ROBERT B. DENHARDT THOMAS J. CATLAW

Theories of Public Organization

7TH EDITION

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SEVENTH EDITION

ROBERT B. DENHARDT
University of Southern California

THOMAS J. CATLAW
Arizona State University

Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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Robert B. Denhardt and Thomas J. Catlaw

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Preface

This seventh edition of *Theories of Public Organization* continues to advance the important themes of prior editions of this book but also offers significant enhancements and additions. The most notable and visible addition is Thomas Catlaw as a collaborator and coauthor for this book. Professor Catlaw is the Frank and June Sackton Professor of Public Administration in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University. He has made considerable contributions to the development of public administration theory and, in particular, to our understanding difference and democratic practice in contemporary public organization. With Professor Catlaw's arrival, we have taken the opportunity to examine the book with fresh eyes and enthusiasm and to bring renewed clarity to the book's overarching concern for personal and organizational learning, democratic practice, and the need to reconsider the relationship between theory and practice in a more constructive fashion. We think that these themes are more important than ever for public organizations and the world we live in today. Yet, as we explore through updated considerations of contemporary theory, thinking about public organizations remains limited in ways that continue to constrain our practice and, by implication, our individual and shared well-being.

ONGOING CENTRAL THEMES AND PURPOSES

Fundamentally, though, the additions and enhancements to this edition continue with the important themes established in earlier ones. This is a book about theory but also about practice. It is written to introduce theories of public organization to students of public administration and to those outside the field who wish to involve themselves in organizations committed to public purposes. More important, this book is an attempt to develop a critique of the mainstream literature in public administration theory based on its inability to connect with the real experiences of those working in and with public organizations.

In recent years, the traditional separation of theory and practice in the field of public administration has become even more pronounced. Academics and practitioners, who have always viewed each other with some skepticism, now seem even more divided. This is an extremely unfortunate situation, limiting both our understanding of public organizations and our actions within them. The primary intent of this book is to understand more clearly the separation of theory and practice and to begin to reconcile their differences through personal learning and action.

To achieve this purpose, we first review a number of past efforts in the field, not to present a comprehensive historical review of theories of public organization but to examine representative works that embody the commitments and views of various groups at various times. Based on this review, we then consider contemporary studies of public organizations and suggest ways in which we might better understand the world of public administration. Several more generic organization theorists, who have made sustained contributions to the field of public administration, are included as well.

In our engagement with these works, we have discovered more consistency exists among the various theorists than one might expect. This discovery has led to the following conclusions, which are implicit in all that follows:

1. Although there have been many diverse theories of public organization, the mainstream work in public administration theory has centered on elaborating a so-called rational model of administration and a view of democratic accountability implicitly based on the politics–administration dichotomy.
2. As a theory of learning, this approach has limited itself to a positivist understanding of knowledge acquisition, failing to acknowledge or to promote alternative ways of viewing public organizations. Specifically, this approach has failed to integrate explanation, understanding, and critique in theories of public organization.
3. As a theory of organization, this approach has limited itself to instrumental concerns expressed through hierarchical structures, failing to acknowledge or to promote the search for alternative organizational designs. Specifically, this approach has failed to integrate issues of control, consensus, and communication.
4. Theories of public organization have consequently appeared to practitioners to be unrelated to their concerns, failing especially to provide a moral context for personal action in the governance process.
5. Despite the dominance of the mainstream view, there have always been significant counterpoint arguments in the field.
6. These challenges become even more important as we move from an exclusive focus on government to a more embracing focus on governance, especially democratic network governance.

To fulfill the promise of public administration theory, we now require a shift in the way we view the field, a shift that will lead us to be concerned not merely with the government administration but also with the broader process of

governance, human relationships, and managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values. Following such a perspective, which is elaborated in Chapter 1, we are led to a broadened concern for the nature of administrative work in public organizations broadly defined—one that incorporates not only the requirements of efficiency and effectiveness but also the notion of democratic responsibility. This shift has implications for the field of governance and public administration and for the larger field of management as well. To the extent that various institutions of governance dominate the social and political landscape, it is appropriate to ask whether all such organizations should be governed in such a way as to seriously maintain our commitments to freedom, justice, and equality among persons. The question is not how we should view the operations of government agencies but rather how organizations—and relationships—of all sorts might be made more public, how they might aid in expressing the values of our society.

For nearly a century, private administration, or business administration, has stood as a model for public administration. We suggest in this book that public organizations—and the theories and approaches that support them—may become models for reconstructing organizations of all types along more democratic lines. The tradition of public administration contains elements of organizational reform that are important for all our institutions. If democracy is to survive in our society, it must not be overridden by the false promises of hierarchy and authoritarian rule. *Democratic outcomes require democratic processes.*

The connection between theory and practice will be very important in accomplishing this goal. A theory that stands apart from practice and from the values and meanings implicit in practice will never enable us to do more than modify our practice incrementally. It will not permit the kind of broad commitment to the notion of democratic governance that our society requires. In our view, however, the connection between theory and practice can occur only through the process of personal learning. Only as individuals reflect on their experiences and generalize from them will they develop theories of action. And only in this way will they be able to incorporate their ideas into a practical and personal philosophy of public administration.

Consistent with this view, the book incorporates several pedagogical features, including discussion questions and brief but pointed case studies after each chapter. Most important, however, is the appendix on keeping an administrative journal. The journal provides a way of connecting theory and practice by examining one's administrative experiences from four different perspectives. Careful use of the administrative journal will make the material in this text come to life for the reader. In a sense, the reader is asked to develop his or her own case studies through entries he or she makes in the administrative journal. Just reading or thinking about theories independent of practice will not substantially affect our actions. For truly significant learning to occur, we need to demonstrate to ourselves the relevance and meaning of theory in our everyday lives. Theory, we will find, is ultimately a very personal matter, and the administrative journal helps make this connection.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER CHANGES

To advance the work of the book, new suggested readings and discussion questions have been added throughout. More substantively, we have made the following changes in this new edition:

Chapter 1 has been significantly restructured and revised in order to bring out more fully the unique approach to the question of the relationship of theory to practice and connections among various perspectives and approaches presented in this book. We urge both theorists and practitioners to consider alternatives to "applying" theory to practice and to think differently about the expectations and demands both have for one another.

In Chapter 2, we make important revisions to the sections on Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to reaffirm and make more accessible their importance for contemporary public organization and, in particular, thinking critically about democratic public organization and possibilities for knowledge acquisition.

Chapter 3 includes a new introductory discussion that situates the development of theories of public organization in a more nuanced historical context. It also adds a new section on the pivotal role that gender played in the development of early theories of public administration and how gender conditioned and constrained the way in which scholars and practitioners came to think about "science." This highlights the scholarship of Camilla Stivers and her analysis of the importance of the Settlement Movement (and settlement women) for public administration. The chapter now includes expanded discussion of early theorists in the field who offered alternatives to the scientific, rational approach, such as Mary Follett and Ordway Tead.

Chapter 4 includes an extensive new section on complex adaptive systems and new institutionalist theories. We focus, in particular, on the relationship of systems and institutionalist thinking to the underlying assumptions of the rationalist model.

Chapter 5 adds a new section on contemporary theories of motivation, including public service motivation, and their implication for the prospects of the organizational humanist perspective.

Chapter 6 has been entirely restructured and reoriented. The overall theme of this chapter is now to locate the emergence of the policy perspective and the new public management in the general search for new governmental theories and practices that emerged from the late twentieth century in the face of considerable political and social turmoil and, later, fiscal crises. The chapter includes new and updated sections on the literature on policy implementation and the new public management. These sections highlight both the intentions of these approaches but also some of the unexpected—and unfortunate—consequences—of these efforts.

Chapter 7 significantly expands its discussion of gender and public organization and adds important new material on race, sexual orientation, and able-bodiness. It shows how feminist theories and queer theory, in particular, offer unique and useful lenses through which we understand how differences and identities matter in public-organizational life. The discussion of democratic network governance has been revised significantly to incorporate key ideas from Eva Sorensen and Jacob Torfing about how to democratically "anchor" these networks, and we advance the case for the necessity of making internal organizational

dynamics part of conversation about democratic governance and reconsideration of the relationship between politics and administration.

Finally Chapter 8, also considerably restructured and revised, brings together many of the major themes of the book to offer a different way to approach the theory–practice question. We highlight again how different forms of knowledge acquisition imply different kinds of relations of theory to practice and, thus, to key dimensions of public organizations. We suggest that the dominant approach to this question presents a misleading account of practice and thus what we can expect from theory and academic research. We show that there can be a place for all forms of knowledge acquisition, but only when personal learning and individual sense-making in particular organizational contexts are made our primary concern.

Throughout this work, we have come to believe more firmly that ideas do make a difference. Human action requires human thought, and without thought, our actions are blind. However, when we realize that thought leads to action, we must also recognize the responsibility of those who theorize. The connection between thought and action, theory and practice, demands that those who think and those who write share a moral obligation with those who act in public organizations. This responsibility, the responsibility of the theorist, has, for the most part, been underplayed in our field. A more thorough understanding of the vocation and the obligation of the theorists is very much needed in our discipline—and indeed in all the social sciences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND APPRECIATION

A word about our own learning about public organizations and to those who have provided help and support during our work on this project, in both its original and revised versions. Foremost among them, we want to recognize colleagues—past and present—at the University of Missouri–Columbia, the University of Colorado–Denver, the University of Delaware, the University of Southern California, and Arizona State University. We have also benefited greatly from our association with a network of other public administration theorists around the world including friends such as John Nalbandian, Orion White, Cynthia McSwain, George Frederickson, Bob Backoff, Sloane Dugan, Barry Hammond, Astrid Merget, Larry Kirkhart, Michael Harmon, Naomi Lynn, Brint Milward, Frank Marini, Bayard Catron, Guy Adams, Jim Wolf, Frank Sherwood, George Frederickson, John Forester, Cam Stivers, Cheryl King, David Farmer, Ralph Hummel, Hugh Miller, Jos Raadschelders, Patricia Mooney Nickel, Angela Eikenberry, Jen Eagan, Louis Howe, Sandra Kensen, Peter Bogason, Eva Sorensen, Jacob Torfing, Richard Box, Kym Thorne, Alex Kouzmin, Margaret Stout, Richard Box, and Kelly Campbell Rawlings. We also want to thank the administrative practitioners and students who have been so helpful in focusing our work over the past years.

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About the Authors

Robert B. Denhardt is Professor and Director of Leadership Development in the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California, Regents Professor Emeritus at Arizona State University, and Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the University of Delaware. A past president of the American Society for Public Administration and a member of the National Academy of Public Administration, Dr. Denhardt has published twenty-two books, including *The Dance of Leadership*, *The New Public Service*, *Managing Human Behavior in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, *Theories of Public Organization*, *Public Administration: An Action Orientation*, *In the Shadow of Organization*, and *The Pursuit of Significance*.

Thomas J. Catlaw is the Frank and June Sackton Chair in Public Administration and an Associate Professor in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University on the Downtown Phoenix Campus. His research centers on the application of political and social theory to problems of governance and social change. He is the author of *Fabricating the People: Politics and Administration in the Biopolitical State* and has published widely on matters of public administration and democratic participation. Dr. Catlaw was editor of *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, an international journal dedicated to innovative and critical analysis of governmental practice, and has worked previously for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget in Washington, DC, on issues of federal audit policy.

The welfare, happiness, and very lives of all of us rest in significant measure upon the performance of administrative mechanisms that surround and support us. From the central matters of food and shelter to the periphery of our intellectual activity, the quality of administration in modern society touches our daily lives. Today your life may depend upon the administration of purity controls in a pharmaceutical house, tomorrow it may depend upon the decisions of a state department of motor vehicles, next week it may rest with the administrative wisdom of an official in the Department of State. Willy-nilly, administration is everyone's concern. If we wish to survive, we had better be intelligent about it.

