

BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: BRIDGING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. Public management is, by nature, multidisciplinary, but the integration of psychological ideas and approaches has remained limited and sporadic. This study addresses the need for a unified framework that incorporates psychological insights into public administration research and its applications. Using a conceptual research approach, the study synthesizes systematic literature from political science, behavioral economics, and psychology to provide a disciplined framework for Behavioral Public Administration (BPA). No original data were gathered; instead, the study examines previously published material to identify trends in behavior and gaps in existing administrative studies. Four basic ideas define BPA: (1) its broad applicability across administrative domains; (2) the relevance of methodological rigour through experimental designs; (3) a reciprocal exchange between public administration and psychology; and (4) the practical value of behavioral insights in improving governance outcomes. These ideas form the foundation of a conceptual model that connects psychological theory to policy efficacy and administrative conduct. A promising area that clarifies administrative behavior is behavioral public administration. Future studies will enhance methodological tools, experimentally evaluate the framework, and foster multidisciplinary cooperation between public administration and psychology.

Keywords: Administrative Psychology, Behavioral Public Administration, Interdisciplinary Research, Micro-level Analysis, Public Administration

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Long acknowledged for its multidisciplinary character both academically and professionally, public administration has drawn from political science, sociology, law, and, progressively, psychology. Among them, psychology provides unique significance by allowing a micro-level study of the personal attitudes and behaviors underlying administrative procedures. Prominent academics such as Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo, who argued for basing administrative science on the logic and psychology of human decision, have underlined the importance of this viewpoint (Simon, 1947a; Waldo, 1948). Emerging from this legacy, behavioral public administration (BPA) emphasizes the incorporation of psychological ideas and approaches into the field of public administration research. This method recognizes that psychological events, rather than just institutional constructions, define motivation, trust, transparency, and decision-making.

Rising academic interest in how individual-level insights could complement macro-level ideas has driven the development of behavioral public administration. In their respective domains, behavioral economics and political psychology have previously

demonstrated the effectiveness of this integration by providing precise techniques and sophisticated ideas that have challenged accepted wisdom. Comparatively, recent content studies of prestigious publications, such as the *Public Administration Review* and *JPART* (Tummers et al., 2016), indicate that the absorption of public administration has been slower but is increasing continuously. These advances represent a shift from perceiving psychology as a peripheral influence to viewing it as a fundamental analytical lens for examining administrative events.

BPA's micro-level emphasis helps to position it, especially in public administration studies. BPA closes the gap between personal cognition and organizational outcomes by examining the perceptions, feelings, and behaviors of public servants, citizens, and administrators in institutional environments. It enables academics to analyze the psychological foundations of administrative decisions by incorporating psychological concepts such as limited rationality, motivated thinking, and cognitive biases. Primarily through experimental and measurement-based approaches, this approach enhances rather than replaces conventional public administration by providing explanatory depth and empirical rigour (Anderson & Edwards, 2015).

1.2 Problem Statement

Although there is a significant theoretical need for integration, psychology's impact on public administration has been scattered and limited. While political science has fully evolved into psychology-informed subfields, such as political psychology, public administration has not yet institutionalized behavioral techniques to a comparable degree. Many fundamental themes, such as leadership, openness, and service motivation, therefore require rigorous behavioral research. The absence of a cohesive framework has hampered the possibility of methodological consistency and theory development. Furthermore, the psychological insights that do exist often remain isolated from broader administrative discussions, resulting in the underutilization of important information that could significantly enhance public sector performance (Raadschelders, 2011).

The issue goes beyond academics. Whether they will follow the rules, believe in government judgments, or act morally in the face of contradicting incentives, administrative systems are based on presumptions about how people will behave. Without psychological understanding, these presumptions run the danger of being oversimplified or false. Public service motivation, for example, has sometimes been investigated abstractly without considering the inherent psychological processes, such as work satisfaction or emotional control. This has widened the discrepancy between theoretical ideas and actual reality, therefore compromising the success of administrative changes and laws.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Given this issue, the main goal of this paper is to provide a logical and practical framework for behavioral public administration. These covers identifying its main elements, emphasizing its applicability to issues facing public administration today, and demonstrating how psychological theories can be pretty relevant in administrative settings. The paper also aims to inspire academics to view behavioral public administration as a distinct subject with its own theoretical roots and methodological toolbox.

