

WHAT, *DEFEND* BUREAUCRACY?

Offhand, can you think of a more dumb idea than to defend bureaucracy? One of the great demons of our times?

Let me begin by assuring you I am not using the word in its common meaning of government offices so bound in red tape they can't help anyone. Or of arrogant bureaucrats who think they have the power to push people around as they see fit.

In this book we transcend such stereotypes and think concretely and broadly about the agencies of administration that do the work of government in this huge country. In it you will find that I contend the general quality and effectiveness of these departments and bureaus to be greater than most believe. Some are outstanding and stand as world exemplars in their field. This is why I make a substantive case for bureaucracy as it exists in this country.

It is entirely understandable if you are wary of my conclusion. Americans are known for their individualism and love of personal freedom and hence tend to be suspicious of big and powerful institutions. They benefit from the fruits of a market economy and frown on paying a good chunk of the fruits of their labor to a public treasury. Business executives and investors that make the economy productive dislike being constrained by government regulation. Hence this book is practically contrary to the American way! Actually, my pride of country is deep and made deeper for the relative competence and dedication I see in the civil servants who make our democracy work on a day-to-day basis.

I have a big job ahead of me as I present my case. I do not lecture at you as a know-it-all authority but as someone who wants to stimulate your own thinking. I hope you enjoy this intellectual journey we take together; contact me at goodsell@vt.edu if you wish to discuss a point.

SOME PRELIMINARIES

First we need to attend to some preliminaries. The term “bureaucracy” is derived from the Old French word *bureau*, initially referring to a heavy wool cloth that covered tables. Later on, *bureau* meant the table itself and then the desks at which people work in offices. Hence literally bureaucracy means “desk rule” or governance by those who work at desks.¹

Max Weber’s Model. The famous German sociologist Max Weber, writing in the context of early twentieth-century Prussia, theorized that bureaucracy is the form of organization that inevitably emerges when money-based societies take on complex tasks. The reason is that it is capable of unparalleled precision, speed, continuity, and technically optimal capabilities for advanced collective action. These assets are achieved, he said, because of the combined effects of several organizational features. Known today as the Weberian model of bureaucracy, these are: (1) fixed duties for officials that apply within a set jurisdiction, (2) a graded system of hierarchical authority from highest level to lowest; (3) the use of formal rules to guide the carrying out of duties; (4) the maintenance of written files over time; and (5) employees who are full-time, salaried, trained, tenured, and work at an office away from home. However, Weber warned, in addition to being technically superior, the tight efficiency of bureaucracy enables it to acquire political power. Hence a regime’s top leadership is always in danger of becoming overwhelmed by the concentrated information, resources, and skills of its bureaucracy. Do you think this could be a danger in America?²

Since being translated into English in the 1940s, Weber’s work has had a pervasive influence in public administration thought. At first scholars ambivalently admired his comprehensive compilation of administrative traits on the one hand, but took seriously his warnings about bureaucracy’s threat to democracy on the other. By the 1960s academic critique of the model extended to the point of outright condemnation of the

model's stress on hierarchy, rules, and expertise as inviting top-down dominance of the institution as well as organizational inflexibility. A few decades later this critique became the springboard for an antithesis theory of bureaucracy whereby nonhierarchical processes, multipoint collaboration, and minimization of the public-private distinction were championed. Still later a "governance without government" thesis emerged that repudiated the centrality of stand-alone bureaucracies in general as the heart of public administration in favor of a networked series of multiple, scattered, public and private actors acting jointly.³

These ideas that detract from Weber's model are attractive in many ways. They emphasize the importance of decentralization, partnerships, flexibility, decision influence upward as well as sideways, and participation by citizens in administration. Yet at the same time the classic attributes of precision, speed, and expertise are still needed in this era of electronic communication, nonstate wars, and global markets. Furthermore the cultural coherence and endurance of the stand-alone institution is still important as a basis of achieving pride, dedication, and self-identity in a workplace. From the standpoint of responsible and fiscally sound administration, a sharp focal point of official accountability is also indispensable. Perhaps you differ, but I believe the individual bureaucracy is here to stay as a keystone for a compatible bureaucracy-democracy fit; in a country like ours, governance must simultaneously involve desks, networks, and ballot boxes.

US Bureaucracy: An Overview. Bureaucracy has the reputation of being big and everywhere. Yes, from the financial standpoint, it looms large. The federal government's annual outlays are equivalent to a slice of the Gross National Product between 18 and 25 percent of the whole, depending on the state of the economy. State and local government expenditures augment federal outlays by approximately 40 percent, leading to total annual public sector spending in excess of \$6 trillion at this writing. A gross expenditure figure overstates the cost of the bureaucracy itself, however; most public spending goes not to public payrolls and operating budgets but to entitlements to individuals, allotments to subsidized industries, payments to government contractors, and to a lesser degree grants and contracts with nonprofit service providers.⁴

A more direct measure of bureaucracy's magnitude is the number of bureaucrats employed. Table 1.1 provides total-employee numbers for each level of government in three years. The grand total for 2011 of roughly 22 million bureaucrats is about 12 percent of the economy's employed workforce. You can see big differences in magnitude among the three levels of government; clearly, most of American bureaucracy is not at the national level but in the states and localities, especially the latter. Variations over the three years are steady in overall scale, although it is notable that some 800,000 bureaucrats were added to the totals during the George Bush presidency and about 350,000 were lost to them in Obama's first term. Hence the overall amount of American bureaucracy is by no means determined alone by the ideology of the party that elects the president, as one might anticipate.

Another surprise, at least to me, is how when one disaggregates public employment figures into the number of workers per workplace, the image of bureaucracy as a mammoth phenomenon begins to dissipate. This is especially true for offices that deal directly with the public. A few years ago I calculated the average size of 40,671 postal and other federal offices around the country and found that 69 percent had staffs of ten or less and 53 percent had five or less. Similarly, 55 percent of Social Security field offices employed fewer than twenty people. For 53 percent of the nation's 1,872 local welfare departments, essentially the same situation obtained. Budget cuts during the recent recession and the federal sequester of 2012–2013 have driven these workplace numbers even lower.⁵

Level	2005	2009	2011
Federal	2,720	2,824	2,854
State	5,078	5,329	5,313
Local	13,926	14,480	14,099
Total	21,724	22,633	22,266

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2012, p. 300. Bureau of the Census website, "Government Employment & Payroll." Accessed July 19, 2013.

Disaggregating bureaucracy is necessary to understanding it from the standpoint of the type of organization as well. United States public administration is remarkably varied and pluralistic, just like the country itself. The classic bureau is common but by no means the only type. From the standpoint of continuous, empowered effort, however, it has many advantages, which is probably why it is pervasive (as Weber argued). These features include a legislative statute or local government charter that authorizes pursuance of identified goals; annual appropriations to enable the continuation of this work over time; a hierarchical organization that makes possible focused accountability and unified internal management; and staffing by a nonpartisan body of specialized civil servants.

The potential effectiveness of this workhorse of bureaucracy is implied by efforts of legislatures to create opposing but similar organizational forms as a counter to it. Placement of the bureau in an overhead structure like the Department of Homeland Security or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration augments political control by the elected chief executive. Establishment of nonexecutive bureaus like state legislative staff offices or a Government Accountability Office augments political control by elected representatives. Agencies like an Office of Director of National Intelligence provides operational coordination, while an Office of Management and Budget enables managerial supervision.

Other types of organizational entity do not augment control but affect capabilities in other ways. Government enterprises such as the US Postal Service make the activity dependent on its own earnings without the assurance of annual appropriations. Independent regulatory commissions replace unified top leadership with a bipartisan board whose members serve rotating terms. Public organizations financed by multiple governments, such as regional planning commissions, facilitate coordination across jurisdictions. Inspectors general and the Postal Inspection Service constitute insider watchdogs to look for wrongdoing. A paramilitary body of uniformed professionals like the US Public Health Service Commissioned Officer Corps transcends agency jurisdictions. So, my reader, variety is the spice of public administration as well as other aspects of life.