—Dwight Waldo (1955, p. 70)

Source: Waldo, Dwight. (1955) Public administration—study and teaching. Garden City, NY. Doubleday

Free and unfree, controlling and controlled, choosing and being chosen, inducing and unable to resist inducement, the source of authority and unable to deny it, independent and dependent, nourishing their personalities and yet depersonalized: forming purposes and being forced to change them, searching for limitations in order to make decisions, seeking the particular but concerned with the whole, finding leaders and denying their leadership, hoping to dominate the earth and being dominated by the unseen—this is the story of man and society told on these pages.

—Chester Barnard (1948, p. 296)

Source: Barnard, C.I. (1948). Organization and Management Selected Papers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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Learning and Public Organizations

Dwight Waldo's appraisal of the importance of public organizations in our daily lives is even more relevant today than when it was written over fifty years ago (Waldo, 1955). During that time, public organizations at the federal, state, and local levels have grown tremendously, to the point that today over 22 million people are employed by government in this country. In addition, millions more are employed in businesses and nonprofit organizations that play an essential role in the governance process. More important, the range and complexity of the issues addressed by government and related agencies have been extended far beyond what we might have envisioned even a few years ago. Because of the serious impact public organizations have on our lives, when we talk about administration, as Waldo says, we had better be intelligent.

As Chester Barnard (1948) points out, however, we must also maintain a sense of the quality of organizational life. Although we often think of the public bureaucracy as an impersonal mechanism, behind each of our encounters with public organizations lies a lengthy and complex chain of human events, understandings, and behaviors developed in the everyday lives of people just like us. Organizations are indeed the products of individual human actions—actions with special meanings and significance to those who act. The allegedly impersonal organization is the backdrop for a very personal world.

For this reason, public organizations may look quite different depending on our particular perspective. As an example, we often talk about the endless maze of confusion and red tape that seems to characterize public organizations. Certain agencies, despite their alleged interest in efficiency and service, seem "designed" to prevent satisfactory solutions to our problems. On the one hand, the bureaucracy

may respond in such a routinized way as to appear uncaring; on the other, it may seem so arbitrary as to be cruel. Consequently, we should not be surprised that many Americans have a rather low opinion of public bureaucracy.

This picture changes as we become more familiar with the bureaucracy and the people who inhabit it. These individuals are, for the most part, highly concerned and competent, working to make a living and seeking to deal effectively with the complex issues they face. For most, the old notion of public service is not dead. Working for the government is not just another job; it is a chance to participate in solving difficult public problems. It is the "real world," in which people experience pain and pride, joy and disappointment. It is a very personal place.

The relationship of the personal and impersonal in public organizations has a second and related aspect to the quality of organizational life. Often when people think about the relationship between politics and administration, it is in terms of ends and means. Public bureaucracy is thought to be the means or instrument for making public or policy goals a reality; administration is about implementation. But we cannot separate ends and means because the meaning and significance of *what* to do is substantively revealed to us in *how* we do it (Harmon, 2008). When we forget this, we run the risk of viewing the public servants who implement policies as mere instruments or tools rather than as full human beings. This degrades the quality of organizational life and threatens to turn bureaucracies into inhumane places for both citizens and employees. As Harmon (2008 p. 72) writes, "An uncritical acceptance of the ends/means dualism conceals an ideological bias that not only perpetuates disparities of political and organizational power but also precludes an alternative vision of personal development and social relationship upon which a more practical and humane conception of governance may be grounded." The challenge and opportunity, then, for practitioners and theorists of public organization is to understand how the democratic advancement of broad public goals is bound up with the democratic administration of these organizations and the personal aspirations of those who work in them.

So, though this book is concerned with what it means to be intelligent about public organizations, it is also concerned with how our knowledge may be used to deal compassionately with human problems and the world around us. We will be concerned with a fairly basic set of questions: How can we develop a better and more systematic understanding of public organizations? What do we need to know in order to make public organizations more responsive and democratic? How can we make use of the knowledge we have gained so as to improve the well-being of both ourselves and the communities we serve?

THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE

People gain knowledge in many ways. Our understanding of public organizations is clearly influenced by events that occur even before we regularly encounter those organizations. Our experiences in the family teach us much about power, authority, and communication, while our experiences in church and in school present us with information about more structured organizations. By the time we begin to deal with major public organizations, either as members or as clients, we have been thoroughly socialized in terms of some basic patterns of behavior and action. Nevertheless, there is still a great deal of information we must acquire and a number of different ways in which we can acquire it. We can depend on rumor or hearsay, we can investigate the organization's past practices, we can listen and learn from the advice of others in the organization, we can be open to the experience and knowledge of the public or stakeholders that we serve, or we can let ourselves be guided by efficiency experts and organization development specialists.

Deriving Theory from Practice

In each of these ways, we are constructing our own personal approach to or theory of public organization; we are seeking explanations or understanding that will allow us systematically to view public organizations, their members, and their clients. The body of observations and evaluations we make may be said to constitute implicit theories of public organizations, in the sense that although they may rarely be articulated or even consciously considered, they constitute a set of propositions about the way in which public organizations work. Most important, these theories do not exist apart from practice; they are integrally related to the way we act as members or clients of public agencies. Our every action occurs within the framework of the theories we hold or, more precisely, as an expression of our theoretical positions. In the field of action, theory and practice are one. This statement seems simple enough, but exactly the opposite characterization, that theory and practice are disconnected, is in fact the one more frequently heard in contemporary discussions of public administration. Administrative practitioners often complain that theorists, from the Founding Fathers to present-day academics, live and work in ivory towers so distant from the world of practice that their principles and pronouncements hardly correspond to life in the real world. Meanwhile, academics, even those most concerned with the relevance of administrative studies, complain that practitioners in public agencies are so concerned with the nuts and bolts of administration that they fail to maintain a theoretical overview. The gulf between theory and practice seems too great to bridge.

However, like the relationship between ends and means, this way of framing the relationship between theory and practice is misleading. The reason it is misleading is that even academic theorists are, in a very real sense, practitioners. Just as public managers have implicit theories-in-use, theorists and other academic

researchers seek to hone their craft and strive to develop practical expertise in and understanding of the world that they live in. We will return to this theme in greater detail in Chapter 8.

For now, however, we can say that the particular *field of practice* (Bourdieu, 1994) that academic theorists work within is different than the field that managers and analysts in public organizations practice in. It is, typically, a university or other research setting. Working in different fields of practice means that the practical wisdom we develop in theorizing about public organizations is different than the practical wisdom other practitioners develop. This kind of reasoning can be extended, for example, to the many different professions that work in public organizations, such as law, engineering, medicine, social work, or accounting. These professions all have unique bodies of expertise associated with them and distinct ways of viewing the world and thinking about public problems. This approach also can help us to think in a new way about the distance that seems to separate public organizations from the clients they serve. All individuals, including citizens and clients, develop particular expertise and understanding in the fields of practice that they most commonly live and work within. Ordinary people are experts in their own lives, though this personal expertise is different from both the knowledge gleaned from academic research and professional experience.

When we recognize that different groups of people are engaged in different fields of practice and that there are different kinds of knowledge, we can chart a new direction across the "theory-practice" divide (Catlaw, 2008). The task becomes less how to *apply* theories *to practice* than to communicate and translate across fields and bodies of knowledge through a process of *personal reflection and mutual learning*. Our question becomes less a question of whether which academic theorist or practitioner has the ultimate and final account of the real world of public organizations but rather a matter of what we can learn from each other's academic, professional, and personal knowledge and how this learning can help us to become more competent and compassionate actors in the fields we practice in. In this sense, the relationship between theory and practice can be reconstructed around the concept of *personal action*.

For this reason, the central aim of this book is to develop an understanding of public organizations that enables us to integrate theory and practice, reflection and action. To that end, subsequent chapters present an overview of those theories of the individual, the organization, and society that have been proposed as guidelines for making sense of the actions of public organizations; a specific question will be how those theories and the arguments on which they have been built inform our own processes of theory building—processes that lead to our implicit theories of administration.

The central aim of this book is to develop an understanding of public organizations that enables us to integrate theory and practice, reflection and action.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

As we have indicated, theorists and practitioners engage in both practice *and* theorizing. It is the case, though, that not only are their fields of practice different but the theories that they use and create are as well. To illustrate this, we consider two cases that illustrate some of the central topics in public organization theory but do so from the perspective of everyday organizational life. The next section considers the issue of the formal theories of public organization that try to systematically explain and make sense of that experience.

In each case, you might begin by asking how you as an observer would characterize the various actors and how you would analyze their relationships with one another. What kind of information—complete or incomplete, objective or subjective, and so on—do you have available? Does your asking for more information suggest that you hold a certain view of organizations that would be made more complete with the addition of this information? If your questions reflect a set of assumptions about life in public organizations, how would you characterize those assumptions?

Typically, students reviewing cases such as those in this chapter (and elsewhere in this book) comment that they need more information, that the case did not tell them enough. Of course, those involved in the cases would say the same thing—it just seems that there is never enough information. That said, you might consider any case from the standpoint of those involved. Try to understand, from their point of view, exactly what was taking place in their field of practice. Specifically, you might try to reconstruct their analysis of the situation. On what knowledge or understanding of organizational life did they act? What information did they have? What information did they lack? How would they have characterized their general approach to life in public organizations? What expectations about human behavior did they hold? How did they see the primary tasks of their organization? What was their understanding of the role of government agencies and those working in such agencies? What was the relationship between their frame of reference and their behavior?

Case 1

Our first case illustrates the relationship between the way we view organizational life and the way we act in public organizations. Ken Welch was a summer intern in the management services division of a large federal installation. During his three-month assignment, Ken was to undertake a variety of projects related to management concerns in the various laboratories at the center. The management services division was part of the personnel department, but personnel in the division often acted as troubleshooters for top management, so Ken's unit enjoyed considerable prestige within the department and, correspondingly, received special attention from its director.

After a period of about two weeks, during which Ken was given a general introduction to the work of the division, the department, and the center, Rick Arnold, one of the permanent analysts, asked Ken to help him with a study of

the recruitment process in one of the computer laboratories. This was exactly the kind of project Ken had hoped would grow out of his summer experience, and he jumped at the opportunity to become involved. He was especially pleased that Rick, who was clearly one of the favorites of the division's chief and was jokingly but respectfully known as "Superanalyst," had asked for his help. In addition to gaining some experience himself, Ken would have the opportunity to watch a high-powered management analyst at work. Moreover, since it was clear that Rick had the ear of the division's chief, there were possibilities for at least observing some of the interactions at that level, perhaps even participating in meetings at the highest levels of the center's management. All in all, it was an attractive assignment, one on which Ken immediately began to work.

As it turned out, however, Ken could not do a great deal. Since Rick was the principal analyst, he clearly wanted to take the lead in this project, something that seemed perfectly appropriate to Ken. But because Rick had several other ongoing projects, there were considerable periods in which Ken found himself with little to do on the recruitment project. He was therefore more than happy to help out when Eddie Barth, one of the older members of the staff, asked if Ken would help him put together some organizational charts requested by top management. Eddie was one of a small group of technicians who had formed one of the two units brought together several years before to form the management services division. Ken soon discovered that the construction of an organizational chart, especially in the hands of these technicians, became a highly specialized process, involving not only endless approvals but also complicated problems of graphic design and reproduction far beyond what might be imagined. Ken was certainly less interested in this work than in the more human problems he encountered in the recruitment project, but Eddie had always been cordial and seemed to be happy to have some help. So Ken drew charts. After a couple of weeks of working on the two projects, Ken began to receive signals that all was not well with his work. Another intern in the office overheard a conversation in the halls about the overly energetic interns who had been hired. One of the secretaries commented that she hoped Ken could "stand the heat." Since Ken felt neither overly energetic nor under any heat, these comments were curious. Maybe they were talking about someone else, he thought.

