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Bureaucracy to Postbureaucracy: The Consequences of Political Failures FREE

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Summary and Keywords

Pathologies inherent in democratic political systems have consequences for bureaucracy, and they need to be examined. Limited in time, resources, and expertise, elected officials turn to bureaucratic institutions to carry out policy goals but all too often give public agencies too little support or too few resources to implement them effectively. In response to the challenges imposed by politics, public agencies have sought organizational solutions. Bureaucracies facing shortages of material resources, clear goals, representation of minority interests, or public trust have in recent decades adopted less hierarchical structures, exploited networks and privatization, and taken a representative role. In other words, the evolution of postbureaucratic governance institutions is in part a consequence of political incentives. Efforts to diagnose and resolve many of the shortcomings attributed to bureaucracy therefore require an accounting of the political processes shaping the context in which public managers and bureaucrats operate.

Keywords: bureaucracy, political control, public management, politics, networks

Introduction

Governments coordinate the provision of public goods and services by making and implementing public policy. In the study of public administration and public policy, responsibility for establishing policy goals was once attributed to political institutions, with the implementation of policy left to bureaucratic organizations. Limited in time, resources, and expertise, elected officials turn to bureaucratic institutions to carry out policy goals (Friedrich, 1940), but any distinction between political and apolitical decisions within bureaucratic organizations is a clear misconception. Even Frank Goodnow (1900, p.

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16), the alleged inventor of the politics-administration dichotomy, stated: "That is, while the two primary functions of government are susceptible of differentiation, the organs of government to which the discharge of these functions is intrusted [*sic*] cannot be clearly defined. It is impossible to assign each of these functions to separate authority."

Bureaucracies translate legislative goals into administrative action, and "political" decisions are inherent in the process. Goodnow makes a strong argument that politics and administration are symbiotic, that good public policy requires both an effective political and administrative process. To understand public agencies, both bureaucratic and postbureaucratic, requires rejection of the politics-administration dichotomy. Not only do bureaucracies serve democratic functions, but many perceived problems of public administration and governance have their roots in the political sphere.

Legislatures are designed to aggregate and represent preferences to provide bureaucratic organizations with legitimate, yet frequently ambiguous, policy goals, while also seeking to limit growth in government size and to maintain control. Bureaucracies, being well suited to the long-term rationalization of administration, are thus forced into the political role of interpreting unclear goals and drafting rules to address statutory shortcomings, often while facing shortages of political support and resources (Long, 1949). Because democratic politics inevitably comes up short in both articulating policy goals and providing resources, bureaucracies adapt and collaborate according to their values to solve problems of administration. To overcome these failures of politics, bureaucracy adapts and changes in response to the uncertain nature of politics. To understand bureaucracy, what it does and how it does it, one must account for the political circumstances which give rise to so many of the "problems" bureaucracy faces.

Successful policymaking requires coordination and collaboration, and the contribution of bureaucracy to the process depends on political factors. As goal-oriented systems open to external influences, resistant to demise, and increasingly networked with nongovernmental actors, bureaucracies both respond to and shape their environment (Thompson, 1967; O'Toole, 1997). Bureaucracies are responsive to political stimuli to the extent that environmental demands align with their goals, capabilities, and the norms of democratic policymaking. They are less responsive where political demand contradicts organizational mission, where legal or material resources are insufficient, or where authority is ambiguous. Meier (1997) argues that bureaucracies perform best when electoral institutions provide them with (1) clear goals, (2) adequate resources (legal or material), and (3) sufficient autonomy to exploit their comparative informational advantages. Bureaucratic "failures" of efficiency, effectiveness, or responsiveness can often be attributed to a deficiency in one or more of these politically restricted operational needs. As a result, pathologies in bureaucracy are not solely failures of administration; they are the consequence of allocative decisions by elected politicians.

Over the past century, how bureaucracies engage in policymaking has changed drastically, and with these changes come new challenges (March & Olson, 1983). New policy issues have arisen, requiring new public programs and new institutions to carry them out (O'Toole, 1997). The administration of social welfare, national security, and

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environmental protection, to name a few, required governments to reorganize or increase in scope and size to accommodate new roles and address new problems (Nelson, 1982; March & Olson, 1983). Other bureaucracies underwent substantial change as technology made some tasks obsolete and fundamentally altered others. The U.S. Postal Service, for example, adapted by shedding obsolete tasks as communication technology evolved (Carpenter, 2001). New policy goals fostered innovation within bureaucracy in administrative and management tools; change in *what* bureaucracies do is accompanied by change in *how* they do it.

