DIGITAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: REVISITING IDENTITY CRISIS FOR THE ADAPTATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

Technological advancements have undoubtedly made significant contributions to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and preventing red tape. However, as has been examined through artificial intelligence in this study, it has also brought along some questions in the discipline of public administration, especially within the framework of legitimacy and values. Nonetheless, to adapt these new technological techniques to public administration, perhaps paradoxically, revisiting previous dichotomies and crises in the discipline may be illuminative. Therefore, the study analyzes the direction of the digital transformation of public administration through politics-administration, fact-value dichotomies, and identity crises. In the study, along with the benefits of digital transformation and especially artificial intelligence applications, their risks for public administration are also discussed in detail. Afterward, the opposing approaches of two leading figures of public administration, Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo, were revisited to provide a framework for identity crises that today's public administration may face with digital transformation. For this reason, their arguments have been put forward through the literature in the study to address the question of effectively adapting professions for artificial intelligence in public administration.

Keywords: Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence, Sustainability, Identity Crisis, Bounded Rationality.

Jel Codes: H83, D73, D79.

DİJİTAL KAMU YÖNETİMİ: YENİ TEKNOLOJİLERİN UYUMU İÇİN KİMLİK KRİZİNİ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK

ÖZET

Teknolojide yaşanan gelişmeler şüphesiz ki kamu hizmetlerinin etkinlik ve verimliliğini sağlamada ve bürokratik hantallığı önlemede büyük katkılar sağlamıştır. Fakat, bu çalışmada daha çok yapay zekâ üzerinden incelendiği üzere, kamu yönetimi disiplininde özellikle meşruiyet ve değerler çerçevesinde bazı soruları da beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu yeni tekniklerin kamu yönetimine sürdürülebilir bir şekilde uyarlanması için, belki de paradoksal bir şekilde kamu yönetiminde daha önce tecrübe edilmiş dikotomiler ve krizlerin yol gösterici olacağı bu çalışmada literatür üzerinden ortaya konulmuştur. Bu çerçevede

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siyaset-yönetim, olgu-değer dikotomileri ve kimlik krizi tartışmaları üzerinden kamu yönetimindeki dönüşümün yönü tartışılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, dijital dönüşümün ve özellikle yapay zekâ uygulamalarının faydalarının yanı sıra, kamu yönetimi için taşıyabilecekleri riskler tartışılmıştır. Sonrasında, günümüz kamu yönetiminin dijital dönüşümle birlikte karşı karşıya kalabileceği kimlik krizlerine karşı doğru bir yaklaşım sergilenebilmesi için bir çerçeve sunmak amacıyla kamu yönetiminin önde gelen isimlerinden önce Herbert Simon ve ardından Dwight Waldo'nun yaklaşımları literatür üzerinden ortaya konmuştur. Ardından, yapay zekaya yönelik mesleklerin kamu yönetimine nasıl doğru bir şekilde adapte edilebileceğine dair bazı yaklaşımlar paylaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dijitalleşme, Yapay Zekâ, Sürdürülebilirlik, Kimlik Krizi, Sınırlı Ussallık.*

Jel Kodları: *H83, D73, D79.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Innovative technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, machine learning (ML), quantum computing, blockchain, and artificial intelligence (AI) are profoundly reshaping personal and professional environments. In a new world in the making, many existing jobs will disappear, and new competencies will be required. Unfortunately, the public sector seems unprepared for the difficulties they will face in coping with the potential creative destruction of these innovations.

Many existing administrative structures, public practices, and processes that have evolved over the last few centuries are likely to become obsolete soon. Thus, governments in developed countries are striving to increase the potential of using AI to improve policy design and evaluation while reorganizing the internal management of public administrations at all levels as part of the infrastructure, policy, and regulatory preparations in line with Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. Because of potentially disruptive innovative technologies created by AI technology, governments need to rethink how they can best serve their citizens, and public servants need to develop their relevant competency levels. If this is achieved, innovative and proactive public service delivery can reduce the burden on resource-constrained organizations by handling repetitive routine work (Efe, 2022).

With the widespread use of the internet, radical social and organizational changes occurred in the 2000s. The public sector has been affected by these changes. New concepts such as State 4.0 and Public Service 4.0 emerged under the general heading of digitalization (Göçoğlu, 2019). In addition, digitalization, constantly evolving and becoming increasingly visible in every aspect of life practices, makes digital literacy a dynamic process and subjects it to lifelong learning issues. (Özkaya and Erat, 2022).