Downstairs or Upstairs? A major theme in the Masterpiece Theater television dramas “Upstairs, Downstairs” and “Downton Abbey” is how the servants on the lower level of the Edwardian English mansion have a distinctly inferior station in life from the aristocratic family upstairs. Nonetheless the butlers, valets, cooks, and maids working down there become inextricably involved in the lives of family members upstairs, albeit with the class distinction always preserved. Curiously enough, such spatial verticality was the same in the nation’s early state capitols, where legislative chambers were on the second floor, the governor’s office on the ground floor, and bureaucratic offices in the basement.⁶

Life in the Edwardian mansion has metaphoric possibilities for public administration. Those of us who teach and write in the field frequently refer to bureaucrats as “public *servants*.” While our use of the term is based not on perceived inferiority but on a desire to grant respect, the upstairs-downstairs distinction can be compared to the field’s classic distinction between politics and administration. Originally drawn to emphasize the need to keep administration nonpartisan, this “dichotomy” can, in a larger sense, embrace the basic point that in a democracy, elected officials *do* need to exercise *ultimate* authority over administrative agencies. A parallel dyad found in political science is between making public policy versus implementing it, and in organizational economics between the principals who give instructions and the agents who do or do not obey them.

These maxims reflect a profound truth, but not the whole truth. To return to our English mansion analogy, the *identities* of those involved—elected officials and political appointees upstairs and career bureaucrats downstairs—are undeniably distinct. However their *arenas of action* are shared. Both think over the same problems, assess their political implications, formulate possible proposals, listen to affected interests, consult with outside experts, consider implementation mechanisms, and evaluate eventual outcomes. In sum, while the big decisions are ultimately made upstairs, their nature is also shaped downstairs. Moreover, if a political crisis erupts on the second floor whereby ideological division paralyzes action there, it is not inconceivable that big short-term decisions would be made on the lower floor. At the end of the book I address this exact possibility.

BUREAUCRACY'S IMAGE

What does the bureaucracy look like to the public? Because in popular language the term bureaucracy is so pejorative, thoughts spawned by its image yield practically universal disgust. For example a vanity license plate issued in Virginia was lettered "GOVT SUX" (it is a conservative state). I have in my study a bumper sticker emblazoned "Bureaucrats Do It In Triplicate" (I'll let you interpret that). A television presidential-campaign spot aired a few years ago flashed "BUREAUCRATS" in upper case with the last four letters highlighted. Scores of books berating bureaucracy on the worst possible terms are in print, like *The Federal Rathole*, *Burning Money*, *Alice in Blunderland*, and *America by the Throat*.⁷

Some Concrete Images. But when the public is exposed to concrete details about government rather than mere stereotypes, the implanted images may still be negative—but more nuanced. Beverly Cigler and Heidi Neiswender examined how the subject of public administration is presented in eighteen introductory texts for college courses in American government. What is emphasized is the large size and permanence of bureaucracy, its alleged lack of efficiency compared to business, the use of unintelligible language, and the power of agencies to escape full control by the President.⁸

The depiction of governmental administration in television dramas can have significant effect on lay attitudes. Researchers at the Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University in Virginia examined TV episodes aired between 1992–1998 and 1999–2001. They found that in the earlier period, three-fourths of the shows portrayed government as corrupt, cynical, and unrepresentative. In the second time period, however, three out of five episodes depicted an essentially effective public sector, although bureaucrats themselves were portrayed favorably only ten percent of the time.⁹

In a study of motion pictures, Michelle Pautz and Laura Roselle analyzed the ten top American films (in terms of gross receipts) released each year from 1992 to 2006. Among them were *Schindler's List*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Pearl Harbor*, and *The Bourne Supremacy*. Coders assessed how government personnel were portrayed in them and noted

characteristics written into their roles. Of the 105 pictures examined that included a significant governmental presence, 60 percent presented the bureaucrat as inefficient or incompetent and 40 percent as capable. In two-thirds of the negative portrayals, “the system” was construed as at fault rather than individuals. The five most common role characteristics of bureaucrats were, in descending order of frequency: (1) good looking or fit; (2) knowledgeable, wise, or smart; (3) dangerous, evil, or corrupt; (4) friendly or approachable; and (5) professional or rule-following.¹⁰

Beth Wiede and David Schultz assessed the portrayal of public professionals in 20 government-themed films issued between 1984 and 2003. Using content analysis, they uncovered five character types: (1) the Power Monger, exemplified by dismissive EPA official Walter Perk in *Ghostbusters*; (2) the Bureaucratic Criminal, illustrated by presidential aide Gloria Russell who covers up an act of murder by her boss in *Absolute Power*; (3) the Hyper Loyalist who sacrifices personal life to duty, the role of Deputy Mayor Kevin Calhoun in *City Hall*; (4) the Action Hero who rebels against by-the-book routines to save the day, as in Harry Dalton of the US Geological Survey in *Dante’s Peak*; and (5) the Ethics Hero who reveals a presidential cover-up, as in the long-anonymous Deep Throat of *All the President’s Men*.¹¹

Bureaucracy on Facebook. Capturing the popular image of bureaucracy in the twenty-first century would be incomplete without noting what is said in the social media. However “bureaucracy” by itself is not a hot topic there. To get around that problem, the Facebook pages of leading newspaper and television outlets were sampled on days when aspects of administrative governance would likely come up. Selected were January 13, 2011, when President Obama presented an agency reorganization plan, and February 13, 2012, the day the FY 2013 federal budget was made public.

In order to solicit a range of opinion, the Facebook pages of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* were examined for comments on the reorganization plan and the same was done for the budget on television news channels MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News. Entries touching on governance were picked out among the hundreds posted; and from that pool, 15 particularly revealing (and printable)

comments were selected. Seven of these dealt with the reorganization plan (see Box 1.1) and eight the budget (see Box 1.2).

BOX 1.1

Facebook Comments on Obama's Reorganization Plan, January 13, 2012

New York Times

The problem is not the size or duplicative nature of the bureaucracy that is charged with all these functions. Rather, the problem is that there is a function at all. Congress and the President pass all these laws and mandates and obligations and some agency somewhere is charged with implementation. The fact that numbers must be hired to do this bidding, under one acronym or another, or several different acronyms, is not where the problem is. It is in the need for Federal intervention at all. Oh how lucky these congressmen and the President are to blame the Federal largess on the very machine that must carry out all these whims. It is the whims that are the problem. Do away with them and there is no need for the engine.

Conceptually, pulling the five agencies named by the president together under one umbrella will require building another layer of "management and supervision" that will serve only to slow down the larger process. Yes, they will be able to "consolidate some jobs" within the US government, and therefore save some small change, but they will inevitably make the function of those jobs much less efficient by adding the layers.

Every time I see someone slight the EPA, I have to wonder if they've ever googled "Cuyahoga River Fire." That's pre-EPA. While you're there, check out the reason for the FDA, another maligned agency.

Washington Post

The government is too big when people refuse to pay the taxes to support it. Sorry, but those who keep promising that someone else is going to come around and eliminate the deficit are kidding us and themselves. Even Obama is saying that the government should be streamlined. THAT is when you know government is too big and too inefficient.

When people start paying the taxes to support a bigger government, they can have one. Until then, asking for a bigger government with the expectation that someone else is going to come along and pay for it isn't the right way to go. Obama is cutting 1,000 jobs, through attrition, from a total of 2.1 million. Sounds like a very small step in the right direction.

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Wall Street Journal

Isn't adding SBA as a cabinet post EXACERBATING bureaucracy? I have a hard time believing it belongs up there with departments of Defense, State, Treasury, and Justice without trivializing these latter important cabinet posts.