Changes in policymaking generated corresponding changes in public organizations. At one time, public organizations were classic bureaucracies (Weber, 1946). These ideal-type agencies were permanent hierarchical institutions reliant on expertise based on merit procedures and specialization to implement public policy. This has changed, however, as a result of both evolving public program design (and the use of networks, public-private partnerships, collaborative governance structures, etc.) and a realization on the part of public managers of the advantages in fostering coproduction among clientele, engaging in collaborative arrangements with other organizations (public, nonprofit, and private), and contracting out for some services or programs.

Public administration became more networked and less hierarchical, making greater use of contracting out and performance pay principles (Moynihan, 2006; O'Toole, 1997; Hood, 1991). Some analysts also argue that modernization has required increasingly expert, technical, and specialized bureaucratic operations, producing larger scale, yet more decentralized, administration (Riggs, 1997). Reforms in the name of new public management altered the organization of policy implementation by increasingly involving private entities and market-based decision-making mechanisms (Hood, 1991, 1995). Some bureaucracies came to resemble private businesses, with a greater focus on the public as customers. Collaboration across sectors and with citizens also became increasingly common components of bureaucratic operations (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2015; Huxham, 2000; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Such reforms and innovations over the past century were often responses to perceived deficiencies of public service performance. The roots of deficiencies or problems in the administration of public policy, we argue, extend beyond bureaucracy and into the political realm. Responding to these challenges imposed by the political system, postbureaucratic organization of policy implementation evolved.

To diagnose administrative problems and make prescriptive recommendations, bureaucracies must be understood within the broader political system in which they operate. Because much of what bureaucracy does is in response to challenges imposed by the political system, a silo approach, focused on bureaucracy alone, will fail to identify the real problems of democratic governance. Responding to these problems pushed bureaucracies into an increasingly political role, requiring that they seek equilibrium in both legitimacy and capacity. Balancing these often contradictory objectives manifests maladies labeled as inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and the abuse of citizens. Without recognizing the policymaking role of bureaucracies in democratic governance,

instrumental efficiency and effectiveness are viewed as fundamental problems (e.g., Niskanen, 1971; Tullock, 1965). The appropriate solutions from this silo approach are, therefore, extensive political control and structural design (e.g., Bawn, 1995; Moe, 1990; Wood & Waterman, 1994), or administrative and managerial tools (e.g., Hood, 1991). In contrast, recognition of a legitimate policymaking role generates analysis and reform proposals for improvement on democratic dimensions as well, including equity and representation (e.g., Cook, 1996; Hood, 1991; Lipsky, 1980; Meier & O'Toole, 2006; Selden, 1997). Once seen as undemocratic yet rational entities, bureaucracies are now theorized as complex organizations nested within governance systems. The traditional focus on bureaus as unitary administrative instruments or as agents with asymmetric information has shifted to postbureaucratic theories of networks, collaboration, and public management, under the broader umbrella of governance theory (Frederickson, 1999; Fukuyama, 2016; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2000).

In the following, we trace the development of bureaucracy theory, which has transitioned toward postbureaucratic organization of public policy implementation. The “problems” of bureaucracy attracting attention at different stages of theoretical development reflect an evolving understanding of the relationship between politics and administration. What earlier work failed to note, and what research today has discerned, is the political source of bureaucratic problems. A review of this literature is followed by an illustration and discussion of the various political “failures” underlying the perceived problems of bureaucracy that occupy public administration scholars. Recognition of the political roots of bureaucratic dilemmas is far from revolutionary; rather, it echoes some of the earliest bureaucracy scholars, but it is a perspective that has been too often overlooked in recent decades.

Bureaucracy to Postbureaucracy

In the study of bureaucracy, theoretical approaches have focused on a range of administrative outcomes and have in turn attributed the “problems” in public administration to different sources. Rational choice theories emphasize the contribution of information asymmetries and imperfect contracts to argue that bureaucracies inevitably fail to efficiently implement representative policy. New public management theories point to organizational issues as the barrier to optimal bureaucratic performance, with privatization and marketization of tasks being the prescribed solutions. Representative bureaucracy theory seeks to understand where and how public administration serves representative functions, with a democratic deficit being the problem of interest. These literatures (and others beyond the scope of this review) produce a picture of bureaucratic organizations as unambiguously linked to politics and with the roots of bureaucratic “problems” extending beyond the organization: they are systemic and political. From these theoretical developments, the study of *governance*

evolved. Each stage of theoretical development has moved closer to a conceptualization of bureaucracy as a response to political circumstances.