Encouraging empirical rigour using accepted experimental designs and approved measuring instruments, widely utilized in psychology, is yet another important goal. Compared to traditional survey research, these techniques offer a higher degree of validity and facilitate causal inference. The paper demonstrates how behavioral techniques offer more nuanced and practical insights through examples, such as the application of negativity bias in transparency studies or the symbolic consequences of representative bureaucracy (de Fine Licht, 2014; Riccucci et al., 2014).

By suggesting four guiding principles that expand the scope of BPA across more administrative domains, improve methodological sophistication, strengthen the reciprocal relationship between psychology and public administration, and thereby increase the practical relevance of research, the third objective is to establish a foundation for future research. These ideas aim to define BPA as a practical and policy-relevant area of research rather than merely a theoretical curiosity.

1.4 Research Significance

Behavioral public management is important because it may change our perspective on administrative conduct and decision-making. Often emphasizing structure, regulations, and processes, traditional public administration has these as its primary focus. These are crucial, but they do not entirely explain the complexity and variation of actual behavior. Emphasizing the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of administrative life, BPA closes this gap. It provides a prism through which one can see why policies fail despite good design, why public confidence erodes even in cases of transparency, and why motivation declines even in the face of performance incentives.

Behavioral public management also is not a one-way road. Testing psychological ideas in politically and administratively complicated settings can help psychology once again. For public sector performance reporting, for instance, the left-digit bias examined in cognitive psychology gains fresh significance, as small data changes can significantly impact public perceptions (Olsen, 2013). This multidisciplinary interaction enhances the external validity of psychological models and enriches both disciplines. Behavioral insights are already influencing the government. With observable effects on compliance, efficiency, and citizen involvement, initiatives such as the U.S. Social and Behavioral Sciences Team and the Behavioral Insights Team in the United Kingdom have utilized behavioral insights in policy formulation. These examples demonstrate the pragmatic value of BPA and emphasize its applicability to public managers, legislators, and officials seeking to enhance institutional trust and service delivery (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Crucially, integrating psychological insights into public management does not mean rejecting conventional wisdom or approaches. Instead, it promotes a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach that acknowledges the limitations of solely structural or institutional analysis. BPA helps academics and professionals create not just technically perfect but also psychologically informed and behaviorally realistic treatments. Ultimately, the development of behavioral public administration represents a significant step toward a more comprehensive understanding of public sector dynamics. BPA enhances the explanatory capacity and practical relevance of administrative research by centering on personal behavior and attitudes at the core of the study. It reflects the changing academic goals as well as a response to the urgent need for more efficient governance in a society becoming increasingly complex.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Long underlined by academics, the need to incorporate psychological insights into public management was first proposed by Herbert Simon (1947a), who introduced the concept of limited rationality as early as the mid-20th century, thereby subverting conventional wisdom on administrative decision-making. His work significantly influenced the development of behavioural strategies in government and laid the groundwork for understanding administrative conduct as limited by cognitive constraints.

The evolution of behavioural economics in later decades underlined even more the need for psychological insights into policy and management. Researchers such as Thaler and Sunstein (2008) have demonstrated how subtly changing cognitive cues—so-called "nudges"—can significantly affect personal behaviour without altering economic incentives. Several governments, notably the US and the UK, have been motivated by this paradigm to establish behavioural insight units, utilising these ideas to enhance public service performance and compliance.

Political science has also incorporated psychology through the field of political psychology, paralleling developments in economics. Emphasising how ideas, identity, and emotion determine voting patterns, policy preferences, and institutional trust, Lavine (2010) argues for a psychological perspective of political conduct. By providing explanatory depth to events such as citizen happiness, bureaucratic legitimacy, and political involvement, these ideas have directly enriched studies of public administration.

Scholars in public administration have come to recognise the increasing importance of a behavioural perspective. Public administration lacks a consistent epistemic framework, as stated by Raadschelders (2011), which leaves room for multidisciplinary integration. Scholars like Tummers et al. (2016), who explicitly defined behavioural public administration as the study of micro-level behaviours and attitudes in administrative environments using psychological theories and approaches, have responded to this demand. Their efforts have yielded a conceptual framework that provides a unified approach to examining several lines of study, including leadership, motivation, and decision-making.

