

Public Administration at the Millennium: The State of the Field

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ABSTRACT

In 1993, the author analyzed the state of public administration for the American Political Science Association's book, Political Science: The State of the Field. This article reviews the state of public administration at the start of the new millennium: the field's big theoretical questions, enduring theoretical ideas, and its unanswered theoretical puzzles. In the middle of the twentieth century, public administration found itself under attack by both academics and practitioners for theory that provided only weak guidance. New approaches developed in the last third of the century—notably formal theory, network theory, and the “new public management”—have helped bridge the gap. In the end, however, the field's enduring problems are rooted deeply in historic conflicts in the American political tradition. These conflicts make it unlikely that the field will ever be able to escape the struggles that have long bedeviled it. But an understanding of the ways political tradition shapes administrative theory—and of the ways that administrative theory bring political traditions to life—helps provide keen insight into the theoretical issues that matter most.

At the beginning of the new millennium, public administration sits squarely in an historical paradox. It is a proud parent, both intellectually and organizationally, of the professional study of administration. The modern American state owes its basic structure and processes to the contributions public administration made. On the other hand, scholars are fighting over its identity, relevance, and focus. Meanwhile, practicing administrators who once would not have dreamed of launching a new program or restructuring an old one now often press boldly ahead without seeking the field's counsel. Within both the academic and public

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policy communities, public administration is struggling to reassert its former intellectual predominance and redefine its foundations.

Public administration builds from a self-evident importance. Bold policy ideas cannot go far without solid implementation. Elected officials the world over are seeking to reinvent and otherwise reform their bureaucracies because government performance has become even more politically crucial. Administration has, at least since Moses, been important (Wildavsky 1984). It has become only more central since. If spiraling social complexity has made government and its administration even more important, what ideas ought to guide the task of making government work? And if the field's driving ideas seem out of sync with the needs of government managers and with the dominating approaches of its related disciplines, what—if anything—should be done to change public administration's theories?

TENSIONS

The modern study of public administration dates from the Progressive era, especially from Woodrow Wilson's classic, "The Study of Administration" (1887). Wilson's article sought to establish public administration as an important field in its own right. To make the point, he drew a clear line between administration and politics and, since then, this dichotomy has framed the field's toughest battles. The question of whether it is possible—or desirable—to separate politics from administration has preoccupied public administration since. Wilson's article, however, focuses on an even more fundamental point: administration matters—and careful analysts can devise principles to guide its study and practice.

The American Political Science Association's first president was Frank J. Goodnow, who championed Wilson's cause (see Goodnow 1900 and 1905). In Goodnow's view, public administration was the crucial link between the abstract study of politics and the process of improving the way the political system worked. The central importance of public administration lay at the very core of the creation of the new association. Five of the first eleven presidents of the association came from public administration and played important roles in framing the new discipline. One of them—Woodrow Wilson—soon went on to another presidency. As subheadings show in the book review section in the first issue of the *American Political Science Review*, public administration was one of five fields in the new discipline: administration; comparative government (in the form of the study of colonies); public law (including constitutional law and jurisprudence); international law; and political theory. From its very

beginning, public administration was one of the critical foundations of political science, and political science was the natural home of public administration.

Despite this early marriage, however, public administration and political science soon nearly divorced. Public administration promoted a short-lived training movement, devoted to preparing students for the public service with a curriculum independent of political science. Many public administrationists were unhappy about the outcome, and some political scientists found the partnership to be an uneasy one. The difficult issue of training for the public service, and the role of such training within the association, were to become central problems for public administration and its place within the discipline. Public administrationists were never satisfied that political science recognized the importance of practical policy problems and education for the public service; many political scientists struggled continually to advance theory building in the field and cared little about professional training.

When the separation movement failed in APSA's first decade, public administration had little choice but to embrace political science. The American Political Science Association listed public administration as one of the discipline's major fields, a field separate from American government. The connection was an uneasy one, but for better or worse, political science remained the home for the study of public administration (Caldwell 1965; Henry 1987).

Scientific Management: 1915-1940

The message of separating politics from administration, which Goodnow and Wilson preached, soon became a strategy instead for separating administration completely from politics. Following the way charted by Frederick W. Taylor (1911), analysts sought the "one best way" to perform administrative work, a way to seek efficiency free from the meddling of partisan politics. As Roscoe Martin (1952) described, public administrationists built a mechanistic approach to match the emerging private-sector scientific-management models. "Administration was separated severely from the legislative body, toward which its spokesmen frequently manifested not only impatience but also profound distrust." Moreover, "Politics" was anathema—not the politics practiced by administrators, but the politics of the 'politicians'" (p. 67). Advocates of the scientific management approach to public administration saw virtually no barrier to its ability to improve government—if only government administrators could be protected from political meddling.

By 1940, public administration had acquired remarkable prestige and self-confidence within political science and, indeed, in the practice of government. One-fifth of all doctoral degrees awarded that year in political science were in public administration (Martin 1952, 662). President Roosevelt had just implemented the recommendations of the Brownlow Committee (1937), which had proposed sweeping changes to transform the presidency. The committee's three members—Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam, and Luther Gulick—were a pantheon of public administrationists (Karl 1963). Brownlow had helped establish the city manager movement, while Merriam was a vigorous proponent of scientific management. Background papers that were prepared for the committee, notably Gulick's "Notes on the Theory of Organization" (1937), defined the field's orthodoxy for a generation. Meanwhile, young committee staff members soon established themselves as the field's next-generation leaders. Those in the field believed that they had important things to say to government and did not hesitate to say them. When World War II broke out, many of the nation's leading public administrationists went off to Washington to help manage the war effort.