In recent years, the use of social media platforms in international relations, for example, has become more diverse, and states have begun to use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms to provide digital connections with many active users. Therefore, digital diplomacy has

become an active practice in international relations with the rising popularity of social media platforms (Mavruk and Baykal, 2022). Similarly, advancements in information and communication technologies have compelled public administrations to adapt and transform their practices (Altınışık, 2017). The digitalization provides useful tools for public institutions to reduce red tape and enable the effective and efficient public service delivery (Taş, Uçacak and Çiçek, 2017).

On the other hand, despite its benefits, digitalization is often approached with suspicion in many sectors. According to Atatanır's study (2022) on social security, the digitalization process, which shifts business relationships to online networks and the employment contract to e-mail messages, has adverse effects on employees' access to social security rights. Thus, she underscores that digitalization should be accompanied by normative standards. Likewise, digital public administration has long been associated with relatively reducing paperwork in public administration, increasing participation, and providing public services efficiently and effectively. Even if the need for digitalization in public service provision is clear, the important question is: Can the focus on digitalization reduce the discipline to a purely "technical" field, as it did in the mid-20th century?

In the 1950s, public administration was defined as the most rational and limited to a universal-positivist method. This definition deprived public administration of its historical and social context. As a result, the knowledge produced in this discipline could not connect with reality, leading to an "identity crisis in public administration" in the following years (Altınışık, 2017). This research is a literature review focusing on the extensive resources and studies in the field of public administration relating to the identity crisis after WWII. The study will discuss the fact-value dichotomy as the basis of the identity crisis in public administration, in addition to the approaches of Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo in this context. Furthermore, the study will examine how the identity crisis in public administration 60-70 years ago can provide insight into overcoming the new identity crisis in the field brought about by digitalization.

2. LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO HANDLE THE LOOMING IDENTITY CRISIS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Artificial intelligence (AI) learns and refines its ability to respond to questions by creating and refining algorithms using extensive databases. Surprising connections can be discovered between AI based on machine learning algorithms and complex data, leading to insights that influence decisions and applications. Therefore, security, defense, monitoring, control, early warning, intervention, and reporting mechanisms are becoming AI-based with continuous robotic process automation.

AI usage is advancing to enhance service delivery and improve satisfaction among users. Public institutions and organizations will inevitably use this potential at various scales over time. For example, besides training programs, public officials can benefit from AI to make welfare payments and

immigration decisions, detect fraud, plan new infrastructure projects, answer citizen questions, and measure trends and perceptions. The main questions that arise as a result of these developments are:

• How will public duties and processes be affected by artificial intelligence applications?

• What skills should civil servants and workers focus on developing?

• What kind of curriculum should public administration departments and high schools develop in parallel with AI?

• Will Public Administration science, which is already stuck between business and political science as a result of AI processes, disappear in time (Efe, 2022)?

These questions mean an identity crisis for the discipline of public administration. However, this is not the first identity crisis that the discipline has experienced. Hence, this section provides an overview of past identity crises in public administration to set the stage for digitalization debates in public administration.

2.1 From Bounded Rationality towards Full Rationality with Artificial Intelligence

In the early 1920s, the logical positivism approach emphasizing the empirical method emerged. Logical positivism had a profound effect on the American public administration of the era, especially on Chester Barnard. However, the leading figure identified with it in the field of public administration was Herbert Simon (Cruise, 1997). The field of public administration witnessed significant changes in the late 1940s and 50s, influenced by the works of Simon. His concepts of bounded rationality and satisficing (aiming for satisfactory results with available resources) were rooted in the idea that managers couldn't explore all possible options in every situation.

Herbert Simon adapted important aspects of Barnard's work into his own regarding the decision-making process in organizations. Barnard believed individuals' power of choice to be limited by physical, biological, and social factors. Simon's bounded rationality approach is closely aligned with Barnard's approaches to individual behavior (Cruise, 1997; Cruise, 2004; Çelik, 2010; Fry and Raadschelders, 2013). Simon saw man as an uncomplicated phenomenon and argued that he consists of simple behavioral systems. However, according to him, the complexity of our behavior is a reflection of the complexity of the environment we live in. For this reason, the central issue of our time concerning decision-making is understanding the environment and the uncertainty surrounding its processes. Accordingly, he developed the "bounded rationality" model, which advocates that people are only partially rational (Kalantari, 2010).