Much empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of behavioural techniques in mastering fundamental administrative tasks. Riccucci et al. (2014), for example, examined representative bureaucracy and concluded that a psychological association with bureaucrats' increases perceived legitimacy among minority populations. Likewise, de Fine Licht (2014) conducted experimental research on transparency and found that, depending on how the information is presented, increased knowledge can exacerbate unfavourable impressions, even when it promotes procedural justice.

Using psychological measures and notions has also helped to improve the assessment of public service motivation (PSM.). Initially conceptualising PSM from sociological roots, Perry and Wise (1990) have further expanded the notion by academics, utilising psychological characteristics such as intrinsic motivation, emotional labour, and value congruence. These improvements have produced more accurate and relevant PSM measurements in many administrative settings. Other researchers have concentrated on the perceptual and symbolic sides of performance measures. Olsen (2015b) examined how people perceive school inspection ratings, for instance, and found a "left-digit bias," wherein a small number of changes have a dramatic effect on impressions. This study emphasises how objective measurements are psychologically influenced, therefore influencing public confidence and responsibility.

Additionally, guiding public sector leadership research has been behavioural public administration. Applying psychological theories of transformational and transactional leadership, researchers have investigated how different leadership approaches affect employee performance, commitment, and satisfaction. This research has given a fresh understanding of the function of psychological safety, ethical leadership, and emotional intelligence in administrative environments.

Moreover, the impact of behavioural science has made the use of experimental approaches increasingly common in public administration. Researchers have tested theories regarding behaviour under controlled circumstances through lab and field studies. For administrative research, Anderson and Edwards (2015), for example, highlighted the unrealised potential of experimental designs, noting that these approaches may provide stronger causal claims than conventional observational studies.

Notwithstanding these encouraging advances, public management still integrates psychology only partially and inconsistently. Many researchers use psychological ideas without properly grounding them in behavioural theory or without employing rigorous techniques of psychological assessment. This has produced a corpus of scattered, often lacking in theoretical coherence literature. Moreover, few studies specify behavioural public administration as a distinct study area, which results in uncertainty regarding its scope and boundaries. Furthermore, notable is the underrepresentation of several psychological concepts in studies on public management. Although they have been extensively investigated in psychology, topics such as cognitive dissonance, emotional

control, and personality characteristics remain largely unknown in administrative settings. This restricts the ability of public administration theories to explain, especially when examining personal reactions to ethical quandaries, change, or stress.

Methodologically, also lacking are strong experimental and longitudinal research. Although political psychology and behavioural economics regularly employ similar techniques, public administration research has primarily relied on cross-sectional polls and case studies. This has limited the field's capacity to track behavioural change over time or draw causal conclusions. Furthermore, neglected is the connection between individual behaviour and company culture, which has great importance. While situational and contextual elements are acknowledged in psychological theories, public administration studies have not methodically investigated how administrative surroundings affect psychological reactions. This presents a lost opportunity to integrate environmental psychology with organisational behaviour into administrative research.

Finally, public administration and psychology do not engage in reciprocal conversation. Public administration seldom provides insights back, even when it draws ideas from psychology. Public administration may provide applicable real-world settings for evaluating the external validity of psychological theories, as Tummers et al. (2016) and Perry (2016) indicate; nevertheless, this promise is still mostly unrealised. By providing a disciplined framework for behavioural public administration, this essay fills up these voids. It summarises current studies, highlights fundamental ideas, and proposes a future research plan aimed at strengthening multidisciplinary cooperation. Through methodologically sound and behaviorally informed research, this approach not only enhances the empirical basis but also advances the theoretical development of public administration.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

Grounded on conceptual and theoretical analysis, the study used a qualitative research methodology. Rather than collecting new empirical data, the authors developed a framework by combining past research from public administration and psychology to define and illustrate the emerging discipline of behavioural public administration. Using a conceptual model approach, the authors closely examined previous theoretical contributions, noting categories, ideas, and principles pertinent to behavioural public administration. This approach was used to provide basic knowledge and offer a methodical account of how psychology can be systematically incorporated into administrative research.