A few days later, however, Ken was asked to come to Jim Pierson's office. Jim, another of the older members of the staff, who, Ken thought, had even headed the technical unit, had remained rather distant, although not unpleasant, during Ken's first weeks at the center. While others had been quite friendly, inviting Ken to parties and asking him to join the personnel department's softball team, Jim had seemed somewhat aloof. But then Ken and Jim had very little contact on the job, so maybe, Ken reasoned, it was not so strange after all. Ken saw the meeting as a friendly gesture on Jim's part and looked forward to getting better acquainted. Any hopes of a friendly conversation, however, were immediately dispelled; as soon as Ken arrived, Jim began a lecture on how to manage one's time, specifically pointing out that taking on too many projects meant that none would be well done. Although there were no specifics, Jim was clearly referring to the two projects on which Ken had been working.

Ken was stunned by the meeting. No one had in any way questioned the quality of his work. There were no time conflicts between the two projects. And even if there had been, Ken wondered why Jim would take it on himself to deliver such a reprimand. Later that afternoon, Ken shared his conversation with the other intern, who commented that Jim had always felt angered that, when the two units were brought together, he was not made director. Ken hinted at the controversy the next day in a conversation with Rick but received only a casual remark about the "out-of-date" members of the division. Ken began to feel that he was a pawn in some sort of office power struggle and immediately resolved to try to get out of the middle. As soon as he had an opportunity to see the division chief, he explained the whole situation, including his feeling that no real problems existed and that he was being used. The chief listened carefully but offered no real suggestions. He said he would keep an eye on the situation.

Later in the week, at a beer-drinking session after a softball game, the director of the department of personnel asked how the internship was going. In the ensuing conversation, Ken told him what had happened. The director launched into a long discourse on the difficulties he had experienced in reorganizing units within his department. But he also pointed out how the combination of the two units into the division had decreased his span of control and made the operation of the department considerably easier. It was clear that he preferred the more analytical approach to management services represented by the chief and by Superanalyst. In part, he said that the reorganization had buried one of his main problems, or, Ken thought later, maybe he said it would do so soon.

This case illustrates a wide range of issues confronting those who wish to know more about public organizations. What motivates people working in public organizations? How can we explain faulty patterns of communication in public agencies? How can we best understand the relationship between bureaucracies and bureaucrats? How can we cope with or, perhaps even direct, organizational change? Even more important for our purposes, this case indicates the central role of the acquisition of knowledge as the basis of our actions. Each of the persons involved here was faced with the problem of accumulating knowledge about the specific circumstances; then he had to determine how that information might fit into (or require him to modify) his own frame of reference, his own implicit theories about how people and organizations behave. Each of these persons had to resolve three basic questions about his understanding of public organizations: (1) What knowledge is needed as a basis for action? (2) What are the best possible sources of that knowledge? (3) How can that knowledge be applied to the situation at hand? Only after resolving these questions (at least implicitly) was each person able to act.

Take Ken Welch, the central character in this case, as an example. Among the many categories that Ken might have used to help him understand what was happening in this situation, Ken chose to emphasize those relating to power and authority. His concern (perhaps even obsession) with power and authority provided a special lens through which he viewed the world, a lens that highlighted some events and filtered out others. After obtaining a certain amount of

information, Ken concluded that he was a "pawn" in "an office power struggle" and tried to work things out by appealing to those who had authority in the organization. If, on the other hand, Ken had focused on other topics—for example, the breakdowns in communication that often occur in complex organizations despite attempts at cooperation—he would have acted quite differently, probably trying to discover the cause of the confusion and seeking to work out a more effective relationship with his fellow workers. In any case, it is clear that Ken's own perspective on organizational life, his own implicit theory of organization, was crucial in directing his actions.

Case 2

Let us examine another case, one that illustrates again the connection between the theories people hold and the actions they take, but one that also illustrates several other themes central to the study of public organizations. John Taylor and Carol Langley worked for a local community development agency. Following a rather massive reorganization of the agency, in which a number of new programs were taken on, John was asked to supervise a new housing loan program, and Carol was asked to assist him. The program was designed to provide low-interest loans to help people rehabilitate housing in certain parts of the city. Although John and Carol had experience in related areas, neither was familiar with this particular program. To make matters worse, seminars to provide help in establishing such programs had been held some months earlier. John and Carol were simply given a manual and told to begin.

The program involved a number of new activities and took considerable time to set up. For example, it was necessary to train new housing inspectors, who would coordinate their activities with those provided by the city, and relationships had to be established with many agencies that would provide information about the applicants being processed.

John soon began receiving considerable pressure to complete the processing of the first group of applications within a very short time. For one thing, the first group of applicants consisted of about forty people who had originally applied for other programs but had been turned down. Since their applications had been on file in the agency for as long as a year, they were eager to have their requests processed quickly. Initial visits and phone calls from several of the applicants made John quite aware of their feelings. In addition, however, John knew that this particular loan program would have a significant impact on the community and that, consequently, his doing an efficient job under these difficult circumstances would be important to the agency and in turn important to his own future in government service.

Carol recognized the necessity of doing the work as quickly as possible, but she also felt a special obligation to the applicants themselves. She took seriously the agency director's comment that the agency could use this opportunity to help "educate" the applicants about the procedures involved in such projects. She felt that it was very important to contact the applicants periodically to let them know what was happening, for example, with the inspections, cost

estimates, loan amounts, financial information, and terms and conditions of the loans. Unlike John, who spent most of his time in the office, she talked frequently with the applicants, many of whom she knew personally from her previous position in the agency.

For each applicant, John and Carol were to accumulate a complete file of information about financial status and about the rehabilitation project the applicant had in mind. This file was to be received and signed by the applicant, then forwarded to the regional office of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for its action on the loan.

John felt that the process could be completed more quickly if Carol would simply get the applicants to sign a blank set of forms that could be kept at the office. When information was received regarding a loan, the appropriate items could be entered on the signed forms, thus saving the time that would be involved in reviewing each form with the applicant. Also, this procedure would eliminate the often lengthy process of coordinating several office visits to discuss the material.

When John asked Carol to obtain the signed forms, she refused. She not only felt that the applicants should see and understand the materials before signing, she was afraid that it might be illegal to have people sign blank forms. When she talked with John's supervisor about the request, she was told that the procedure was not illegal and had even been used before in the regional office.

John and Carol obviously had different orientations toward the role of public administration in modern society. Similarly, they had different understandings of how one might be effective as an administrator. Consequently, when they encountered this particular situation, they immediately fit the given circumstances into their administrative frames of reference, and these frameworks became the bases for their actions. John seemed most concerned with the efficient completion of the task with which he had been presented, while Carol seemed more concerned that she be immediately responsive to members of the client group and helping them to understand the loan process.

As we will see, the issues that seem to separate John and Carol are not unusual; indeed, they lie at the heart of public administration theory. On the one hand, government agencies are urged to attain the greatest possible efficiency in their delivery of services—to cut through red tape whenever possible. On the other hand, since public agencies should presumably operate in the public interest, they must be responsive to the needs and desires of those with whom they work. Moreover, one might argue that public agencies bear a special responsibility to help educate citizens to deal more effectively with social problems on their own.

On the one hand, government agencies are urged to attain the greatest possible efficiency in their delivery of services. On the other hand, they must be responsive to the needs and desires of those with whom they work.

This case also provides an interesting commentary on another issue that we will encounter in our study of public organizations: Where we stand in our field of practice considerably influences what we see. Specifically, a person's actions often look quite different from the inside than from the outside. We might, for example, characterize John's behavior as self-serving, concerned only with impressing those who might influence his impending promotion; more charitably, however, we might characterize John as highly concerned for the agency's clients, anxious to help them receive their loan approvals as quickly as possible in order to ease their financial difficulties. John himself might describe his actions in either of these ways, or he might speak of the situation in completely different terms. For example, he might say that he felt tremendous pressure to get the job done, both from those inside and those outside the organization; consequently, he experienced this entire situation, especially the conflict with Carol, as a source of personal anguish. Although we can rather readily describe the behavior of individuals in organizations, it is much more difficult to assess the meaning that their activities have for them. Yet in seeking intelligence and compassion in our understanding of public organizations, both are necessary.

FORMAL THEORIES OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

We mentioned earlier the academic, professional, and personal sources from which we derive our understanding of public organizations. Regardless of whether we consciously attempt to develop our perspectives, they do develop, and they guide us. If we wish to sharpen our ability to respond with greater intelligence and compassion to those situations we face as members or clients of public organizations, we need to consider more carefully the implicit theories we hold. One way to do that, of course, is to compare our own implicit theories of public organization with those more explicit theories developed by theorists and practitioners in an attempt to better understand the organizational world in which we live. Interestingly, often when we read formal theories we may learn for the first time that we actually have implicit theories that guide us and inform our actions. These theories may enable us in some ways, but they may limit our possibilities in others. In reading and reflecting on formal theories of public organization and comparing them with our own perspectives, we can make adjustments or refinements that would enable us to understand more clearly our own actions and the actions of others.

Why Study Formal Theories?

There are clearly certain advantages to examining formal theories. Although those who construct such theories entertain essentially the same questions as others seeking a better understanding of organizational life, they do so with considerably more care, rigor, and sophistication. Not that they are any brighter or

more perceptive than others—they simply have more time to devote to the practice of theorizing. Because formal theories are more carefully developed, they reflect both a wider range of topics than we might ordinarily consider and an agenda emphasizing those items that seem most important. For this reason, formal theories provide a benchmark against which we may measure our own approaches to organizational life, and the rich plurality of formal theories, in turn, provide us with a variety of ways to reflect on and consider the actions we take. In seeking to improve our own understanding, we would be well advised to study the way in which other theorists and practitioners have attempted to construct their own theories. By doing so, we get an idea of the range of questions that we should consider, an overview of the issues that have been debated back and forth (and among which we will inevitably have to choose), and a sense of where we stand with respect to the central questions facing those in public organizations.

As we have suggested, theorists differ with respect to what constitutes an appropriate theoretical base for understanding public organizations; however, at a very broad level, most agree that the purpose of theory generally is to provide a more coherent and integrated understanding of our world than we might otherwise hold. Theory seeks to move beyond a simple observation of facts or a blind adherence to certain values to provide more general interpretations. It does not simply draw together facts, it draws from them; it does not simply recognize values, it reorders them. A theory is not simply an arrangement of facts or values but a thoughtful reconstruction of the way we see ourselves and the world around us. It is a way of making sense of a situation. Theories may then be evaluated in terms of their capacity to help us see our world more clearly and to act more effectively in that world.

As we have already seen, administrative practitioners have to make choices about the kind of knowledge they need, the ways in which it can be successfully acquired, and the ways in which it may be applied. Theorists must do the same—they must ask what kinds of knowledge they wish to produce, how they can ensure that their results will be complete and accurate, and how the newly acquired knowledge can be applied. Theorists must make certain choices about what to study and how to study it. And, once these choices have been made, theorists and their theories are bound by them.

For this reason, we should maintain some skepticism concerning theories of public organization (and concerning other theories as well). We must realize that these theories of public organization, like public organizations themselves, result from human activity undertaken in fields of practice—particular constructions that may be more or less appropriate for various purposes. All theories emphasize certain things and deemphasize others. Theories reflect both the personal history and field of practice of the theorist but also the historical context in which the theory was produced. For this reason, as we consider various theories, we will see life reflected—both personal and cultural life. However, we should realize that this reflection is, again, limited and partial, filtered as it is through the lens of history and the specific choices made by the theorist.

The Role of Models

This fact can be illustrated by a consideration of the roles of models in transmitting knowledge. Public administration theorists often speak of their work as the task of developing models of organization or models of administration. In this sense, the term *model* does not mean an ideal form of organization or type of administration but rather a representation of real life (in this case, a representation in language). We might, for example, think of organizations as analogous to the models of molecular structures found in physics, with the balls being various offices and the connecting rods being lines of authority. In any case, the models developed by theorists of public organization share some of the characteristics of models in general.

