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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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1.1 THE CONTEXT: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Although public administration exerts a constant influence on people, it is difficult to define and describe. In this work a concrete and operational approach is adopted. A wide meaning is ascribed to public administration based on an open systems approach. Public administration is defined as:

- that system of structures and processes,
- operating within a particular society as environment,
- with the objective of facilitating the formulation of appropriate governmental policy, and
- the efficient execution of the formulated policy.

This definition stresses the importance of the environmental context, politics and policy, policy execution and management. From this definition it is also clear that public administration defined in this way is much wider in scope and nature than public management. Public management is only a part of public administration and care should be taken not to reduce public administration to public management. Doing so may lead one to disregard the dynamic context and political nature of public management.

The academic discipline of public administration should be studied in the widest sense of the definition presented here. In terms of this definition, the specialised study of public management, is seen to be linked in a similar way to public administration as, for example, administrative law, policy studies, organisational science and bureaucratic theory.

It should be incorporated within the broader theory and practice of public administration, but is not equal to the broader field of public administration.

The above view of public administration as the broader context of public management is also evident from the curricular requirements set by the prestigious International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA).

According to IASIA (1978), curricula for public administration should include, inter alia, knowledge of:

- cultural, economic, legal, social and political institutions and processes;
- organisations and organisational behaviour;
- policy analysis, formulation, implementation and review;
- administrative processes with particular emphasis on managerial functions, personnel and finance;
- quantitative and non-quantitative tools and methodology; and
- ethical and value systems within which public administrators must operate.

Starling (1986:7-12) states that the National Association of Schools of Public Administration of the United States of America recommends that public administration curricula and programmes at universities and colleges cover:

- the political, social and economic environment;
- policy analysis;
- managerial processes;
- analytical tools; and
- individual, group and organisational behaviour.
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From these views it is clear that public management is only a part, albeit a very important part, of public administration.

A central question involves the relevance and necessity of a specific public management approach as opposed to a generic approach to management which claims to be applicable in both public and private management contexts. The debate about this question is the focus of Chapter 2, but a summary of the argument for a distinctive approach to public management is presented below in the following section.

### 1.2 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

IASIA (1978:17) presents an argument for the distinctiveness of public management as follows:

> Although the administration of public functions and private business enterprises have some common elements, the environment, objectives and processes of administration are sufficiently different to call for curricula [and practices] which focus on the public aspects of management. For example, training in quantitative analysis may be common for both public and private managers, but training in the political environment and values is more essential for the public manager.

It can be argued that the approaches to the management of public and private organisations will have more in common at the level of techniques and less in common at the level of political and managerial judgement and decision-making. The implications of this distinctive approach are numerous and important, and are discussed in Chapter 2.

### 1.3 A PUBLIC MANAGEMENT MODEL

In an attempt to conceptualise, explain and simplify the complexities of public management, a model may prove a useful tool. The model used here, presented in Figure 1.1, accepts the fundamental premises of the contingency approach to management. The contingency approach is based upon open systems theory and stresses the importance of the environment for the theory and practice of management. This emphasis is a constant and continuous theme in the public management model presented here. Public management functions and public managerial skills should be constantly assessed in terms of the public management environment.

The contingency approach as point of departure is complemented by a view of relevant selected public management functions and skills. In this way the functional approach to management is integrated with the contingency approach. Functions and skills are distinguished on the following basis.

The public management functions constitute ongoing concerns for public managers and are used to delineate and conceptualise the management task in line with a functional approach to management. These public management functions are supported and underpinned by management skills. The skills are distinguished from the management functions as they are more practical and can be taught and learnt practically.