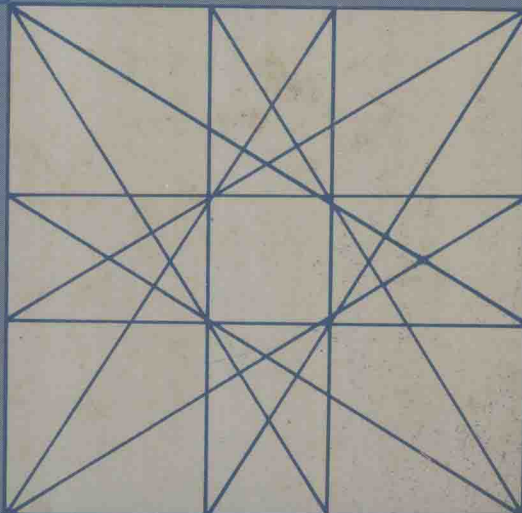


PERSPECTIVES  
ON PUBLIC  
BUREAUCRACY

FRED A. KRAMER



THIRD EDITION

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# Perspectives on Public Bureaucracy

A Reader on Organization

THIRD EDITION



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# Preface



I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN fascinated by large organizations. Organization and decision theories, managerial styles, and the behavior of people in organizations affect an organization's ability to deal with its environment. There is no "one best way" to treat these aspects of an organization; what is "best" depends on the situation confronting the organization at a particular time.

This collection of articles and explanatory essays presents several perspectives on how public bureaucracies might deal with these issues. If the student or practitioner has been exposed to various perspectives, he or she will be more able to understand the motives and actions of the people with whom he or she works. Hopefully, such an understanding will suggest means for coping with the situation at hand and will reduce the frustration of trying to change large-scale organizations.

I have chosen these selections from a variety of sources because, in my experience in federal, state, and local governments, they reflect the way some managers deal with organizational problems in public bureaucracies. The theoretical orientation of the readings is by design. Mason Haire has suggested that "all managerial policies have a theory behind them," although the theory is generally implicit.<sup>1</sup> Managers generally use practical techniques to solve problems that confront them. They often do not recognize the theoretical foundation that governs most of their behavior. It

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<sup>1</sup> *Psychology in Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 19.

is my hope that these articles will bring the theoretical perspectives into the open.

In commenting on the first edition of *Perspectives*, the late Wallace Sayre suggested that I add articles that emphasize the political dimension more. Sayre used to say that "public and private management are similar in all the unimportant ways."<sup>2</sup> My orientation is to see political implications in virtually everything, so I did not explicitly emphasize power and politics in the selections for the earlier editions. In this edition, however, I have finally taken Sayre's advice by adding the Eugene Lewis selection.

There are, however, political implications for the reader to discover in all the articles. Private sector experience cannot be transplanted to the public sector without pruning and grafting. The purpose of these selections is to encourage the reader to think of the possibilities of improving public management. Which managerial theories and techniques work in the public sector? Which ones can be made to work?

I wish to thank Jim Murray and John Covell of Winthrop Publishers and Raeia Maes for their help at various stages in this project and with the companion volume, *Dynamics of Public Bureaucracy*, which is coming out in a new edition. I also want to express my deep gratitude to the authors of these selections.

I welcome hearing from students, teachers, and practicing public administrators about suggestions for future editions.

F. A. K.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Joseph L. Bower, "Effective Public Management," *Harvard Business Review* 55: 132 (March-April 1977).

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Perspectives  
on  
Public Bureaucracy

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# *Bureaucracy and Environmental Change*



WE DO NOT HAVE to look far to find areas in which governmental action has not been very successful. Discrimination in housing, poverty, crime, and racism are just a few issues that have resisted governmental efforts to solve them. Many public programs have not lived up to the reasonable expectations of their designers. The reasons for these policy failures are complex, but part of the explanation lies in failures of public management to mobilize both internal resources of government and the external resources of politics. Usually public management is concerned with techniques of internal management, but, as Norton Long has pointed out, public management is doomed to failure unless it can gain the support needed to do the job from the larger political system.<sup>1</sup>

This volume presents several perspectives on public management. By understanding the nature of bureaucratic organization and its relationship to the political environment, persons working in the public sector might be better able to accomplish the public's business. And such knowledge might make those outside the public sector more effective in dealing with public bureaucracies.

Warren Bennis, who has been in the forefront of managerial change for over two decades as a researcher, consultant, and university president, is a strong believer in participative management. Indeed, Bennis has claimed that "*democracy becomes a functional necessity whenever a social system is competing for survival under conditions of chronic change.*"<sup>2</sup> To Bennis, democracy is a system of beliefs that governs behavior, and one of the main values of this belief system is a search for truth. Under conditions of change, people in organizations must make

decisions based on information that reflects reality. Many rigid bureaucratic organizations distort information. These organizations might make decisions that appear to conform to the information they have, but if the information has been systematically distorted in some way, the decision will be incorrect. If an organization makes too many incorrect decisions, it will not survive.

