

Public Administration

POLICY, POLITICS, AND PRACTICE

William C. Johnson



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William C. Johnson
Bethel College



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William C. Johnson is Professor of Political Science at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota, where he teaches a broad range of undergraduate courses, including public administration. In addition, he is a member of the Community Faculty of Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, where he directs independent studies in urban planning and serves as chair of his local planning commission, the Shoreview City Planning Commission in Shoreview, Minnesota. He is the coauthor (with John Harrigan) of *Governing the Twin Cities Region* (1978) and the author of *The Politics of Urban Planning* (1989) and numerous articles.

Public Administration: Politics, Policy, and Practice is the product of Professor Johnson's 25 years of classroom teaching coupled with extensive experience in government at the grass roots level. The book also reflects Professor Johnson's strong belief in the link between accountability in government and an informed citizenry. The result is an exceptionally clear and dynamic text that combines a wealth of theoretical insights with practical observations culled from real-world experience.

Preface

As I wrote this book, I had in mind an image of some students whom I expected to read it. These persons are quite diverse, but one characteristic they have in common is that they are students in an American college or university and they are enrolled in an introductory course in public administration. They are male and female; late adolescents and those in their fifties and sixties; they come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Some students take the course because they are, or intend to be, political science majors, others are already in government service. Yet others are simply interested in how government works—something they will want to know if they become accountants, attorneys, bankers, health professionals, insurance agents, leaders in voluntary and nonprofit organizations, social workers, or teachers. For that matter, homeowners, parents of public school students, and beneficiaries of social assistance programs would do well to take the course, too.

A first course in public administration should enlighten these students on the subject of how government goes about its business. More to the point, students need to know how they relate to the many components of government in this country (and in other nations as well). That is what this book is about, and what the courses in which it will typically be used are designed to do. Those who want to learn how to *do* government's business, whether it is to prepare a budget, hire personnel, or design a work program, must look ahead to more specialized courses and texts.

The major themes in this book are as follows:

Government's primary mission in society is to serve the public purposes as they have evolved from societal needs and popular expectations over the decades. Public administration consists of the means for accomplishing those purposes in a sustained and efficient manner, and must be evaluated by this criterion.

Public administration begins with public policy, government's choices of action to fulfill the public purposes. The vast complex of policies characteristic of modern societies ensures the need for administration. In this sense, public policy and public administration are inseparable, and neither can be fully understood without a working knowledge of the other.

Government in the United States is a complex network of organizations whose major components include not only federal agencies but those commonly labeled state and local. Without neglecting agencies of the federal government, this text gives much attention to administration in state and local governments, for they are, after all, the major employers of public personnel and the average citizen's most common point of contact with government.

Public administration is also carried on, in an important sense, by private organizations. Much of what governments do is paralleled or duplicated in the private sector. This offers a choice of how a given service, from education and health care to housing and corrections, might be provided. These public-private relationships are highlighted in chapter 7.

Public administration is also a global enterprise. The public purposes of nations are similar enough that administrators in any country can learn from their counterparts in others. More important, public issues increasingly cross national boundaries and require cooperative action. Environmental pollution, immigration, banking and credit, and technology are only some of the issues that call for such global administration. Most chapters illustrate this connection in some way.

I take neither a purely positive nor negative view of the achievements of American public administration. Governments operate in an atmosphere of public distrust, which appears to be growing, and it is fashionable to criticize government agencies and their employees as bumbling at best and downright corrupt at worst. This book portrays public policy in a more varied light. Public policy has had some remarkable successes and some dismal failures. Much more common are outcomes that delight neither a program's supporters nor its detractors, with plenty of ifs, buts, and on-the-other-hands. It is vital that students gain the ability to identify and explain complex policy outcomes, whatever they may be. From there they can arrive at their own evaluations and weigh others' judgments as well.

Organization of the Book

In keeping with these themes, I have divided this book into five parts: Introduction, Structures, Policies, Operations, and Outcomes. This indicates one of its basic purposes: to portray public administration as the enterprise of carrying out the laws and policies that the people's representatives have enacted.

