted by the constitutional referenda. In the new system, the PM enjoys strong executive powers (the 'super PM' system). To make reforms systemic and sustainable, strong political will needs to be reinforced by strengthened institutions and enhanced administrative capacity. Understanding such transition under the condition of war and the immaturity of political parties, the society conditionally agreed to adopt a new constitution. The Armenian society did not fully understand the need for a transition to parliamentary rule, but the vote in favor of constitutional reform took place under the condition that the acting President, as he had publicly promised, would not run for the Prime Minister. Much of Armenia's population interpreted the constitutional referendum as a political maneuver.

Summing up the overall, it is evident that despite small steps taken to build a modern system of public administration in the second stage of state development, the formation of public administration actors, the gap between them all, did not allow the system to develop in a harmonious manner. To date, almost all the public administration institutions are in need of development, and the current legislative framework needs to be improved. From the point of view of the possible impact on the public administration system, based on the tendencies of public administration and the developments at the national level, transforming the role of the government and spreading the new concept of public administration has been distinguished since 2018.

Conclusion and discussion

The comprehensive research of the decision-making process with the public administration theory helps formulate the following conclusions. Public administration is defined as an extended decision-making process. Although a good decision does not guarantee a good outcome, it emphasizes the professional nature of public administration. As a complex process, decision-making process has three comparatively important phases. The mentioned phases are designed by one of the leading theorists Herbert A. Simon, who see the most important are intelligence activity, design activity and a choice activity. Though furtherly, the approaches of decision-making process are continuously developing, Simon's categorizing is useful, because of its practical perceptions.

The better understanding of the decision-making process requires the continuous study of the methodology and mechanisms of decision-making process, analysis of interests, policy-making, and after all the qualitative assessment of decisions. The need to pay attention on methodology and mechanism for decision-making derives from the strategic necessities, strategic planning and strategic government. At the same time, it is impossible to realize strategic government without counting the interests of public administration all actors. One more important aspect, reached by our research is the

critical role of policy, which is important for guiding the decisions. Policy assists in objective decision-making. And finally, the basic approaches of the organization theory state that the relevant expertise impact on decision-making process. Accordingly, the quality of decisions depends on expertise function. Here, the explanation of expertise function underlines clear distinction between an academician and an administrator. An academician thinks about the kind of structure and functions necessary for organization, while an administrator works on how to build that structure and execute the functions.

This research based on the statement that public administration is the practical functioning of the executive power or the government. Mostly, as the government makes decisions based on legal analysis, relevant facts and information, and also on balance of competing public and private interests and values. Consequently, we have considered any decision as a possible solution developed and proposed by the government. Thereby organization theory analysis the whole system of public administration, it becomes possible to formulate multiple roles of government as a manager, a policy-maker, a negotiator and a 'striver'. Hence, fragmental references from the Anglo-American cases in the article clearly illustrated that for better outcomes, the government should not only outline the problem and suggest solutions, but also explain the decisions with high professionalism. Otherwise, the policy fails and the adopted decisions lose their legitimacy. For better outcomes, the government should not only outline, but also explain the problem, thereby professionally justifying the decision-making.

In the RA, public administration and policy do not play a major role in the delivery of services and the provision of much needed economic infrastructure. Capacity development, that will impact on decision-making process in the public administration needs to be addressed at three levels: individual, institutional and societal. Key in this process is decision-making for policy support.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.46991/JOPS/2023.2.6.076>

Conflict of interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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