Bounded rationality is a psychology-based concept brought to the fields of management and economics. Simon stated that environmental factors, as well as mental limitations, prevent decision-makers from reaching the optimum level in the evaluation of alternatives. Simon argued that

environmental factors such as uncertainty about future events and the costs associated with acquiring information influence behaviors of the decision-makers. He also suggested that information asymmetry is the other barrier to rational decision-making. As a result, artificial intelligence applications can solve the information asymmetry and information cost problems faced by decision-makers in the public sector. Hence, they have more resources to move from "bounded rationality" towards full rationality. However, even if this is the case, we cannot escape from the long-debated topic of public administration discipline-i.e., the fact-value dichotomy. In the book titled Administrative Behavior, Simon has tried to put forward a comprehensive theory of organizational management that brings a rational positivist view to the process of obtaining data. According to Simon, the scientist's task is to test the truth of propositions on the basis of observed behavior. Therefore, he argues that the personal values of either the scientist or the person as the subject of the study should not be considered in the theory development (Cruise, 1997).

As a matter of fact, the reference points of Simon and the digital public administration discourse in transforming the discipline are identical. Both perspectives contain presuppositions and value judgments embedded in management technology, emphasizing that the pursuit of public administration is a functional and technical field; therefore, although it has no equivalent in social reality, it contains features that repeat the "efficiency despite everything" obsession (Altınışık, 2017).

Despite the power of Simon's teachings, those dissatisfied with them began to seek another haven for themselves. This sought-after scholarly haven has been the "New Public Administration" approach (Cruise, 1997). This approach emerged after the Minnowbrook conference held under the auspices of Dwight Waldo at Syracuse University in the US in 1968.

Dwight Waldo tried to distance the discipline of Public Administration from the influence of logical positivism with his book titled 'The Study of Public Administration', which he wrote in 1955 when the logical positivism approach was dominant in public administration. However, it wasn't until 13 years later that his efforts began to take effect (Cruise, 1997). In light of these thoughts, the Minnowbrook conference, organized in 1968, had an important place in determining the new direction of public administration. The Minnowbrook conference was the starting point of the move towards democratic idealism in public administration. This academic event, named after the Minnowbrook Lecture Hall of Syracuse University, was held very close to Woodstock, the symbol gathering place of the counterculture youth of the period (Stillman, 2000).

2.2. End of the Politics-Administration Dichotomy and Emergence of Identity Crisis

Until the middle of the 20th century, as a result of the abandonment of the two cornerstones of public administration, the politics-administration dichotomy and the management principles identified with the POSDCORB acronym, public administration was deprived of its distinctive epistemological identity (Henry, 1975). As the politics-administration dichotomy put forward by Woodrow Wilson

started to lose its validity, many public administration scholars argued that public administration was in an identity crisis that needed to be resolved.

The most influential scholar in this subject is Dwight Waldo. Throughout his long career, Waldo has continually kept the issue of identity crisis on the agenda by reformulating it several times. He focused on legitimacy issues in public administration (Rutgers, 1998). According to the New Public Administration, Simon's principles were just an indication of how far public institutions had moved away from humane realities. The over-emphasis on achieving efficiency and efficacy in public institutions without considering the needs and demands of the public, which are the very reasons for the existence of these institutions, has led to a legitimacy problem (Reyes, 2003).

As there was no separation between politics and administration, new questions for delineating the boundaries began to be asked: Where does political science end, and where does public administration begin? Should Public Administration be seen as a skill or as a science? Waldo summarized this problem as follows: "The critical question is whether it is appropriate to see public administration as a separate field at the point it has reached today. The last two generations have seen it that way, but now people think that public administration is or should be something different" (Reyes, 1979).

New public administration rejected the long-standing politics-administration dichotomy that had preoccupied scholars in the public administration discipline for many years. Instead, it introduced a new set of values that the field needed. These values were equity, responsiveness, and the acknowledgment that public administration operates in a volatile rather than a static environment (Reyes, 2003). In his post-conference studies, Waldo argued that public administration should continue as an interdisciplinary professional field. He claimed that neither a new generally accepted theoretical basis nor definite boundaries could be put forward instead of the academic consensus based on the politics-administration dichotomy in public administration (Mainzer, 1994).

