# Behavioral Public Administration (BPA):
# The need for a New Field (Literature Review)

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## Abstract

Modern scientific literature agrees on the issue that it is impossible to perceive public administration as a separate field. Public administration as a field, by general definition, includes the implementation of public policy and the structure and work of various actors (state or non-state) involved in the implementation process. Due to the voluminous nature of the mentioned field, it is not appropriate to consider them separately, because the organizations involved in the process of public policy implementation are not self-generated structures but each organization relies on human resources. Therefore, in the agenda of the scientific space, together with the research in the field of public administration, there was a need to use the results of the research of behavioral science. The paper specifically deals with the issue of analyzing the necessity of behavioral public administration as a field, which is analyzed through a literature review. The sources used to analyze the mentioned issue include relevant scientific articles and books. The purpose of the study is to determine and analyze the connection between behavioral science and the field of public administration, and the effectiveness of their combination, which leads to the broader goal of the study, which should answer the question of the necessity and effectiveness of the existence of behavioral public administration as a field. The relevance of the research stems from the broad nature of the field of public administration, which puts on the agenda the need to combine the achievements of various adjacent

fields.

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**Keywords:** Public Administration, Behavioral Sciences, Public Policy

## Introduction

Public administration as a scientific field is wide and voluminous, which determines its complex nature. Based on the mentioned circumstances, it is difficult to perceive it as a separate field. The field of public administration is related to many other fields, but the modern scientific literature has actively begun to discuss its connection with the behavioral sciences.

In the form of a literature review, this paper will try to present such issues as the definition of behavioral public administration (specifically what is meant by the field), how a similar approach is implemented in the state structures of different countries, and according to the scientific literature, in what way the field of behavioral public administration should be developed. The first chapter of the paper deals with the definition of behavioral public administration. How do different scientific literature see this field, and what do they focus on (due to the fact that the field of public administration itself is voluminous)?

The second chapter of the paper addresses the issue of integrating behavioral public administration into the structures of different countries. The examples of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Japan and Thailand are given, as well as the example of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development as an intergovernmental organization.

The third chapter of the work addresses the current state of the development of the field of behavioral public administration and what will be done in the future, which will contribute to the development of the mentioned direction into a stronger field (taking into account the side effects).

Through the analysis of the issues listed above, it is possible to answer the broad goal of the paper, which involves determining the need and effectiveness of behavioral public administration to make the process of public policy planning and implementation more productive.

## Definition of Behavioral Public Administration

Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Sebastian Jilke, Asmus Leth Olsen and Lars Tummers define behavioral public administration as "the interdisciplinary analysis of public administration from the micro-level perspective of individual behavior and attitudes by drawing on recent advances in our understanding of the underlying psychology and behavior of

individuals and groups". They distinguish three main components from the mentioned definition: "(1) individuals and groups of citizens, employees, and managers within the public sector are the unit of analysis; (2) it emphasizes the behavior and attitudes of these people; and, most importantly, (3) it does so by integrating insights from psychology and the behavioral sciences into the study of public administration" (Grimmelikhuijsen, Jilke, Olsen, & Tummers, 2016).

Three levels of analysis of the main component of network governance, networks, are distinguished: community, network and organization/participants (Provan & Milward, 2001). Psychological theories can be applied to participant-level issues of cooperation and competition, as well as how and why people cooperate in networks, accountability, or why cooperation fails. In the mentioned paper, the authors cite the example of Canadian-American psychologist Philip Tetlock (1983), who carried out experiments and showed how individuals engage in more complex information processing and elaborate justifying behavior if there is a hostile audience. Consequently, these theories can also be applied to public organizations that often operate in a hostile media environment (Grimmelikhuijsen, Jilke, Olsen, & Tummers, 2016).

American political scientist Herbert Simon (1916-2001) is associated with the analysis of the relationship between behavioral and administrative sciences. His 1947 book "Administrative Behavior: a Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations" discusses the complex nature of decision-making and how administrative science should be closely related to the logic and psychology of human choice (Simon, 1947).