Part One consists of Chapter 1, which serves as an *Introduction* to the basic concepts used in the book and offers an overview of the discipline and profession of public administration.

Part Two, called *Structures*, sketches the government organizations through which Americans receive their goods and services, the general concepts of organization and bureaucracy by which these units of government are structured, and the relationships between the national, state, and local governments that are necessary to carry out most policies. Because public administration is an organized activity, it is essential to grasp the frameworks of these organizations early in the study.

Part Three gives attention to the *Policies* that administrators are charged to carry out. One must understand how public policies originate and how they acquire their forms, including the role that administrators play in policy-making, and the exercise of power over it that produces one set of policies rather than another. A major policy area is regulation of business, which offers many examples of the dilemmas that must be resolved in the administrative process. Of growing importance are the cooperative relationships between governments and private sector organizations, the choice of which are policy alternatives in themselves. Governments must also concern themselves with their many impacts, for better or worse, on individuals and groups of citizens. These impacts may include the provision of services, citizens' participation in administrative decisions, and administrative actions that affect constitutional rights and liberties.

Part Four surveys *Operations*, the internal dynamics of administrative organizations. First, there is a survey of the issues of leadership and management by government executives. This is followed by an inquiry into planning and decision-making by public agencies. The selection and management of government employees, amid such issues as employee organization and conflicts of interest, is a central task of many administrators. Finally, the control of spending and revenue determines both how much government is able to do and how efficiently it can do this.

Part Five concludes the book by asking about the *Outcomes* of administration and how the public evaluates and responds to them. Many factors determine whether and how well policies are implemented, and it is also possible to learn why a given policy may not be implemented well. A growing demand is that the outcomes of administration be evaluated systematically and objectively, in order to learn how to implement policy more successfully in the future. The final chapter examines the means by which American citizens, directly or indirectly through their representatives, hold administrators accountable for their actions or inactions.

Although there is a logical order in the topics and chapters, I realize that teaching priorities differ. Some instructors will prefer to discuss finance and personnel management earlier in the course, for instance. They should encounter no major problems in choosing a different order in their courses, since the chapters do not heavily depend on the preceding ones.

I have provided five discussion questions at the end of each chapter. These questions do not have definite right or wrong answers, but are designed to broaden students' thinking about the issues raised and help them identify differences of opinion. A student can be assigned in advance to prepare to lead a discussion on one of these questions, or the entire class may be given a brief written assignment to prepare them for a debate on an issue.

Readings in each chapter offer examples related to the text but not directly part of it. They are drawn from books or recent news articles that provide a unique perspective on the topic. Two questions accompany each one, which can be used in class discussions, in-class writing assignments, or on tests. I believe that the annotations to the suggested readings at the close of each chapter will prove valuable to students. There is also an instructor's manual available, in which I provide a set of test questions for each chapter. These questions are also available on a microcomputer test-generator program, EZ-TEST.®

I am indebted to several persons for their contributions in bringing this book to print: Irving Rockwood and John Holland of The Dushkin Publishing Group's editorial staff; Pamela Korsmeyer, a painstaking editor; and from the academic realm, Beverly A. Cigler, Pennsylvania State University - Middletown, James A. Gerhardt, Southern Methodist University, Roger G. Hollands, Ball State University, Mark W. Huddleston, University of Delaware, Stephen L. Percy, University of Wisconsin, David O. Porter, California State University - San Bernardino, and Lois T. Vietri, University of Maryland, who read all or parts of the manuscript. Laurie Gennrich, a Bethel College student, critiqued part of the manuscript to give me a consumer's perspective. The few (I hope) errors in fact or judgment that remain are my own responsibility.

William C. Johnson

PART

1

Public administration is the enterprise of serving and protecting the public. In a large and diverse nation, this has multiplied into countless distinct tasks, which clearly multiplies the demands on administrators as well. It is also an inevitably political enterprise, as citizens make demands for specific services and protections. Chapter 1 presents the basic concepts necessary for the beginning of this study and an overview of the discipline and profession of public administration.

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