

Reviving Public Interest: Theorizing Cases of Common Good

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Abstract

Self-interest outweighs in public life as public officials try to primarily fulfill their personal desires and needs. Civil servants occupy prestigious positions in their societies and ought to promote citizens' preferences though they neglect to pursue what they believe to be best for society as a whole. The aim of this article is to identify theories of public interest and explain the two cases that benefit citizens. The article answers the following specific questions; what theories can be used to understand public interest in Sub Saharan Africa? What opportunities do positive cases contribute towards understanding public interest? What methods are appropriate for public interest studies? This study adopts the post-modernism philosophical orientation. It is based on the standard modern rural hospitals and the earth satellite that benefit citizens. Analysis of these two positive cases demonstrates that a multi theoretical approach namely; Public Choice Theory, Deontology Theory and Stewardship Theory together can be used for understanding Public interest.

Keywords: Uganda, Public Choice, Stewardship, Deontology, Public Interest

Introduction

For though you and your ancestors got your property by murder and theft, and you keep it by the same power from us, who have an equal right to the land with you, yet we shall have no occasion of quarrelling (as you do) about that disturbing evil called particular property: for the earth with all her fruits of corn, cattle and as such like was made to be a common store-house of livelihood to all mankind, friend and foe without exception (Win, 1649). Yet how little have the best of us, in acquirements in positions, even in character, that may be credited entirely to ourselves; how much to the influences that molded us. Who is there, wise, learned, discreet or strong, who might not, were he to trace the inner history of his life, turn like the stoic emperor, to give thanks to the gods, that by this one and that one, and here and there, good examples have been set him, noble thoughts have reached him and happy opportunities opened before him (George, 1880).

George presents lacking common interest; the notion of acting with the interests of people in mind existed long before but it has evolved – changing but building on past ideas as society has evolved. In times of absolute dynamic rule where the interests of the ruler were paramount, acting in the interests of the people was, perhaps, a pragmatic measure to minimize trouble. Cyrus the Great of Persia, ruling some 2,600 years ago, is asserted by the ancient Greeks to have believed that a ruler should ‘understand how to govern people so they may have all the necessities of life in abundance and might all become what they ought to be. The implicit rationale for this was to achieve approval, and thereby stability, and make ruling an empire that much easier. After Cyrus died, his sons (immediately quarreled), cities and nations revolted and chaos erupted (Dent, 2009).

The phrase ‘public interest’ seems to have gained prominence during the seventeenth century. In 1609, a French satirist Regnier argued that public interest is something governments invoke to justify unjust or illegal action, though he actually used the phrase ‘raison d’etat’. In England, the 1624 Statute of Monopolies, while considered to be discussing the public interest matter in concept, used the phrase (for patents not in the public interest) ‘generally inconvenient’. Similar references of being ‘inconvenient to the Commonwealth’ appear in patent letters at the same time. However, by around 1670, the Lord Chief Justice of the King’s Bench of England was referring, in an essay on access to ports, to wharves being ‘affected with a public interest’ (Xenophon, Cyropaedia, c400 BCE).

Public and private interests are intermingled in the lives of community leaders as they serve their individual interests more than those of the society (Van Bockel & Mirko, 2006). Kings, emperors and sultans reigned according to ‘God’s will’ and this was seen as a divine order which represented public interest. The sovereign was perceived as a mediator between God and the people (Stoffer, 1994). Serving God implied obedience to the sovereign. During the seventeenth century, this obedience became weaker. The Glorious Revolution in England (1688) is a good example

of how the king was pressured to shed his absolute reign and share power with parliament so as to foster the interests of the English people. About 100 years later the French revolution followed suit. After a process of creating more distance between the sovereign and the people during the 17th and 18th century, eventually the people grabbed their interests (Schama, 1989). In the 18th century when the USA was established, comparable people-based powers were established. The founding fathers created a Republican Constitution which represented the will of people at the time (Constitution of USA, 1788).

There has never been any kingdom without subjects just as no modern state without citizens (Bechya, Ben Asher Ibn Chalawa, 1515-1996). Kingdoms foster the interests of their subjects just like modern states serve their citizens (Mostovicz, Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2009). Without leaders promoting the interests of their people, society would collapse (Hobbes, 1651). In such condition, there is no place for industry; because uncertainty then prevails; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation; no use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious buildings; no instruments of moving and removing such things that require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continued fear and danger of violent death and life of man the solitary, poor, nasty brutish and short (Moellendorf, 2009).