In his conceptual work, Sebastian Jilke discusses the issue of addressing the so-called "big questions". According to him, public administration is not a move towards studying narrow issues with greater precision, but a unique opportunity to assess broader institutional changes at the individual level, where, on the one hand, changes in institutional design unfold their effects and, on the other hand, assumptions about human behavior are made. Studying these microfoundations will allow public administration scholars to clearly assess the "Big Questions" at the individual level by building a cumulative evidence base through research programs that are embedded in the "Big Questions". Consequently, Herbert Simon's vision of public administration as a design science would be compatible with Dwight Waldo's ambition to understand the big questions about normative values and larger social change (Jilke, 2016).

As can be seen from the definitions in the scientific literature, due to the fact that the field of public administration itself is voluminous, it is impossible to focus on a specific issue of administration when defining behavioral public administration, because public administration includes the

issue of both organizational culture and organizations (actors) or individuals involved in the planning and implementation of public policy. One thing that unites any definition is the issue that requires the application of the findings of the behavioral sciences to the field of public administration, a combination of these two fields, because any process of public administration is created by individuals and the whole process is based on their internal or external behavioral aspects.

**Implementation of the field in practice**

In 2010, the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) ("Nudge Unit") - a social purpose corporation (SPC) was founded in United Kingdom. Initially, it was formed as part of the Prime Minister's Office, and in 2021 it was transferred to the ownership of the innovation charity Nesta (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts). BIT has conducted hundreds of behaviorally informed field experiments with government partners, both in the UK and globally (Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

Insights were drawn from heuristics (or mental shortcuts) and automatic responses that affect people's decision-making. The team conducted various research methods such as experiments, surveys, and more to support their theories and assumptions within their jurisdiction (Antolino & Salonga, 2022).

As mentioned above, the corporation is also known as the Nudge Unit, which is based on the nudge theory. In 2008, this theory was introduced into the scientific literature by Richard Thaler (book Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness) to explain how to "nudge" society to make beneficial decisions with a long-term perspective.

In 2014, in the United States, President Barack Obama established a White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team (It was canceled by the Trump administration). In September 2015, SBST published its first annual report detailing the results of initial projects that drew on behavioral insights. These projects have helped promote retirement security, expand college affordability, connect workers and small businesses to economic opportunities, improve health outcomes, and increase program integrity and government efficiency (Congdon & Shankar, 2015).

The Innovation Lab (The Human Experience Lab – this name was never officially sanctioned) started as a small design thinking unit of the Public Services Division (PSD) of the Prime Minister's Office in Singapore in 2012. Their main task was to create a public service that puts citizens at the center of all policy-making processes (Lau, 2019).

The Behavioral Sciences Team (BEST) was established in 2017 under the Ministry of Environment of Japan to apply insights and knowledge

from behavioral science to government policies and strategies. The organization collaborates with academia, industry, central and local government agencies and other stakeholders. Local authorities participated in seminars, lectures, trainings and other programs conducted by BEST. Among the local governments in Japan, the City of Yokohama was the first to establish in 2019 the Yokohama Behavioral Insights and Design Team, the first local government to be recognized by BEST and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The Human Behavior (HuB) council, which is a public-private partnership, was also established to address social issues through human behavior perspective (Antolino & Salonga, 2022).

The government of Thailand established the Behavioral Science Research Institute (BSRI) (Srinakharinwirot University) in 1975 to address social issues by creating models and insights that are relevant to Thais. In 1984, the institute started offering the Master's Degree Program in Applied Behavioral Science Research. Later, this program was extended to a Doctoral Degree in the same discipline. The program began accepting students in 1994 (Behavioral Science Research Institute, 2007).

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank both now have in-house behavioral science units, while New South Wales, Washington, DC, and Philadelphia are among the local governments with dedicated teams. The authors note that less centralized collaborations between academics and policymakers in the behavioral sciences are on the rise and that more academics are seeking government partners and vice versa (Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

As can be seen from the given examples, both European countries and the United States of America, as well as Asian countries, are working on integrating behavioral public administration into the public policy process. The approach that unites each state's organization is their aim to improve the process of public policy planning and implementation, to be more adapted to the local social context, which ultimately creates an opportunity to implement productive public policy.