The initiative of cutting bureaucracy and/or costly dependences of the government looks good, but what is behind the new plan of the White House? Frequently, the politicians promise changes that after that nobody implements due to the difficulties or risks to make those changes. Do you remember the famous case of Guantanamo?

Source: Facebook pages of the media shown.

BOX 1.2

Facebook Comments on Obama's Budget for Fiscal 2013, February 13, 2012

MSNBC

I can't believe people are actually agreeing with this! 30%?!?!?! That's almost one third of their income. To support OTHER people.

I suppose we can close down all the schools, ambulance services, government offices, police forces, all because you do not think the rich should be taxed. In FDR's term they were paying 70 some percent in taxes and they were still doing just fine. It is NOT solely the middle class's job to support this country especially when the top 1% of this country, i.e. "the RICH AND FILTHY RICH" have all the money.

Fairness? How is it fair that the successful get punished and continually get raped by the government, while others are collecting food stamps, housing, welfare, unemployment, etc. Fair would be not having an entitlement system and have everyone pay the same % regardless. Taking from the rich is easy because of envy. Why should the responsible members of society foot the bill for the least responsible? Those programs weren't meant to be life long entitlements, which is what they have become.

Your idea of "fairness" seems to ignore all the systemic issues of unfairness already present in our economic and political system. Stop pretending that everyone in this country has the same access to opportunities and government

that the rich do. From the very beginning the poor go to poor schools while the rich go to rich schools. Access to education is paramount in terms of an individual's ability to increase financial "success," but as a country we make sure that only the rich grow up in your utopia of opportunity. It is this lie of equal opportunity that has done and continues to do the most damage to our country.

CNN

Typical big government socialist. One year left of this jerk.

Socialist? What idiots you are to even say such a stupid thing! Do you think paying taxes for your police, firefighters, teachers, roads, bridges, and everything ELSE your dumb and sorry arse uses EVERY SINGLE day is a socialist thing?

FOX News

GOVT> is the problem.

We do have a spending problem... and a lot of it is waste at the top of government... we have people running key positions with no qualifications... could any of us get jobs we don't qualify for... I think not... we spend for things on government contracts that we can buy cheaper at a hardware store... it just makes no sense... are there no common sense politicians... sure doesn't look like it.

Source: Facebook pages of the media shown.

For background, Obama's reorganization plan called for consolidating all or parts of six agencies into a new but as yet unnamed cabinet-level department. These were the US Trade Representative, the US Trade and Development Agency, Export-Import Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, Small Business Administration, and most of the Commerce Department other than the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The stated aim of the plan was to reduce duplication, focus more squarely on the needs of business, and eliminate 1,000–2,000 jobs by attrition.¹²

Four of the positions expressed on this plan were squarely on the cynical side: the functions of federal agencies are unneeded and are the

product of politicians' whims (*New York Times*); if Obama admits the government should be streamlined, you know it is too big; cutting 1,000 jobs goes in the right direction but not nearly far enough (both *Washington Post*); and the plan looks good but will no doubt be fruitless (*Wall Street Journal*).

Two other plan comments are critical but more moderate in tone: a consolidation could help but will also create another layer of management (*New York Times*); and adding the SBA to a department trivializes that organizational unit (*Wall Street Journal*). Only one statement is clearly sympathetic to public administration: if you know about the Cuyahoga River fire, you know the EPA is important (*New York Times*).

Obama's 2013 budget proposed expenditures of \$3.803 trillion against revenues of \$2.902 trillion, generating an anticipated deficit of \$901 billion. Although required by law and necessary for its wealth of detail on federal operations, Congress considered the document to be little more than a meaningless gesture; at that time the 2012 election campaign was underway, and no one knew what would happen to taxes and looming spending caps.

Of the eight comments on the budget, five were hostile to bureaucracy and three reasonably favorable. The most negative ones come right to the point: taxes are unbelievably high and only "support OTHER people" (MSNBC); Obama is a "big government socialist" jerk (CNN); clearly government "is the problem"; and waste is prolific (both Fox News).

Another commentator's reply to the "OTHER people" dismissal was that ordinary citizens benefit from government services but the "FILTHY RICH" don't pay their share of the cost (MSNBC). A retort to the "socialist" charge was that it is stupid to think we don't need things like fire fighters and roads (CNN).

In a longer interchange on the issue of fairness, one writer argues that successful citizens are "raped by the government" while irresponsible "others" benefit from free services. An entry answering this assertion states that it ignores the unfairness built into the system by having society's deck stacked against the poor from the start (both MSNBC).

You will have many reactions to these statements, and I wish I could hear them. To me, two points stick out. One is the predictable one that

antibureaucracy feelings correlate with a conservative political posture. A less obvious observation is that those who express anger against government tend to speak in abstractions (politicians' whims, big-government socialist, raped by government) while progovernment commentators are more concrete in their references (firefighters, roads, the Cuyahoga River).

What About Trust? Public opinion polls offer the possibility of a more systematic—but not necessarily perfect—understanding of government's image. In its ongoing surveys the Gallup organization asks, "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" In 2001, three weeks after 9/11, 60 percent of Americans said "just about always" or "most of the time." A year later the percentage dropped to 45 percent, and by 2005 it was 30 percent. In 2010 the figure was down to 19 percent.¹³

Yet Gallup has also found that the extent of governmental trust depends on what branch or level you pick. Table 1.2 offers five breakdowns from 1997 to 2012. As for the executive branch at the national level, it reached its zenith during the period in 2002 at 72 percent. This was the first such survey conducted immediately after 9/11. Over the following years it dropped quite steadily until a rise to 61 percent occurred in September of the year President Obama first took office, 2009. It then declined to 49 percent but rose once again to 56 in 2009, a month before his re-election. What this suggests is that the image of *who* is president as well as what happens to the country affects this poll number significantly.

By contrast, trust in Congress remained in or near the 60s until 2005 and then began a downward run to the 30s and was at 34 percent in 2012. The judicial branch has remained relatively stable in the 60s–70s range except for 80 percent in 1999. Both state and local governments hit their highest levels for the period in 1998, with the states typically in the 50s and 60s thereafter and the localities achieving the 60s and 70s. Like the other categories, they too showed upticks in 2012.¹⁴

One of the realities of polling is that the wording of the question often affects the responses given. A survey in 2011 conducted by Ipsos-Reuter asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means complete distrust and 10 means

TABLE 1.2 Percent of Public Expressing Trust in Government

	Executive Branch	Legislative Branch	Judicial Branch	State Government	Local Government
1997	62	59	71	68	69
1998	63	61	78	80	77
1999	64	57	80	n/a	n/a
2000	65	68	75	n/a	n/a
2001	63	65	74	65	69
2002	72	67	75	n/a	n/a
2003	60	63	67	53	68
2004	58	60	65	67	68
2005	52	62	68	67	70
2006	46	56	69	n/a	n/a
2007	43	50	69	67	69
2008	42	47	69	67	72
2009	61	45	76	51	69
2010	49	36	66	52	70
2011	49	31	63	57	68
2012	56	34	67	65	74
Mean	56.6	53.8	70.8	63.3	70.3
Std. Dev.	9.077	11.128	5.057	8.848	2.625

Source: Trust in Government/Gallup Historical Trends. Accessed January 25, 2012 and July 24, 2013 at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5392/trust-government.aspx>.

