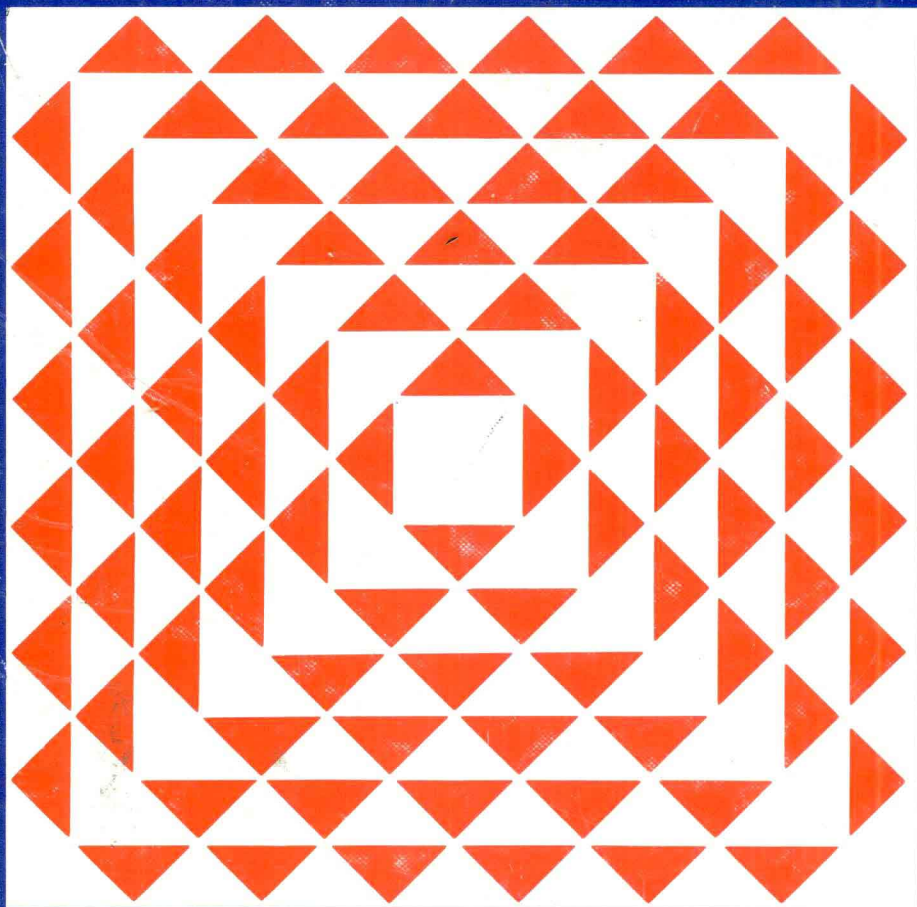


THE CRAFT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

George E. Berkley



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Northeastern University

Allyn and Bacon, Inc. Boston London Sydney

for Patricia, tender comrade

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BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02210

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Berkley, George E
The craft of public administration.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Public administration. I. Title.

JF1351.B47 350 74-26589

ISBN 0-205-04681-9

Second printing . . . September, 1975

Preface

Any writer of a textbook in a field already somewhat crowded with such works faces a crucial question. What does his book have to offer that the others lack?

He will not find this an easy question to answer since he is scarcely the best or most impartial judge of his own work. However, what can be said in this instance is that *The Craft of Public Administration* reflects an attempt to achieve two specific goals. One is to convey to the reader some measure of the genuine excitement which characterizes the world of public administration. The second is to provide some actual assistance to the reader if he plans to work, or is already working, in the public sector.

To meet these twin and, fortunately, essentially convergent goals, I have studded the book with examples. Not only have illustrations and illustrative anecdotes been scattered throughout the book, but each chapter has a case study designed to illuminate some of the points raised in the chapter. I have also sought to outline some of the techniques which successful administrators employ in coping with their manifold challenges. Thus, the book contains such suggestions as how to work with politicians, how to engage in collective bargaining with public employee unions, how to get rid of unwanted employees.

