

Book Review

Paradoxes in Public Administration

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A review of Ahmed Shafiqul Huque, *Paradoxes in Public Administration: Dimensions of Development* (Dhaka University Press Limited, 1990), 188 pp., Tk. 350, hardcover.)

The present work "is concerned with the process' of administration primarily and, to a lesser extent, with the development of a body of knowledge concentrating on this process" (p. 2). The main questions Huque has raised are: "is there a single process of public administration? Is that process applicable throughout the world? Are the consequences of the process uniform across societies?" (p. 8).

The paradoxes Huque dealt with are in the arena of principles of administration, administrative behavior, administrative decisionmaking, bureaucracy, and administrative elitism. They are not really new. Many of these paradoxes were identified long ago. For example, Merton, Blau, and many other scholars pointed out how the structure and functioning process of ostensibly rational organization may generate administrative delay, inefficiency, red tape and public harassment. Simon in an article in *Public Administration Review* (1944) identified the paradoxes between the principles of "span of control" and "flat hierarchical structure", and between the principles of "unity of command" and "specialization of tasks." The concept of "formalism" developed by Riggs in *Administration in Developing Countries* (1964) warned us about the wide gap between what is "ideally prescribed" and what is "actually practiced" by the administration in prismatic societies. Nevertheless, the book under review deserves special attention for an excellent compilation of the paradoxes scattered throughout public administration literature and for organizing them in a very logical and coherent fashion. The most remarkable contribution of the book, however, is that it has, in a very scholarly manner, recorded the implications of the paradoxes in administration for "development administration," whether we mean by these two words "administration of development" or "development of administration."

Following the Riggsian tradition, Huque has depicted a very gloomy picture of administration in developing countries. He writes: "Normally cherished values like justice, fairplay and principles have no meaning..., and administration and administrators can be purchased for a price" (p. 18); "rules devised to form the core of an administrative system are hardly used for the designated purpose" (p. 22);

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“administrators enjoy making life difficult for the citizens” (p. 19). Administration in developing countries is characterized, the author tells us, by what can be called a “distrust” syndrome, and by conflicts and confusion. The author examines at length the implications of the paradoxes in administration for developing countries and argues that the same process or technique of administration cannot be profitably applied across cultures. This is one nice way of saying that a science of public administration having the capacity of transcending cultures is yet to be discovered.

An elaborate discussion on the paradoxes of administrative accountability and their development dimensions could fit very well in Huque’s scheme of research. The author makes more or less a passing reference to the “Friedrich-Finer debate” (p. 117) that generated enormous academic enthusiasm among many social scientists on the issue of administrative accountability both immediately before and after the Second World War. Ensuring administrative accountability is a problem of great magnitude for the developed countries. The “ungovernability: thesis of the state is intimately related to this problem. It is all the more problematic for developing countries where the roles of the bureaucrats and political executives have not yet taken a definite shape. In chapter 3 (Paradox of Administrative Behavior) Huque has examined how an attitude of “distrust” between the administrators and the public is adversely affecting the vitality of the administrative apparatus in developing countries. In chapter 5 (Paradox of Bureaucracy) the author could have examined the relations between bureaucracy and political executives and show its reunifications for the administration in developing countries. This could add substantially to the contributions of the book.

It must, however, be admitted that the author has done an excellent job of filling in the void in the public administration literature by relating the paradoxes to the issue of development in the developing countries. One very remarkable thing about the book is that it has accommodated an excellent synthesis of many of the renowned works in public administration literature within a short space. The author deserves special appreciation for that. The book is a must for students, researchers and teachers of development administration and for administrators and policymakers of developing countries.

References

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