## The direction of development of the BPA field

Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Sebastian Jilke, Asmus Leth Olsen and Lars Tummers distinguish 4 principles in the direction of combining public administration and psychology: (1) extending behavioral public administration to more public administration topics, (2) methodological advancement (development of other research methods, such as functional magnetic reasoning imaging, scale development, diary studies, field experiments, laboratory experiments), (3) strengthening behavioral public administration as a mature subfield, and (4) increasing value for public

administration practice (The question of performance of public institutions - A behavioral approach can provide evidence of what should or should not be done to improve perceived performance. For example, citizens' negative attitude towards the government is not only the result of bad performance, but may also be due to unconscious negative bias) (Grimmelikhuijsen, Jilke, Olsen, & Tummers, 2016).

According to the authors, it is important to develop interdisciplinary approaches, which include collaboration between academics, the PhD program in public administration, and the Department of Psychology. Two-Way Street - Active contribution of public administration to psychology by emphasizing psychological processes between citizens and political actors (Grimmelikhuijsen, Jilke, Olsen, & Tummers, 2016).

In this direction, it is important to use a behavioral approach to structure performance systems in government agencies, to understand how information is shared between government units, or to build trust in resident-state interactions (Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

Non-experimental behavioral science can be used to examine how political appointees negotiate with internal and external stakeholders, how they introduce new legislation that may have a cost today but will bring benefits tomorrow, or at least how public sector employees understand their roles (Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

One of the strengths of the field is its ability to identify new topic areas for research by drawing academic researchers out of their traditional comfort zones (eg, on-campus behavioral research labs or theorizing in their office) and into the real world. By doing so, the field has the potential to foster methodological innovation, encourage academics to explore new and richer data sets, link qualitative and ethnographic research with administrative findings, and identify new thematic areas for scholarly inquiry (Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

With increased realism seeing individual behavior will improve the ability to predict behavior and devise policies (IWASA & DE ALMEIDA, 2020).

Anthony M. Bertelli and Norma M. Riccucci focus on research methods that should be used in the field of behavioral public administration. In their opinion, Considering BPA as a subfield of public administration is perhaps questionable and certainly premature. The subfield cannot be determined using experimental or other methods. The experiment has limitations that need to be re-evaluated for public administration and it must coexist with non-experimental methods (Bertelli & Riccucci, 2022).

Paul Nyray A. Antolino and Ma. Regina M. Salonga's research framework includes five important components of a behavioral approach to Public Administration. The first component of this framework is behavioral

science which studies how individuals make decisions and behave in a complex environment. The second component is public administration. The third component is Behavioral Public Administration and Governance Indicators, the measuring indicators of which are: (a) political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, (b) voice and accountability, (c) government effectiveness, (d) the rule of law, (e) regulatory quality and (f) control of corruption. The fourth component is the Application of Behavioral Science in the Subfields of Public Administration and the fifth component is the Future of the Behavioral Approach to Public Administration (Antolino & Salonga, 2022).

**Conclusion**

Scientific literature agrees on the issue that it is impossible to perceive any field separately, therefore, the mentioned approach also applies to the field of public administration. Public administration and in general, any process is based on individuals, their interaction, and internal and external perceptions, therefore the issue of combining behavioral sciences and public administration has been actively placed on the agenda of scientific literature. The paper, through three chapters, tried to answer a number of important issues, which include, first of all, the question of the definition of behavioral public administration as a field.

The definition of behavioral public administration is different in the form of formulation, but the common line that unites them is that it refers to the need to integrate behavioral science, that is, to consider the psychological characteristics of individuals, to analyze them in the process of public administration.

The second chapter is devoted to the issue of implementing behavioral public administration in practice, which can be said that the example of each country fits the national context, but the common background shows that the United States of America and Europe, as well as Asian countries, see the need for the development of this field.

Finally, an important issue is how the scientific literature sees the development of behavioral public administration as a field. Both fields (behavioral sciences and public administration) are so voluminous that in the process of combining there is a need to consider many issues, such as research methods, the issue of studying psychological conditions at the level of individuals and guiding the process of public administration based on this information.

In conclusion, it can be said that as it can be seen from the analysis of the scientific literature, the policy process is complex and due to the fact that its driving force is individuals, the mentioned situation reflects the necessity of the existence of behavioral public administration as a field. To this day,

the mentioned issue has controversial issues, how to combine the two fields, which the scientific space is actively working on.

**Data Availability:** All the data are included in the content of the paper.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors reported no conflict of interest.

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