Note: For the national government, the question put is "Let me ask you how much trust and confidence you have at this time in the [branch named]." For subnational governments, it is "How much trust and confidence do you have in the [level of government] where you live when it comes to handling [level] problems? Percentages are the sum of the responses "a great deal" and "a fair amount."

complete trust, how much do you trust or distrust the following?" The outcome given for the federal government was pretty sour: 31 percent chose scores 1 to 3, 28 percent 4 to 5, 21 percent 6 to 7, and 18 percent 8 to 10. The interpretation given by the pollster was that 80 percent of the population harbored nonexistent, mild or lukewarm trust in Washington. When the same question was applied to local government, the outcome was slightly better at 76 percent. In another example, a Pew survey conducted in the same year asked how much respondents trust the information they receive from federal government agencies. The results were 6 percent a lot, 38 percent some, 32 not too much and 22 not at all, yielding a 92 percent other than fully satisfactory experience. Corresponding percentages at the state level of government were slightly better at 8, 43, 29, and 18.¹⁵

The best available data set for our purposes comes from the work of William Adams and Donna Lind Infeld at George Washington University. It is an annual nationwide poll called Battlefield that focuses on public attitudes toward the federal civilian workforce. To minimize partisan bias, Adams and Infeld asked leading pollsters associated with each of the two major political parties to help design and administer it. Battlefield's prime question is "Would you say that you have a great deal of confidence, a lot of confidence, some confidence, or very little confidence in federal civilian employees?" Table 1.3 presents the responses over four years, with percentages for the "great deal" and "a lot" options combined in the first column with the third column also incorporating the "some" option.

One could argue that these questions lean toward yielding progovernment answers just as the questions previously discussed lean toward the anti side. Yet I am prepared to conclude that they do show that the public appears to perceive the explicit referent of federal civilians as more trustworthy than such generalities as the "government in Washington" or "executive branch." Indeed, the mean percentage for at least some positive confidence is over 70 percent. As with the Facebook entries, we are encountering the phenomenon whereby particularized evaluations of bureaucracy are better than abstract ones.

Adams and Infeld looked for independent variables that have an appreciable effect on their results. A differential ranging from 14 to 24 points separates respondents who identify with the two major parties,

TABLE 1.3 Degree of Confidence in Federal Civilian Employees, 2009–2012 (in percent)

	Great Deal or a Lot	Some	At Least Some	Very Little	No Opinion
2009	21	54	75	21	4
2010	19	47	66	27	7
2011	20	53	73	23	4
2012	22	46	68	28	4
Mean	20.5	50.0	70.5	24.8	4.8

Source: Articles in *PA Times* by William C. Adams and Donna Lind Infeld: "Surprising Majority of Americans Endorse Careers in Government," August 2009; "Trust in Federal Workers Continues to Erode," October 2010; "Federal Workers Gain in Public Trust," October 2011; "Americans Exhibit Increasingly Partisan Views of Federal Workers," October 2012.

with Democrats more confident in the bureaucrats and Republicans less so. A racial divide exists as well: in 2012, 20 percent of whites were in the great deal column as over against 27 percent of Hispanics and 35 of African Americans.¹⁶

In the annual Adams-Infeld data one thing caught my eye. Except for 2012's "great deal" response, over the four years an annual up-down-up-down movement occurred in the three confidence columns, with an inverse pattern in the "very little" response. Although probably not statistically significant, I cannot help but wonder whether this means public trust in bureaucracy tends to drop off in election years.

In addition Adams and Infeld offer comparative figures across institutions, as seen in Table 1.4. This is made possible by virtue of the fact that the Gallup organization asks similar questions for other parts of government. Keeping in mind that the table lists the institutions in order of high to low, the military and Congress stand by themselves as the top and bottom extremes respectively. In between are two clusters: the first is the police and Supreme Court and the second the criminal justice system, public schools and federal employees. The presidency follows in a category by itself. The fact that our national public servants rank alongside the schools and courts and above the presidency and Congress is definitely worth noting.

TABLE 1.4**Comparative Degree of Confidence by Institution, 2012 (in percent)**

	Great Deal		At Least		
	or a Lot	Some	Some	Very Little	No Opinion
The Military	75	18	93	1	6
The Police	56	28	84	16	0
Supreme Court	37	38	75	22	3
Criminal Justice System	29	40	69	29	2
Public Schools	29	40	69	30	1
Federal Civilian Employees	22	46	68	28	4
Presidency	36	27	63	36	1
Congress	13	34	47	52	1

Source: William C. Adams and Donna Lind Infeld, "Americans Exhibit Increasingly Partisan Views of Federal Workers," *PA Times*, October 2012.

Note: Question asked is the same as for Table 1.3, adapted to institution.

Workplace Violence. This seems like an odd topic to bring up in a discussion of bureaucracy's image. The reasons are twofold, both of which reflect my pro-bureaucracy slant. One, we should avoid being dismissive of low-paid government employees who perform bureaucracy's routine work; in this era of cutbacks they can face anxiety-producing workloads and layoffs. Two, we need to recognize that certain fringe elements of the society hate government so much they want to do violence to its employees.

The Department of Justice estimates that around a million cases of workplace violence occur each year in the American economy. Approximately 30 percent take place in government—double of what we would expect given the relative sizes of the private and public sectors.¹⁷ In 2005, 4.8 percent of private employing establishments reported incidents, compared to 14.7 percent in local government and 32.2 in state government.¹⁸

On August 20, 1986, in a post office in Edmond, Oklahoma, postal worker Patrick Henry Sherrill suddenly pulled out a gun and killed two of his supervisors and 14 coworkers. Seven bystanders were injured. He then turned the gun on himself. Postal investigators found that Sherrill had been showing stress on the job, probably caused by a recent wage cut, fewer workers available in the office, and fear that he was about to lose his job. The incident was widely reported in the media and the term “going postal” entered the language.

After this incident came to light, it was discovered that similar occurrences had previously happened four times in the US Postal Service. In the following decade five more post office melees occurred, almost always involving firearms with the shooter committing suicide afterward. What the rampages had in common was antisupervisor rage, increased work pressure from cutbacks, and personal mental problems. Hoping to shed the stigma of the derisive “going postal” term, the USPS responded by placing “workplace environment analysts” in each of its 85 districts. Since that time no additional instances have been reported.¹⁹

An even darker face of the problem of workplace violence in government is attacks against government employees rather than by them. I refer here not to law enforcement officers who routinely face danger,

but civilian bureaucrats who are unlucky enough to symbolize government authority to persons who are deranged or deeply resentful.

The first major domestic terrorist attack in the United States also occurred in the state of Oklahoma, nine years after the Sherrill shooting. On the morning of April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh parked a Ryder truck loaded with two tons of fertilizer explosive in front of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. Just after hundreds of federal employees had arrived for work and deposited children in the building's daycare center, the truck's cargo exploded. The entire front of the eight-story building was ripped off, killing 168 people including 19 children. After he was captured and before he was executed, McVeigh made it abundantly clear that his motivation was bitter resentment against the national government of the United States.

In the years that followed, many additional antigovernment attacks occurred, especially against the Internal Revenue Service. In 2008 an Alabama taxpayer, after he and his wife had been arguing with an IRS agent on the phone, rammed his Jeep Cherokee SUV into the agency's offices in Birmingham, Alabama.²⁰ In 2009 a Florida man was sentenced to 30 years in prison for hiring an undercover FBI agent posing as a hit man to kill the IRS worker who was investigating his tax liability. In 2010 a disgruntled taxpayer piloted his private plane into the IRS office in Austin, killing one employee and himself. He had left a suicide note on his website saying, "Well, Mr. Big Brother IRS Man, let's try something different; take my pound of flesh and sleep well."²¹ In 2011 a plot was uncovered in which four elderly Georgia men were conspiring to blow up offices of the IRS and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, as well as scatter the deadly toxin ricin in cities by car or over them by plane. Inspired by Timothy McVeigh and an on-line novel titled "Absolved," the men had boasted of collecting a "bucket list" of government officials that needed to be "taken out."²²

Another major target for antigovernment activity is agencies that manage federally owned public land, often in the far West but not exclusively there. Each year the Fish and Wildlife Service receives 10 to 12 threats or acts of violence against its personnel. The Bureau of Land Management experiences 20 to 30 such incidents, the National Park Service 100 or more, and the Forest Service 200 to 400. Examples of such activity are

threatening to kill federal agents while they are enforcing grazing restrictions; running a truck over a Park Service ranger at Organ Pipe Cactus Monument; telephoning a BLS refuge manager to tell him his life is under a \$15,000 contract; and placing a bomb in the front yard of a Forest Service district resource manager, destroying his car, and blowing out the front windows of his house.²³