Another issue in public administration under question with the politics-administration dichotomy was the management tradition, which prioritizes efficiency, efficacy, and economy in public institutions. Although Waldo did not deny the significance of these principles, he put forward the idea that productivity can only be measured within the framework of the social mission. According to him, the general purpose of public institutions should be to reduce the social and economic difficulties of people inside and outside the institution and increase the opportunities in people's lives (Reyes, 1979).

The primary intellectual legacy of the New public administration approach is the emphasis on social justice (Frederickson, 2010). Frederickson describes social justice as the third cornerstone of public administration alongside efficiency and efficacy. Additionally, for him, creating equitable solutions to public issues involves identifying those in greater need of a service and ensuring they receive more benefit from it instead of offering the same level of service to everyone. Public administration

should not only be evaluated based on efficiency but also on criteria such as equity and responsiveness because it is not impartial (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003).

Fact-value dichotomy is the distinction between what is (facts) and what ought to be (values). Simon maintained a value-free public administration. The identity crisis that took shape within the framework of these debates has resulted in the public administration coming out of its shell as a discipline and paying more attention to social problems. In other words, it brought back values into public administration.

The potential impact of digitalization on organizational effectiveness and efficiency in public administration is significant and undeniable. However, as discussed, it has always been controversial to reduce efficiency and effectiveness issues solely to the organizational level while assuming that public bureaucracy is disconnected from the society in which it operates.

2.3. Artificial Intelligence Experts and Public Bureaucracy

Artificial intelligence is the ability of a computer to perform characteristics and activities that are generally unique to humans. Today, ever-increasing competition due to globalization requires businesses and governments to leverage technology at the highest level to keep the upper hand. In parallel, many countries have established relevant public institutions and prepared a "national artificial intelligence strategy document" outlining the guidelines for the operation of artificial intelligence in the public sector (Erkutlu, Ergün, Köseoğlu and Vurgun, 2023). For example, after the transition to the presidential system in the Republic of Türkiye in 2018, the Digital Transformation Office (Digital Dönüşüm Ofisi) under the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye was established to lay a solid foundation for the transition from e-government to digital government. In parallel with this development, one of the six strategic priorities of the "National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2021-2025", which was adopted in 2021 with the vision of "producing value on a global scale with a sustainable artificial intelligence ecosystem for a prosperous Türkiye" is to train Artificial Intelligence Experts and increase their employment in the bureaucracy (T. C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı- Dijital Dönüşüm Ofisi, 2023).

According to the digital government report of OECD (2023), the mentioned organization works to ensure effective digital transformation throughout the public sector. It receives strong support from the highest official ranks of government. The report, however, maintains that leadership for digital government needs to be distributed throughout the public administration. While Türkiye is satisfied with its existing digital capabilities and established technical practices, the public sector workforce needs continued investment to acquire and develop the skills required for the 21st Century. Besides, managers must foster operational environments that enable continuous learning to unlock digital talents and encourage them to reach their full potential.

The number of artificial intelligence experts within the public bureaucracy will continue to increase. The key question here is not whether these experts are necessary but how they will integrate into the public bureaucracy. Herbert Simon examined this subject for certain professions in organizations, and his teachings remain relevant today.

In his book, Herbert Simon criticized the management principles put forward by Urwick and Gulick and Taylor's Scientific Management approach as "proverbs." He argued that these so-called principles could not be subjected to scientific inquiry and often contradicted each other (Kalantari, 2010). For example, Herbert Simon criticized the division of labor/specialization principle examined by Gulick and Urwick as such: "An increase in the level of division of labor increases managerial efficiency! Does this statement mean that every increase in the division of labor will increase efficiency? If so, which of the following alternatives is the correct application of the principle in question in the relevant example? 1. A patient care plan should be implemented in which different nurses will be deployed in different regions and where they will perform all patient care duties, including school examinations, home visits of schoolchildren, and tuberculosis care. 2. A functional patient care plan should be implemented in which some nurses will be assigned to perform school examinations, some to visit school children's homes, and others to care for tuberculosis." Both administrative arrangements essentially respond to the need for specialization—while the first provides specialization by location, the second provides functional specialization. The principle of division of labor does not help in any way in choosing one of these alternatives (Simon, 1946).