The two-stage approach helped the writers to guarantee depth and clarity. In the first step, they investigated how behavioural ideas developed in related disciplines, such as political science and economics. This stage enables them to identify conceptual commonalities and make comparisons. In the second step, they applied these realisations to key public administration spheres, including openness, incentives, and representation. The design was intended to be exploratory, supporting further empirical validation and improvement. Since the study is a theoretical contribution, no actual data were gathered; instead, the emphasis stayed on building an analytical lens depending on past work.

3.2 Data Collection

The data for this study consisted of scholarly works drawn from elite academic publications in public administration, psychology, and behavioural science. The writers methodically reviewed past peer-reviewed papers covering behavioural aspects in administrative environments. They included research that explicitly applied psychological theories to address public administration concerns, such as public service motivation, legitimacy, decision-making, and performance assessment. Review the inclusion criteria, which are centred on applicability to the framework of behavioural public administration. The researchers gave publications either (a) applied psychological theories or

approaches in administrative environments or (b) novel behavioural discoveries relevant to key topics in public governance top priority. Academic databases and carefully chosen journal lists, including Public Administration Review, JPART, and multidisciplinary publications such as Behavioral Science & Policy provided sources. This method aimed to gather both factual richness and conceptual variety from the literature.

The researchers arranged the material according to its thematic importance, noting areas such as transparency, trust, portrayal, and motivation. Every chosen work was reviewed for its theoretical foundation, methodological approach, and key conclusions. This methodical evaluation methodology provided a solid basis for identifying knowledge gaps and behavioural trends in public administration research.

3.3 Data Analysis

The chosen literature was examined by the writers using a methodical conceptual synthesis. This method identified recurrent theoretical constructions and classified them into more general themes fundamental to behavioural public management. From psychological literature, they identified important variables and models and examined how these ideas have been applied or could be applied in administrative contexts. The study went via topic grouping and coding. For psychological concepts such as heuristics, prejudices, identity, and motivation, the authors categorised each chosen research. After that, they grouped the codes into general categories consistent with administrative considerations, such as policy execution, leadership, and openness. This thematic approach enables writers to link previously unconnected strands of literature.

Given a qualitative approach, no statistical program was used. To preserve openness and academic rigour in their study, the authors followed methodical review guidelines, nonetheless. They employed comparative methods to identify areas where psychological approaches have already influenced public policy and where integration remains lacking. This comparison approach not only enhanced the legitimacy of the conceptual model but also ensured that the emerging ideas were grounded in a thorough understanding of both disciplines. The writers combined their results into four guiding concepts as they developed the final framework. Every principle was supported by concrete data from the examined research, thereby providing the conceptual ideas with a pragmatic foundation. Emphasising the need for empirical validation, experimental design, and methodological improvement in behavioural public administration, the data analysis concluded with future objectives for the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The investigation yielded conceptual outcomes rather than actual ones. The significant result of the study is the formalisation of a four-key principle-based framework for Behavioural Public Administration (BPA). These ideas emerged from a thorough synthesis of psychological and behavioural concepts relevant to public administration. The fundamental principle of a psychological viewpoint, the authors found, is that public policy forms and influences personal conduct.

Table 1. Four Principles of Behavioral Public Administration

Principles
Broad Application
Methodological Rigor
Disciplinary Integration
Practical Relevance

The first concept is that behavioral public management should be used generally across subfields, including performance management, transparency, citizen satisfaction, and accountability, rather than limited to a small group of issues. These areas, according to the authors, typically encompass cognitive processing and individual-level interactions

suitable for psychological research.

The second principle emphasises methodological accuracy and the importance of experimental strategies. The paper emphasises how laboratory and field studies testing psychological processes in real-world environments can provide behavioural research in public administration with explanatory power. This method backs hypothesis testing and causal inference.

The third principle pertains to disciplinary integration. The writers promote behavioural public administration as a two-way interaction between psychology and public policy. They discovered that public administration provides a rich setting for assessing the external validity of psychological models even while it draws ideas from psychology.

Underlines its practical importance; the fourth principle also suggests that by matching policy design with human cognitive and emotional inclinations, the results indicate that behavioural insights may assist in enhancing public services, citizen involvement, and administrative performance.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Behavioral Public Administration

Forming a loop between empirical testing and theoretical improvement, this graphic illustrates the conversion of psychological theory into practical applications.