In recent years prosecutors and other prominent officials have been assassinated in Western states. In 2013 the executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections was shot to death point blank when he answered a knock on the front door of his home. The suspected killer, who had the word “Hate” tattooed on his hand and a swastika on his stomach, was one of three notorious members of a white supremacist gang.²⁴

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, approximately 1,300 antigovernment, radical-right Patriot and Hutaree organizations and armed militiamen units exist in the United States, such as F.E.A.R., which stands for “Forever Enduring Always Ready.” Some 100,000 individuals are also estimated to be active in the Sovereign Citizen movement, whose members reject the validity of US laws, deny the obligation to pay federal taxes, and refuse to get driver’s licenses. The FBI categorizes the group as “domestic terrorist.”²⁵

WAYS THEORISTS CONDEMN IT

We now migrate in our discussion from how ordinary people perceive bureaucracy to how the experts do. Not surprisingly, they tend to be divided between those who regard it as a societal curse and those who see it as a societal asset. We begin by examining theorists who condemn bureaucracy and then turn to those that commend it. On each side, selected publications are discussed that raise issues about how well it works, its affects on people, and its relation to democracy.

It Does Not Work. Many academic critics argue that bureaucracy simply does not work, or at least not the way it should. A classic statement of this position is made in the 1944 book *Bureaucracy*, by Ludwig Von Mises. He was a pro-free market economist who came to the United States in 1940 as the German Nazi regime conquered Europe. In this country he taught

at New York University where he influenced conservatives such as Milton Friedman and Ayn Rand. In his book, Von Mises contrasts two systems, Profit Management and Bureaucratic Management.

In the first, decisions are based on economic calculations designed to achieve profit maximization. In this explicit yet open-ended framework, managers are able to act freely and creatively in accord with market conditions. Personal freedom and political democracy flourish under this system. Bureaucratic Management, however, operates in the face of two powerful limits, the law and the budget. Such restraints do not free the manager to be creative, but to the contrary establish static norms and regulations that greatly limit decision freedom. Moreover, since bureaucracy's output has no cash value, no clear means of evaluating the activity exists. At the working level, meanwhile, a psychology develops whereby the combination of career tenure and seniority advancement attracts only mediocre talent, offers no incentive to accept change, and elevates to the top old men who have lost their vitality. With no opportunity or reason to excel, bureaucracy becomes institutionally dead and of prime use only to totalitarian regimes. Remarks Von Mises with contempt, "the main difference between a policeman and a kidnapper and between a tax collector and a robber is that the policeman and the tax collector obey and enforce the law, while the kidnapper and robber violate it."²⁶

Another book which declares that bureaucracy is by its nature destined to work badly is by University of California professor emeritus Guy Benveniste. Published in 1983, it is also named simply *Bureaucracy* but written from a social-psychological rather than economics perspective. Moreover it considers bureaucracy in the private sector as well as in government. Benveniste's argument is elaborate but simple in its essence: "If we want to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of bureaucracies, we have to reduce the level of fear that exists within them."²⁷

At the individual level, such fear stems from the harm that could be done to one's career if uncertain yet possible adverse events unfold over time. Examples are a decision that turns out to be unwise or an action that later damages the organization's image. Underlying the anxiety is a feeling that somewhere in the organization evaluators are assessing your work closely, and will delay your advancement or demean your status if something goes awry. This uneasiness operates at the edge of consciousness

and causes the bureaucrat to be unduly cautious and conservative in his or her daily work. Byproducts are obsessive rule abidance, scrupulous documentation, distrust of others, and generally a joyless work life.

At the organizational level, Benveniste outlines a number of defensive “games” that are played to reduce uncertainty. In government these include inflating citizen demand for services, making clients wait to teach them a lesson, and engaging in trivial planning to legitimize decisions already made. Another strategy is “spreading” the organization by acting through intergovernmental bodies or stakeholder networks so as to deflect clear responsibility for failed outcomes. He regards the practice of organization development as a response to uncertainty rather than a way of defusing it, and sees citizen participation as possibly degenerating into a way to legitimize centralized control.

The most influential contemporary account of bureaucracy’s purported ineffectiveness is *Reinventing Government*, by consultants David Osborne and Ted Gaebler. Since its publication in 1993, this book has stimulated reform efforts at all levels of government in the United States and in several foreign countries. Vice President Al Gore’s National Performance Review during the Clinton presidency was built conceptually on the book, and it did much to inspire the New Public Management movement in academia.

Osborne and Gaebler believe that the agency-based concept of bureaucracy with its stable civil service workforce and centralized authority is a thing of the past. It originated in the industrial economy of the Progressive Era and New Deal, they say, and is now outdated with the onset of the information economy. They deplore traditional bureaucracies as staggeringly wasteful, a problem that cannot be rectified by budget cuts. This is because

*waste in government does not come tied up in neat packages. It is marbled throughout our bureaucracies. It is embedded in the very way we do business. It is employees on idle, working at half speed—or barely working at all. It is people working hard at tasks that aren’t worth doing, following regulations that should never have been written, filling out forms that should never have been printed.*²⁸

How, then, should bureaucracies reinvent themselves? Although Osborne and Gaebler insist they know that government cannot be run like a business, their proposals have a strong private enterprise ring. Governments should focus on policy “steering” and devolve to others the “rowing” of direct service delivery. They should move from “government by program” to “market-oriented government” that catalyzes private suppliers, shares risk, and leverages investments. Administration by monopoly should be replaced by administration by competition, using such tools as vouchers, franchising, competitive procurement, load shedding, and internal profit centers. Also government itself should become enterprising, via fee-for-service mechanisms, joint investments, revolving funds, and profit centers. As for the bureaucrats, they should be hired with less red tape, subject to pay for performance, and evaluated for results, not just efforts.

It Is an Oppressive Force. A second category of writers denounce bureaucracy because it is seen as inherently oppressive of the human beings it serves as well as those it employs. A classic early article in this area is by Robert K. Merton, a prominent American sociologist who taught for many years at Columbia University. Titled “Bureaucratic Structure and Personality,” it was published in *Social Forces* in 1940.

Merton points out that the authority of bureaucrats inheres in the offices they hold, not in the individuals who occupy them. Hence it is not surprising that their conduct is governed by the structure of this instrument of production, as Karl Marx would call it. The bureaucracy’s purpose is to carry out the tasks assigned it in an efficient, precise, and predictable manner. To achieve this purpose, decisions must be made according to set rules, and clients must be treated depending on how they are categorized by those rules.

The problem of bureaucracy for Merton arises from what Thorsten Veblen termed “trained incapacity.” This refers to how the carrying out of a narrow, single duty closes off one’s horizons. A propensity for rigidity is reinforced by methodical and disciplined work habits, a culture that stresses devotion to the organization, and the desire to maintain a clean record so that regular promotions occur throughout the career. Collectively, these factors lead bureaucrats to overstep minimal needs

for performance reliability and become so accustomed to ritualistic application of the rules that they value their content over the ends being sought, causing what sociologists call a displacement of goals.

The outcome of all of this, says Merton, is that when citizens arrive at a government office for assistance, they are greeted by a “public servant” whose bureaucratic personality makes a mockery of that phrase. They encounter instead an arrogant, impersonal, domineering, and inflexible official. All humanity is squeezed out of the pathos of a single citizen in need going to the sovereign state for help.²⁹

A leading book on the actual practice of bureaucratic service to clients is Michael Lipsky’s *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, first published in 1980. He defines “street-level bureaucrats” as public school teachers, policemen, welfare workers, and court employees. Although ideally these bureaucrats should treat every client equally and in accord with objective criteria, in practice they make discretionary decisions. More often than not, acute selectivity is forced by the compulsions of heavy caseloads and inadequate staff. The formal rules are not blatantly ignored, but they are applied in such a way as to make decisions quickly, in high volume, and in accord with the perceived demands of “the system.”