Simon not only criticizes the internal contradiction of the principle of specialization but also argues that the principles of division of labor and unity of command contradict each other by giving different examples: If an accountant working in a school is under the command of an educator and unity of command is observed, then the finance department cannot give directives on the technical and financial aspects to the relevant employee. Similarly, the director of the motor vehicle unit of the public works department would not be able to give direct orders to the fire truck driver for the same reason. It is not universally agreed upon whether unity of command should always take precedence over specialization. Scholars are divided on this issue. Proponents of unity of command can refer to Gulick's explanations, while those in favor of specialization can cite Taylor's theory of functional control (Simon, 1946). Consequently, artificial intelligence experts in the public sector will have to navigate these differing approaches.

Within the framework of Digital Public Management, five approaches to adapting to the change brought by digitalization and especially artificial intelligence to bureaucracy come to the fore (Efe, 2022; Kolbjørnsrud, Amico and Thomas, 2016):

1- Leaving Coordination and Control to Artificial Intelligence: Normally, managers at all levels spend more than half their time on administrative coordination and control tasks. For example, a nursing home manager has to constantly change the shift schedules due to illness, holidays, or sudden departures of the relevant personnel and optimize them in a way that will prevent service disruption and allocate resources in the best way. AI has the potential to automate many of these tasks.

2- Focusing on Decision-making: Many decisions require insight beyond what AI can derive from data alone. Managers use their knowledge of corporate history and culture in addition to empathy and ethical values. One should think of technology as something that aims to support managers rather than replace them.

3- Approaching Intelligent Machines as Co-workers: Managing the transformation is a complex issue. Managers who view AI as a type of colleague will soon realize there is no need to "compete against a machine." AI will always serve as an assistant and advisor to managers.

4- Working Like a Designer: Managers' own innovative abilities are vital. However, perhaps even more important is their ability to benefit from the capabilities of their staff. Manager designers can integrate various ideas and bring them together into viable and attractive solutions.

5- Improving Social Skills of Managers: It would be a mistake to underestimate the social skills of managers that are critical to networking, coaching, and collaboration. Those skills will help them stand out in a world where AI performs the many administrative and analytical tasks they do today. While they will use digital technologies to leverage the knowledge and judgment of partners, customers, and communities, they must be able to uncover and bring together different perspectives, insights, and experiences.

These principles, especially the last one, endorse the approach of Dwight Waldo, who argues that public administration should be a discipline beyond Herbert Simon's organizational management-based approach and benefit from both sociology and political science.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The digital transformation has significantly impacted the public sector. New technologies have led to the adoption of practices such as e-government, reducing bureaucratic red tape and saving a significant amount of financial resources. (Taş, Uçacak and Çiçek, 2017).

The discourse on digitalization is expanding with concepts, technologies, and processes such as information and communication technologies, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the Internet. However, viewing public administration solely as a technical matter causes to confine the discipline to a sphere that is disconnected from time and space perception (Altınışık, 2017). Nevertheless, as discussed in this study, especially on the basis of AI, it is essential to pay attention to some issues in integrating digital transformation into public administration. Integrating new technologies into public administration to achieve efficiency may bring along problems of values and legitimacy. However, these problems came to the fore in the field 50-60 years ago on the basis of the fact-value dichotomy. So, we can benefit from old discussions concerning new technologies and their adoption.

Since public administration requires the processing of much more data than private organizations, new technologies such as AI can play a crucial role in modernizing and generally improving the functioning of the public sector. On the other hand, the transparency, accuracy, and security of processed data are also significant issues to manage. Thus, the possibilities of applying AI in the functioning of public administration are limited by the principle of legality and objectivity, the need to ensure a high degree of reliability of the technologies used, and the need to ensure that the rights of citizens are respected. Hence, public administration faces particular challenges in using AI and algorithms more generally. These techniques may create problems with the specific requirements associated with the principle of good governance (Efe, 2022).

Finally, to make an analogy about the place of artificial intelligence in public administration, in Star Trek science fiction movies and series that marked a period, Mr. Spock from Vulcan planet was one of the spaceship's most important crew members and a must. But despite all his superiority vis-a-vis the human race, the ship captain was a human being, Captain Kirk, and he was proving the rationale of being selected as a captain with his wit reflecting his humanness in each episode. As discussed in this study, it would be a mistake to overlook managers' critical skills in networking, coaching, and collaboration. These skills are the basis for the indispensability of managers in today's world, where artificial intelligence performs many administrative and analytical tasks.

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