Consider for a moment a particular model automobile. This model car is intended to represent a real full-sized car. It has the same general shape as the larger car; it has bumpers and windows; and it even has wheels that roll. In these respects, the model car reflects reality rather well. But in one sense, the model car is drastically different—it has a rubber-band motor instead of a gasoline combustion engine. In this respect, the model car distorts rather than reflects reality. Yet this distortion was intentional. The model maker wished to illustrate the fact that the automobile moves along the ground and felt that it was more important to illustrate this aspect of the full-sized car's performance than to portray accurately the device by which it is propelled. The resulting model is then both a reflection—and a distortion—of reality. For the model to be meaningful to us, we must recognize which is which.

In investigating theories of public organization, therefore, we should always seek to be aware of the choices theorists have made in constructing their theories and the distortions to which these choices may have led. In terms of language, we should always inquire into what is said, what is left unsaid, and what should be said next. This last point is particularly important, for, as it was discussed earlier, theory invites action. Thus, we should ask how theories express not only who we and our organizations are but also who we and our organizations might become.

BUILDING THEORIES OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

Let us now turn to the choices that theorists have had to make with respect to building theories of public organization. Specifically, we argue here that these choices have left our understanding of life in public organizations incomplete; even so, although a comprehensive and integrated theory of public organization cannot be developed for the reasons discussed above, a number of very important themes appropriate to that study have been explored in great detail. These can help make us make sense of our involvement with public organizations and in turn to improve the overall quality of the public service. Although this argument is developed throughout the book, it is appropriate at this point to review some of the ways in which the issue of theory building in public administration

has been viewed in the past and to outline some of the ways in which a more integrated approach might be developed.

Before doing so, a word of caution. As Jos Raadschelders (2011) has elaborated, there are serious challenges to developing anything like a single comprehensive theory of public organization. Indeed, such a theory is probably not possible for several reasons. First, virtually every discipline in the social sciences studies things relevant to life and work in public organizations. Knowledge about public organization is also highly fragmented across thousands of bureaus and offices. No one can collect, let alone master, all this knowledge. Second, and as suggested above, academic researchers do not have a monopoly on defining their object of inquiry, that is, public organization. Policy makers, administrative practitioners, citizens, and nonprofit and business groups all play a role in defining the scope and quality of public organizations. Finally, as we will see in this book, there is substantial and often fundamental disagreement among academic theorists themselves about the topic. Just as all individual perspectives and theories are limited, so too are all efforts to integrate theories.

In our view, what books like this one can do is offer ways to "map" or integrate the various sources of knowledge and theories of public organization (Raadschelders, 2011). There are many ways to do this, and it is important to be clear about how and why such a mapping is undertaken. Our approach is, again, aimed to highlight the centrality of *personal reflection* and *mutual learning* so that we can each become more competent and compassionate actors. This reflection and learning must also take place in the face of considerable uncertainty and the acceptance that the unification of knowledge about public organizations is impossible. In our view, it is ultimately through *personal action* that different theories and ways of knowing can be integrated in ways that are useful for advancing public purposes. In the next section, we add the concern for the particular *quality* of that personal action and emphasize the importance of *democratic* practice in and across public organizations.

MAPPING PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

With respect to the scope of public administration theories, at least three orientations to the study of public organizations can be identified. First, public administration has been viewed as part of the governmental process and therefore akin to other studies in political science. In this view, a theory of *public organization is simply part of a larger political theory*. Second, public organizations have been viewed as much the same as private organizations. In this view, a theory of *public organization is simply part of a larger theory of organizations*. Third, it has been argued that *public administration is a professional field*, much like law or medicine, that draws on various theoretical perspectives to produce practical impacts. In this view, a theory of public organization is both unattainable and undesirable. As we will suggest, these three approaches present significant obstacles to

recognizing the possibilities for personal action as the location for integrating different ways of knowing and problematically constrain our understanding of public organization.

Public Administration and Government

The view that public administration is distinguished by its relationship to the governmental process was held by many early writers in the field and continues to attract numerous followers. From this perspective, the public organization—typically the public bureaucracy—is recognized not only as being an arm of government but also as playing a significant role in the governmental process. Public organizations are said to affect the development and implementation of public policy in various ways and consequently to affect the allocation of values in society. If this is the case, however, then such organizations must be subject to the same criteria of evaluation as other actors in the political process. Terms such as *freedom*, *equality*, *justice*, *responsiveness*, and so on are as appropriately applied to public administration as to the chief executive, the legislature, or the judiciary. Therefore, according to this view, the body of theory most appropriate to inform the operations of the public organization is political theory, and the most important recommendations theorists might make are those that would guide the formulation and implementation of public policy.

This view of public organizations as central to the political process was held by many early theorists, especially those from the discipline of political science. (Curiously, the relationship between the subfields of public administration and political theory is marked by considerable ambivalence. Although often seen as the practical and philosophical extremes of the discipline, public administration and political theory share an important heritage based on their concern for effective democratic governance.) Although the roots of public administration in political theory have often been neglected, usually in favor of more immediate technical concerns, some theorists have maintained an interest in the political theory of public organization—an interest that we will later see especially marked in the "new public service" and in certain aspects of the emphasis on public policy. It is an especially critical issue as we explore the emergence of democratic network governance.

Public Administration and Private Organizations

In contrast to this position, others have argued that the behavior of individuals within organizations and the behavior of organizations themselves are much the same, regardless of the type of organization being studied. This generic approach to organizational analysis has also attracted many followers and has indeed created an interdisciplinary study drawing from work in business administration, public administration, organizational sociology, industrial psychology, and various other fields. Proponents of this view argue that the basic concerns of management are the same, whether one is managing a private corporation or a public agency. That is, in either case, the manager must deal with issues of power and authority,

with issues of communication, and so forth. If this is the case, we should expect that lessons learned in one setting would be easily transferable to the other. More important, lessons learned in either setting would contribute to a general theory of organizations. For example, research on both the motivation of assembly line workers in the automobile industry and the effects of new incentive patterns in the public sector would contribute to a more general explanation of employee motivation.

Typically associated with the view that a generic study of administration should be undertaken is that the chief concern of such a study should be efficiency. In part, this concern grows out of the early relationship between science and business, which clearly emphasized the use of scientific principles to increase the productivity of the organization. This concern was soon voiced as well in the public sector; indeed, in an article often cited as inaugurating the field of public administration, Woodrow Wilson (1887), the future president, argued that such a study might permit the same gains in efficiency as those being made in the private sector. In any case, this viewpoint, proposing a generic study of organizations structured around an interest in making organizations more efficient, remains an important and perhaps even a dominant one among scholars of public administration, such as Herbert Simon and James Thompson.

Critics of the generic view of organization contend that, notwithstanding the implications of democratic political theory, there are important differences between public and private organizations (Allison, 1997; Bozeman, 1987; Rainey, 2003, Ch. 3; Stillman, 1996). For example, they note that government agencies are typically more interested in service than in production or profit and rely on legislative appropriations rather than markets for funding. Consequently, they argue that the purposes of government agencies are considerably more ambiguous than those of private industry and are usually stated in terms of service rather than profit or production. With goals that are more difficult to measure, they argue, government agencies are inherently limited in the degree of efficiency they can attain. Moreover, practitioners point out that the decision-making process in public agencies is pluralistic, and that not only must agency personnel be attentive to other factors in the environment but also their ability to act may be effectively preempted by decisions made elsewhere in the governance system. The requirement that government and its related organizations be responsive to the interests of the citizenry places obvious, although certainly proper, restrictions on the decision-making process. Finally, practitioners note that their actions occur much more in the public eye than those of their counterparts in industry. As the old saying goes, public administrators live in a goldfish bowl, their every movement scrutinized by an often-critical public.

As we will explore in Chapter 7, contemporary developments in public service and governance add an interesting wrinkle to the relationship between the political theory and generic management approaches. As more nongovernmental organizations, such as businesses, nonprofit organizations, and citizen groups, become involved not only in policy formulation but also service delivery, the conventional boundaries between public and private organizations are blurring. This raises interesting questions about the role of private organizations in the

political process and the implications of democratic political theory for them. So while public organizations may learn from the generic study of organizations and management, the concerns of democratic political theory are deeply relevant to management and generic organization theory today.

Moreover, conceptually, the intertwined relationship of means and ends discussed earlier also complicates the relationship between management and political theory. In other words, since there is not a hard and fast distinction between political goals (*what* we want to do) and administration techniques (*how* we do it), management and political theory, too, are bound up with and cannot do without one another. As mentioned earlier, when we forget this, we run the risk of viewing the public servants who implement policies as mere instruments or tools rather than as full human beings. This degrades the quality of organizational life and organizational effectiveness and threatens to turn public organizations into inhumane fields of interaction for both citizens and employees.

Public Administration as a Profession

Finally, there is the view that public administration is best viewed as a profession, like law or medicine, drawing from many theoretical perspectives. Dwight Waldo (1975, pp. 223–224), one of the most revered theorists in public administration, was especially vocal in promoting this viewpoint, drawing an analogy with the field of medicine: "There is no single, unified theory of illness or health, theories and the technologies based on them constantly change, there are vast unknowns, there is bitter controversy over medical questions of vital importance, the element of 'art' remains large and important. 'Health' proves, on close scrutiny, to be as undefinable as 'good administration.'" Yet in spite of the apparent lack of coherence in theory, medical schools purport to train professionals in the field of medicine and do so by drawing on the theoretical perspectives of many different disciplines. Similarly, one might argue that education for careers in public administration should follow a comparable strategy, with our being concerned less with the disciplinary background of certain ideas and techniques than with their applicability to problems administrators actually face. Given that no single discipline can currently provide the kind of knowledge needed by administrators in the public sector, we might hope that all disciplines would contribute what they can.

While viewing public administration as a profession is a very pragmatic approach to the issue, unfortunately this view, perhaps even more than the other views presented here, precludes the possibility that a theory of public organization will fully match the interests and concerns of practitioners. To say that public administrators must merely draw from theoretical perspectives developed within the context of such a traditional academic discipline as organizational analysis or political science is to say that public administrators must depend for guidance on theories not directly suited to their interests. From the standpoint of the administrator, political theory remains incomplete, for it leaves out essential concerns of management; similarly, organizational analysis is incomplete, for it leaves out a concern for democratic responsibility. In any case, the administrator is left with the theoretical problem of reconciling the two perspectives.

OTHER CONSTRAINTS ON THEORY

Before the scope of theories of public organization can be examined further, we note two other tendencies in public administration theory that have limited the range of questions entertained by the field, though we have already hinted at them.

Focusing on Large, Complex Organizations

First, most, although certainly not all, public administration theorists have focused their work primarily on large and complex organizations. Thus, definitions of the term *organization* have revolved around features most clearly associated with traditional bureaucratic structures. Organizations are said to be groups of people brought together to accomplish some purpose; they are seen as directing the activities of many individuals so that some particular goal can be achieved. In addition, the direction of these activities occurs through a series of authority relationships in which superiors and subordinates interact. Characteristically, in these relationships authority flows primarily from the top down. Bureaucratic organizations are also defined by their structure, or hierarchy, which results from dividing labor and clarifying authority relationships (so that each person has only one boss).

Although most definitions of *organization* developed by persons studying large and complex organizations involve some combination of these elements, it is possible to define *organization* in a more open-ended fashion. For example, Chester Barnard (1948, p. 73) described an organization as "a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons." Note that Barnard's definition not only expands the range of groups we might consider organizations but also suggests that we focus on coordinated activities rather than formal mechanisms. Although most of the theories reviewed in this book concentrate on large and complex organizations, the wide range of public agencies as well as profound changes in the contemporary nature of governance suggest that we be open to a less restrictive definition of our subject matter. Moreover, we should be aware that by taking attributes of large bureaucratic structures as defining characteristics of public organizations, we may unconsciously commit ourselves to a continuation of such structures. If public administration practitioners and theorists choose to study only bureaucratic organizations, they are far less likely to consider alternative modes of organization. Indeed, they may tend to try to fit other organizations into this model. (As we see later, there is a great advantage to being more flexible on this issue.)