Practices utilized to this end fall into three groups. One is to ration services. Access fees, long wait-time queues, selectively withheld information, triaging, and creaming are methods by which this is done. A second strategy is to take direct control of the client relationship. This is accomplished by means of physically intimidating offices, complex processing routines, isolating clients from each other, stigmatizing individuals by labels, and imposing strict rules on conduct. A third practice is to husband scarce resources by maintaining the existing backlog intact so as to discourage new work, using receptionists to screen out undesirables, and referring clients to other service providers. Lipsky’s overall conclusion is that by means of these actions, street-level bureaucrats do not just implement public policy but make it. In the process they corrupt the ideals of their professions and perform as agents of social control over society’s marginalized classes.³⁰

If bureaucracy oppresses citizens, what does it do to its employees? In general, critical theorists and postmodernists believe it dehumanizes them. The most penetrating voice on this score is that of Ralph

Hummel, a long-time friend recently deceased. His book, *The Bureaucratic Experience*, presents his position; it first appeared in 1977, and its 5th and final edition was published in 2008.³¹

Hummel's ideas are sure to set you thinking. His starting point is that bureaucracy, which he defines as "rationalist administration driven by a single will," has become the dominant form of human organization in the world. People who spend eight or more hours a day immersed in its controlling, soulless grasp lose their identity, freedom, and individuality. Their relationships with others are no longer authentic and spontaneous but structured by the organization in terms of work assignment. Their cultural values are not inherited from a unique personal background but imposed by the organization, with prime emphasis on the virtues of efficiency, capitalism, and imperialism.

Turning to the process of dehumanization itself, the functions of gaining knowledge, obtaining mastery of one's work, and exercising moral judgment are taken over by the organization. Bureaucracy replaces the psyche; personal feelings and conscience are exiled, and capacities for imagination and sensibility disappear. The proactive, self-making, language-creating individual is lost from view. Bureaucracy confers a self-image derived from occupation of a particular office, which leads to alienation from the self and a de-centered psyche. People learn to think of themselves as means to bureaucratic purposes, not beings precious unto themselves.

It Is Antidemocratic. When at the beginning of this chapter I was discussing Weber's model of bureaucracy, I mentioned in passing that he warned of its political power. We need to cover this aspect of his thinking more fully.

Weber asserts that bureaucracy is, among all social structures, one of the hardest to destroy. Because of its discipline and technical competence, it is, in itself, a power instrument of the first order—to the one who controls it. Well, you might respond, in a democracy with regular elections, this instrument of power is blunted. Even so, more is involved. Since modern society would be impossible without bureaucracy, chaos would reign if it disappeared. Hence, in an ultimate sense, the bargaining chips are on its side (as in a government shutdown). Then too, regardless

of whether a democracy or autocracy is in place, the degree of expertise and knowledge at the disposal of the bureaucracy cannot be matched by any other component of government. This imbalance gives it great heft in dealing with matters of state, and much more so if the bureaucracy decides to keep its operations secret (and it was the bureaucracy that invented the notion of “official secret,” according to Weber). The overall consequence is that the very characteristics that make bureaucracy so effective also make it so powerful that it places the controlling capacity of even the regime’s top officials in question. Two quotes translated from German:

Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge. This is the feature of it which makes it specifically rational. This consists on the one hand in technical knowledge which, by itself, is sufficient to ensure it a position of extraordinary power. But in addition to this, bureaucratic organizations, or the holders of power who make use of them, have the tendency to increase their power still further by the knowledge growing out of experience in the service. For they acquire through the conduct of office a special knowledge of facts and have available a store of documentary material peculiar to themselves.³²

Under normal conditions, the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy is always overtowering. The “political master” finds himself in the position of the “dilettante” who stands opposite the “expert,” facing the trained official who stands within the management of administration.³³

Another author translated from the German, Henry Jacoby, denounces what he calls “the bureaucratization of the world.” In a book by that name, he insists man’s existence in the modern world is controlled and directed by central agencies of government. The sole individual is unable to escape bureaucracy’s regulation and manipulation, if for no other reason than it seems essential for a modern-day lifestyle. This myth of indispensability, as Jacoby calls it, prevents any return to spontaneous self-sufficiency.

Hence Jacoby concludes that the real problem with bureaucracy is not how well or badly it functions but its corroding impact on democracy. Speaking from his interpretation of European history, he says its impact is to undermine if not destroy the values of freedom of the individual, equal rights, the legality of government, and the division of governmental power. All of these attributes are suppressed by administration's own autocratic ways, he says. For one thing, the agencies are internally controlled by the use of hierarchy and rules. For another, bureaucracy's external relationships to other centers of power are manipulated by strategies of empty ritualism, procrastination in carrying out instructions, and quiet sabotage of policy initiatives. This is true despite the claim by bureaucrats that they are nonpartisan and politically neutral. "It is doubtful whether the virtue of 'neutrality' does in fact exist; mostly it exists only within certain limits. The continuity of the bureaucratic machine favors a predominantly conservative attitude."³⁴

We end our tour of antibureaucracy writings with a contemporary law professor who believes the values of our legal system have been trampled upon by the discretionary powers conferred upon bureaucracy. Richard Epstein, in a book titled *Design for Liberty: Private Property, Public Administration, and the Rule of Law*, examines the intersection of the three elements in its subtitle. A proper balance between private rights and bureaucratic power has shifted so much from the former to the latter that protections of the law have been eviscerated. Epstein traces the origin of this megashift to the Progressive Movement but says it began in earnest with FDR's New Deal and has continued under Obama as exemplified by the Affordable Care Act and Dodd-Frank Wall Street reform law.

The leap in scale of the role of the federal government, although legitimized by a series of free elections, has endangered the very legal principles set down by the Constitution to protect us from runaway government, which Epstein sees as neutrality, generality, clarity, consistency, and prospective application. The author illustrates the degeneration of these values by recounting what has happened with respect to eminent domain takings, health and safety regulations, the permitting of building projects, and the allowing of popular protests in public places. The only proper policy domains that should be reserved for federal government

action, Epstein believes, are law enforcement, infrastructure provision, and national defense.³⁵

WAYS THEORISTS COMMEND IT

I now turn to theorists who do not condemn bureaucracy but commend it. With “bureaucracy” being tantamount to a hate word in the English language, one would expect them to be few. Actually that is not true. To illustrate, no less than two “cases for bureaucracy” were made using this title decades before your author took pen to the subject. In 1933 Charles and William Beard published such a piece to denounce the “frenzy” of attacks against New Deal agencies. Thirty years later Harlan Cleveland did the same to reject “canards” heaped upon the Department of State.³⁶

It Can Be Made to Work. The first items we discuss on the “pro” side relate to whether bureaucracy works. My initial selection is a chapter by Christopher Leman found at the beginning of a volume titled *The Tools of Government*, edited by Lester Salamon. The book’s overall theme is that in today’s complex environment, public service delivery should be shifted more fully from public agencies to third parties. In the language of what is termed the New Governance, “direct” government gives way to “indirect” government via contracts, grants, loans, loan guarantees, government enterprises, vouchers, and tax expenditures. Leman’s chapter gives bureaucracy one last chance to show its wares to the book’s readers before delving into the chapters on alternative tools.³⁷

One thing Leman does is to identify types of situations in which direct administration seems desirable. These are where (1) the exercise of legitimate force is involved, as in policing and incarceration; (2) adequate performance is so critical that it cannot be left to chance, as in controlling civil aircraft; (3) equity considerations are especially important, as in Head Start and Food Stamps; (4) no private providers are available to take over the activity; and (5) government reserve capacity is needed, for example stores of back-up emergency medical supplies.