Early public administration research approached bureaucracy as a unitary actor, characterized as a vertically integrated closed system with meritocratic promotion (Weber, 1978; Olsen, 2008). With a view of bureaucratic organizations as the administrative instruments of a democratic political system, public service performance was conceptualized as responsiveness to the preferences of elected officials. Scholars in this era were largely occupied with accountability problems—how to ensure that bureaucracy as a nonrepresentative institution can be reconciled with democracy (Finer, 1941; Friedrich, 1940; Wilson, 1887). Maintaining the conceptualization of bureaucrats as subservient agents, the solutions to this implementation problem were structural. Hierarchical organization and line management were seen as key to solving problems of accountability (Weber, 1978). This view, however, gave way to a rational actor approach as the behavioral revolution spread through public administration and political science.

The next generation of bureaucracy research followed economic principles of rational choice in attributing individual motivations to bureaucrats (Downs, 1967). Relaxing the assumption of apolitical and uniform utility functions among public administrators, this set of theories explored the importance of information asymmetries in shaping public policy outcomes through agency theory (Niskanen, 1971; Moe, 1984; Bendor, Taylor, & Van Gaalen, 1987; Milgrom & Roberts, 1992). Given that bureaucrats are rational agents, willing and able to act in their own interests, bureaucratic actions can diverge from those actions preferred by elected officials when bureaucrats exploit their information advantage. Given limited resources (time, financial, etc.) legislators and executives cannot articulate to bureaucracy every contingency in a complex political and economic environment. Scholarly attention has thus focused on solving information asymmetry problems in a context of incomplete contracts and individually rational actors (McCubbins, Noll, & Weingast, 1987, 1989; Epstein & O'Halloran, 1994, 1999; Bawn, 1995; de Figueiredo, Spiller, & Urbiztondo, 1999). Scholars sought to resolve incentive incompatibilities between elected officials and administrators through institutional design; to exploit the expertise and resource advantages of bureaucrats while maintaining optimal political control; or in other words, to maximize economic efficiency.

Although the rational choice approach offered critical insight into bureaucratic decision making, it has several limitations. First, a faulty assumption that political officials speak with one voice (ignoring the multiple principals problem) assumed away goal conflict. Where goal conflict was permitted (see McCubbins, Noll, & Weingast, 1987), it was assumed that structural controls could lock in priorities for the bureaucracy and create a static system. Second, the approach assumed simple responsive actors without recognizing that bureaucracies are not monolithic and contain a wide range of values. In particular, management plays an essential role in the translation of legislative policies through the actions of street-level bureaucrats (Meier & O'Toole, 2006). Third, efforts to

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maximize one goal, efficiency, have ramifications for the multiple goals imposed on bureaucracy by the political branches. If political institutions do not deal with goal conflict, bureaucracy cannot unilaterally resolve the conflicts.

Following the shortcomings of rational choice and agency theory, attention pivoted toward management *within* bureaucratic organization (O'Toole & Meier, 1999). (New) public management theories remain rooted in microeconomics with the assumption that competition drives private-sector efficiency. Applying competitive principles to public-sector delivery would thus improve efficiency and bureaucratic effectiveness. With this perspective, problems of bureaucracy are seen as organizational and managerial ones, and research questions aim to improve service performance (Bryson, Berry, & Kaifeng, 2010). The prescribed solutions followed a logic of competition and accounting, and sought to adopt lessons from private-sector management. Emphasis was put on input and output control and evaluation, as well as performance management techniques. Competition and market mechanisms were held up as solutions to optimize resource allocation. Contracting out, cost management, specialization, disaggregation, and decentralization were specifically recommended (see Bryson, Berry, & Kaifeng, 2010). The key contribution from these works was the recognition of the plural and interdependent actors in public policy implementation. The assumption of bureaucracy as a unitary actor or a collection of rational shirkers gave way to a more sophisticated understanding of individual motivation and heterogeneity of organization. However, new public management reforms increased institutional and policy complexity (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow et al., 2006) and maintained a focus on intraorganizational problems and solutions, thereby neglecting any political explanations. Furthermore, prescriptions maintained a strict adherence to application of private-sector practices despite evidence of unintended consequences (Hood & Peters, 2004).