As its influence grew, its professional status was anything but certain. Considerable debate raged about whether public administration was science, process, or art—or, indeed, whether public administration even belonged within political science. Some unhappy political scientists answered the question by forming the American Society for Public Administration in 1939, largely out of a sense that a new institutional home was needed to better train new public servants. ASPA was devoted to the "science, process, and art of public administration"; its founders solved the intellectual dilemma by embracing all the competing perspectives. Even if public administration's home was unclear, however, the field had at least won its battle for respectability by the start of World War II. It had important seats in the central councils of American government and it continued to play an important role in political science.

Critical Self-Examination: 1940-1969

Soon after the end of the war, however, public administration's place within political science declined precipitously. Simple principles about the pursuit of efficiency, based in an administration separate from politics, seemed unacceptably shallow in the light of the war's administrative experience. Meanwhile, political scientists were developing a theory of power in American government that showed clearly the poverty of administrative theory apart from politics. Norton Long (1949) wrote about the role of power within bureaucracy, and Robert A. Dahl (1947) argued

that the study of administration would never become a science. For their part, public administrationists developed a new perspective on the relationship between administration and democracy (Appleby 1945; Waldo 1984).

Herbert Simon delivered the final blow to the politics-administration dichotomy by arguing that the principles approach frequently led to conflicting, and hence useless, prescriptions (1946). He attacked a highly stylized version of the scientific approach to management that did not capture its genuine richness. His criticisms, however, deeply reflected a growing dissatisfaction with the old theories within a new, politically aware approach to public administration (Fesler 1990). Even more important, he redefined decision making, instead of organizational structure, as the critical problem of administration (Simon 1947). In a stroke, he shifted the central unit of analysis from a structural approach to one founded in human interactions. The change eroded the ideas that had guided public administration for half a century and left the field bereft of its central intellectual force (White and McSwain 1990).

Political science, meanwhile, was itself shaking free of the legal-institutional approaches that had defined it since the discipline's founding and was moving instead toward new theories of pluralism and behavioralism. Pluralism rocked public administration. For decades, public administration had sought to ensure that efficiency ruled over political pressures. Pluralism vastly increased the number of actors and gave them all equal legitimacy. The theory also shifted analysis from the process's outputs to the inputs, notably political bargaining, that shaped it. Behavioralism undercut the study of institutions and concentrated instead on individual behavior.

More subtly, the behavioral revolution introduced new methodological standards, including statistical tests based on computer analysis of large data sets, which administrative studies could not meet. Behavioralism also rejected inductive Hoover Commission-style prescriptions and administrative case studies in favor of the development of deductive theories, based on statistical evidence. With the downfall of traditional administrative theories and the rise of a new political science, Allen Schick concluded, "Public administration had come apart and could not be put back together" (1975, 157). While many within public administration vigorously fought separatist tendencies (Martin 1952), public administration and political science moved apart. Many public administrationists sought autonomy from political science, especially in the American Society for Public Administration. For their part, many political scientists saw little merit in

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studying administrative institutions in their search for a new theory of politics (Caldwell 1965).

In 1904, public administration had been a critical pillar in Goodnow's vision of political science, and the field had been central in defining and leading the association itself. By 1962, when APSA issued "Political Science as a Discipline" (1962, 417, 421), a special report on instruction in the discipline, public administration was mentioned only in passing as a subfield of American government. The American Society for Public Administration drew public administration scholars away from political science and some scholars in political science wondered whether public administration properly belonged in the discipline. Dwight Waldo sadly wrote:

It is now unrealistic and unproductive to regard public administration as a subdivision of political science. . . . The truth is that the attitude of political scientists (other than those accepting public administration as their "field") is at best one of indifference and is often one of undisguised contempt or hostility. We are now hardly welcome in the house of our youth. (Quoted in Schick 1975, 160.)

Meanwhile, by the 1970s, new public policy programs had sprung up. They fostered public management, which quite consciously sought to distance itself from traditional public administration, a phrase that by then had virtually become an epithet.

Centrifugal Forces: 1969-Present

Many competing approaches rose to replace the old orthodoxy. In the leading textbook of the era, Leonard D. White celebrated the field's diversity: "There are many ways to study the phenomenon of public administration. . . . All of these approaches are relevant and from all of them come wisdom and understanding" (4th ed., p. 11; quoted by Storing 1965, 50). While some of this diversity reflected a lively intellectual search for new ideas, some students of administration saw it as a "complacent, indiscriminating eclecticism" (Storing 1965, 50). If *any* approach could be useful, then no approach could be *central*. The shift was so great, in fact, that Leonard D. White, perhaps the leading student of administration from the 1920s to the 1950s, ended his career not with grand theories but with administrative histories (White 1948; 1951; 1954; 1958). It was almost as if he felt compelled to begin again at the beginning, to rebuild the field on a new foundation of fresh interpretations.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, public administration suffered from the lack of a theoretical guide and a comfortable

disciplinary home. It had come to the realization that politics mattered but had not developed a persuasive explanation of *how*. Meanwhile, much of political science had convinced itself that public administration had little to offer a more behaviorally oriented field. Some public administrationists forcefully argued that “public administration can no more escape political science than it can escape politics,” as Allen Schick put it. “Until it makes peace with politics, public administration will wander in quest of purpose and cohesion” (1975, 160). Public administration fell into critical self-examination and a serious intellectual crisis (see Ostrom 1973).

Public administrationists have disagreed among themselves about the prospects for resolving this crisis, especially within the discipline of political science. Dwight Waldo’s John M. Gaus Lecture before the American Political Science Association argued that “*estrangement* is perhaps too mild to characterize the relationship of public administration to other fields of political science.” Waldo suggested that, for most political scientists, “public administration concerns the lower things of government, details for lesser minds” (1990, 74; emphasis in original). Herbert Kaufman’s Gaus Lecture worried that public administration and political science were reaching “the end of alliance” (1990). In a third Gaus Lecture, James W. Fesler contended that the worlds of governance and of political science “should not be far apart” (1990, 85; see also Holden 1999; Frederickson 1999).