Equating Public and Government Administration

Second, most, although again not all, public administration theorists have largely equated public administration with government administration—that is, with carrying out the mandates of government. Students of public administration have concentrated on those agencies formally a part of government: departments,

boards, and commissions at the local, state, and federal levels. Paul Appleby (1945, Ch. 1) argued that since "government is different" from private enterprise, public administration is different from business administration. As we discussed earlier, there certainly are reasons for thinking that the field of public administration can be differentiated from other, similar fields, but is this simply because it is attached to government? When those in public agencies are asked what they see as distinctive about their work, they tend to clearly distinguish their perception of their own work from their perception of work in private industry. For many administrators in this country, these opportunities and constraints do indeed set the world of public administration apart. However, there are signs that these features are not simply due to the fact that government is involved. One could certainly argue that less democratic political systems can be more precise in their objectives, less pluralistic in their decision-making processes, and more careless about openness or accountability. It is quite possible to conceive of totalitarian systems in which administrative activities would appear to have none of these distinguishing characteristics. In addition, many so-called private enterprises are today being increasingly thrust into the public arena as part of the governance process and are finding it necessary to modify traditional management practices. Many private and quasi-public organizations are more and more oriented toward service objectives. They carry out their efforts with increasing concern for the impact of uncertain environmental factors, and their operations are subjected to careful scrutiny by both government and the public.

This development suggests not that government and business are becoming more and more alike—which may be the case—but that *the degree of democratization to which an organization is committed determines the publicness of its management processes*. Those organizations that are committed to following an open, public process in the formatting *and* execution of policy will encounter the special opportunities and constraints that we associate with public organizations.

DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

In light of these matters, our point of view is that an approach to developing an integrative theory of public organizations should accomplish several things.

First, it should clarify the perspectives of earlier approaches to the field—the political, the generic, and the professional. Democratic political theory as typically described is concerned with the way in which public institutions promote societal values that have been defined and applied with a high degree of citizen involvement and with a high degree of responsiveness to the needs and interests of the citizenry. Democratic theory thus focuses on such issues as freedom, justice, and equality. Theories of organization, in contrast, are concerned with how individuals can manage change processes to their own or to corporate advantage, especially in large systems. Such theories focus on issues of power and authority, leadership and motivation, and the dynamics of groups in action. This book brings these perspectives together and, in doing so, complicates traditional

thinking about the relationship between politics and administration, means and ends, and the inside and outside of organizational life.

Second, an integrative theory of public organization should illuminate and make sense of the different ways of acquiring knowledge in and about public organizations. This book describes three major models of knowledge of acquisition—the rational, the interpretive, and the critical. Each approach considers sources of knowledge and the relationship of theory to practice in a distinctive manner, and these differences have important implications for organizational processes. Though we see a role for all forms of knowledge, we raise questions here about dominant model of knowledge acquisition and explore how it constrains human and organizational learning. In turn, we offer a way to think differently about how to connect different forms of formal and personal knowledge.

Third, an integrative theory of public organization should identify public administration as a *process* rather than as something that occurs within a particular type of structure (hierarchy, for example), organizational form, or societal sector (government, for example). This emphasis on public administration as a *process* rather than the particular work of a particular sector or institution complicates the familiar societal division of labor among government, market, and civil society. We can see public administration as occurring across different kinds of organizations and sectors.

Fourth and finally, such a theory should emphasize the *public quality of that process*. This is a significant point. As noted above, we can readily imagine many political systems that do not seek to incorporate democratic practices into their work. It is also easy to imagine many kinds of organizations—businesses, nonprofits, and governments—in *democratic* political systems being involved in the work of contemporary governance whose relationships among each other lack openness and transparency and whose own organizational processes treat their employees and clients poorly and disrespectfully. This third point emphasizes centrality of the public and democratic quality of the relationship among the many actors in public administration—both among collaborators in public service and within organizational boundaries.

Taking this all together, we argue that public administration is concerned with managing change processes in pursuit of publicly defined societal values. Such a definition of the field suggests that public administration is more than simply the conjunction of several other approaches to study and practice—that it contains an essential and indeed distinctive coherence of subject matter. This formulation would permit the development of theories of public administration rather than theories related to public administration. To the extent that we are able to define our subject matter in a distinctive way, we will be able to focus on the development of a coherent and integrated theory of public organization, one that fits with emerging trends in the governance process. Moreover, to the extent that our definition is relevant to contemporary administrative practice, it will be of considerably greater use to those active in the field than other theories that have thus far been proposed. Indeed, it will recognize the awkward complexity that characterizes the work of those in public service and the imperative for openness and mutual learning that marks the context of governance today.

Public administration is concerned with managing change processes in pursuit of publicly defined societal values.

This view of the practitioner implied here points to an individual sensitive to the impact of interpersonal and structural relationships on the development of stable or changing patterns of organizations—someone able to recognize and respond to the subtleties of organizational change processes. It also acknowledges that these practitioners stand in a special relationship to the formulation and elaboration of societal values—a relationship that provides an ethical basis for public organizational management. "The [practitioner] lives in the nexus of a political and an administrative world and therefore is neither an independent actor nor solely an instrument of the political system. In this singular position, [she] accepts, interprets, and influences the values which guide the application of skills and knowledge" (Denhardt & Nalbandian, 1980).

CONCLUSION

With these considerations in mind, we may now turn to some of the forces that have shaped our understanding of public organizations in modern society. As we have seen, all of us construct implicit theories that guide our actions in public organizations, and one way to focus our own theories more clearly and to improve their effectiveness as guides to action is to study formal theories of public administration. By doing so, we can test and reflect on our personal theories by comparing them with those of others and consider more carefully how our theories might help us as members or clients of public organizations. We can also aspire to better understand the various ways in which other people theorize their own experience in public organizations.

All of us construct implicit theories that guide our actions in public organizations.

The next several chapters examine how theorists and practitioners in public administration have sought to develop more formal perspectives on public organization and management. Although the contributions of such disciplines as political science and organizational analysis are noted, attention is focused on the works of those theorists who have consciously emphasized the study of public organizations and, in doing so, have formed the basis of the modern study of public administration.

Our discussion begins with a consideration of the broad significance of the study of public organizations for individuals in modern society. As the

discussion in this chapter has made clear, building a theory of public organization is not simply a matter of accumulating sets of techniques that can be applied to particular situations. To speak of the meaningfulness of our experiences or the impact that those experiences have on the values of society is to begin a much more complex study—one that suggests that we be attentive not only to empirical questions related to the management of change in complex systems but also to the larger social, political, and ethical contexts within which public organizations exist.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some strategies you might employ to learn about public organizations in a democratic society?
2. What are some questions you might ask in learning from case studies or the experiences of others?
3. What is the role of formal theory in learning about public organizations and democratic governance?
4. In what ways is working in public organizations different from working in the private sector?
5. How might definitions of "public administration" vary—and what difference would the variations make in the way we understand work in public organizations?

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The Intellectual Heritage

Marx, Weber, and Freud

Theorists of public organization, like other social theorists, must address themselves to a particular tradition of discourse, one that at least in part defines the nature of their work. The questions considered by earlier theorists must be accepted, reformulated, or shown to be irrelevant—and their omissions must be pointed out and corrected. Under all circumstances, theories must be adapted to the changing social and cultural circumstances of the times. Only in this way can theories claim to improve our understanding of life—in public organizations or elsewhere.

Obviously theorists focusing on public organizations must take into account previous works in public administration theory. They also must relate their work to the larger cultural and intellectual traditions of which that work is a part. If for no other reason than to justify that their study is an important one that addresses central human concerns, theorists of public organization must resist the temptation to take a very narrow or mechanical view of their topic. Like other social theorists, they must ask how their work fits with other cultural and intellectual efforts of their time and how it addresses the broadest questions regarding the human condition. To fail to do so may itself ensure that their studies have little relevance for the general advancement of humanity.

This chapter, therefore, takes the somewhat unusual, but nonetheless important, step of examining the works of three theorists—Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud—whose thinking defined the intellectual orientation of the Western world and whose writings presented some of the most articulate and influential statements on the quality of life in modern industrial society. Taken together, the efforts of these three theorists have substantially influenced the

direction of social theory over the past century, and although their work did not obviously influence the early development of the field of public administration, they established an agenda that all social theorists grapple with—whether they are conscious of it or not. For theorists and practitioners in public administration, the demand for relevance requires being attentive not just to technique but to broad social and cultural conditions. Thus, before more explicit theories of public organization are examined, the basic orientations of these thinkers and the ways in which they have influenced the development of modern social theory are reviewed. Moreover, we attempt to integrate their works into a critical standard by which specific works on organizational life might later be evaluated.

KARL MARX

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is, of course, best known for his critical analysis of the dynamics of capitalism and for establishing the theoretical basis for the expansion of socialism and communism in the twentieth century; in addition, his work provides an important and quite fundamental statement of the conditions of social life in modern industrial society. Marx expresses an intense concern for the restrictions that the development of modern institutions places on the development of human capabilities. As we saw dramatically illustrated by events in Eastern Europe and the former communist bloc during the early 1990s, Marx's work has obvious flaws as a prediction of historical developments in the twentieth century. However, his analysis of the impact of modern industrial organization on individual development remains one of the most important and influential statements on this topic.

Hegel to Marx

Marx's efforts are based in large part on Hegel's view of history as the unfolding of reason and of the freedom that reason implies. According to this view, existing circumstances, seen as passing phases in the evolution of freedom, must be removed in order to ensure the continued extension of reason and freedom. The present is compelling, however, in the sense that it occupies our attention, thereby diverting us from the task of expanding freedom. For this reason, the present is more important for what it conceals than for what it reveals.

The task of social theory becomes one of unmasking the false appearances generated in the present in order to permit expanded freedom in the future. It is through the act of critique that we exceed the limits of the present and permit the possibilities of the future. To demonstrate the way in which ideas would play themselves out in the development of reason, Hegel employed a dialectical approach that sees ideas as being produced in a continuous process of conflict and conciliation. In its classic exposition (though one from which Hegel often departed), the dialectic involves an original idea, a *thesis*, countered by its opposite, the *anti-thesis*, or *antithesis*. The interaction of thesis and antithesis culminates

in a *synthesis*, not merely a compromise between the two opposing ideas but an advancement beyond them. The synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis, which is opposed by an antithesis, and so on. Accordingly, the development of ideas occurs through a process in which conflict is central.

Marx's specific contribution was to connect Hegel's understanding of dialectical processes to the historical and empirical analysis of different forms of social and economic organization, or "modes of production." This view is called "historical materialism." These modes of production are aimed at satisfying basic material needs—such as food, shelter, and clothing—that are essential for sustaining human life, and each establishes a set of social relationships for the distribution and exchange of goods and services. Over time, both the technical and social dimensions of these modes of production change. For Marx, these socioeconomic forces of production are fundamental to the development of human societies. They make up the "base" on which society rests. Political, legal, artistic, religious, and other phenomena are secondary and are, in large measure, reflections of the "superstructure" for those primary socioeconomic relationships. In this way, the consciousness of any age reflects the basic forces or modes of production that lie at its heart. Each individual and each society develops its own understanding of the world, but this understanding is conditioned by the social and economic circumstances that characterize the particular epoch and the historical forces that gave rise to it. As Marx (McLellan, 2000, p. 329) famously put it, human beings "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."