Although Bennis deals with the private sector in the article that follows, he is concerned with the internal and external processes, both of which affect public bureaucracies. His term *reciprocity* deals with the conflicts between individuals and the organizations for which they work—the internal aspects. Some of the organization theories he refers to in his overview will be dealt with in detail in this volume. *Adaptability* refers to the organization's ability to deal with its external environment. It used to be assumed that the external environment of private-sector organizations was quite stable. Now it appears that "environmental turbulence" caused by many factors, including increased governmental involvement, may threaten the ability of firms to achieve their stated objectives. The politically charged environments of public bureaucracies have often been subject to changes that challenge their survival.

Using the Bennis article as a preview of organizational theories, which you will be able to study in more depth later, what kind of additional information might you want to assess his contention that "we will all witness and participate in the end of bureaucracy"? Is he talking about all levels of organization? Or just the top levels? Where do the top levels stop? If public bureaucracies adopted the structural reforms advocated by Bennis to resolve the reciprocity problem, how might that affect citizens?

#### PERSPECTIVES

Observers of public bureaucracies have long been concerned with adaptability to the environment. John Gaus, writing in the thirties and forties, saw public organizations tied to their physical and social surroundings. Gaus sought to explain the actions of public bureaucracies with reference to "people, place, physical technology, social technology, wishes and ideas, catastrophe, and personality." He thought these referents would explain "why particular activities are undertaken through government and the problems of policy, organization and management generally that result" from governmental action or inaction.<sup>3</sup>

Key aspects of the environment of a public agency are the special relationships that develop between the agency and its clientele, the agency and the legislative committees that control its programs and

budget, and the clientele and the legislative committees. These relationships, which are depicted in figure 1, tend to be mutually beneficial for the participants. To use a biological metaphor, they are *symbiotic*. These symbiotic relationships have been called "policy whirlpools," "policy subsystems," and "interest group liberalism" by a generation of political scientists.<sup>4</sup>

These symbiotic triangles develop because power in a complex modern society tends to be decentralized. Central executives, the top of the governmental executive hierarchy, cannot be expected to be knowledgeable and concerned with all aspects of policy that are theoretically under their control. Because of the lack of support from the upper levels of the hierarchy, the agencies generally do not have enough power to carry out their mandates. They often must rely on the clientele to help them develop and enforce regulations or mobilize support. This reliance on clientele tends to make the agencies be "reasonable" in regulating the clientele and expansive in providing services to them.

Because the agencies are beholden to the legislature for money and program authorization, they want to help those legislators who are in positions to help or harm them. These people are generally those in leadership positions or on the committees and subcommittees that directly affect the work of the agencies. The agencies can see that favored legislators get certain programs for their districts—a practice that helps legislators get reelected. The clientele is also in a position to help legislators get reelected. Clientele can deliver campaign contributions—and in some cases votes—to key legislators who support favored agency programs.

But the policy triangle does not explain why some interests are effective in influencing policy and others are not. More important, it tends to deal with groups, not citizens. In a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, the role of citizens in dealing with their government is important. Eugene Lewis presents a more sophisticated

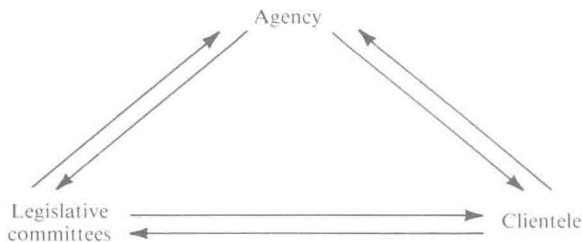


FIGURE 1  
*Symbiotic relationships of political bureaucracy.*

version of the symbiotic triangle by dividing what we have called clientele into three categories—constituents, clients, and victims.

As you read the Lewis article assess the worth of these categories. Do they significantly add to the understanding of the environment in which agencies operate? Do agency relations concerned primarily with treating citizens in one of these three ways contribute to the stability of the environment or radically alter stability? Do these categories help explain changes in agency policies?

## NOTES

1. Norton Long, "Power and Administration," *Public Administration Review* 9: 257-64 (Autumn 1949).
2. Warren G. Bennis and Philip E. Slater, *The Temporary Society*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 4. Emphasis in the original.
3. John Gaus, *Reflections on Public Administration* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1947), p. 9.
4. One of the best books on this relationship is Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). Also see A. Lee Fritschler, *Smoking and Politics*, 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975) and Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 2nd. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979).