4.2 Interpretation

The above findings provide a disciplined and theoretically supported framework for defining the extent and goals of behavioural public administration. The study notices these results as a basis for improving the profession by transcending descriptive research of behaviour toward a more predictive and explanatory science of public administration. The suggested ideas provide direction for public managers' eager to implement behavioural techniques in use and serve as a scaffolding for subsequent empirical studies.

The concept of general use highlights the significant potential of BPA. It demonstrates that behavioural insights are not limited to specialised subjects but rather are fundamental to understanding general governance challenges. This is consistent with current initiatives in evidence-based policymaking, in which knowledge of citizen and administrative psychology is very vital.

4.3 Comparison

The present approach exhibits both convergence and creativity when compared with earlier works in related disciplines. BPA aims to expose how actual human behaviour differs from rational-actor models, much as behavioural economics does. However, it goes further, examining administrative settings such as political responsibility, corporate culture, and trust-building areas that behavioural economics often overlooks.

Using individual-level analysis, the study also aligns with political psychology; nonetheless, it differs in emphasising bureaucratic behaviour and institutional design over voter sentiments or ideology. The findings extend earlier research on public service motivation, which has investigated psychological features such as altruism and identity. This article deepens the discussion by suggesting that to fully understand their procedures and results, these features must be analysed both empirically and descriptively.

4.4 Limitations

Although the conceptual framework is thorough, its lack of empirical testing limits its effectiveness. No fresh data were gathered; instead, synthesis, rather than direct observation or testing, produced the concepts. Consequently, the idea requires empirical

confirmation to verify its relevance across various locations and civilisations. Furthermore, depending solely on already published, rich, and multidisciplinary material may have overlooked more recent, unpublished, or non-English sources that could offer alternative perspectives. The emphasis on Western models of psychology and public administration also limits the framework, potentially restricting its use in non-Western administrative environments.

Finally, while important, the focus on experimental techniques may not always be possible in complicated administrative settings. Particularly in delicate policy domains, ethical, logistical, and political limitations might make it challenging to implement such strategies. Notwithstanding these constraints, the work lays a necessary basis for further research. It enables academics to experimentally evaluate the suggested ideas and refine the framework through cross-cultural comparison, multidisciplinary communication, and real-world experience.

CONCLUSION

Defining Behavioural Public Administration (BPA) as the integration of psychological theories and methodologies into the study of individual behaviour within public institutions, this paper presents a foundational framework for this field. Together, the four basic ideas of broad applicability, methodological rigour, disciplinary integration, and practical relevance define the scope, goal, and possibilities of BPA. These ideas immediately address the first research question: the limited and fragmented integration of psychology into public administration studies.

The results show that by emphasising how public workers and the public perceive, interpret, and react to institutional structures, BPA may help increase knowledge of administrative behaviour. BPA presents fresh approaches to evaluate traditional public administration ideas and guide evidence-based policy and management by using experimental methodologies and psychological insights. This methodical approach not only improves theoretical clarity but also provides a valuable manual for applying behavioural insights to address real-world problems in government.

Future studies will expand on the conceptual basis laid here by experimentally verifying the suggested ideas in many administrative environments. Researchers could conduct field and lab tests to determine how psychological processes—such as cognitive load, identity salience, or framing effects impact administrative outcomes. This research will support the scientific basis of BPA and confirm its relevance in various spheres and cultures.

Expanding BPA's methodological variety is another exciting path. Researchers will investigate creative ideas, such as diary research, real-time behavioural monitoring, and digital experimentation, and create new measurement tools tailored to public administration environments. These approaches will provide better insight into how public actors navigate ethical conundrums in their daily operations, experience emotions, and make judgments.

Ultimately, the subsequent research will investigate the reciprocal relationship between public administration and psychology. BPA develops not only from psychological ideas but also by providing insights into human behaviour under institutional limitations. This dialogue will strengthen the external validity of psychological research and confirm the part public administration plays as a location for multidisciplinary innovation. Scholars will continue to mold BPA into a mature, powerful area, bridging scientific knowledge with societal benefit by pushing these research paths.

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