In addition, Leman is willing to claim that in-house administration does have some inherent overall advantages. One is vertical integration. Possessing its own personnel, equipment, and other resources gives the agency full control over what it needs to carry out the mission. The

complexity and uncertainty of relying on multiple parties with different goals are eliminated. Another advantage is that it avoids the extra transaction costs of coordinating and evaluating the activities of outside organizations. While private providers may produce repetitive concrete services more cheaply because of scale, coping with amorphous problems like child obesity or energy independence are better handled by government. Finally, undue delays or instances of corruption are harder to ferret out when spread among private organizations. Also disclosure of sensitive information or violation of employee due process may be less stoppable. Leman concludes by criticizing the federal government for its clumsy, outdated personnel system, but praises it for the many technological innovations it has spawned for society.

In another book named *On Thinking Institutionally*, Hugh Heclo of George Mason University lays the basis for thinking about bureaucracies in a way that transcends the mundane. Institutions are not simply instrumental “tools” at all but living organizational entities of inherent importance. Illustrated by everything from the institution of marriage to the local hospital, institutions are conveyances of values inherited from the past that have been adapted for the present. As a consequence institutions give purpose to collective social life and endow human efforts with shared meaning. While unquestioned belief in their rightness and wisdom should never be tolerated, so too should blanket, wholesale rejection of their authority. Heclo takes a midway position between these two extremes by advocating for a residue of skepticism and occasional dissent to be coupled with generalized acceptance and occasional devotion.

Heclo’s institutions include those that comprise the operating arms of government. In fact he devotes several pages of his book to more particularized concepts of thinking institutionally that pertain especially to bureaucracy. He describes these as “tattered modern remnants” of past institutional practice that deserve “respect in depth” today. One is the concept of profession, a notion that gives seed to the possibility of engaging in a noble cause, such as serving the interests of one’s community. A second is the notion of office, which envisions the carrying out of duties that call for responsible fulfillment of a public duty impartially and conscientiously. Third is stewardship, an idea that anticipates being faithfully attentive to the needs of others so that the trust of those others is deserved and won.³⁸

As it happens, your author has developed an institution-based normative theory of bureaucracy—although when doing so, he had not yet encountered Hecló's work. It is described in a book named *Mission Mystique: Belief Systems in Public Agencies*. The project was the outcome of several years of field research on the qualities of six government agencies that were chosen because they are thought well of to a particularly high degree. My aim was to uncover the traits they might have in common. Four federal organizations were studied: the National Park Service, National Weather Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Peace Corps. One agency each was investigated at the state and local level: the Virginia State Police and the Department of Social Services of Mecklenburg County in Charlotte, North Carolina.

I was analyzing bureaucracy at its best because I wished to uncover in specified conceptual terms what "best" seems to mean in institutional terms for bureaucracy. Obviously these six organizations do not represent some kind of "median norm" in public administration. Their full set of attributes is probably rivaled by a small minority of the thousands administrative bodies in the US public sector. Yet the properties that came to my attention are generic in nature and adaptable to varied settings. Probably most extant bureaus already possess one or more of them in some degree. This realization led me to conclude that, at the very least, my framework could serve as a set of useful goals for improvement in public administration. In any case, I went away from the project with the firm conviction that American bureaucracy *can* work, indeed exceedingly well.

My normative framework is shown in Figure 1.1. It is called a template rather than a model since it constitutes only a recommended guide, not a precise recipe. The term "belief system" connotes value commitments that reinforce each other to create a whole. Their fulfillment yields an image or status I call "mission mystique." The first word in this term indicates the overriding importance of mission achievement as an institutional goal. The second word conveys my realization that what these attributes in combination seemed to do is create an aura of institutional charisma that radiates in two directions: inward to the workforce, where it fosters pride and devotion beyond what one would normally expect; and outward to external constituencies and the informed public, who regard the agency with unusual admiration and respect.

Figure 1.1 shows the full extent of relevant features I uncovered. The template's three columns and three rows form a matrix of nine numbered cells. A central mission purpose (cell 1), regarded by society as important (cell 2), and legitimized by a past record of achievement (cell 3), establishes an overall sense of institutional direction (the top row). This direction is pursued energetically (middle row) by virtue of the intrinsic motivation of personnel (cell 4), their common immersion in a mission-centered culture (cell 5), and knowledge of stories of the past that foster pride and identity (cell 6). The always-lurking danger of having an intense mission commitment become stale or perverted (bottom row) is forestalled by welcomed internal dissent (cell 7), opportunities for policy experimentation (cell 8) and organizational learning that enables agency self-renewal (cell 9).³⁹

It Can Free and Enrich. Contrary to what we encountered above, commending theorists say that bureaucracy is not necessarily oppressive and, on the contrary, can produce freedom. Larry Preston, a political scientist at Northern Arizona University, states that freedom of choice is certainly limited when working in bureaucracy, but it is also enabled. For example, the existence of rules and standard operating procedures set boundaries for action but also confer independent exercise of choice within them.

FIGURE 1.1 The Mission Mystique Belief System: A Template

	Direction Column	Environment Column	Time Column
<i>Purpose Row</i>	1. Central Mission Purpose	2. Important Societal Need	3. Recorded Achievement
<i>Energy Row</i>	4. Intrinsic Motivation	5. Institutional Culture	6. Celebrated History
<i>Vitality Row</i>	7. Accepted Dissent	8. Qualified Autonomy	9. Ongoing Renewal

Source: Charles T. Goodsell, *Mission Mystique: Belief Systems in Public Agencies* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011), p. 14.

The resources provided to bureaucrats for carrying out their duties permit professionals and technicians to practice their expertise freely. Bureaucracy even does something as fundamental as creating the stability and predictability necessary for engaging in the process of reasoned choice. Also the inevitable internal politics that take place in a bureaucracy offer the chance to make bargaining choices. Thus,

*properly conceived, advancing bureaucratization need not mean a loss of freedom. Indeed, personal and social life centered around the rules and logic of bureaucracy can witness far greater freedom than was ever possible in our laissez faire or communal past.*⁴⁰

In a book titled *In Praise of Bureaucracy*, British sociologist Paul du Gay contends in the same vein that bureaucracy does not crush the individual who works in it, as Hummel claims, but instead makes freedom compatible with sovereign authority. His position is developed from Max Weber's concept of ethos of office and runs parallel to Hecló's thoughts on the subject. The ideal "life order" conferred on bureaucrats who occupy an office is such that when on duty, they must not act in arbitrary or unpredictable ways, but otherwise are entitled to make prudent use of discretion. Existing between the separated boundaries of the rules' dos and don'ts is space for creative, independent action by the bureaucrat to seek goals in a spirit of fairness.⁴¹

In 1976 Canadian social psychologist Elliott Jaques presented ideas in his *A General Theory of Bureaucracy* that also take issue with the arguments of Hummel. Working in a hierarchical organization can be—but need not be—alienating, says Jaques. To the contrary, under the right circumstances it can become a setting conducive to a humane work life. The secret is to enable individuals to exercise their natural abilities to the full and to enrich their relationships with colleagues.

Jaques lays out three fundamental principles to achieve this result. The first is that the organization must be small enough to allow its members to know each other, at least by sight, making possible what he calls a "nodding" mutual recognition quality. This facilitates personal interaction, the building of social ties, authentic dialogue, and mutual respect.

Hence the defining workplace unit should not exceed 250 to 300 members; if that is impossible, subparts on that scale are separately identified.

A second principle is to locate the work activity in a single geographic place. This way, members can interact socially with each other on a private basis outside work. Third, Jaques advises that hierarchical levels be limited to three: head manager, section managers, and below that unsupervised work teams. Under this arrangement workers are free to employ their craft knowledge without continuous interference. Reporting is limited to a single immediate superior with appeal possible only one step away.⁴²

Jacques' prescriptions for ease of contact, physical proximity, and a flattened hierarchy sound quaint today. Nonetheless it is very possible that they are feasible more than ever in an electronic age. The village-like qualities that he strives to create may now be possible for the first time in a mass society via e-mail, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

Democracy Counts on It. Early in this chapter I broached the metaphor whereby the bureaucrats generally work “downstairs” and elected officials hold sway “upstairs,” even though the lower-level folk often ascend the stairs to advise the upper-level. Theories like those of Weber and Jacoby portray something of an invasion of the upper story by the lower, however. What would be a contrary view?