While rational choice and new public management theories focused on efficiency and effectiveness in public service provision, other lines of work sought to understand values, motivations, and the representational role of public bureaucracies. These works begin with the assumption that bureaucrats have values of their own, which they employ when making decisions (Dahl, 1956). Allowing for individual values thus opens the door for a conceptualization of bureaucracy as a democratic institution through which individual administrators represent citizen interests. Questions raised in these literatures seek to understand bureaucratic values and how those values translate political intent into actions affecting agency clientele. Bureaucrats as individuals embody multiple roles (Selden, 1997) and hold multiple values (Keiser et al., 2002). Professional motivation (Teodoro, 2011, 2014) and public service motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990; Crewson, 1997) both influence decision making, and may supersede the preferences of political factors where policy goals are ambiguous or in conflict (Brehm & Gates, 1999). Goal conflict and ambiguity are thus seen as key problems. Recognizing that not only do bureaucrats have their own values, but that these values have implications for policy outcomes by shaping decision making has been a critical contribution from this line of work (e.g., Lipsky, 1980;

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Meier & O'Toole, 2006; Keiser et al., 2002). Furthermore, where bureaucratic values represent (minority) clientele interests not represented in the political process, public organizations may serve more than an instrumental role in democracy.

Other work on bureaucratic values has highlighted the importance of outcomes beyond allocative efficiency. Democratic systems value many other goals, such as protection of minority rights, equity, and procedural due process, or equal opportunity and equality in policy outcomes. Valuing such goals undercuts the potential contribution of agency theory or new public management to improving bureaucratic performance (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014). These theories are best equipped to generate recommendations for greater efficiency, but they struggle to provide insight on optimization of noneconomic goals. First, representation occurs in both political/electoral and bureaucratic institutions (Long, 1952). Diversity within bureaucracy promotes more responsive policy by ensuring that all, or at least more, interests are represented in the implementation process (Selden, 1997). Equity and representation in public service provision are important goals and outcomes in their own right, but they may also conflict with economic efficiency. Further, the contribution of bureaucracy to democratic government is more than instrumental. In a constitutive role, bureaucracy can promote the democratic capability of citizens through deliberation and participation (Cook, 1996; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). In other words, it should be a goal of bureaucracy to develop citizens' capacity for effective participation in democratic processes (Vigoda, 2002). Theory and prescriptions for public bureaucracy become more complex when performance is conceptualized in a multidimensional way to incorporate these goals, thereby challenging rational choice or new public management theory (Kelly, 1998; Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014).

Bureaucrats are not the only actors involved in policy implementation, however, as acknowledged and advocated by (new) public management theory. Contracting involves other entities in public service provision with distinct values of their own (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2011). Understanding "bureaucratic" outputs or outcomes, therefore, requires consideration of nonprofit and private organizations and the relationships therein. In response to this critique are theories of networks, collaboration, and multidimensional "success" or, in other words, *governance*.

The term *governance* is widely used across public administration, political science, economics, sociology, and a host of other disciplines. As a result, it has been liberally applied to a diverse set of social phenomena, generating theoretical ambiguity (e.g., Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2000; Frederickson, 2005; Fukuyama, 2016; Peters & Pierre, 1998). Generally, the term is used as reference to the coordination of plural actors to produce a common good or outcome. This coordination may be small or large, local or global. Coordination among employees, schools, markets, or international environmental resources are all cases of governance. More specific to the study of bureaucracy and public administration, a governance approach incorporates all of the "regimes of laws, administrative rules, judicial rulings, and practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable government activity, where such activity is broadly defined as the production and delivery

of publicly supported goods and services” (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2000, p. 235). With this conception, the study of *governance* includes all the institutions and actors engaged in the public policy process, from drafting and implementation to evaluation, and is explicitly concerned with the interactions and relationships therein.

While public governance is not a cohesive theory per se, it is a perspective or approach to understanding public policy implementation and public service delivery that incorporates multiple lines of research, including sociopolitical governance, public policy governance, administrative governance, contract governance, and network governance (Osborne, 2010). Each of these theoretical subfields overlap in their objects of study, and all share similar characteristics. Governance theories diverge from previous literatures by accounting for *hybrid* policy and management tools, the *multijurisdictional* nature of modern administration, and *plurality* of stakeholders and their interests (Bevir, 2011). Bureaucracy is fundamental in governance, along with political and nonstate actors. Nonprofit organizations, private and public actors, special districts, states, and municipalities are just a few of the entities involved in modern design and implementation of public policy.