Division of Labor, Class Conflict, and Class Consciousness

Marx (Tucker, 1978, p. 699) saw historical change as largely a consequence of contending economic forces that result in conflicts between economic classes: "All history is the history of class struggles." For example, the dialectical relationship between the ancient slave societies and the emergence of feudalism eventually gave way to the development of capitalism. Later, in Marx's view, the conflict between capitalism and socialism would lead to communism.

The possibility of class relationships and class conflict emerges when the tasks of production start being divided among various workers and specialization begins. For Marx, the first such division of labor was between material and intellectual work, though he emphasizes the importance, too, of the sexual division of labor among men and women in the household. With the division of labor, individuals are required to do only one kind of work in order to survive. One type of work is given to one group of people, and another kind of work to another. There is "fixation of social activity" (McLellan, 2000, p. 185), and social classes form around these various types of work. While the modern mind sees the division of labor as natural and as producing "efficiencies" in the economy, Marx argues that such specialization encourages people—especially those engaged in intellectual, managerial, and artistic labor—to neglect their connection to material socioeconomic realities and to unequally distribute these meaningful and creative activities. Invariably, one

group of workers becomes dominant and one type of work accrues to it undue social prestige and material advantage.

Because Marx saw an intimate connection between the human condition and the process of production, the development of the division of labor was disconcerting, though he did join Adam Smith (1976) in acknowledging the impressive economic forces it unleashed. Marx saw each individual as possessing certain natural capacities, "natural powers, vital powers," comparable to instincts. At the same time, however, he saw the individual as a "suffering, conditioned, and limited creature," dependent on outside forces for sustenance (Tucker, 1978, p. 115). Since the objects of our instincts lie outside, we must, according to Marx, engage in an attempt to control the outside world in such a way that it serves our interests—"The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy [our] needs" (Tucker, 1978, p. 156). Thus, in the most basic sense, people are defined by the work they do. So, to the extent that we become "fixed" in narrow, restricted activities, we are limited in what we can be and the lives we are able to lead.

The Problem of Change

Marx was also interested in understanding why people seem to put up with these conditions. He offered a highly influential and important answer to this question. Those in dominant economic positions seek to reproduce and sustain their positions. Importantly for this purpose, the groups who control means of production also have substantial influence over the dissemination of knowledge through society (through the superstructure and, for example, the media) and, by virtue of this influence, may be said to direct the consciousness of the society. Those ideas consistent with the interests and perspectives of the dominant class will be dominant: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas …" (McLellan, 2000, p. 192). As a result, many members of society come to adopt a consciousness or worldview that may be contradictory to their own material interests and that serves to reinforce their subordinate class position. Workers, for example, may come to believe that their work should contribute to the accumulation of private property by others, whom they may see as more fortunate and even more deserving. As such, ruling groups are able to reproduce their dominance in subtle ways.

Capitalism, Industrial Organization, and Individual Development

Though Marx was interested in understanding the historical development of human societies, as we have indicated already he was especially concerned with applying this materialist view of history to an analysis of the conditions of modern capitalism.

For Marx, capitalist societies are based on a particularly volatile, dominating relationship between two classes, the capitalists, or bourgeoisie, and the workers, or proletariat. Here a minority group, the capitalists, owns the means of production and is able to accumulate profits from the surplus production of the mass of

proletariat. The accumulation of profit by the owners occurs only with a corresponding impoverishment of the workers. Those who own land and capital are interested in personal profit and provide workers with only those wages necessary to continue their production. The individual worker's contribution to the productive process is expropriated by those in a position of dominance to increase their own gain. The struggle between the capitalist and the worker over wages and profits is, of course, one in which the owners of capital have a distinct advantage.

In the dialectical movement of economic processes in modern society, the forces of capitalist production seem to require an increasingly complex and oppressive mode of organization to sustain and reproduce themselves. This is epitomized in bureaucratic capitalism. Under bureaucratic capitalism, the division of labor is taken to an extreme. The individual's work is assimilated into the production of standard units, which no longer bear the stamp of the individual. Unlike the craftsperson, who can point with pride to the product of his or her labor and consider it a unique contribution, the assembly line worker treats a passing object in only a certain routine way. In this process, the quality of the work is no longer important; only the quantity matters, and to that quantified production, the individual's labor merely adds a twist here or a turn there.

Given these conditions, Marx made two key observations about the nature of the division of labor in capitalism. First, while specialization itself is not at all unique to capitalism, capitalism harnesses the creative power of humans' ability to coordinate their work activities and places it under the domination of a single group, the capitalists. Innovation in economic production and the division of labor simply become new ways to dominate labor: "[A]ll methods for raising the social productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer …" (McLellan, 2000, p. 520). Second, we no longer see the product of our labor as an expression of our own creativity, our own personality; rather, we view the product as simply an object existing apart from us, and we come to view the work process itself in an objective fashion, as standing apart from us. In doing so, we become *alienated* or estranged from our work in the way Marx (Tucker, 1978, p. 74) describes:

> The fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that, in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home.

Even more important, if we are defined by the work we do, yet that work is taken from us and made into an object, then we are separated from our own sense of self. We are alienated not only from the specific work processes in which we engage but also from a basic part of being human beings. No longer do we work to satisfy our most basic human need to produce. Instead, we see work as something to be avoided whenever possible. We work only because we have to—because we need the money or are forced to work. Our waged labor is

involuntary. We come to treat work as something we do in order to supply other satisfactions. Work is no longer an end in itself but only a means to an end.

We are alienated from our work and ourselves, and because labor is an inherently *social* process, we are also alienated from one another. As our work becomes increasingly detached and objectified, as we come to view our work in instrumental terms, we also recognize others as mere objects in our instrumental world. As this orientation affects more and more interactions, those interactions become devoid of human qualities and are better described in the language of the machine, the chief metaphor of industrial processes. As we see ourselves as objects in a system of production, we see others in the same way, and the distance between ourselves and others increases. In sum, bureaucratic capitalism creates conditions in which our alienation from our work, ourselves, and others is inevitable.

That we continue to submit to such a situation is in part the result of our domination by others, those who control the means of production and the means of cultural reproduction. For very practical reasons, the slave must submit to the master, the worker to the manager. But, as suggested above, our submission may be even more subtle. Our condition of confinement and alienation is accompanied by a particular form of ideological justification that portrays the existing situation as the way things are supposed to be, as a natural order in which some are to lead and others to serve, some are to be rich and others poor. To the extent that we become captive to this ideology or consciousness, we do not question the circumstances under which we live. Although we may occasionally complain about working conditions or the amount of our pay, we may fail to address the underlying condition of domination and exploitation that is the basis of our suffering.

According to Karl Marx, the forces of production seem to require an increasingly complex and oppressive mode of organization, in which individuals suffer increasing alienation and depersonalization.

Social Theory as an Impetus to Action

Yet we do suffer. Occasionally our suffering is so clearly revealed to us that we are compelled to act, and social theory is intended as a force that inspires that action. The task of social theory, Marx suggested, is to reveal to us how our understanding of our present conditions has been clouded by ideology and other forms of mystification, to illustrate the conditions of domination that limit us, and to point the way toward greater individual and collective freedom and possibility. These conditions are examined in light of larger historical processes and of the individual's potential for greater autonomy and responsibility in the future. Critique leads to action.

This last point is of particular importance. The critical social theory that Marx devised in an attempt to help us understand the limits of personal and social freedom in a complex society also demands that we take action to alter our situation. The connection between reflection and action, between theory and practice, is very close. A theoretical knowledge of the actual conditions under which we live reveals so much that we are compelled to act to improve our circumstances. Knowledge of the limits that society has placed on us is so striking that we must respond. Theory and practice become one, a connection described by Marx with the Greek term *praxis*. Through praxis, we engage in critical reflection on our own situation and that of our society to reveal the basis of social domination and the suffering it promotes; then, recognizing the reality of our situation (moving beyond our false consciousness), we are compelled to act to increase our sense of autonomy and responsibility, both for ourselves and for our society.

MAX WEBER

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), although best known to students of public administration for his analysis of rational bureaucracy, has had a broad and profound impact on the social sciences. Weber envisioned a sociology that would combine a concern for objectivity with an understanding of the meaning of human action for those involved—a combination extremely difficult to achieve. Indeed, Weber struggled with this issue through many of his works, and his interpreters have taken widely differing positions based on their understanding of this issue. In any case, of the three writers whose works are examined in this chapter, Weber has clearly had the most direct impact on theories of public organization, although even his influence was felt fairly late in the development of the field. For this reason, his work and its extensions are studied here in some detail.

Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic

Weber's most famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), examines the relationship between social thought and economic action, specifically with reference to Calvinist Protestantism and capitalist economic life. In contrast to Marx's emphasis on the relationship between economic conditions and patterns of social change, Weber acknowledged that change could be propelled by other forces—for example, tradition or belief. Importantly, these forces were not necessarily tied to the class position of the individual; indeed, one could argue that they cut across class relationships. Therefore, according to Weber, the interests expressed in changing societies are not merely economic; they relate as well to the world of ideas and ideals.

As an example, Weber argued that the belief in predestination was so disconcerting to followers of Calvin that they sought a kind of "loophole" in their destiny, a way of ensuring that they would be among the elect who enter the state of

grace. The loophole they developed was "earthly success," which they saw as a sign of heavenly favor and assurance of their place among God's chosen, and they diligently sought to extend their holdings. The result, according to Weber, was an accumulation of capital and an entrenchment of the capitalist system unparalleled elsewhere. In this case, a system of belief propelled an economic system rather than vice versa.

Although Weber, as a social scientist, did not endorse any one economic system, he was careful to point out that from the perspective of technical rationality (i.e., formal efficiency), the capitalist dependence on private ownership, managerial control of the means of production, and reliance on competitive pricing in the marketplace were clearly at an advantage. Especially in contrast to socialist systems of planning, Weber saw capitalism as maintaining the capacity to calculate in formal terms the most rational (efficient) organization of the productive mechanism. Not that Weber glossed over the possible detrimental effects of such a system, especially with respect to individual creativity and personal development—capitalism and the type of rationality it represented were mixed blessings, capable of tremendous material advances but at odds with a concern for individual prerogative.

Rationalization of Social Theory: The Notion of the "Ideal Type"

There is an interesting connection between Weber's work on the Protestant ethic and his later work on rational bureaucracy. Weber contrasted the ascetic approach to life that seemed to characterize the modern age—and which he seemed to prefer himself—with the mystical spirit he saw elsewhere. To the ascetic, experiences were generally seen as means to ends; for example, Calvinists worked in order to ensure their salvation. The mystic, instead, seemed to appreciate experiences as ends in themselves. The question of whether human action, including human labor, is best seen in instrumental terms, as a means to an end, lies at the heart of Weber's analysis of the rationalization of society.

But to understand Weber's formulation of this question, we must first understand his approach to the development of social theory. Although Weber was interested in establishing the legitimacy of an objective social science, he was also well acquainted with the special considerations that differentiate the work of the social scientist from that of the natural scientist. He felt that objectivity in the social sciences could be achieved through procedures designed to eliminate personal prejudice in the research process. Although science can tell us what is, it cannot, in his view, tell us what ought to be. Although science can assess the likelihood that given actions will move us efficiently toward our objectives, it cannot say what those objectives should be. These questions need to be addressed in quite a different forum and must be carefully eliminated from research. But Weber also recognized that values do play a part in social science, with respect both to the way in which the values of individual social actors influence social relationships and to the way in which the social scientist selects those topics that are of greatest interest or significance. Clearly, all actors bring to their interactions with others preferences and concerns that affect their behavior; it is

futile to attempt to understand action without reference to the meanings held by the actors involved. The social scientist, then, unlike the natural scientist, must be constantly aware of the way in which cultural values manifest themselves in the activities of individuals. Moreover, since the social scientist is also a social actor, the scientist's own values influence both the topic to be studied and the boundaries of the study itself. In large measure, the social scientist makes these decisions based on an estimation of the cultural significance of the particular subject to be investigated. The topics of importance to a particular society are those that will most likely be given attention by social scientists. Sociology, according to Weber, is "a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences" (Giddens, 1947, p. 328). The sociologist is interested in how interacting subjects constitute structures of meaning that in turn guide future action.