Meanwhile, within the public policy schools, public management sought its own solutions. Analysts argued that leadership counts (Behn 1991) and that “managerial craftsmanship” lies at the core of the problem (Bardach 1998). Some argued the need to “break through bureaucracy” (Barzelay 1992). Lynn (1996) self-consciously distinguished public management from public administration.

These debates reflect the great uneasiness of the field’s leaders about whether the rift between public administration and political science can be healed, whether alternative approaches (like public management) offer greater promise, and what public administration’s institutional home ought to be. They reflect a fundamental tension between the traditional theoretical foundation of public administration—control by authority, exercised through hierarchy—and newer approaches that, its advocates contend, better match administrative practice. They reflect fundamental concern about the links between theory and practice: how much public administration can—and should—seek normatively to guide the management of public programs.

ADMINISTRATIVE IDEAS AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

These cross-pressures shape both the theory and the practice of public administration at the turn of the millennium. Theorists have tried, especially since the mid-1980s, to put more starch into administrative theory. They have sought a stronger analytical framework and clearer theoretical propositions, most notably through formal and game theory approaches. They have sought to break the theoretical dominance of hierarchical authority by developing network-driven approaches. Practitioners have attempted to develop effective reforms. The reformers, however, have derived little from public administration or its intellectual cousins. That created a three-way bridge whose spans failed to connect: the traditional concerns of public administration, the strategies to make administrative theory more rigorous, and the efforts to find new tactics for effective management.

These problems flowed in large part from different, often conflicting, *ideas* in American political philosophy. Wilson, for example, argued that policy makers needed to delegate power to administrators because policy makers could not possibly cope with the complexity of government programs. They could delegate power secure in the belief that the chain of democratic accountability ensured their ultimate control over administrators' actions. For their part, administrators could develop a toolbox of professional skills that they could employ regardless of policy makers' goals. "If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly," Wilson wrote, "I can borrow his way of sharpening a knife without borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it; and so, if I see a monarchist dyed in the wool managing a public business well, I can learn his business methods without changing one of my republican spots" (Wilson 1887, 220). Wilson's genius lay in arguing a way to bring greater technical expertise—and therefore greater power—into American bureaucracy without having that power threaten democracy and accountability. His approach transformed the pursuit of efficiency into a virtual administrative religion (Kanigel 1997).

Wilson's argument had three important influences on American public management and, especially, on management reform. First, it established the importance of the execution of public policy quite apart from its creation. While Americans had thought quite carefully about effective government, they had not thought much about management as a separable and important function. Second, the argument was based on the notion that management could and should be done well. Wilson believed that the effectiveness of government hinged on the effectiveness of its

administrative apparatus. That, in turn, helped build a strong case for a professional administration and a strong management capacity, regardless of who might be in elected office. Third, because management was important and because management was, at least abstractly, perfectible, Wilson's argument firmly established the twentieth century's reform tradition. As important as the Progressives' processes and structures were in American government, even more important was the reform tradition they reinforced. That tradition carried across Republican as well as Democratic administrations, through two Hoover Commissions, a host of smaller efforts, and ultimately into the Clinton administration's National Performance Review.

Madison, Hamilton, and Jefferson

Despite this rich tradition, many analysts have spent much of the twentieth century struggling to escape Wilson's shadow. Some of the attack came from Madisonians, who saw political power, not administrative efficiency, at the core of government action. As John Gaus powerfully argued, however, "A theory of public administration means in our time a theory of politics also" (1950). More recently, Matthew Holden passionately contended (1999) that no theory of politics is complete without a theory of administration.

The Madisonian tradition, rich in an understanding of balance-of-power politics, is not only a theme deeply embedded in American political thought, it also drove political science's bureaucratic politics and implementation movements during the 1970s and 1980s. Morton Halperin (1974), for example, told the story of the State Department in terms of the political forces converging on it. Pressman and Wildavsky's classic *Implementation* (1973), for example, was as much an argument about the centrality of political power in understanding administrative action as it was a rejection of traditional public administration's approach to the field. James Q. Wilson's *Bureaucracy* (1989) brilliantly assembled the strongest Madisonian influences on the field.

To strengthen the public nature of public administration, administrationists in the Hamiltonian tradition have long pursued a subtly different theme. The Federalists, led notably by Alexander Hamilton, laid out the case for an effective national government. In the *Federalist Papers*, *Federalist* 70, Hamilton forcefully contended that "energy in the executive is a leading character of the definition of good government." Along with his Federalist colleagues, he sought a strong and effective executive branch. He argued for "democratic nationalism," with the nation

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as the primary community and with “intelligent activism” shaping the federal government’s policies in pursuit of the public interest (Lind 1997, xiii). His was a national view of a lively and powerful national government, held in check by popular institutions but energized to do the public’s work.

Contrasting with the Hamiltonian influences is the strong Jeffersonian tradition that has powerfully framed American political and administrative life (L.D. White 1951). Jefferson’s agrarian roots led him to a strong commitment to a government devoted to a small government that protected individual autonomy. In Jefferson’s spirit, many Americans have long argued for a government sharply limited in its power and, to the extent that government is necessary, for locally based government. Jefferson himself thought little about day-to-day administration and derived little satisfaction from authority. The Jeffersonian tradition, therefore, conveys only a fuzzy notion of administration. It is a tradition driven from the bottom up, but it is also one more powerful in concept than in practice. As president, Jefferson was ironically a supreme Hamiltonian who vastly increased the size of the United States by the exercise of “energy in the executive.” John Gaus (1947, 135) reminds his readers that how one feels about power depends on whether one has it: “When you are out of power, you want to limit the powers of those who are in; but your zeal (or rather, that of your wiser and shrewder leaders) will be cooled by the consideration that you want to leave a loophole through which you can respectably undertake the same activities when you in turn achieve power.” Nevertheless, the idea of grass-roots government and bottom-up responsiveness have been an overwhelming influence on American public administration for more than two centuries.