To meet the criteria of readability and utility, I have tried to include those recent developments in public administration which show signs of having some staying power. Consequently, the reader will find material covering such topics as planning, program budgeting, productivity measurement, management by objectives, systems analysis, the use of consultants and other emerging trends in the field. Furthermore, examples are drawn from such timely occurrences as the Vietnam war and the Watergate affair. At the same time, more traditional materials are by no means ignored. The works of such worthies as Frederick W. Taylor, Mary Parker Follett, Elton Mayo, Chester I. Barnard and others are at least briefly discussed.

Preface

In getting the book ready for publication I have piled up some debts which I should like to acknowledge. Thanks to my capable and considerate editor, Robert Patterson, I have had the benefit of valuable critiques of the manuscript by professors Thad F. Beyle of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Richard Chackerian of Florida State University at Tallahassee, Kent Chabotar of Michigan State University, Richard Hogarty of the University of Massachusetts at Boston and J. David Palmer of Georgia State College in Atlanta. I only regret that the pressures of an early deadline prevented me from making as full use of their suggestions as I might have wished. Two of my colleagues in the Department of Political Science at Northeastern have also given me valuable assistance. Professor David Barkley urged me to include many examples, while Professor David Schmitt suggested the title. I am grateful to them both.

I should also like to thank Louis Sheedy, Management Sciences Director for the U.S. Civil Service Commission in Boston for introducing me to the basic principles of PERT and supplying the two charts I have used to illustrate how it works; the American Society of Public Administration and, in particular, its Massachusetts chapter for helping me keep in touch with the “real world” of public administration during my academic career; and the staff of the Boston Finance Commission who have been consistently kind and helpful to me since I departed as their chairman in 1966. Most of all, I am indebted to my students, particularly the working practitioners in our MPA program at Northeastern. Bringing with them their experience and knowledge of the current state of the craft, they have furnished me with much information and many insights. Special thanks are due to Sheri Larsen, Edward Montminy and Ronald Lawson whose research papers were used as source material in certain sections of this work.

Finally, Miss Barbara Sladeck who performed the formidable task of translating rough-hewn material into neat typewritten copy deserves an extra measure of gratitude and praise for her efforts in behalf of the author and his book.

One Sunday in May 1962, he took André Malraux out to Glen Ora for luncheon, and, as Kennedy later described it, they fell into a discussion of the persistence of mythology in the contemporary World. "In the nineteenth century," Malraux said, "the ostensible issue within the European states was the monarchy versus the republic. But the real issue was capitalism versus the proletariat. In the twentieth century the ostensible issue is capitalism versus the proletariat. But the world has moved on. What is the real issue now?" The real issue today, Kennedy replied, was the management of industrial society—a problem, he said, not of ideology but of administration.

—Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in *A Thousand Days*

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The Administrative Craft

Not so very long ago, an author wrote a book dealing with the changes which organizations are undergoing in a technological society. He proudly entitled his work *The Administrative Revolution*. His publishers liked the book but hated the title. Why? The answer is simple. In their opinion, any book with the word *administration* in its title simply would not sell.¹

Although they finally published the book under its original title, there is no gainsaying the fears and doubts which prompted their attempt to rechristen it. The word *administration* does conjure up connotations of colorlessness, and it does cause most readers to turn away or, to use a more current phrase, turn off. While administration, particularly public administration, is America's fastest growing industry, it arouses more apathy than ardor and inspires more distaste than devotion.

Without stopping to probe the roots of the anti-administration syndrome, let us take a look at the subject itself to see if such an attitude is justified. Is administration best depicted as a leafless tree growing sadly in a bleak landscape, or can it be thought of as a lush and luxuriant plant busily sprouting all kinds of interesting blossoms?

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A classic textbook defines administration simply but graphically in this opening sentence. "When two men cooperate to roll a stone that nei-

1. The book in question is the author's own prior work, *The Administrative Revolution: Notes on the Passing of Organization Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

ther could have moved alone, the rudiments of administration have appeared.”² Such a concrete if elementary illustration has much to tell us as to just what administration is and what it is not.