Public governance builds upon previous work in public administration but goes further to open up the “black box” of state and bureaucratic decision making (Bevir, 2011), and recognizes the complexity of bureaucratic problems (Teisman & Klijn, 2008). As Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (2000) point out, by expanding the study of public administration to include not just organization and management within bureaucracies, but also the behavior and relationships of a diverse set of organizations and institutions, evaluation of government performance becomes more complex. Research in governance covers first-order questions about units of analysis and operationalization of performance, as well as questions about optimal design of service delivery organizations and networks, sustainability in service systems, and the values underpinning implementation institutions and decisions (Osborne, 2010). The key distinction between a governance approach and previous generations of bureaucracy research is the comprehensive acknowledgment of the networked and multilevel environment of policy implementation and the multifaceted nature of policy goals or performance (Peters & Pierre, 1998). Because this approach acknowledges policy implementation as a system of actors seeking to fulfill multiple goals (often at odds with one another), it is possible to trace the roots of bureaucratic problems beyond the organization level. Therein lies the future of public bureaucracy research—in acknowledging and accounting for the political sources of challenges to bureaucratic performance, multiply defined, as a step toward identifying their solutions.

The study of bureaucracy has expanded and advanced into a postbureaucracy approach by accommodating individual rationality, incomplete information, bureaucratic motivations and values, representation as a bureaucratic function, the plurality of actors in public policy implementation, and a multifaceted concept of performance. With this evolution came a recognition of bureaucratic performance as a complex phenomenon

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requiring more than intraorganizational explanation. With a governance approach, it is possible to identify external sources of public service delivery shortcomings. In the following, we illustrate a case of bureaucratic failure, and we discuss why a governance approach is necessary to identify the roots of administrative problems—political failures.

A Bureaucratic Failure?

The early development of the U.S. National Parks system illustrates many of the challenges that politics can impose on bureaucratic organizations. As early as 1864, the Yosemite Grant signed by Abraham Lincoln set aside the Yosemite Valley in California to preserve its natural features. The administration and funding of its protection were left to the state of California. By protecting a tract of land in the territory of Wyoming from settlement, occupancy, or sale, the Yellowstone Act of 1872 created the first federally managed national park “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” The secretary of the Interior was granted exclusive control over the “preservation, from injury or spoliation, of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said park, and their retention in their natural condition” (Yellowstone Act, 1872, Sec. 2). Preservation of natural land was an entirely new task for the U.S. federal government—or perhaps any national government at the time—and the secretary was given explicit discretion to “make and publish such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary or proper for the care and management.” However, also being denied any funding from the federal government, the superintendent of the park was further tasked with raising all revenues necessary for the administration of Yellowstone. The park was created, policy goals were established, and discretion given, but any means for improvement or enforcement were denied.

In a report to the secretary of the Interior not long after creation of the park, the first superintendent of Yellowstone, Nathaniel Langford, expressed his vexation with the situation (Langford, 1872). Without federal funding, the administration was forced to raise revenue through fees paid by tourists, licenses for hunting, and leases for commercial tourism. However, access for tourists required the construction and maintenance of roads, and threatened natural features with tourist traffic. Access for hunting and gaming required monitoring and maintenance of wildlife populations and regulatory enforcement. The goals of protecting Yellowstone’s natural features while maintaining financial self-sufficiency were clearly at odds. Lacking personnel or clear legal standing to enforce regulations or improve facilities, it soon became evident that protection of the land from poachers, vandals, or unauthorized grazing was impossible.

Declining conditions in the park eventually forced Langford to step down in 1877, though subsequent superintendents continued to face the same challenges. Not until 1894 did the Yellowstone Game Protection Act give administrators legal authority to enforce and punish violators of park wildlife regulations. Over the next decades, a growing number of national parks were established under the administration of the Department of Interior, while other national monuments and historical sites were created under the control of the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture or in the War Department. Many department heads faced similar difficulties in administration as those seen in Yellowstone, and limited authority and resources similarly challenged state-managed parks such as

Yosemite. In 1916 the “Organic Act,” signed by Woodrow Wilson, created the National Park Service as an independent agency, and the control of all national parks and monuments was consolidated and funding centralized.

The failure of Yellowstone’s administration to achieve the goals laid out by policymakers to preserve the land was, in large part, attributable to the operating context determined by the political system. Goals were poorly defined and in conflict; preservation was a relatively new concept and at odds with ensuring access for citizen “enjoyment.” Legal and financial resources were denied, leaving administrators with insufficient means to carry out their tasks. Political support waned, leaving administrators without advocates to improve their operating environment. Lastly, uncertain legal authority left administrators with limited autonomy to affect change. The first decades of the national park system fell short in balancing preservation and recreation because administrators lacked clear goals, sufficient resources, political support, and autonomy. To explain this case of bureaucratic failure as a problem of responsiveness, information, intraorganizational management, or bureaucratic values would be too narrowly focused on bureaucracy as operating in a vacuum. Bureaucracies function in a context subject to external factors, and the shortcomings of the political system are crucial in explaining public service performance.