These four influences—Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Wilsonian, and Madisonian—have become the bedrock of American public administration. Not only do they represent the ideas of important thinkers, they also embody four major approaches to both the study and the practice of public administration. The Hamiltonian approach embodies the strong-executive/top-down approach, while the Jeffersonian approach represents the weak-executive/bottom-up approach. The Wilsonian approach, focusing on hierarchy, authority, process, and structure, contrasts with the Madisonian approach that builds on a political balance-of-power. These are abstractions, of course—more of what Max Weber would call *ideal types* than literal representations. Nevertheless, as exhibit 1 shows, they represent strong and recurring patterns in the intersection of American political thought and public administration.

Exhibit 1

Administrative Ideas in the American Political Tradition

	Wilsonian Hierarchical	Madisonian Balance of Power
Hamiltonian Strong-executive/ Top-down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong executive• Top-down accountability• Hierarchical authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centered on non-bureaucratic institutions• Focus on political power• Top-down accountability
Jeffersonian Weak-executive/ Bottom-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weak executive• Bottom-up accountability• Responsiveness to citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centered on non-bureaucratic institutions• Focus on local control• Bottom-up responsiveness

Since the late nineteenth century, these four traditions have framed the basic choices that face the American system. Should administrators and theorists alike focus on strengthening the central government in the Hamiltonian tradition or should they focus on devolving authority to state and local governments or privatizing programs in the Jeffersonian tradition? Should they focus on the executive-strengthening, efficiency-driven, one-best-way of the Wilsonian reform tradition? Or should they integrate the administrative process more seamlessly into the rich texture of the American political process, especially the separation of powers, in the centuries-old Madisonian constitutional tradition? Faced with such tough trade-offs and inescapable demands, American pragmatism has fed a constant appetite for administrative reform—and constantly shifting strategies for building administrative theory. Like the Rubik's cube, which presents a devilish puzzle with a daunting array of colored squares, the American constitutional system offers virtually infinite choices. Governing requires figuring out how to make those choices, how to sustain support for them, and how to adapt the choices to new and pressing problems.

The puzzle is difficult to solve, in part because of conflicting theoretical approaches to management issues and in part because of the difficulty of providing rigorous practical advice on practical problems that ultimately depend on infinitely variable individual behavior. Traditional public administration grew from the rich Wilsonian tradition in hierarchical authority. Separating policy making and its administration seemed sensible if the roles could be clearly delineated and if administrators' behavior could be held consistent with the policy along the chain of command. Hierarchical authority provided an elegant solution. Elected

officials could frame policy and delegate details to administrators. Top administrators could factor the technical details through the hierarchy and hold lower-level administrators accountable through authority.

The fundamental elegance of the theoretical solution broke down in practice, however. Elected officials showed strong instincts to delegate not just technical issues but also important policy questions. They learned that they could intervene selectively in the administrative process to adjust both the policies *and* the details. On the administrative side, the realities of administrative discretion and human behavior meant that authority could not control action. This posed a serious problem for administrative theory: While theorists produced maxims and suggested trade-offs, they could not provide a straightforward solution to the basic theoretical problem of operating hierarchical authority within a democracy. It also posed a problem for practice: The fuzziness of the theory led to less self-assured recommendations by analysts—and less eagerness by elected officials to take the advice. These two dilemmas became even more serious as the social sciences sought to become more rigorous and elected officials faced ever-greater complexity in their management problems.

Formal and Game Theory

Economics-based approaches have offered both a diagnosis of these problems and a theory to solve them. Beginning with Nobel laureate Ronald Coase (1937) and continuing through the work of theorists like Oliver Williamson (1975), the economic-based approach began with a different premise. Instead of seeing workers within a bureaucracy in an instrumental sense—people hired for the skills and controlled through hierarchical authority—it has viewed workers as self-interested individuals. The approach, christened *principal-agent theory*, views organizational interactions as relationships between a principal, who has a job to be done, and an agent, who agrees to do the job in exchange for compensation. In such relationships, principals and agents alike seek their self-interest.

Principal-agent theory explains how organizations work—as networks of contract-based principal-agent relationships (H.C. White 1985). It explains why individuals do what they do—self-interest drives them. But it also helps to explain organizational pathologies. Information asymmetries plague the relationships and can produce *adverse selection*, in which principals cannot know enough about their agents to make sure they have selected the best ones. It can also yield *moral hazard*, in which principals

cannot know enough about their agents' behavior to be sure that their performance matches the terms of the contract.

Agency theory thus identifies *information* as the critical organizational problem. Principals can improve their selection of agents by learning more about them before hiring them. They can reduce moral hazard by adjusting agents' incentives and improving the monitoring of their behavior. It has been most important in two applications: theories of bureaucratic outcomes and theories of institutional choice. In the bureaucratic-outcome approach, researchers have set out to reform the bureaucratic politics literature. Bureaucratic politics, along with much early public choice literature, suggested that American bureaucracies resist change. Controllers, like members of Congress, have little incentive for oversight because the rewards are few (Mayhew 1974). The bureaucratic outcomes approach, however, argues from the experiences of the Reagan years and from sophisticated quantitative analysis that the course of bureaucracies can indeed be changed. The argument goes like this (see, for example, Wood and Waterman 1991): Institutions headed by elected officials, such as the presidency and Congress, create bureaucracies; that is, bureaucracies can be viewed as agents for the principals'—elected officials'—wishes. The principals design within bureaucracies incentives and sanctions to enhance their control. When the principals detect bureaucratic behavior that does not match their policy preferences, they use these incentives and sanctions to change that behavior. Among the important sanctions are the president's appointment power and the budgetary leverage that the branches share.