Administration, first of all, is people. A stone sitting by itself on the side of a hill is certainly not administration. Nor does a stone which, through some act of nature, rolls down a hill constitute administration. People have to be present before administration can take place.

Second, administration is action. Two men watching or admiring or leaning on a stone does not, it itself, constitute administration. They have to be doing something before administration can enter the picture. There is no such thing as inactive administration. (Although many who have to deal with administrative agencies sometimes believe otherwise.)

Third, administration is interaction. One man moving a stone or two men each independently moving stones in separate fields are not examples of administration in action. (And remember, there is no other kind). In order for their activity to become administration, their efforts must in some way be related. This does not mean that they have to be aware of each other's activity. But somewhere in the background there must be some coordination between what each of them is doing. Administration, by its very nature, involves people relating to other people.

People interacting with other people to accomplish tasks—this, indeed, is what administration is about. Yet that is not all that administration is about. A further ingredient is required, for not all work activity involving human interaction can bear the administrative label. The prisoner and his guard, for example, may have an intense relationship involving the moving of stones or, more likely in this case, the making of little stones out of big ones. Yet, we would not define this relationship as administrative in nature. Rather, the prisoner is the recipient of a network of administrative relationships involving the guard with his co-workers and his superiors. Strange as it may sound, the prisoner is a beneficiary, albeit in this instance usually an unwilling one, of administration. He is the client of an administrative service not a participant in the creation of such a service. Put in other words, he is closer to the administrative product than he is to the administrative process.

The line that separates administration from other types of human interaction often becomes blurred and fuzzy. Take the relationship between a professor and his students. In this case, the students are the clients, and, hopefully, somewhat more willing ones than the prisoner we just cited. They are the beneficiaries, although some of them might dispute the use of such a term, of an administrative process involving

2. Herbert A. Simon, Donald W. Smithbury and Victor A. Thompson, *Public Administration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 3.

the professor, his colleagues, his dean, the department secretary and even the building custodian.

But now let us assume that the class is one in biology and the professor and students decide to undertake a joint project such as investigating the pollution of a nearby river in order to write a report for the state legislature. At this point, the relationship starts to change. Now, they are *mutually* involved in a joint endeavor. In their former relationship, they both might have had a convergent interest in that the students may have wanted to learn as much as possible about biology—you will note that this example is purely theoretical—and the instructor may have wanted to teach them as much as possible about biology. But the situation was nevertheless different. The students were there to obtain a product; the professor was there to dispense it. Consequently, the students were not more engaged in an administrative relationship with their teacher than are the customers of a department store administratively engaged with the store's sales clerks, buyers, etc.

This introduces a new element in our definition. Joint or cooperative activity is an essential part of all administration. This does not mean that such cooperative activity must always be spontaneous or voluntary. A young man may be drafted against his will into the army. He may be sent even more against his will to a foreign base. Yet, in performing whatever role may be assigned to him at that base, he will be participating in administration. Like it or not, unless he wishes to brook disciplinary action, he will be involved with others in a common effort, namely that of maintaining what at least his superiors will claim to be the nation's security.

To sum up, administration is a process involving human beings jointly engaged in working toward common goals. Administration thus covers much if not most of the more exciting things which go on in human society. Why, then, should anyone feel justified in wanting to color it grey?

ART, SCIENCE OR CRAFT?

The very title of this book indicates that it classifies administration as a craft. Why this classification instead of another? Why should we not consider administration an art or a science?

Science is characterized by precision and predictability. A scientific rule is one that works all the time. As a matter of fact, rules in science are considered to be so rigid and final that they are not called rules at all but laws. Two parts of hydrogen combined with one part of oxygen will *always* give us water—or steam, or ice, depending on the

temperature—regardless of where and when the amalgamation of the two elements takes place. Of course, if the apparatus combining them is dusty or if someone switches it off at the wrong time or if any of countless thousands of other things happen, the formation of H_2O may not occur. But this does not invalidate the formula. With other factors kept out of the process, and in pure science it is often fairly easy to keep out intrusive factors, we can combine hydrogen and oxygen on a two-to-one basis with the certainty that we will derive some form of water.