Political Failures

Goodnow’s focus on the two functions of politics and administration called attention to the need to first resolve political conflict to establish public policy goals and second to craft administrative arrangements to act in pursuit of these policy goals. Failure in either of these functions would generate ineffective public policy. The study of public administration has focused primarily on administrative failures and consequent calls for reforming public management, privatizing functions, or contracting for better performance. However, attention should also be paid to the political failures that contribute to the root cause of the policy problems currently laid at the feet of public organizations. These failures of politics have implications for structural forms and, in fact, hasten the transition from bureaucratic to postbureaucratic forms of policy implementation.

Failures of the political system that subvert public administration include: not resolving political conflict (thus generating conflicting or ambiguous goals), not providing adequate resources for implementation purposes, and limiting the autonomy needed by bureaucracy to develop the expertise necessary to resolve public problems. Some of these failures are the consequence of the political process itself, which is after all the embodiment of conflicts over the authoritative allocation of values. These conflicts endure, and are subject to ongoing debate; there is no reason to assume that losers in political fights will simply accept the results and not continue these disputes in the

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administrative process. Other failures in representation are generated by the competitive incentives created by existing political structures.

Elected legislators and executives face a fundamental conflict in representing citizen interests. If they are concerned with reelection, they seek to provide the public services demanded by constituents, who have a limited willingness to pay. Balancing public demand for goods and services with public demand for low taxes and efficient government leaves elected officials in a challenging position. As noted by Kettl (2002, p. 27), "Public administration thus is paradoxical, caught between citizens' antipathy toward government and their insistence on government service and protection." Very often, the outcomes of this tension are policy goals sufficiently vague and resources sufficiently limited so as to appease conflicting interests. The consequences of elected officials making these politically optimal policy decisions manifest in bureaucratic "problems." In order to operate efficiently and effectively, bureaucracies require clear goals, political support, adequate resources, and sufficient autonomy (Meier, 1997). The nature of electoral competition in a democratic system and legislators' representation of constituent interests, however, makes it difficult or impossible for political officials to provide these prerequisites for bureaucratic success.

Hardships imposed on bureaucracy by politics must be managed from within because public agencies are obliged to deliver on their tasks, regardless of how adverse the operating environment may be. If elected officials fail to provide clear goals, resources, support, or sufficient autonomy to administrators to implement policy efficiently or effectively, the mail must still be delivered, students must be instructed, and national defense must be maintained. As agencies created to provide public goods and services, bureaucracies must find a way to function, regardless of the institutional or resource constraints put upon them. The circumstances in which public bureaucratic organizations operate, in comparison to private organizations, requires their management to be adaptable, to coordinate, and to represent their own values in decision making. In response to these political failures, public agencies have adopted increasingly postbureaucratic organization.

The first shortcoming of the political system is a failure to articulate clear goals. Legislatures are designed as institutions of deliberation to aggregate diverse constituent interests. The failure to resolve differences among these diverse interests, and as the result of time and resource constraints, means that public policy goals are often ambiguous or in conflict. Legislators are motivated by electoral incentives to draft policies satisfying as many interests as possible. The comparative advantage of bureaucracy, however, is to develop and maintain the expertise necessary to implement consistent and effective policy. Successful government requires successful policy implementation, which demands the expertise that only bureaucrats can cultivate. In other words, "[e]fforts to govern without investing in ... intellectual capital will inevitably be impoverished" (Kettl, 2002, p. 17). Given the unavoidably ambiguous policy goals that legislatures articulate, it is left to bureaucracy to apply expertise and resolve inconsistencies and to deal with unanticipated contingencies. Research has consistently

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shown that organizational and managerial effectiveness in public agencies is weakened where policy goals are ambiguous (e.g., Chun & Rainey, 2005). Public service performance suffers when elected officials provide conflicting or unclear goals, but the root of the problem lies outside of the bureaucratic domain—it is a political failure to provide bureaucracy with what it needs for optimal functioning.

The inability of the political system to resolve conflict and generate clear goals means that bureaucracies must now deal with this conflict and generate program outcomes. Bureaucracies logically apply the idea of near decomposable systems in breaking problems into smaller parts, which are then delegated to different portions of the organization to solve. The underlying assumption is that reaggregating these “solutions” will generate a coherent policy. Goal conflict and ambiguity thus contribute to bureaucratic decentralization and the delegation of authority as a first step. A government agency that implements conflicting goals in this manner might also opt to simply run programs separately with each developing clientele ties without ever resolving the goal conflict. The classic example of such a strategy is the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which operates a variety of programs that work at cross purposes but are not shaped by an overarching agricultural policy.¹ The consequences of ambiguous policy goals are increasingly complex organizations, which move away from ideal-type Weberian bureaucracy toward postbureaucratic policy implementation.