Philosophical Orientation

This study adopted the Post-modernism Philosophical Approach which denotes the existence of attitudes and ways of being that are different, or alternatives to those typical of modernity. Thus, from the Latin roots post = after and modern = new, it is opposed to the concept of modernism as an expression of a mutated understanding or overcoming of our time. This adjective also encompasses the persuasions by which, at a certain point within modernity, there has been a crisis; a rethinking, a radical change in the way we perceive reality (Ligorio, 2004). Post-modernism philosophy consists of the effort of concretizing a vision of the world that was already being manifested in other disciplines. This is seen in our cases of the twenty-three hospitals and the Mpoma earth satellite which relates well with promoting the citizens' interests.

Post-modernism can be defined as "a loss of faith in metanarratives" according to Lyotard's original idea. By metanarrative we mean any transcendental theory or reference frame (Lynch, 2001) which the researchers are using to evaluate and judge the relevance of the two cases of public benefit. The concept of post modernism does not define itself but it is rather defined by difference and contrast to the idea of modernization. Humans can only observe the world through structures and modes peculiar to human thinking, such as categorization and language (Vattimo, 1985). Post modernism has been applied in a variety of disciplines and in all of them it denies rationality and any kind of rationalization, calling for fragmentation and multiplicity (Addis & Podesta, 2004). Many researchers are drawn to post modernism due to its interdisciplinary nature which allows for the crossing of theoretical boundaries (Miles, 1999).

Post-modernism is a way of thinking which sticks close to the reality of our society of becoming, without defining, or explaining. It tries to be a reflection of the trends that it is creating and which are changing at the same time. As well, it is advisable, first to analyze these trends and determine if their role is one that builds cohesion, or destructive. The points most easily targeted are obviously those that question, most intensely, the pre-established order rejection of rules, trends, taboos etc (Sayers & Monin, 2007). Our approach to deconstruction, the much-favored methodological tool of the post modernists builds on theory and practice already firmly established in the discipline. In our case, we are guided by three theories; Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962), Deontology Theory (Kant, 1724-1804) and Stewardship Theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) to explain the two cases of public good.

This study is based on two cases; twenty-three standard modern hospitals built in rural Uganda and the earth satellite at Mpoma in Mukono District. Respondents included seven former senior government employees. These respondents are all above 60 years and are knowledgeable about the twenty-three hospitals and the earth satellite at Mpoma respectively. They were chosen because they are conversant with the two cases under study having been senior government officers and top managers at Uganda Telecom respectively. The researchers also used literature review on the subject like the work for progress development plan that outlines how these hospitals and the earth satellite were built. To build a coherent case, a thematic narrative analysis, as recommended by Lejano and Leong (2012), was used to identify common but also complementary narratives between respondents. These sources gave a variety of perspective of the government serving its citizens. These two cases followed a structure recommended by Smith (2016) that is context, action, result and lessons learnt. Ontologically, this study recognizes the constructed

social reality (Bevir, 2011). It moves away from formal explanations towards historicism. It provides a defense of serving citizens through practical cases of common good. We now proceed to present the two cases (standard modern rural hospitals and the earth satellite) that benefit the citizens in a number of ways.

The Twenty-Three Standard Modern Rural Hospitals

In Uganda, past governments have a long and distinguished record of working in the interest of citizens. In the health sector, the fundamental justification for the continued development of health service was started in the Development Plan called Work for Progress in 1966. Through this plan, twenty-three standard modern rural hospitals were built across Uganda. They were built within a reasonable distance of every household and people made use of these rural hospitals as confirmed by the large number of attendants. The hospitals were built across the country to provide an even geographical distribution of medical services. For example, in the western region: - Kambuga, Kagadi, Bundibugyo, Kitagata, Kiryandongo and Itonjo. Eastern region: - Iganga, Pallisa, Bududa, Atuturi, Bugiri and Busolwe. Northern region: - Apac, Yumbe, Moyo, Anaka, Labwor, Nebbi. Central region includes; Kawolo, Nakaseke, Kiboga, Gombe and Kayunga. The objectives of these health facilities were; to teach citizens basic hygiene and drastically reduce any individuals' chances of falling sick, bring elementary facilities for treatment and other medical care within easy access of every member of the community and to bring about a marked and continuous improvement in the general level of the population's health.