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# Organizational Developments and the Fate of Bureaucracy



Warren G. Bennis

ORGANIZATIONS ARE COMPLEX, GOAL-SEEKING social units. In addition to the penultimate task of realizing goals, they must undertake two related tasks if they are to survive: 1) they must maintain the internal system and coordinate the "human side," and 2) they must adapt to and shape the external environment.

The means employed for the first task is a complicated system of social processes which somehow or other gets organizations and their participants to accommodate to their respective goals. This process of mutual compliance, where the two parties conform to and accommodate one another, is called *reciprocity*. The means for the second task has to do with the way the organization transacts and exchanges with its environment; this is called *adaptability*.

The social arrangement developed to accomplish the tasks of reciprocity and adaptability in contemporary society is called bureaucracy. I use that term descriptively, not as an epithet or as a metaphor à la Kafka's *Castle*, which conjures up an image of red tape, faceless masses standing in endless lines, and despair. Bureaucracy, as I use it, is a social invention, perfected during the Industrial Revolution to organize and direct the activities of the firm and later (at the turn of the century) conceptualized by the great German sociologist, Max Weber.

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*Reprinted from "Organizational Developments and the Fate of Bureaucracy," by Warren G. Bennis, Sloan Management Review, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 41-55, by permission of the publisher. Copyright © 1966 by the Sloan Management Review Association. All rights reserved.*

Ironically, though Weber worked heroically to create a value-free science, the term bureaucracy has taken on such negative connotations that even dictionaries use the term in the vernacular. For example, the *Oxford Dictionary* quotes Carlyle as saying: "The Continental nuisance called 'Bureaucracy'." It also defines a bureaucrat as "one who endeavors to concentrate power in his bureau." However empirically valid these descriptions may be, bureaucracy in a more technical sense, revered in theory by sociologists and in practice by most businessmen, has become the most successful and popular device for achieving the major tasks of organization. To paraphrase Churchill's ironic remark about democracy, we can say of bureaucracy that it is the worst possible theory of organization, apart from all others that have so far been tried.

Now is the time to challenge the conceptual and empirical foundations of bureaucracy. To jump to my conclusion first, I will argue that bureaucracy which has served us so well in the past, both as an "ideal type" and a practical form of organization, will not survive as the *dominant* form of human organization in the future. Social organizations behave like other organisms: they transform themselves through selective adaptation, and new shapes, patterns, models—currently recessive—are emerging which promise basic changes. This argument is based on the assertion that the methods and social processes employed by bureaucracy to cope with its internal environment (reciprocity) and its external (adaptability) are hopelessly out of joint with contemporary realities. So within the next 25 to 50 years we will all witness and participate in the end of bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of this paper elaborates this viewpoint. First, I shall take up the problem of linkage one: how organizations get men to comply, the problem of reciprocity. In this section I shall discuss how contemporary psychologists and students of organizational behavior attempt to resolve this issue. Then I shall discuss the second crucial linkage: adaptability, and then present current thinking about this. Finally, I shall sketch the conditions and structure for organizations of the future.

# 1. LINKAGE ONE: THE PROBLEM OF RECIPROCITY

The problem of reciprocity, like most human problems, has a long and venerable past. The modern version of this one goes back at least 160 years and was precipitated by an historical paradox: the twin births of modern individualism and modern industrialism. The one brought about a deep concern for the constitutional guarantees of personal rights and a passionate interest in individual emotions and growth. The other brought about increased rationalization and mechanization of organized activity.

By coinciding, the growth of technology and enterprise tended to subvert the newly won individual freedoms and to subordinate them to the impersonal dictates of the workplace. . . .

In its crudest form, the controversy is a conflict over priorities of criteria: the individual's needs, motives, goals, and growth *versus* the organization's goals and rights. . . .

### *Enter Bureaucracy*

Bureaucracy is a unique solution in that it links man's needs to organizational goals. It achieves this linkage through an influence structure based on *legal-rational* grounds instead of on the vagaries of personal power. The governed agree to obey through the rights of office and the power of reason: superiors rule because of their role incumbency and their technical (rational) competence. In short, bureaucracy is a machine of social influence which relies exclusively on reason and law. Weber once likened the bureaucratic mechanism to a judge *qua* computer:

Bureaucracy is like a modern judge who is a vending machine into which the pleadings are inserted together with the fee and which then disgorges the judgement together with its reasons mechanically derived from the code.<sup>2</sup>

The bureaucratic machine model was developed as a reaction against the personal subjugation, nepotism, cruelty, emotional vicissitudes and subjective judgments which passed for managerial practices in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. For Weber, the true hope for man lay in his ability to rationalize, calculate, to use his head, as well as his hands and heart. Roles, institutionalized and reinforced by legal tradition, rather than personalities; rationality and predictability, rather than irrationality and unanticipated consequences; impersonality, rather than close personal relations; technical competence rather than arbitrary rule or iron whims—these are the main characteristics of bureaucracy.