The second failure of the political system is the imposition of resource scarcity. Being accountable to taxpayers, legislators tend to economize budget allocations and cannot guarantee stability in resource flows due to uncertainty in issue salience or in coalition (political) support. With limited or volatile resources, bureaucracy is challenged in meeting goals, but it is also made dependent on political support for continued resource flows. Managers in public organizations seeking consistency or improvement in outcomes must buffer budget shocks, invest in capacity, and collaborate or network with third parties to solve problems (Meier & O'Toole, 2011). Political support, prone to wax and wane, is also key to successful collaboration and networking to solve policy problems. Much of public managers' day-to-day efforts deal explicitly with solving problems of resource scarcity, which is largely a context decided by legislative institutions. The resource problems that public managers are occupied with solving are the consequence of political institutions' failure to provide sufficient resources for effective policy implementation.

The insufficient allocation of resources creates pressures for public organizations to seek additional resources. One way to do this is to move away from the traditional bureaucracy forms and seek out resources via collaboration or participation. Coproduction whereby clientele assist in delivering services is one strategy; creating partnerships with nonprofits or private-sector organizations is another; cooptation of resource rich actors is a third. In short, resource scarcity provides a motivation (or a need) for public organizations to move away from traditional bureaucracy toward collaborative networks. Such strategies risk goal displacement or partial goal displacement as the agency seeks resources to operate one program and cedes autonomy over another (see Selznick, 1949;

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O'Toole & Meier, 2004). Similarly, exchanges are rarely costless, so attracting resources from environmental actors is likely to come with strings attached in terms of policy goals or administrative procedures. The consequence of resource scarcity is an increasing number and diversity of actors involved in implementation, thereby further obscuring allocation of authority and accountability.

The third political failure is the institutionalization of unequal access or representation of minority interests. Political institutions are designed to serve the majority, and all too often underrepresent or underserve minority interests (see Lublin, 1997; Lieberman, 1998). Given that policy goals are unlikely to equally represent all interests, a bureaucracy that values equity in outcomes is pushed into a representational role to compensate for the maldistribution of influence. Not designed to be a representative organization, bureaucracy nonetheless finds itself in environments with policy goals and implementing institutions biased toward the interest of a privileged group (Hero & Tolbert, 1996, 2007; Lieberman, 1998). One response is to compensate through intraorganizational decision making. Research has long demonstrated the role of individual bureaucrats' values in shaping public service outputs. In particular, bureaucrats can adapt their decision-making behavior to ensure equity in outcomes—to reconcile a biased political system with democratic principles of equal representation. Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2011) show that bureaucrats only represent interests when program benefits are inequitably distributed, implying that bureaucrats take a representative role only in the context of inequity.² Where politics or administration achieves equity in outputs and outcomes, active representation of minority interests would be redundant or ineffectual. The motivation for active representation is derived from a context of institutionalized inequities. As a result, representative bureaucracy is a response to the failure of politics to generate adequate representation.

Adoption of a representation role, particularly the representation of minority interests, also creates incentives to move from bureaucratic to postbureaucratic forms of organization. The extensive literature on representative bureaucracy (see Groeneveld et al., 2015) demonstrates that the representation of minority interests occurs primarily at the street level, not at mid- or upper management levels. Lewis and Ramakrishan's (2007) study of immigrant incorporation in U.S. cities demonstrates that electoral institutions do little to foster the incorporation of immigrants into the community, but that local bureaucracies consistently develop such efforts as the result of implementing public policies in social services and law enforcement. Minority representation develops at the street level likely because such representation is not as visible or salient to electoral institutions, which perceive that representation is a legislative function, not a bureaucratic one (Daley, 1984). Therefore, minority representation encourages decentralization and the delegation of authority downward. Moving from a decentralized organization to a postbureaucratic network moves the representation even further from the view of the political oversight processes.³ As a consequence of unequal representation in political processes and institutions, bureaucracies adapt service provision to promote

equity among heterogeneous interests, thereby taking on a postbureaucratic role in democratic government.

The final burden on bureaucracy is the political system's failure to guarantee popular trust in government. General distrust of and dissatisfaction with politics and elected officials are transferred to all facets of government, including bureaucracy, and affect perceptions of public service performance (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). As the face of government, being the institutions with which citizens interact the most, bureaucracy must engage with a citizenry dissatisfied with government. The transference of distrust from electoral politics to government institutions more broadly requires that bureaucrats take on a reconciliatory role to achieve goals. In order to address the failure of political institutions to foster trust, it becomes an important role of bureaucracy to create value through engagement in community building, socialization, and trust building (see Cook, 1996; Stoker, 2006).