Before these rural hospitals were built, Ugandans used to depend on the dispensaries that were not properly equipped and hospitals that were built by missionaries. The missionaries' hospitals were very few, largely located in urban centers and charged fees that could not be afforded by all Ugandans. For example, the National Anglican Church built Mengo hospital and the Catholics built Rubaga and Nsambya hospitals which were far from rural areas. When these twenty-three hospitals were completed, Ugandans all over the country easily accessed modern healthcare.

Uganda enjoyed a level of health services far superior to many other developing countries. Each of these rural health centers had: 100 beds for general, maternity and pediatric cases, an out-patient clinic, a store/laboratory building, housing for all the hospital's staff and an ambulance. These health facilities had; well-equipped and functioning diagnostic equipment, well-equipped maternity wards, water, no leaking roofs and enjoyed sufficient qualified personnel in terms of qualified doctors and nurses. Major health scourges such as small-pox, sleeping sickness and meningitis were reduced to occasional incidences. Others such as tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, river blindness and leprosy were controlled as a result of these rural hospitals. Infant mortality rate fell from 30 to 25 percent between 1959 and 1969 because of the works of these rural hospitals (Uganda Census, 1969). The government provided quality out-patient and in-patient medical care to its citizens (Development plan, 1966).

The Earth Satellite

In the communication sector, Uganda used to depend on Mount Margaret Satellite of the East Africa Community (currently Mount Longnot satellite in Kenya) for its international communication. The past government was concerned that Uganda had no international link to the world. Citizens used to book for a week before making calls at different call centers. There were few call centers across the country like at; Kampala Post office, Nakawa and Entebbe and the calls were very expensive. The minimum cost per call was like \$ 7; therefore, one had to make the call very brief. For instance, if you lost your mother and you were calling your father abroad you would just say "mother dead" without greeting him, identifying yourself and even not giving the cause of your mother's death. It was tiresome as Ugandans had to travel long distances to make calls at the designated call centers. Calls were dialed manually, and the callers were not given the chance to dial by themselves. There was heavy traffic with long queues for making calls. Whenever you made a call, you would be connected to the country you were calling through Nairobi or Cairo or South Africa. You could only send voice, video or telegram, you could not send pictures. These phones made a lot of noise and the call centers were always congested.

To reduce this challenge of lack of communication, a contract was signed between Uganda and Nippon Electric Comp (NEC), a Japanese company which constructed the earth satellite at Mpoma in Mukono District. Uganda became the second country to have such a satellite in Sub Saharan Africa after Nigeria that did it in 1975. The satellite provided cheap, reliable, flexible, convenient and fast communication for Ugandans. To date, the satellite benefits citizens through Uganda Telecom Limited (UTL). It became a gate way to the international community by offering direct communication to five countries; USA, UK, Italy, France and Germany. Currently, a number of international Telecommunication companies depend on this satellite for their operations on commercial basis and

pay revenue to Uganda like; AT&T Technologies (USA), Deutch Telecom (Germany Telecommunication), Gemtel Telecom (Libya), Sky Vision (Israel) (Personal communications with; the former Mpoma Satellite Manager, 13th October, 2015; The former Planning Manager UTL, 4th November, 2015).

Theoretical Underpinnings

The two cases above of serving the citizens call for theoretical review. According to Danemark (2002) and Reay & Whetten (2011), a good theory is the one that explains practice/behaviours. There are a number of theories that could explain these actions of serving citizens. They include; Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962), Deontology Theory (Kant, 1724-1804) and Stewardship Theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). A Multi-Theoretical Approach is adopted in explaining the cases of public interest above due to the limitations in each theory (Neville, 2011).

Public Choice Theory

The Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962) focuses on the scientific analysis of the behavior of individuals with respect to government. It looks at how the motivations of individuals affect the outcome of their collective decision making (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962). It articulates the problem of individuals in groups faced with the choice of doing what is best for themselves or what is best for the group (Russell, 1982). This theory explains how the previous governments took pleasure in pursuing collective goals for citizens by building the twenty-three modern hospitals across Uganda. Also, the case of building the earth satellite at Mpoma illustrates how the government provided cheap, flexible and reliable communication to Ugandans. The strength of this theory lies in the fact that an act of improving the net welfare of majority of Ugandans could happen again today as demonstrated by the twenty-three rural modern functioning hospitals for the citizens and the earth satellite.