This issue has important implications for the conduct of social science because, although the social scientist seeks objective explanations of the phenomena under investigation, those explanations need not be of the same order as those of the natural scientist. Indeed, what distinguishes the search for explanation in the social realm is not the comprehensiveness of one's theoretical perspective but rather the capacity of explanations to help one understand the uniqueness of human undertakings. We seek to understand those aspects of our lives that strike us as somehow out of the ordinary. Even if we seek general theoretical frameworks, we do so in order to understand what is unique.

This point leads directly to Weber's notion of the "ideal type" as a way of formulating social understanding. Through the elaboration of ideal types, according to Weber, social scientists can provide an objective analysis of the impact of social events on individuals and societies. The ideal type is not ideal in a normative sense; it does not suggest that a particular social configuration is desirable and should be pursued. Rather, the ideal type is an abstraction and elaboration of a particular set of elements whose combination imparts a special cultural significance. As such, the ideal type is more than just a description of a set of events; indeed, it may never have existed in an empirical sense. Yet it is of conceptual importance in that it contains an explanation and interpretation of a significant component of social reality. Importantly, however, the ideal type grows out of an interest in specific and definable problems.

Ideal-Type Bureaucracy

Most familiar to students of public administration, of course, is Weber's analysis of the ideal-type bureaucracy, a discussion that occurs in the context of a larger examination of patterns of social domination. Weber argued that every system of authority must establish and secure a belief in its legitimacy, but that this may be done in many different ways. Variations will occur with respect to the kind of legitimacy claimed, the kind of obedience sought, the kind of administrative staff supporting the authority, and the way in which authority is exercised. Specifically, Weber identified three "pure types" of legitimate authority: (1) legal authority, based on a belief in the legality of certain patterns or rules and in the

right of those in positions of legal authority to issue commands; (2) traditional authority, based on a belief in the importance of enduring traditions and those who rule within such traditions; and (3) charismatic authority, based on an emotional attachment or devotion to a specific individual.

Legal authority, which depends on the establishment of legal norms within a group and the agreement of members of the group to be bound by the legal system, is exercised through a bureaucratic administrative staff. Weber's (1947) discussion of the pure type of legal authority with the employment of a bureaucratic administrative staff outlines the central characteristics of bureaucratic organization. In this form, officials operate according to the following criteria:

1. They are personally free and are subject to authority only with respect to their impersonal official obligations.
2. They are organized in a clearly defined hierarchy of offices.
3. Each office has a clearly defined sphere of competence in the legal sense.
4. The office is filled by a free contractual relationship. Thus, in principle, there is free selection.
5. Candidates are selected on the basis of technical qualifications. In the most rational case, these qualifications are tested by examination, guaranteed by diplomas certifying technical training, or both. Candidates are appointed, not elected.
6. They are remunerated by fixed salaries in money, for the most part with a right to pensions. Only under certain circumstances does the employing authority, especially in private organizations, have a right to terminate the appointment, but in addition to this criterion, the responsibility of the position and the requirements of the incumbent's social status may be taken into account.
7. The office is treated as the sole, or at least the primary, occupation of the incumbent.
8. The office constitutes a career. Promotion is based on seniority, achievement, or both and depends on the judgment of superiors.
9. Officials work entirely separated from ownership of the means of administration and without appropriation of their positions.
10. They are subject to strict and systematic discipline and control in the conduct of the office. (p. 328)

Weber pointed out that bureaucratic organization may be applied equally well in a number of different settings. Although the term *bureaucracy* is most often applied to government agencies, this form of organization is also found in business organizations, voluntary associations, and even religious institutions. Bureaucratic organization is so attractive because it appears to be the most efficient approach to controlling the work of large numbers of people in pursuit of given objectives. Weber (1947, pp. 333–334) put it this way: "Experience tends universally to show that the purely bureaucratic type of administration … is,

from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings." Because bureaucratic organization provides exacting structures of authority within which commands may be transmitted, it allows a degree of "calculability of results" for those in positions of authority (p. 337).

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>
> —Max Weber

Expansion of Bureaucracy

Given the complexity of modern society, Weber saw the expansion of bureaucratic systems to all spheres of human activity as the single most important development in the modern world. Businesses, governments, churches, all seem to organize around the same principles, which emphasize the exercise of authority through hierarchical structures. This development, according to Weber, although stimulated by the rise of capitalist systems, is not restricted to such systems. Indeed, Weber noted that socialist systems may require an even higher degree of bureaucratization than capitalist systems in order to provide a stable economic life. "Bureaucratic administration is, other things being equal, always, from a formal, technical point of view, the most rational type. For the needs of mass administration today, it is completely indispensable. The choice is only that between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration" (Weber, 1947, p. 337).

It is difficult to determine whether Weber's analysis of bureaucratic administration constitutes an endorsement of this mode of organization or whether his presentation is more a warning of the inevitable consequences of increasing bureaucratization. Herbert Marcuse (1968, pp. 223–224) has argued the former—that Weber's critical analysis ultimately turns into "apologetics" that are quite favorable to the extension of capitalist domination through bureaucratic mechanisms. Marcuse sees in Weber a melding of formal and substantive rationality, in the sense that the technical requirements of continued capitalist expansion come to displace a concern for some larger concept of reason, such as that associated with notions of freedom, justice, and equality. Most important is Marcuse's argument that Weber sees the increasing rationalization of modern life as the "fate" of modern human beings, thus implying its inevitability. Such a viewpoint strikes Marcuse as excessively deterministic, failing to recognize that conditions that have been socially and historically constructed can be reconstructed through

reasoned and aggressive human action. For Weber to argue that the inevitable future of mankind lies in our submission to rigid, disciplined, bureaucratic orders hardly provides the impetus for efforts to work out a more satisfactory relationship between the individual and the organization.

Weber, however, was not unmindful of the negative consequences of bureaucratic organization, either the complaints of red tape and inefficiency or the more enduring sociological consequences of extended formalistic impersonality. Weber's formulation may be read as an ideal type pointing out those features of the social landscape that uniquely influence the development of society, both positively and negatively. In this respect, at least according to some analysts, Weber was entertaining essentially the same question that occupied Marx: the increasing limitation of the human spirit under conditions of rapidly expanding bureaucratic regulation. However, Wolfgang J. Mommsen (1974), an observer more sympathetic to Weber, argued that Weber was deeply worried about the implications of modern industrial capitalism and its bureaucratic "iron cage." This cage would severely constrain human potential, and its pervasiveness and power across all areas of social life would leave the individual with little space and hope for changing things.

The only possible escape, in Weber's work, from the pattern of increasing social regulation lies in his hope that charismatic leaders might emerge in positions to control the otherwise enduring systems of bureaucratic administration. The charismatic leader is one to whom followers have an emotional attachment, one with a certain presence or ability to inspire followers to greater endeavors. But charismatic leadership is not simply inspirational; it is creative as well. Such leadership provides a spark that permits societies to grow and to develop. Indeed, it was Weber's dream that through the direct democratic choice of charismatic leaders, societies might finally be able to transcend the limitations of bureaucratic regulation.

SIGMUND FREUD

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was among the first, and certainly the most well-known, theorists to emphasize the notion of the unconscious in the pursuit of a healthier mental attitude. But Freud did much more: He developed an understanding of the life of groups, organizations, and societies. We focus here on this more global interpretation of Freud's work; however, to comprehend this work, we must start with some basic concepts of psychoanalysis.

The Conscious and Unconscious Minds

Earlier in this chapter, we saw how Marx showed that the world may not be as simple as it may appear. Complex social processes may be driven by economic relations that are out of sight or, because of the influence of dominant ideas, out of mind. Without understanding these underlying relations, we do not understand our conditions as well as we might and are in a weak position to change them. Freud's discovery of the unconscious makes a similar claim: Though we

may think our conscious mind, or ego, is in the driver's seat, in fact, our waking life is guided by unconscious desires and repressed memories that are, like Marx's economic base, out of sight and the conscious mind.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory begins with the straightforward supposition that the individual seeks certain pleasures or gratifications but that relatively few of these wishes can be fulfilled. Individuals also often push bad memories or unpleasant thoughts out of their conscious minds. There are many things we would rather not think about. When the unfulfilled wishes and unpleasant thoughts of the individual are denied, they are repressed into the unconscious, where they remain hidden and unrecognizable but capable of great influence over the individual's development and everyday life.

The repression of wishes that cannot be fulfilled creates the greatest discomfort for us, and often they sabotage our own conscious wishes to lead happy and fulfilling lives. Freud (1955) writes:

> We have come to the conclusion, from working with hysterical patients and other neurotics, that they have not fully succeeded in repressing the idea to which the incompatible wish is attached. They have, indeed, driven it out of consciousness and out of memory and apparently saved themselves a great amount of psychic pain, but, in the unconscious, the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active, and finally succeeds in sending into consciousness, instead of the repressed idea, a disguised and unrecognizable surrogate-creation, to which the same painful sensations associate themselves. (p. 27)

Freud's point in this passage is worth drawing out more explicitly. He is saying that the wishes and thoughts that we repress into the unconscious mind return into our lives but they return in different forms, so we do not recognize them for what they are.

Freudian psychoanalysis identifies several ways in which the conscious mind, the ego, avoids or defends against these unconscious desires and makes them hard to recognize. The ego may engage in *displacement*, which entails varying the object choice by substituting a new choice for the original. For example, if you have just had a discussion with your supervisor who has asked you to take on a new project, you might be angry with her without realizing it, feeling that she does not know how much you have on your plate already. When the phone rings and your spouse asks you to pick up dinner on the way home, you get angry. Here, you have "taken out" or displaced your anger about your supervisor onto your spouse. Another way that the ego relates is through *projection*. This is when we externalize an internal wish, desire, or feeling. A common form of projection is when we put negative feelings or attitudes about ourselves onto another person that we "just don't like." Frequently, organizational and public life is organized around "others" or enemies. Though these projections can help to allay group or individual anxiety, they can often lead to tragic consequences (Adams & Balfour, 2009, pp. 24–25).

A third technique is *reaction formation* in which we replace a desired object with its opposite. This is evident in people who sometimes demonstrate patently

hypocritical behavior, for example, public officials who have a record of being against homosexual behavior but, later, might be shown to have engaged in precisely that behavior. Finally, there is *fixation* or *regression*. This involves stopping development at a particular stage or, in fact, regressing to an earlier stage in our personal development. A common form of regression is retreating into the "child" position, which is often expressed as helplessness or the desire for someone else, such as a parent, to resolve or take care of difficult situation.

Though the unconscious is not visible or directly accessible, it leaves many clues for us to investigate further, if we are alert enough to spot them. Spotting and interpreting them is largely what the process of psychoanalytic therapy involves—the investigation of clues revealed through the interaction between patient and therapist. The relationship between the therapist and the patient is initiated because the patient vaguely recognizes some personal problem. Often they are in some kind of emotional pain or find their life to be affectively flat and unfulfilling. But neither the therapist nor the patient knows exactly what the problem is, much less its source or its likely cure. However, both can use certain clues to begin to recover and discuss a portion of the patient's life history that has formerly been concealed. Other clues may emerge as the therapist develops an interpretation of the symbols provided in the patient's dreams or in free association. Still other clues may reveal themselves in the patient's personal peculiarities—behaviors such as forgetfulness and slips of the tongue. These clues may be taken as symptomatic of certain conditions lying beneath the surface of the patient's behavior and conscious intentions.