Bureaucratic outcomes students have surveyed a number of federal agencies, and they have built a statistically significant case that agency outcomes covary with political preferences, especially changes in presidential administrations. (See T.M. Moe 1982 and 1985; Weingast and Moran 1983; Wood and Waterman 1991.) From that, these students conclude that "elected leaders can and do shape bureaucratic behavior in systematic ways" (Wood and Waterman 1991, 801). This approach has tended to focus on the *process*, rather than the *outcome*, of bureaucratic behavior. For example, they tend to study the number of seizures by drug enforcement agencies or the level of enforcement activity by regulatory agencies. It is an old problem in measuring bureaucratic performance to separate measures activity from results. In drug enforcement, thousands of small dealers can be put out of business without affecting the large suppliers; a large number of seizures can produce high levels of activity without demonstrating effectiveness. Likewise, hundreds of small antitrust cases can pale by comparison with one single

case, such as the divestiture of AT&T, which took years to accomplish but which produced profound implications. Covariance between changes in independent variables—such as changes in presidential administrations—and changes in process measures—such as the number of seizures or inspections—may in fact say very little about bureaucratic outcomes. That weakens the argument for a clear principal-agent connection between the preferences of elected officials and the activities of government bureaucracies. Furthermore, it underlines the critical information problems that afflict inferences about the whole process.

The impact of institutional-choice theory has been far greater (see T.M. Moe 1995). It seeks to examine the basic questions of bureaucratic politics—the three-way interactions among bureaus, politicians, and interest groups. Unlike bureaucratic politics, however, it attempts to model these interactions formally. Institutional-choice theory borrows heavily from agency theory in postulating the bureaucracy as an agent of political forces and in incorporating serious information asymmetries. It assumes that the players are self-interested, but it also builds on Simon's (1947) argument about bounded rationality. Participants would like to maximize their utility—to optimize—but they cannot because of information constraints. Thus they must satisfice and adapt their choices to the constraints they face. The result is a tight argument, based on mathematical (but not necessarily statistical) models, that produces a pluralist outcome: the power of bureaucracies is the result of the equilibrium that contending political forces produce (Bendor and Moe 1985; Knott and Miller 1987; T.M. Moe 1989).

Institutional-choice theory thus completes the steps, in rigorous form, first made by bureaucratic politics. It replaces the traditional public administration view of bureaucracy-as-actor, as independent variable, with a new view of bureaucracy-as-acted-upon, as dependent variable. Organizations are not designed to promote efficiency but rather to reflect the power of political interests. These interests select among organizational options to improve results, an approach christened *institutional choice*. They can understand which external controllers have the greatest incentives and strongest tools to dominate bureaucratic behavior. For example, Mayhew (1974) argued that members of Congress have little incentive for oversight because the rewards are few. (Compare T.M. Moe 1982 and 1985; Weingast and Moran 1983; Wood and Waterman 1991.)

It is scarcely surprising that bureaucratic structures often do not seem to be designed to promote efficiency, or that they often produce ineffective results. Institutional-choice theory contends

that they are not fundamentally designed to do so. Rather, they are the result of rules, implicit and explicit, that are the result of political forces. These rules can be discovered, influenced, and changed. Any attempt to reform bureaucracy thus must take account of not just (and perhaps not even) efficiency but rather of the constellation of political forces that will create the rules under which the bureaucracy must operate. Some studies in this tradition, such as Chubb and Moe's controversial study on reform of local schools (1990), build on economic theories to recommend more choice as a way to make bureaucracies more responsive. Recent analyses have become even more sophisticated, both in modeling bureaucratic behavior and in specifying outcomes. Irwin L. Morris's examination of the Federal Reserve (1999), for example, carefully assesses the independence of Fed policy making. He compares the Fed's decisions with presidential and congressional policy preferences to conclude that monetary policy results from a highly interactive system.

The economic approach has come under heavy criticism, especially from theorists who contend that the search for rationality robs the study of organizations of their very life. Economic theories of organization, Charles Perrow contends, represent "a challenge that resembles the theme of the novel and movie *The Invasion of the Body-Snatchers*, where human forms are retained but all that we value about human behavior—its spontaneity, unpredictability, selflessness, plurality of values, reciprocal influence, and resentment of domination—has disappeared" (1986, 41). Terry M. Moe agrees (1987, 475), contending that bureaucracies tend to be omitted as major features of these models. Instead, they appear "as black boxes that mysteriously mediate between interests and outcomes. The implicit claim is that institutions do not matter much."

Even more fundamental has been the battle within political science on rational-choice theory. Green and Shapiro have contended that "rational choice scholarship has yet to get off the ground as a rigorous empirical enterprise." Indeed, they argue, "many of the objections that rational choice theorists characteristically advance against rival modes of social science turn out to be applicable to their own empirical work" (1994, 7). Others (see Scharpf 1997) have tried to pull the formal approaches back to actor-centered explanations.