However, the theory of public choice is unable to explain how the citizens worked collectively to build all the twenty three hospitals across Uganda. The theory does not illustrate that all the citizens benefited from the hospitals. This theory therefore falls short of the fact that there is no mechanism for making collective choices other than dictatorship that translates the preferences of diverse individuals into a well-behaved social utility function (Arrow, 1950). The theory is criticized on the basis that it does not show the logic of rational decision making which lead individuals to invest little time in collecting information to help them decide on what benefits majority citizens (Downs, 1957). That a committee can set an agenda that favours their most preferred outcome at the expense of the majority of citizens is another weakness of this theory (Mckelvey, 1976; Schofield, 1978). This theory does not present any sharp demarcation of the public; the public has constituent groups and individuals with differing views and this theory does not show how to combine the differing views of citizens (Barry, 1965). A large number of people's welfare is always actually not affected by public actions (Amartya, 1984). The theory of public choice neglects constitutionalism, rules and legal order in making of government choices (Buchanan, 1984). The deontology theory attempts to partially address the weaknesses of Public choice theory.

Deontology Theory

Deontology emerges from the Greek word "deon", which means necessary or obligatory. This theory states that the only unqualified good is good will (Kant, 1724-1804). The Deontology Theory by Kant (1724-1804) asserts that right action is action in accordance with a rule that can be made applicable to everyone. Deontology is the extent to which an individual subscribes to universal moral rules and codes in decision making (Elias, 2002). Good will manifest itself in acts of the sake of a duty, where duty implies a recognition and adherence to a law or precept (Nancy, 1991). Deontology refers to a general category of ethics or morals that define right action in terms of duties and moral rules (Bowie, 2002). Deontologists focus on the rightness of an act and not on what results from an act (Kant, 1724-1804).

Kantian moral philosophy is based on the Categorical Imperative. "Act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" Kant's second formation categorical imperative dictates that human beings should be treated not simply as a means to one's own ends but also as ends in themselves (Bowie 1999; Sullivan, 1989). It follows that people in business relationships should not be used, coerced or deceived and that business organizations and practices should be arranged so that they contribute to the development of human rational and moral capabilities (Bowie, 2002). Kant's third formation indicates that if your maximum is a universal law, your act, or some other feature of natural organization, could not be most appropriate and best adapted for its natural purpose. According to Kant (1785/1959; 1797/1991), the only moral acts are those done out of duty. Such acts must be done, regardless of their circumstances or their consequences for the actor and others, they are

inherently obligatory. By contrast, acts done in pursuit of one's own goals and acts done out of desire or inclination, have no moral relevance or moral worth. A manager who accepts Kantian morality would ask whether the principle on which any given decision is based passes the test of the Categorical Imperative. Is the principle based on good will? Does it treat people as ends in themselves? And it can be willed universally without contradiction unless the principle of your action can be universalized, it is immoral to make an exception for yourself (Bowie, 2002).

In regard to this theory the twenty-three hospitals were built under the guidance of a Development Plan called Work for Progress while the earth satellite at Mpoma in Mukono was constructed based on an agreement that was signed between the government of Uganda and Nippon Electric Company a Japanese company. The Deontic ethical orientation demonstrated by Kant asserts that right action is action in accordance with a rule that can be made applicable to everyone. Such ethical schemas tend to blame and castigate any act that results in injustice and breaking rules (Felps et al., 2006). The Deontic Approach ignores and/or fails to examine the motives behind people's ethical behaviour (Ntayi, 2013). The drawback of deontology is that it only focuses on motivation and the duty of the decision maker and ignores the consequences derived from the judgments (Ntayi, 2013). Another drawback of deontology is that it only focuses on motivation and the duty of the decision maker and ignores the consequences derived from the judgments (Maheran & Norhaini, 2012). The deontic ethical orientation ignores Teleology which is based on the intended outcomes or goals of a certain action. If the outcomes are desirable, then the action in question is morally right; if the outcomes of the action are not desirable, then the action is morally wrong (Forshyth, 1980; 1992). The Stewardship Theory comes in to address the shortfalls in Deontology Theory.