A classic early article on the question is “Fear of Bureaucracy: A Raging Pandemic” by Herbert Kaufman, author of many fine books in our field. This anxiety, he says, stems from the belief that bureaucracy is so powerful it is out of control. But, he asks, if this is true, who controls it? If we ask people who have been thwarted by bureaucracy, we find that everyone has a different answer. To use contemporary examples, Occupy on the extreme left sees bureaucracy as the tool of Wall Street, while the Tea Party on the far right blames big-spending Democrats. The coal-burning utilities tell us that global-warming activists are responsible for regulatory “overreach,” but environmentalists believe that lobbyists for those who spew carbon into the atmosphere sabotaged the standard. Back in Washington, political appointees of the administration complain that committee chairs exercise too much influence in the agencies Downtown. Yet Republicans on the Hill are sure the White House is dictating

agency actions. How, then, can anybody be behind bureaucratic power if everyone is? Kaufman's answer is that hyped rhetoric about the power of "bureaucracy" is an abstraction that says nothing cognitively meaningful and merely shows how political warriors need a devil to blame when they lose a fight. What better Lucifer than the bureaucracy?

The only way to comprehend the power of bureaus, Kaufman goes on, is to disaggregate the abstraction of "bureaucratic power" and assess the political influence individual agencies are able to bring to bear in concrete situations. It will be found that diverse factors determine how each organization is both empowered and constrained, in different degrees and ways, as it goes about its decision making. Particularizing the analysis this way does not give satisfying simple answers, but it does bring to light the absurdity of flat-out pronouncements that an identifiable, omnipresent, all-powerful, single vague force is always standing ready to sabotage democracy.⁴³

If it is granted that bureaucratic influence is variable rather than inexorable, one can begin to think more imaginatively about a desirable role for the bureau in policy and power. It might even be possible, despite the specters raised by bureaucracy's critics, for it to *contribute* to democracy. This is the thesis of a book named *Bureaucratic Representation* by Canadian professor H. T. Wilson. He urges us to look to the administrative implementation process for ways for government to act affirmatively and actively in behalf of necessary public and social interests. A major reason that such action is needed is the failure of traditional electoral representation to transcend its proestablishment, conservative biases, Wilson says. Hence ostensibly neutral civil servants should practice bureaucratic representation.

What Wilson means by this phrase is a form of interaction between bureaucrats as they deal with practical problems and policy makers as they make policy. It involves the exercise of "constructive discretion" by bureaucrats, which consists of conveying insights gained during the process of implementation to policy makers as a source for appropriately adjusted policy content. This allows a "closing the loop" in the policy process whereby past outputs of legislatures are turned into fresh policy-making inputs, made possible by learning from direct encounters with public needs. The prime opportunity for that to

happen is the rule-making process, where the problems that lead to regulatory intervention are systematically heard. Informal discretionary experiences with agency clients can also be drawn upon for improvement ideas. Wilson readily admits his idea is sure to set off a howl of protest from the legislative and legal communities. Yet somehow we must convince representative bodies to shift away from the pattern of giving agencies wide discretion and then slapping them later for what they come up with.⁴⁴

The final item of literature to review is *Pragmatist Democracy*, by Christopher Ansell at the University of California, Berkeley. Like Wilson, Ansell proposes an expanded role for bureaucracy in policy making, but his vision for it is considerably more sweeping. He calls upon the administrative agency to become the linchpin for a newly conceived form of democracy. It entails a public deliberative process comprised of several intertwined elements: open consideration of new ideas; a holistic comprehension of issues; deliberate pooling of information; a problem-solving mentality; and a readiness to think reflexively, engage in joint discussion, and permit consensus to evolve.

Last but not least, pragmatist democracy requires a willingness to get the hands dirty in real-world policy experimentation. This is not laboratory experiments to attain objective knowledge in the positivist vein, but actual trial runs of promising intervention approaches followed by subjective assessment of outcomes. It is often valuable to carry out a series of reiterative experiments to capture the full yield of pragmatist thinking.

The bureaucratic agency does not monopolize this activity yet acts as its prime sponsor. To make a bureau capable of this role, it is necessary to modify the principle of hierarchy so that authoritative influences move upward as well as downward. Decentralization as well as centralization are imparted to give localized grassroots groups sufficient space to formulate ideas and launch initiatives. Authority is thought of in relational rather than legal terms in order to nurture authenticity and social bonding. Then, on a practical level, top officials and street-level bureaucrats join forces to fashion workable implementation schemes. The end product is that public administration performs not only at the tail end of the policy process but at its front end as well, concludes Ansell.⁴⁵

SO WHAT'S OUR STARTING POINT?

I bring this first chapter to a close by tying together tightly the points we have covered to give you the best starting point possible for working out your own thoughts on bureaucracy.

In this book I do not use the term “bureaucracy” as a synonym for failed government. It refers, rather, to American public administration and, in particular, its agencies.

Defined this way, bureaucracy is massive in scope with respect to both dollars and personnel numbers. But its organizations and people are spread out among all three levels of our federal system—with most at the local level—and operate in every corner of the country, often in small offices.

Its image is poor among Americans when viewed as an aggregate phenomenon. However, when considered concretely as particular agencies and programs, it receives warmer reviews—including being awarded more trust than Congress.

Published academic thought on bureaucracy ranges across a wide spectrum. For many years the preponderance of scholarly writing was critical. In recent years a substantial amount of countering literature on the other side has appeared.

One point in contention is bureaucracy's effectiveness. Condemning theorists say its monopolistic form causes agencies to be static and mediocre, whereas private firms are more dynamic because they face competition. Accordingly, a movement exists to devolve their activities to the private sector, particularly through contracts. The pro side responds by saying the bureaucracy's career service gives it unparalleled expertise and knowledge. Also many of its activities are life-and-death in nature and should be kept in-house. When the agency culture stresses the importance of its mission to employees, an impressive degree of dedicated service can be generated.

Another split in the literature concerns the attitudes and motivations of the bureaucrats. On one side, critics charge that the hierarchical and specialized structure of bureaucracy, along with its need to use rules, cause its personnel to be narrow, rigid, and rule obsessed. Other ills are a fear of failure and the possibility of arbitrary actions toward clients. Ralph Hummel, bureaucracy's most penetrating critic, contends that people who work in bureaucracy become dehumanized.

In contrast, favorable writers argue that the stability and predictability of bureaucracy provide an opportunity for reasoned judgment, autonomous choice, and personal fulfillment. It is also possible to impart more humanity to bureaucracy if aspects of organization size and communication are rethought. Ascribing evils to bureaucratic behavior using abstract deductive reasoning leads us to ignore the fact that individual agencies are living institutions. They embody core values of the society and put professionalism, a sense of duty, and possibilities for earning trust to work in behalf of the public.

A final point of contention is bureaucratic power. On one side, its huge aggregate size and the fact that bureaucrats are not elected lead critics to charge that bureaucracy circumvents and crushes democratic values and principles by invading private rights and sidestepping legislative power. It possesses a near monopoly of information that gives it the ability to dominate elected officials.

The counter argument is that a mythic concept of overall bureaucratic power is a product of blame laid on government by individuals for its failure to obey their will. The political influence actually exercised within bureaucracy must be assessed at the level of the individual bureau; and, in that light, its amount, use, and impact vary greatly. Bold theorists on the pro side who propose radical new policy roles for administration go beyond implementation of policy and say it could achieve more democracy than we now derive from elected legislatures.

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