Some sciences, or some aspects of science, do not, it is true, achieve such a 100 percent level of predictability. Quantum theory, for example, is predicated on the predicted behavior of only some, not necessarily all, of the particles involved. Many of the more scientific aspects of the social sciences similarly deal with expectations which govern only a portion of the elements being scrutinized, not all of them. For example, many social scientists feel that they have established pretty much as a scientific law the theory that political participation correlates with education and affluence. Put more explicitly, they feel that their research has proven that the more educated and/or the more affluent people are, the more they will tend to participate in democratic politics. To justify such an adamant stand, they point out that this theory has been tested under a variety of conditions in both this country and abroad and generally has been substantiated. Voting and other forms of political participation will almost invariably be greater in those communities or neighborhoods where education and/or affluence is greater. However, one cannot automatically assume that any person who has a Ph.D and a \$50,000-a-year salary—the two do not always go together—will be a feverish participant in the political process. Indeed, one cannot even be sure that he will be a voter. In similar fashion, one cannot single out an individual at the bottom rung of the education-affluence ladder and automatically assume that he is estranged from, or antagonistic to politics. Obviously, *some* low income and less educated people participate quite intensively in politics while *some* of the well-educated rich have never even bothered registering to vote. Yet, with it all, the latter are much more likely to take a more active role in politics than are the former. Science here reigns, though somewhat imperfectly, by establishing degrees of probability.

What does all this tell us about administration? Actually, quite a bit, although it may not add up to a completely clear picture. (Few things involving administration ever do.) Administration makes or should make great use of scientific data, laws and theories. The use of mathematics and computer sciences in some aspects of budgeting is a fairly obvious example. The utilization in personnel work of somewhat less definitive but nevertheless statistically valid material developed by

psychologists is another. Thus, administration uses these types of scientific data, but is it a science itself?

In attempting to answer this question we should note that the utilization of science is not confined to the sciences themselves. Music, for one, bases itself on laws of harmony that are quite mathematical. Painting depends on laws dealing with the colors of the spectrum. Yet, both music and painting are arts, not sciences. In a sense, the same holds true for administration. Administrators make use of scientific laws, techniques and data. But they do so in ways that allow a great deal of free rein to the individual imagination and temperament. Usually a variety of successful ways exist for dealing with any particular problem and any administrator can devise yet another one. Furthermore, problems are rarely, if ever, identical and it would be difficult to evolve any equations that would cover all cases. In algebra we know that if $2x = 4$, then x will *always* equal 2. We are almost never that certain about any "law" in administration. The equations change depending not only on the circumstances but also on the personality of those dealing with them. And this should not be viewed as an erasable imperfection. It is, rather, an integral part of the administrative process. Like the painter and composer, the administrator uses science, but also, like them, he uses it in ways which tend to reflect his own mood and personality.

Does this make administration an art? Here, again, the picture is far from crystal clear. As we have noted, administrators, like artists, do tend to work in individual and often highly imaginative ways, employing a various mix of materials, including intuition, in their labors. One man's administrative product is never quite the same as another's, just as one composer's symphony differs from another's. Individual style tends to show through in both cases, though it is certainly more pronounced in the latter field.

But administration is not an art for there is a difference which, while often illusive, is nevertheless vital. Artists create works of aesthetics; administrators solve problems or at least attempt to do so. Therefore, their respective end products and the criteria used for evaluating them tend to differ. Although we can state with some certainty that Beethoven was a great composer, no one can state with the same certainty that he was greater than Bach. Nor can one say that Mozart was greater than Brahms or that Mendelssohn wrote better music than Liszt. Each was doing his own thing, so to speak, and our judgments of their accomplishments depend heavily on our tastes and inclinations.