Stewardship Theory

The closing decades of the twentieth century witnessed the large-scale separation of executives and regulatory agencies from central government departments in many countries (Laegreid & Verhoest, 2010). This ushered in the Stewardship Theory out of the dissatisfaction postulated by the selfishness of the agents and ensuring that the inseparable clash of interests between principals and agents is minimized (Schillemans, 2013). The theory assumes that stewards are motivated by collective or social goals and not (primarily) by their self-interest (Davis et al., 1997; Van Slyke, 2006). This theory predicts that if managers are left on their own, they will indeed act as responsible stewards of the assets they control (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Under stewardship, the executive manager is far from being opportunistic. Block (1996) suggested a stewardship role "Service over self-interest" believing that both organization and individual needs will be achieved best by honoring relationships and treating followers like owners and partners. The essential assumptions underlying the perceptions of Stewardship Theory is that behaviors of the managers are aligned with the interests of the principals. The theory places greater value on goal convergence among the parties involved in corporate governance than on the agent's self-interest (Van Skyle, 2006). Stewards are motivated by intrinsic rewards such as reciprocity and mission alignment rather than individual goals; the steward understands the success of the company as his own achievement. Stewardship theory is focused on intrinsic rewards that are not easily quantified such as trust, growth, achievement and duty (Mills & Keast, 2009).

In relation to this theory, the previous governments promoted public health by building the twenty-three hospitals that catered for the health of Ugandans. Also, the earth satellite built provided cheap, reliable and flexible communication. People stopped travelling long distances to make calls at far-away call centers as this brought in mobile telecommunication enhanced by the satellite. However, the former governments did not explain their choice of why they chose to build those rural areas in some regions at the expense of other locations. Stewardship Theory suffers from being static as it considers the relationship of the principal agent at a single point in time and assumes no learning amongst the individuals as a result of their interactions (Donaldson & Davis, 1993). In addition, "Stewardship" possesses no commonly accepted definition (Meidinger, 1998). There is lack of a uniform definition that reflects the present wide use of the concept.

Statement of Opportunity

Regardless of areas of responsibility or clientele, government officers are supposed to make their decisions and actions in public interest (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007). Hence public interest is associated with assumed public needs (Bozeman, 2007). The twenty-three modern functioning hospitals in rural areas provided Ugandans with quality healthcare. The earth satellite at Mpoma provided cheap, reliable, flexible, convenient and fast communication to Ugandans and up to date, it still benefits Ugandans Telecom Limited (UTL). These two cases present an opportunity from which to learn and improve practice. The existing theories namely; Public Choice Theory, Deontology Theory and Stewardship Theory explain these cases that benefit Ugandans. The theories cannot

individually explain the cases of serving citizens; therefore, a combination of all the three theories is needed to explain public interest (Neville, 2011).

The previous governments used public resources to build the 23 modern hospitals across rural Uganda and the earth satellite at Mpoma in Mukono. Citizens are able to access medication across the country through the 23 hospitals and also access telecommunications cheaply through Uganda Telecom. This phenomenon can be explained by Public choice, Deontology and Stewardship theories. Public choice theory relates the behavior of individuals with respect to government (Tullock, 1987; 2008). This theory fails to illustrate how to combine individual and group interests in decision making. It also neglects constitutionalism, rules and legal frameworks in making of government choices which deontology theory attempts to solve. The Deontology theory asserts that the right action that is in action accordance with a rule that can be made applicable to everyone (Kant, 1785). Similarly, the 23 hospitals were built based on the Development Plan called Work for Progress and the earth satellite at Mpoma was built based on the agreement that was entered between Uganda and the Japanese company Nippon Electric Company (NEC). The theory regards the actions that are morally required, forbidden or permitted but it does not explain why they are required, forbidden or permitted (Nancy, 1991). This weakness could be reduced by the Stewardship Theory. The Stewardship Theory assumes that stewards act in the best interest of their principals (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) as seen when by the government taking pleasure in pursuing collective goals for the citizens through building the twenty-three hospitals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The twenty-three modern functioning hospitals and the earth satellite demonstrate that public interest is an epistemological and ontological issue. This article used the two cases of common good to inform theory and practice in creating public interest. It also concludes that the three theories; Public Choice Theory, Deontology Theory and Stewardship Theory can altogether explain public interest. The two cases further suggest that postmodernism philosophy can be used to explain cases of public benefit. These cases allow both human and non-human objects to be analyzed for their influence on public interest. Theories can be explained through cases. Cases of common good enable researchers, policy makers and practitioners to replicate the positivity exhibited. This study recommends that such cases that promote common good be revived and put in place again today to benefit citizens. Government officers benefit the citizens' will and preferences if they pursue these catastrophes that benefit the majority of Ugandans. The study further encourages the adoption of postmodernism philosophy at the expense of critical realism because mixed methods and triangulation promote compensatory effects in which data and method's weaknesses and strengthen themselves (Collins & Hussey, 2019).

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