This is bureaucracy: the pyramidal organization which dominates so much of our thinking and planning related to organizational behavior, and which mediates the organization-individual dilemma through a rational system of role constraints.

### *Critiquing Bureaucracy*

It does not take a great critical imagination to detect the flaws and problems in the bureaucratic model. We have all *experienced* them: bosses with less technical competence than their underlings; arbitrary and zany rules; an informal organization which subverts or replaces the formal apparatus; confusion and conflict among roles; and cruel treatment of subordinates

based not on rational grounds but on quasi-legal, or worse, inhumane grounds. . . .

Almost everybody . . . approaches bureaucracy with a chip on his shoulder. It has been attacked for many different reasons: for theoretical confusion and contradictions, for moral and ethical reasons, on practical grounds or for inefficiency, for methodological weaknesses, for containing too many implicit values and for containing too few. . . . The criticisms can be categorized as the following:

- a. Bureaucracy does not adequately allow for the personal growth and the development of mature personalities.
- b. It develops conformity and "group-think."
- c. It does not take into account the "informal organization" and the emergent and unanticipated problems.
- d. Its systems of control and authority are hopelessly outdated.
- e. It has no adequate juridicial process.
- f. It does not possess adequate means for resolving differences and conflicts between ranks, and most particularly, between functional groups.
- g. Communication (and innovative ideas) are thwarted or distorted due to hierarchical divisions.
- h. The full human resources of bureaucracy are not utilized due to mistrust, fear of reprisals, etc.
- i. It cannot assimilate the influx of new technology or scientists entering the organization.
- j. It modifies the personality structure such that man becomes and reflects the dull, gray, conditioned "organization man."

Weber himself came around to condemn the apparatus he helped immortalize. While he felt that bureaucracy was inescapable, he also thought it might strangle the spirit of capitalism or the entrepreneurial attitude, a theme which Schumpeter later developed. And in a debate on bureaucracy Weber once said, more in sorrow than in anger:

It is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with nothing but those little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving towards bigger ones—a state of affairs which is to be seen once more, as in the Egyptian records, playing an ever increasing part in the spirit of our present administrative system and especially of its offspring, the students. This passion for bureaucracy . . . is enough to drive one to despair. It is as if in politics . . . we were deliberately to become men who need "order" and nothing but order, who become nervous and cowardly if for one moment this order wavers, and helpless if they are torn away from their total incorporation in it. That the



world should know no men but these: it is such an evolution that we are already caught up in, and the great question is therefore not how we can promote and hasten it, but what can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parceling-out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life.<sup>3</sup>

I think it would be fair to say that a good deal of the work on organizational behavior over the past two decades has been a footnote to the bureaucratic "backlash" which aroused Weber's passion: saving mankind's soul "from the supreme master of bureaucracy." Very few of us have been indifferent to the fact that the bureaucratic mechanism is a social instrument in the service of repression, that it treats man's ego and social needs as a constant, or as non-existent or as inert, that these confined and constricted needs insinuate themselves into the social processes of organizations in strange, unintended ways, that those very matters which Weber claimed escaped calculation—love, power, hate—are not only calculable and powerful in their effects, but must be reckoned with.

#### *Resolutions of Linkage One: The Reciprocity Dilemma*

Of the three resolutions to the discrepancy between individual and organizational needs, only the last truly holds our interest now. The first resolution minimizes or denies the problem; it asserts that there is no basic conflict. The second is more interesting than this. It allows for conflict, but resolves it through an absolute capitulation on the side of the organization or the individual; one or the other, total victory or unconditional surrender. Essentially it is a way out of the conflict; for it seems to exclude ambiguity or conflict or the mutual adaption that provides chronic tension.

It might be useful to say more about the second resolution, for it is far from unpopular. Too often, it is chosen by those who view organization solely as a system of impersonal forces or solely as a function of individual personalities. Daniel Levinson<sup>4</sup> calls this split vision the "mirage and sponge" theories of organization. The former view, implied in most psychoanalytic literature and held by most romantics, asserts that all role behaviors are functions of personality or mere byproducts of unconscious motivations and fantasy. The "sponge" theorists, seen most commonly in sociological circles, hold that man is infinitely plastic and will yield to or be shaped by role demands. If, for example, you view Eichmann solely as an unwitting instrument of the system, of the German bureaucracy, and see the "*banality* of evil," then the sponge theory seems to dominate. If, on the other hand, you tend to focus exclusively on Eichmann himself as evil, and as a victim of aggressive instincts, then the mirage theory seems to hold. . . .