To some extent, our personal tastes and inclinations enter into our judgment of administrators. But only to some extent. For in administration there are usually some objective standards that can be applied in evaluating the work that administrators do. Each administrator may

have his own way of proceeding and each administrator's problems may be unique, but in most cases there is an objectively desirable and determinable goal to be met. In his classic work *Administrative Behavior*, Herbert Simon ably addresses himself to this point. "The criterion which the administrator applies to the factual problems is one of efficiency. The resources, the input, at the disposal of the administrator are strictly limited. . . . It is his function to maximize the attainment of governmental objectives (assuming they have been agreed upon) by the efficient employment of the limited resources that are available to him. . . ." ³

Admittedly, making judgments on administrative efficiency, particularly when it comes to weighing the efficiency of one administrator against that of another, it is not always an easy task. But to some degree, at least, it can be and is done. No such criterion would ever be utilized in evaluating a work of art. There is good music and bad music, good painting and bad painting. But who has ever heard an efficient symphony or viewed an efficient picture?

Consequently, if we turn to the last category, that of craft, we find a more suitable or at least a more comfortable classification. The man who paints a picture which hangs in a museum is an artist. The man who brings his easel and palette into the museum to copy this picture is a craftsman. The latter has an objective standard for the goal he is trying to meet and against which he can be judged. He may use a variety of techniques and materials in his effort to achieve this goal. But the goal remains the same. Another painter-craftsman with the same aim may mix his paints differently, shade his light differently, or do a host of other things which the former craftsman did not do. But he is striving for the same end and an outside observer can usually determine who was the most successful.

A more pertinent hypothetical problem will further point up the ability of viewing administration as neither a science nor an art but as a craft. Let us assume a city is divided for the purpose of garbage collection into two distinct and equal sections. One team of sanitation men under an assistant sanitation commissioner is assigned to each section with the objective of keeping the streets clean. One of the assistant commissioners may choose to have his men work straight eight-hour shifts five days a week; the other may choose to bunch the efforts of his men at key times in the week and work them for longer periods of time on fewer days. One may try to improve the conditions of work by conducting a promotional campaign designed to persuade the residents of his section to switch from garbage cans to cellulose bags. The other may

3. Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 186.

deem it more fruitful to ask the police to crack down on the street litter law. One may offer his men extra inducements if they do their job successfully while the other may hold out to his crew the prospect of more time off. The ways in which each team goes about its work may differ depending on the personalities of their administrative leaders, the personalities of the men and a variety of other factors. But an objective standard exists for comparing the relative efficiency of each, namely which produces cleaner streets.

Most administrative activity does not lend itself to such an easy evaluation as the example just given. When it comes to assessing the efficiency of a foreign policy operation, to take just one example, assessments and judgments can become very tricky. The administration of a policy often becomes hard to separate from the policy itself. (This is an important issue in public administration which we will explore in greater detail later on). Furthermore, there is not always agreement on the criteria or the objective against which success or failure is to be measured. And, in many cases, varying conditions will complicate our comparison. In the street cleaning case, for instance, one team may excel another team only because its streets are in a lower density section of the city which has less garbage. Or it may out-perform the other team because its district is closer to the incinerator, thereby cutting down the travel time needed to send its dump trucks back and forth.

Nevertheless, despite all these complicating factors, in most administrative situations, there is an objective standard lurking somewhere, shadowy and illusive and hard to apply though it may be. At the same time, there is almost never a precise formula that will invariably work best in all situations. The situations not only change but the ideas that may be applied to handling them are almost as infinite as the mind of man.

Another example, this one from history, will provide further support for our contention that administration may be more easily categorized as a craft than as an art or a science. As the New Deal reached its height, Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes emerged as Franklin Roosevelt's most valued and trusted aides. Each man was given a substantial chunk of the federal public works and relief programs to administer. However, as they acquired power they became increasingly suspicious and jealous of each other. Word of their growing rivalry and animosity soon leaked out. This caused their respective partisans or opponents in the government, in the press and in the public at large to leap to the attack or to the defense as the case may have been. Washington was abuzz with rumors of the feud, and the fact that so many others were choosing sides was producing disruption throughout the governmental network.