Shepsle and Bonchek counterattacked by arguing that although "political science isn't rocket science," the formal models provide "purposely stripped-down versions of the real thing." These models, they argue, provide greater rigor than the story-telling approach that characterized much of the post-World

War II literature in the field (1997, 8-9; see also Friedman 1996). They contend that solid study of bureaucracy requires embedding it in larger political systems, and, therefore, any effort to separate policy from administration is folly. The relationships between bureaucrats and the rest of the system can be modeled as a bargaining process. The process produces three conflicting arguments (see chap. 13). First, "the permanent bureaucracy exploits its informational advantages vis-à-vis elected politicians, leading to bureaucratic budgets too large, bureaucrats too numerous, and bureaucratic output too abundant." This model, founded in Niskanen's work (1971), presumes that politicians suffer from a lack of incentives and information to provide better oversight. Second, Shepsle and Bonchek suggest, politicians often are proactive and well informed, and they use their information to bargain effectively with bureaucrats over outputs (see Miller and Moe 1986). Finally, they review McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast's argument (1987 and 1989) that the information asymmetries might actually favor politicians, who can use their advantages to control effectively the behavior of bureaucrats.

Several important conclusions flow from the formal and game theory approaches. First, these approaches are not fully mature. The theorists themselves acknowledge that large holes remain in their arguments and that far more work needs to be done. Second, the approaches do not all lead in the same direction. The theorists are engaged in lively, even heated, arguments among themselves about which formal approach is most useful. These battles are nowhere close to resolution. Third, the theoretical formulations are far more elegant than their empirical tests. The behaviors they seek to model are extremely complex and not easily reducible to equations and statistics. To conduct empirical tests, they must impose large constraints and look only at pieces of the puzzle. They contend that this is a natural part of theory building. Traditional public administrationists, on the other hand, often find the limits on questions and evidence arbitrary and unpersuasive. Fourth, regardless of these criticisms, the theories have surfaced new approaches and explanations that largely escaped more-traditional administrative studies. They have provided, in particular, a far richer explanation of the linkages between bureaucrats and bureaucracies, on the one hand, and the larger political system on the other. Finally, whatever their theoretical value might be, the formal approaches provide little guidance to administration-in-action. Practitioners often have little patience with the abstract battles over the relationships between principals and agents. The theories might explain why Congress, for example, behaves as it does in dealing with

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bureaucracy, but policy makers provide scant guidance, at best, about what they ought to do about it.

The formal approaches thus have become far more sophisticated. They have not yet won the day within political science, however. Nor have they succeeded in bridging the gap between administrative theory and practice. They have enriched the debate and framed some questions far more sharply. Public administration has learned it can neither ignore the significant contributions of these approaches—nor can it completely accept them.

Networks

Other theorists have taken a markedly different approach. They recognize that authority and hierarchy have traditionally rested at the very core of traditional organizational theory. However, much of government's changing strategies and tactics, especially since World War II, has involved heavy and increasing use of multiorganizational teams and partnerships with non-governmental tools (Mosher 1980; Salamon 1981; Kettl 1988). The more government relies on such complex relationships that stretch far beyond hierarchical authority, the more trouble traditional administrative theory has in explaining behavior.

The government, for example, is relying more on an impressive variety of tools, from private-sector ties to implementation through nonprofit and voluntary organizations (Hood 1983; Brudney 1990). Similar trends are afoot at the state and local levels as well (Fixler and Poole 1987). The result is a trend toward a "hollow state," with government organizations providing essential services but relying on indirect workers for most of the labor (Milward and Provan 1991; Seidman 1998).

The growing interconnections among public, private, and nonprofit organizations profoundly disrupt traditional notions of administration. Different strategies and tactics demand new approaches to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness (Smith 1983). The result of these new strategies is often not so much privatization of the public sector, as their advocates suggest, but rather governmentalization of the private sector as more and more of society becomes tied, if even indirectly, to the administrative machinery of governmental programs. At the same time, the simultaneous centralization and decentralization of governmental programs demands a fresh look at the tactics of policy control. As Charles H. Levine pointed out, subtle policy changes have gradually produced a "quiet crisis" challenging not only the government's personnel system but also public management as a

whole (Ingraham 1987; Ingraham and Rosenbloom 1990; Levine with Kleeman 1992).

The field's response has been to develop a new theory of network-based relationships. Both formal and informal ties link organizations seeking a common purpose. These linkages could be through intergovernmental grant programs, contracting relationships, or loose partnerships. They include federal, state, and local actors, as well as for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. (See Savas 2000; O'Toole 1997a and 1997b; Milward and Snyder 1996; Milward and Provan 1995 and 1998; Kettl 1993; Scharpf 1993.)

This work has made several important contributions. First, it has helped public administration escape the pathologies of theory deeply rooted in hierarchical authority. Second, it has helped reconcile theory to new—and obvious—patterns of administrative practice. Third, it has led to intriguing new approaches to coordination that do not rely solely on authority (see Wise 1990; Cleveland 1985; Chisholm 1989). Fourth, it has helped to provide the foundation for linking the study of *governance* with an understanding of the workings of *government*. This last contribution is perhaps the most important because, as Frederickson argues, this provides the critical connection “to the big issues of democratic government. It is in governance theory that public administration wrestles with problems of representation, political control of bureaucracy and the democratic legitimacy of institutions and networks in the time of the fragmented and disarticulated state” (1999, 19).

Indeed, Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (1999) have considerably strengthened the analysis of governance frameworks. They define “governance” as “regimes of laws, administrative rules, judicial rulings, and practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable governmental activity” (pp. 2-3). This approach, coupled with careful investigation of the web of relationships within government, provides a strong foundation on which to build future theoretical advances.

Thus network theory not only has provided a framework for understanding the growing interconnections among varied organizations that find themselves working together to implement public policy, it also has helped public administration gain fresh purchase on the question that has occupied it since its founding—and, indeed, the nation since its creation: how best to understand the connections between political power and representative democracy.