Increasing levels of political distrust not only create incentives for public organizations to independently cultivate support for and trust in agency programs, but also encourage the adoption of postbureaucratic forms of organization. A classic way to build trust in relationships with clientele is to bring them into the process either through coproduction or through cooptation by advisory groups or joint programs. To the extent that such processes occur in collaborative networks, citizens work within one organization that they already trust (the nonprofit or the interest group) and create programs that benefit them in cooperation with the government agency. As a consequence of generalized distrust of the political system, public agencies adopt postbureaucratic processes in policy implementation, including collaboration, networking, and coproduction (O'Toole, Meier, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2005).

In short, the problems created by political failures provide incentives for public organizations to transition from traditional bureaucracies to postbureaucratic collaborative institutions. To the extent that authorizing legislation encourages or mandates such collaborative networks (Hall & O'Toole, 2000), the process is encouraged by both the political system and bureaucratic incentives. Even without legislative authorization, the inability of the political system to perform its role in a symbiotic politics-administration system means that bureaucracy must assume both roles and that the dual role is made more feasible by evolving to collaborative forms of governance.

Conclusion

The development of bureaucracy theory follows the evolution of postbureaucratic policy implementation. Weberian bureaucratic agencies have given way to less hierarchical, cross-sectoral, and collaborative organizations of actors working toward multiple, often conflicting goals. As adaptable and open systems, bureaucracies respond to problems in governance, many of which are caused by politics in modern society. The course of bureaucratic transition to postbureaucratic systems of governance cannot be understood without expanding the scope of research to include the broader political system, which produces many of the conditions motivating reform. Quite simply, postbureaucratic institutions are a response to the challenges imposed upon public administration by the failures of politics.

Previous scholarly work that focuses on intraorganizational failures or problems of agency is inadequate in explaining the structure, organization, and performance of contemporary policy implementation. A focus on bureaucracy to explain public service performance is misguided and cannot lead to the best applied research. The clear solution is for public administration, both as scholarship and as practice, to return to its classical roots, with a focus on creating governance systems rather than simply seeking to perfect bureaucracy (Meier, 2010). Reading the classic public administration works of Luther Gulick (1937) or Dwight Waldo (1952) reveals a concern as much with the political side of the politics-administration relationship as the administrative side. In 1937, the Brownlow Commission proposed a fundamental reorganization of the U.S. presidency to transform it into an institution capable of generating effective policy action. Waldo and others debated both the nature of the federal system and how federalism could be restructured for more effective governance. Similar debates focused on key political questions linked to the separation of powers. At the local level, reforms such as city manager government or the independent school district sought to create governance systems that structure the interaction of the political with the administration.

Much of the research in the latter half of the 20th century was restricted in scope to questions of within-organizational management, structure, and reform. Though this approach fundamentally contributed to an understanding of behavior within bureaucratic organization, it is ill equipped to diagnose problems originating outside the agency. In other words, only with a focus on governance systems can research hope to solve the systemic, political failures that persist in challenging bureaucratic functions.

Although predicting the future of any set of institutions is difficult, there are reasons to think that current trends will continue and may accelerate. The current problems of governance that have their roots in the breakdown of the symbiotic relationship between politics and administration have yet to be widely or explicitly addressed. The inability of electoral institutions to deal with pressing public issues, such as immigration, inequality, transnational violence, political instability, and others, will simply push political functions

deeper into the bureaucracy. This situation will in turn lead to a greater need for creating networks, establishing collaborative relationships, and requiring coproduction. These postbureaucratic systems will be accompanied by decentralization, with the likely result of substantial suboptimization and little overall oversight. Even traditional bureaucratic hierarchies will continue to see the political and implementation benefits of the evolution to postbureaucratic forms.

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Notes:

(1.) As examples, the ethanol subsidy program for biofuels is in direct conflict with livestock production programs; nutrition programs are frequently in conflict with marketing programs. Many times Congress enshrines the goal conflict by creating programs in different units (e.g., tobacco subsidies in Agriculture and antismoking campaigns in Health and Human Services).

(2.) Virtually all of the empirical cases of representation deal with situations in which a numerical minority gains fewer policy benefits than their numbers would merit, meaning this may well represent the typical policy implementation context.

(3.) Lodging the representation function in the network either via contracts or via working with nonprofits also permits the agency to distance itself from the representation if it becomes politically sensitive. It is not the agency doing the representation, the claim can be made, but a separate nonprofit organization.

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