The situation placed Roosevelt in a quandary. If he fired or encouraged the resignation of either of these men, he would not only lose a tried and tested aide but he would alienate and antagonize the man's admirers and supporters. On the other hand, if Roosevelt issued a statement denying the feud, he would only succeed in acknowledging and giving credence to the rumors. Here was an administrator with a problem.

Roosevelt decided to solve his problem by embarking on one of his famous conservation tours and taking Ickes and Hopkins with him. For nine days and nights the trio wound their way by train and automobile through the American countryside, inspecting dam sites, forestry projects and other New Deal undertakings. At every opportunity, Roosevelt lavished public praise on his two associates and played up their importance in his administration. And every night he sat down with both of them for a poker game.

By the time the presidential party had arrived back in Washington, the rumors of the feud had begun to dissolve. The steady stream of news and pictures of the men standing shoulder to shoulder had had their effect. And, in fact, it appeared that the two men ended the junket on much better terms. One administrator had solved a pressing problem.

Roosevelt used a great deal of artistry and imagination in dealing with this situation. Yet he was not creating a work of art but resolving a difficult problem. At the same time, however, Roosevelt was certainly not acting as a scientist for what he did does not lend itself to easy formularization. His solution, while it might provide some ideas for other administrators faced with similar dilemmas, certainly does not lend itself to an all-embracing equation. Such a solution, for instance, would not have proven of much use to George Washington when he confronted the somewhat similar challenge of dealing with the bitter fight between his two top aides, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. For one thing, there were no conservation projects to inspect, no trains to transport the visiting party and no photographers to take and send back pictures of their amicable visitations. Furthermore, Hamilton and Jefferson were probably not the type of men who would be amenable to such treatment and certainly it would be hard to imagine the somewhat austere "Father of our Country" sitting them down to nightly poker sessions.

In summary, administration uses artistry but is not an art. It uses science but is not a science. It is more properly thought of as a craft, seeking to achieve goals and to meet standards, and in so doing, often managing to utilize all the creativity and capacity that its harried practitioners can muster.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Since we now hopefully have a better idea of what administration is, let us proceed to describe and designate the different forms it may take. In some respects these forms are as numerous as the various fields which apply it. There is health administration, welfare administration, factory administration, university administration. Within these fields each institution often has its own type of administration which can differ considerably from that of a counterpart institution. But in another sense, there are virtually no essential differences since administration deals with the working relationships of human beings, and this common denominator is often a stronger unifying bond than the disparateness of the numerators. It is sometimes said that administration is everywhere the same and to some degree this is true. Running a hospital or a factory, a small field unit or a large bureaucracy presents the essentially similar problems which tend to crop up when human beings seek to work cooperatively.

Be this as it may, it is helpful in furthering our understanding of administration to distinguish the two broad areas where it is utilized: the public and private sectors. Since this book will focus on the public sector, it might be useful to spell out those ways in which public administration differs from business administration.

The first distinguishing characteristic is public administration's much greater reliance on, and vulnerability to, the law. Legalism in general and laws in particular tend to circumscribe and influence the operation of a public institution much more than they do a private one. "This pervasive legal context is among the principal distinctions between public and private enterprise," note John F. Pfiffner and Robert Presthus. "In private management one is assured that he can do anything not specifically forbidden. In public administration, on the other hand, discretion is limited by a great number of laws, rules and regulations."⁴ To put it more succinctly, in private administration the law generally tells the administrator only what he cannot do; in public administration, the law tells him what he can do.

The much greater preoccupation of public administration with the law is manifested in various ways. For example, a young campaign aide to a politician seeking high office in a New England state was horrified when he learned that the campaign committee had decided to make cash payments to reporters of a local newspaper in return for favorable publicity for the candidate. To the aide, this was rank corruption. However, there was nothing criminal in what was being done. The newspapermen were not working for a public institution but for a pri-

4. John M. Pfiffner and Robert Presthus, *Public Administration*, 5th ed. (New York: The Ronald Press, 1967), p. 427.