Reinventing Government and the New Public Management

Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* staged a frontal attack on these issues. They celebrated what they called "a new form of governance" created by "public entrepreneurs" around the country (1992, xi). These entrepreneurs, Osborne and Gaebler concluded, were reinventing government through ten strategies, ranging from "steering rather than rowing" to "meeting the needs of the customer, not the bureaucracy."

The book was in part a summary of what some managers have been doing for years. It was in part a critique of traditional administrative practice. It was also, in part, a polemic making the case for a reinvented government. It had an extraordinary impact on debates about both the theory and the practice of public administration. The impact was all the more remarkable because neither was an academic: Osborne was a journalist and Gaebler was a former city manager. Their work caught the eye of presidential candidate Bill Clinton (who himself had been an exemplar in Osborne's previous book [1988]). Soon after Clinton's inauguration, he and Vice President Gore launched the National Performance Review (NPR) to reinvent the federal government. Osborne and Gaebler's book quickly moved from best seller to how-to guide for the new administration's program.

The NPR pursued hundreds of recommendations and an aggressive downsizing of the federal bureaucracy. While the Clinton administration had wildly varying success in pursuing these recommendations (see Kettl 1998), it did indeed shrink the federal civilian workforce by more than 350,000 positions. The administration worked with Congress on traditional top-down, Wilsonian/Hamiltonian-style reforms: mandating performance measurement by all federal agencies and implementing a major procurement reform bill. However, the NPR also included Jeffersonian-style bottom-up reforms: urging top managers to empower their lower-level employees to exercise their discretion, and pursuing a major customer-service initiative to make government programs more responsive to citizens' needs.

Modern Madisonians roundly attacked the NPR. David Rosenbloom, editor of public administration's leading journal, *Public Administration Review*, warned reformers, "Don't forget the politics!" (1993). Congressional Research Service analyst Ronald C. Moe contended that the NPR threatened serious damage to democracy by seeking to uproot public administration's roots in administrative law and constitutional practice (1993 and 1994). Frustrated with the drumbeat of private-sector models, H. George Frederickson argued strongly that public administration

is *public* and ought not be confused with private-sector strategies (1992). Indeed, the NPR's arguments for customer service and entrepreneurial government enraged Madisonians. Not only did they see the public and private sectors as so different that private reforms simply were not transferable to government, they also believed that private-sector approaches threatened democratic accountability.

The conflicts were scarcely surprising. Madisonians have scrapped with Hamiltonians for generations over where the balance of power in the American political system ought to lie. Moreover, the presence of both Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian forces within the NPR led to a constant tug-of-war among its elements: Should the reinventers stress downsizing or customer service, performance-driven control or employee empowerment? Administrative reform movements are hard-wired into the national political culture. Perhaps no other nation has so consistently pursued such reform, especially during the twentieth century. The NPR's intellectual provenance came from a best seller produced from outside academe, not from its theoretical leaders. Its instincts, however, contained internal contradictions. Its Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian features ensured both internal conflict and attack from academics, who had been marginalized in the debate and who often found themselves opposed to at least some of the NPR's tactics.

Moreover, the NPR proved just part of a broader, global management reform movement. Driving the global movement was a strategy to shrink government's size and improve its performance that grew out of a liberal New Zealand government and a conservative British government. New Zealand, for example, launched major reforms in the mid-1980s to introduce accrual accounting and management contracts (with senior government managers employed by their cabinet officers to produce prespecified programmatic outputs at an agreed-upon price). The government quite self-consciously sought to drive government administration by models of market-like self-interested behavior. In fact, the reformers borrowed heavily from principal-agent theory, to the point that phrases like "moral hazard" and "adverse selection" regularly popped up in conversations among government officials. (See, for example, Pallot 1999; James 1998; Scott, Ball, and Dale 1997; Boston and Pallot 1997; Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh 1996.) Allen Schick's careful analysis (1996) shows that the New Zealand reforms proved remarkably successful. The United Kingdom followed a somewhat different course, with more emphasis on privatization and customer service and less emphasis on management contracts and accrual accounting. (See Pollitt 1993; Borins 1997.)

Together, these reforms—and others that occurred in a surprising number of nations around the world (Jones, Schedler, and Wade 1997)—were christened “the new public management” (see Hood and Jackson 1991). While scholars debated whether new public management in fact represented a new paradigm (Borins 1997) or part of a continual battle to reconcile old ideas (Lynn 1997), there was little doubt that it represented an approach substantially different from public administration. It focused on management rather than social values; on efficiency rather than equity; on mid-level managers rather than elites; on generic approaches rather than tactics tailored to specifically *public* issues; on organizations rather than processes and institutions; and on management rather than political science or sociology (Thompson 1997, 3). It also provoked a substantial new literature with a strong comparative focus (Hood 1998; Peters and Savoie 1998; Naschold 1996; Aucoin 1995).

The new public management frames three important issues for American public administration. First, in many ways, the new public management fits the Hamiltonian tradition (with a strong, top-down executive, although it does focus at lower bureaucratic levels than does the usual Hamiltonian approach). It is also more Wilsonian than Hamiltonian, especially in its separation of management from policy functions. Second, while analysts have often compared the NPR (Clinton’s National Performance Review) with the NPM (new public management), they are in fact very different enterprises. While they share some features, the NPR was in many ways less sweeping (especially in shrinking government’s basic jobs) yet more ambitious (incorporating outcome-based measures and customer service standards for all government programs). Third, the key differences hinge critically on the American political tradition. New Zealand-style management contracts depended on the separation of policy and administrative responsibilities embodied in a parliamentary system, as well as a willingness by government policy makers to specify clearly the goals they wanted managers to pursue. American institutions and traditions simply do not fit the requirements of many NPM strategies and tactics. That has not prevented the NPM from heavily influencing the NPR, but they are distinctly different phenomena that require differential analysis.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE POLITICAL CULTURE

These distinctions highlight two critically important conclusions about public administration in America. First, public administration is hard wired into the political culture. It follows political norms and policy wants. These norms and wants

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historically have varied within the broad Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Wilsonian, and Madisonian traditions. New reforms, either political or administrative, might well forge a new tradition. Indeed, the industrial revolution sparked American progressivism and gave birth to the Wilsonian tradition at the end of the nineteenth century. These four recurring political values have shaped American public administration for a century and are likely to continue to do so in the twenty-first century. Most administrative approaches, one way or another, flow out of these traditions. Moreover, reforms that do not fit the patterns, like the Westminster new public management, either are ignored in the American system or must be tailored to fit.

