The Science of Public Administration:
Three Problems

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The effort to create a science of public administration has often led to the formulation of universal laws.

Principles of PA have a universal validity independent not only of moral and political ends, but of the frequent nonconformist personality of the individual, and the social and cultural setting as well.
L. Urwick:

There are certain principles which govern the association of human beings for any purpose, just as there are certain engineering principles which govern the building of a bridge.

Willoughby:

In administration, there are certain fundamental principles of general application analogous to those characterizing any science.
The problems

Problems of values

The individual personality

The social framework
# PA and Its Problems

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Problems of values

a. Science as such is not concerned with the discovery of normative values, thus science cannot demonstrate moral values.

b. Efficiency is a case in point, considered as a dominant goal of administration, when conflicted with democratic dogma.
Problems of values

c. The question of responsibility stems from different interpretations of the nature and purpose of democratic government.

d. The function of a science of public administration, not to determine ends, but to devise the best means to the ends established by those agencies entrusted with the setting of social policy.
Problems of values

e. A matter of way to distinguish ends and means, since for in most societies, particularly in democratic ones, ends are often in dispute.

A science of public administration might proceed along establishing a basic hypothesis, then stating ends honestly.
The individual personality

- There are parts of public administration in which man’s behavior can be safely ignored; however, most problems revolve around human beings.
The individual personality

- This concern with human behavior limits potentialities of a science of public administration. (1) It diminishes the possibility of using experimental procedures and experiment. (2) It limits the uniformity of data. (3) The part played by the preferences of the observer is exaggerated, and possibilities of independent verification are diminished. (4) It weakens the reliability of all laws of public administration.
The individual personality

- The *organizational theory* is an extreme example, in which writers on public administration have been heavily influenced by the rational character, and have ignored the irrational qualities of man himself.
The individual personality

- There is no strong evidence that the “logical” organization will achieve its purposes in some sense “better” or more efficiently than the organization that adapts personality needs to the purposes of organization.
The individual personality

- So far the science of organization has been influenced mostly by industrial logic, and less concerned with personal matter. The importance of individual personality in an organization has been proven by several experiments, e.g. Lasswell, Hawthorne, etc.
Public administration cannot escape from its respective social setting that embodies the results of many historical episodes, traumas, failures, and successes, which have in turn created peculiar habits, mores, and institutionalized pattern of behavior.
The social framework

- **Administrative class** in the civil service in Britain had imposed America writers on public administration to duplicate it. However it is difficult to universally draw a conclusion since both has different social settings.
Administrative class in Britain

- General political acceptance of the hierarchical idea.
- Scholastic system that creates the educated nonspecialist, and a recruiting system that selects him.
- The acceptance of merit as the criterion of selection.
- The condition that such a group possesses the prestige of an elite.
Conditions of a science of PA

- The place of normative values is made clear.
- The nature of man in the area of public administration is better understood and his conduct is more predictable.
- There is a body of comparative studies from which it may be possible to discover principles and generalities that transcend national boundaries and peculiar historical experiences.