The role of the therapist is to trace the symptoms revealed in the outer world back to the repressions they represent in the inner world, then to work with the patient toward a more satisfactory resolution than that provided by the mechanisms of repression. The interpretation provided by the therapist, therefore, is designed to restore a part of the individual's repressed history—to connect the dots, so to speak, between the conscious mind and the unconscious—in such a fashion that allows the patient to live their life in a less personally and interpersonally destructive manner.

Understanding the Behavior and Impact of Group Psychology

Although he concentrated initially on the therapeutic role of psychoanalysis, later in his life Freud began to examine more closely the implications of his work for understanding social groups and even entire cultural systems. In his work on group psychology, Freud discussed the "unconscious life of the group"—those patterns or relationships that lie beneath the surface of a group's existence but influence the work of that group in direct but often unexplainable ways. He began by noting that the behavior of the group is often quite at odds with the behavior one might expect from a collection of rational adults, appearing to be based more on regressive, childlike impulses. Some primitive or instinctual force seems to drive the group beyond the normal bounds of logic or explanation. The "mind" of the group can be erratic, impulsive, chaotic, and confused. "A group is extraordinarily credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and

the improbable does not exist for it," Freud (1955, p. 28) wrote. "It thinks in images, which call one another up by association … and whose agreement with reality is never checked by a reasonable function. The feelings of the group are always very simple and very exaggerated, so that a group knows neither doubt nor uncertainty."

Nowhere is the confusion of the group more apparent than in the relationship between the group and its leader. Members of groups are highly desirous of leadership, hoping to find someone who can help them to achieve the fulfillment of their desires; the leader is seen as one who can actualize the fantasy of the group. But leaders and groups operate in an environment that is not theirs to control, so the leader will inevitably be forced—by the realities of his or her situation—to come up with either less or more than the group desires. Moreover, leaders often have their own ideas about the direction the work of the group should take, and these ideas may not be at all consistent with the desires of the group's members. In either case, the leader inevitably fails in the eyes of the group and thus (at least symbolically) earns their hatred. Leaders must then live with the special guilt that the group assigns them, being at once the object of the group's envy as well as its scorn.

Freud himself illustrated the relationship between the leader and the group through the "scientific myth" of the primal horde. This myth imagines a time when a father ruled over several brothers who simultaneously respected and feared their father. When their fear and hatred of their father became unbearable, they banded together to murder him, an act that led to extraordinary guilt on their part. After living for a while in a fatherless, leaderless world, one of the brothers emerged as the leader, but only after assuming responsibility for the murder of the father and correspondingly assuming a massive burden of guilt.

Of course, this myth contains an analogy to the individual's struggle to overcome the influence of the father figure, the reality-enforcing authority in his or her life. But we can also speculate that social groups and social organizations develop in a similar way. As groups form in an attempt to control a part of the world around them, whether the natural or the social world, they inevitably do damage to that world, for which they must assume a certain amount of guilt. But as the leader of the group begins to speak for and be identified with the group, the group members can shift their own guilt to the leader. Then, recognizing the evil of the leader and the guilt the leader bears, the group can only recoil against him or her, thus creating an inevitable tension between the leader and the group. As this tension is repressed into the unconscious mind of the group, it creates patterns that are inexplicable on the surface but nonetheless control the group's behavior.

Groups and organizations, in this view, appear as much more significant to the personal and psychological development of the individual than might first appear. Individuals use groups and organizations not only to accomplish established ends but also to serve as direct sources of need gratification—to provide a sense of security, a defense against the vagaries of an uncertain world. "Many of the organizations we invent, the controls we accept in everyday life, are not so much constructive attempts to solve our problems as defenses against our own lightly buried primitive impulses" (Rice, 1965, p. 84).

This point is extremely important, for it suggests that complex organizations can never be viewed apart from their role in the development of the individual. The organization is not simply an instrument or a technique to be used by an individual or a group and then passed on to someone else; rather, the group, the organization, is itself integral to the development of the person—a direct purveyor of influence and values, of hopes and aspirations, of dreams and desires. In turn, the developmental processes of the individual are integral to the development of the group and the organization. To neglect one is to neglect the other. The individual's relationships to the group, the organization, and ultimately the society itself are critical to an understanding of the human condition.

Individual Autonomy and Cultural Constraints

Freud was well aware of this, and in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1961), he directed his critical insights toward an examination of the impact of civilization on the possibilities for human satisfaction. At its base, civilization implies constraint, the requirement that individuals give up a part of their own autonomy and submit to the restrictions of the group. Although we recognize that we can never be completely happy living a social life, we are attracted to the sense of security and solidarity that the culture seems to provide. This creates a basic tension between the efforts of individuals to achieve some expression of their individuality and the efforts of the culture to achieve compliance and order. Freud (1961, p. 43) indicated the pervasiveness of this tension: "A good part of the struggles of mankind center round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation—one, that is, that will bring happiness—between this claim of the individual [for autonomy] and the cultural claims of the group."

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>
> —Sigmund Freud

As long as we live and work together, we cannot escape the ambivalence of our relationship with our culture. Again, we find the juxtapositions of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, which Freud discussed in terms of an instinct toward life and an instinct toward destruction and self-destruction. We seek life through civilization and the unity and continuity it represents. Freud (1961, p. 69) remarked that our "inclination to aggression is an original, self-sustaining instinctual disposition in man, and … it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization." We are left with the conclusion that civilization represents a massive struggle between conflicting forces in the human condition.

We can see, then, that social and organizational life presents a fundamental paradox. As Marx put it, we are "suffering, conditioned, and limited creature[s],"

dependent on the outside world for the satisfaction of our desires (Tucker, 1978, p. 115). Moreover, our primary sense of self and its place in the world are not freely chosen but also come from outside us through our parents, teachers, and early childhood experiences. In a basic sense, then, who we are and what we desire actually are delivered onto us by others. Yet at the same time, we long for something that is uniquely and singularly ours. However, as Freud pointed out, our culture, it seems, can only thwart this desire, limiting our freedom and independence. Consequently, we face an increasingly restrictive social world, one that provides the outward symbols of status and reward but at the same time prevents expressions of our individuality. For us to grow as individuals requires that we act creatively to mold the world to our desires and, ultimately, that we transcend the limitations of that world and the identities imposed on us. But the creative expression of the individual personality is exactly what our organizational society seems to fear most. And as Freud's discussion of the development of groups suggests, it is not only the individual that suffers in this process but our organizations and society as a whole as well.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

How might we be guided in our study of public organizations by the insights of Marx, Weber, and Freud? Certainly, any commentary their works might provide would be indirect, for the study of public organizations was hardly the central task of any of the three. However, from their collective work may be derived certain insights that can enable us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the role of public organizations in our lives. In the work of Marx, Weber, and Freud, we begin to see some common themes that may guide our own study of life in public organizations—hints at a view of public organizations that puts our involvement in such organizations into perspective.

Clearly, all three theorists see the primary task of modern man as one of finding an effective relationship between the individual and the society. More specifically, given the complexity and the consequent rationalization of society, Marx, Weber, and Freud depict the individual as engaged in a struggle with the forces of organization in society, especially those forces represented by large and complex bureaucracies, both public and private. The study of public organizations in this book involves a similar analysis, although different terms may be used to describe the relationship between the individual and the organization—terms such as *management styles* and *client relationships*. We too must try to place in perspective the crucial relationship of the individual, the organization, and the society.

The central message of Marx, Weber, and Freud for our study may be that, more than anything else today, we need a perspective for understanding the world and our place in it—a perspective cognizant of the impact of complex organizations on our lives yet not bound by it. Perhaps they intended to argue exactly this—that our personal and collective survival depends on our developing both a basic intelligence and a sense of compassion as we live and work in a society of large and complex organizations.

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Controlling Our Environment

Why would we want to develop such a perspective? What purposes might be served by our acquiring such knowledge? One reason might be to control our physical or our social environment to our own advantage. For example, we seek knowledge of energy sources in order to provide heat, to protect ourselves against one of the threats that our environment presents. We seek knowledge of weather conditions and drainage patterns in low-lying areas in order to protect ourselves against another threat. Similarly, if we know how people will react to certain situations that we can change, we can begin to alter their behavior. For example, if we know that an individual's motivation to work is affected by enhanced prestige, we can behave in such a way as to produce a result. In this case, we seek knowledge to explain causal relationships, to predict outcomes, and to control behavior. Indeed, this kind of control can bring to us both material and psychological satisfaction.

Seeking knowledge for purposes of control means that we are most interested in instrumental statements—statements that suggest the proper means toward a given end. If our objective is to achieve greater production, we want to know what steps we can take to lead to that result. This knowledge, of course, does little to tell us which objectives we should be seeking unless those objectives are conceived simply as means themselves toward some larger objective; but such knowledge can be used effectively in moving toward already established goals or objectives.

Finally, the analyses of Marx and Freud pose important questions for the relationship between knowledge and control. As they both argue, what appear to be self-evident, "rational" ends may often be pursued in the advance of some other purpose. People in organizations, for instance, often pursue unconscious desires even as they purport to act rationally, and as we will consider in Chapter 5, humanistic approaches to organizational life that seek to enhance worker satisfaction can also serve the ends of more subtle managerial and technical control. In turn, this prompts each of us, again, to ask about *which* objectives we are asked to pursue in organizations and *how* those objectives were decided upon.

Interpreting the Intentions of Others

Control, however, is not the only purpose served by knowledge. We may also seek knowledge in order to understand or interpret the intentions of others. In this view, we comprehend the actions of individuals as having specific meanings to those individuals and as being based on those meanings—that is, we find that all action occurs within the framework of the intentions of individual actors.

To understand what is happening in any situation, we must not only observe the behavior of the individual but also understand the motives or intentions that support the individual's action. Some theorists use the term *behavior* to refer to what can be observed from the outside and the term *action* to refer to what is intended by the individual. In such a formulation, it is clear that an individual's behavior as viewed by others can be far different from what he or she intends. Recall our discussion of John and Carol in Chapter 1, in which we noted that our perspective significantly affects our perceptions.

If we wish to understand the intentions of others, the meanings they attach to certain activities, we must do more than describe their behavior. We must interpret their actions; that is, we must seek to understand their intentions in acting. We seek *interpretive* statements, those that allow us to comment on the meaning and significance people place on their actions. We ask, what was the point? What was he or she trying to do? Through the act of interpretation, we achieve understanding. Interpretation allows us to reconstruct the individual's own outlook on the world. To understand a person is to know the meaning or significance that he or she attaches to events, and such understanding is not possible without engaging in dialogue and conversation with that person. Knowledge in this sense, then, requires openness to the views and interpretations of others as well as an effort to understand the fields of practice that others live and make sense of their work in.

Freeing Ourselves from Limiting Perspectives

We may seek knowledge for still another purpose—to free ourselves from patterns of thought and action that we have come to accept, perhaps to depend on, even though these patterns do not reflect our true needs or interests. Knowledge of this type allows us to exceed the limitations that "reality" imposes on us and to see the opportunities that the future presents. In this view, our lives are seen to be dependent on the acceptance of a particular view of the world, a "reality" that we take to be natural and unchanging but that is, in fact, the result of a social process by which we have come to believe in its truth. Now, if this process has been biased in some way, so that we focus on one set of events or interpretations instead of another, we may be restricted in the range of possible actions that appear open to us. Particularly where a certain definition of reality has been imposed on us by those in positions of control—that is, where we simply assume the dominant view (the view of the dominant)—we will indeed be misled. We will see our possibilities as quite limited when, in fact, they may be quite broad. We may be so taken in by our beliefs that we no longer recognize them as beliefs or no longer recognize their source and are therefore subjected to the most extreme form of control—control that is not even recognized by those being controlled.

Ralph Hummel's book *The Bureaucratic Experience* (2007) is an especially useful and accessible overview of the problems raised by a "society reduced to organization, culture reduced to economics, psychology reduced to identity, language reduced to information, thinking reduced to logic, and politics to administration" (p. xx). In a society increasingly dominated by instrumental bureaucratic structures,