Second, these values inevitably conflict. The inconsistent guidance of the principles stage of American public administration—centralize! decentralize!—flowed from inconsistent political norms. The American political system is deliciously well organized not to prevent conflict but to channel it, and the streams and torrents of this conflict inevitably flow through the administrative process. Administration has always been politics in action, and action-filled politics creates conflict-filled administration. As exhibit 2 suggests, the reform impulses fit different norms. The norms shift and, hence, administrative approaches do as well. As economists would put it, American public administration is unlikely ever to reach a stable equilibrium. Indeed, the conflicting traditions—and the ideas that flow from them—ensure conflicting approaches. Understanding which ideas, from game theory to reinventing government, come from which political tradition helps explain why.

This is certainly not a prescription for an atheoretical, anecdote-laced public administration. The formal and game theory approaches have demonstrated that more rigorous methods can yield different hypotheses and conclusions. The new public management has produced intriguing ideas for reform, even if many of them fit the American system poorly. Moreover, substantial theoretical advances have occurred because of the systematic comparing of how the interaction between policy and administration produces different issues at different levels.

The field needs new insights because it is struggling with three fundamental questions. First, what should replace the field's reliance on hierarchy? For three generations, hierarchical authority defined traditional public administration, but since the 1950s its theoretical preeminence has slipped. Nevertheless, hierarchical authority has not evaporated. It continues, in fact, to describe how most complex organizations organize themselves and how elected officials think about holding government

Exhibit 2

Administrative Ideas in the American Political Tradition

	Wilsonian Hierarchical	Madisonian Balance of Power
Hamiltonian Strong-executive/ Top-down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional public administration• Principal-agent theory• New public management• NPRDownsizingPerformance measurementProcurement reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bureaucratic politics• Implementation• Game theoryInstitutional choiceCongressional/presidential dominance
Jeffersonian Weak-executive/ Bottom-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NPREmployee empowermentCustomer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Network theory

bureaucracies accountable. How can the field incorporate the continued importance of hierarchical authority into broader models, both empirical and normative, about public administration? Organizational theories of networks and political theories of governance offer great promise. However, linking them and tying them to hierarchical authority will require much careful work.

Second, what should be the field's approach to the policy-administration dichotomy? Public administration relied heavily on it for its first three generations. Since the 1950s, it has reconciled itself to the seamless connection between policy decisions and administrative action. However, especially in the new public management, reformers have resurrected the dichotomy to promote efficiency. New Zealand's performance contracts between cabinet officials and chief executives, for example, embody the policy-administration dichotomy. So, too, does the extensive growth of contracts between American governments and non-governmental partners.

The theory is: Hire agents to perform the government's work and give them flexibility in how best to do it. The practice, however rapidly it is spreading, raises all the knotty questions about political accountability and administrative effectiveness that traditionally have needed public administration theory. Every time theorists think they have resolved the dilemma, either by clarifying the boundaries or melding them, the old policy administration creeps back in. Public administration can no longer be viewed solely as a theoretical approach to the behavior of

governmental bureaucracies. Understanding public administration requires a careful analysis of how administrative behavior links with political institutions, as well as an analysis of how civil society has become hard wired into the process of managing government programs. What new faces will the policy-administration dichotomy present—and how should public administration best resolve it?

Third, how can public administration ensure the systematic testing of its theoretical propositions and, therefore, advance the state of theory? Public administration has long been criticized, especially in comparison with economics and other social sciences, for a lack of rigor in theory and research. The complaints have been so deep that many theorists have argued that the only way to promote careful analysis would be to launch new lines of inquiry separate from traditional public administration.

Labels aside, some work in game theory offers hope for spinning new hypotheses and examining them systematically. Statistical analysis has infiltrated much public administration writing. Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (1999) have shown the potential for careful work in management theory. Barzelay (2000) suggests sorting the basic approaches into categories, defined by important theoretical questions and research approaches. He suggests that a scheme organized by public management policies, government operations, executive leadership, and program design can yield important conclusions. On a different front, international comparisons have produced important insights both about new theoretical approaches and about how the American political and administrative systems interact (see, for example, Jones, Schedler, and Wade 1997). Important methodological advances have increased the precision of administrative arguments and improved the ability of scholars to discriminate among competing theoretical claims. The underlying question is: How can these and other advances promote more careful analysis and theory building in public administration?

These three questions shape the core puzzles in American public administration. Moreover, they bring to life the strong links between public administration and political culture—its variations, conflicts, instabilities, and aspirations. These linkages help explain why administrators act as they act, and why politicians and citizens treat administrators as they treat them. They also explain the many deep-rooted conflicts among scholars with competing theories. Every theoretical proposition is also implicitly a political argument. Propositions that embody different political arguments will predictably produce deep theoretical conflicts. The political traditions also help to identify the issues

that most need debate and discussion. They provide standards for judging the battle and, in the end, assessing how competing ideas are most likely to promote American political ideals.

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