CHAPTER 4

Beliefs

WHEN RICHARD NIXON became president in 1969, he was worried that the federal bureaucracy would sabotage his administration's plans. To Nixon, the government agencies over which he nominally presided were staffed by liberals recruited by past Democratic administrations who would resist his conservative policies. Richard Nathan, a political scientist, has given us a vivid account of the efforts made by the Nixon White House to control or bypass what were often described as "New Deal bureaucrats."[1]

Nixon's worries were nothing new. When the Labour party came to power in Great Britain in 1945, its leaders suspected that the British civil service, most of whose members had been hired by Conservative administrations, would sabotage Labour plans to expand the welfare state and nationalize major industries. To make matters worse, the higher echelons of the British bureaucracy had been recruited from among the graduates of the elite British universities, chiefly Oxford and Cambridge, and these institutions were thought to be bastions of Tory privilege and seedbeds of Tory opinions. A book reflecting these fears had been published shortly before the Labour victory. In it, J. Donald Kingsley argued that democratic control over government was weakened to the extent that the administrators of government programs were unrepresentative of the people at large.[2]

Attitudes and Behavior

Both liberals and conservatives fear that the attitudes of bureaucrats will determine how they define and perform their tasks. Such concerns will strike most people as reasonable. In our daily lives we often explain the

behavior of a spouse or child, friend or co-worker, as reflecting his or her attitude. If a family member performs a household chore reluctantly or moodily, we account for this by saying that he or she has an uncooperative or sulky attitude. If politicians favor higher welfare payments, we explain this by saying that they are liberals; if they want to cut those payments, we take this as a sign that they are conservatives. Given these common experiences, the preceding chapter may strike many readers as beside the point, if not plain wrong. Why talk about situational imperatives and formative experiences when what diplomats, police officers, or antitrust lawyers do is the result of their attitudes?

If that is your view, it may come as a surprise to learn that psychologists do not find much evidence that behavior is explained by attitudes. "Reports of rather low or insignificant relations between attitudinal predictors and behavioral criteria have been accumulating for more than 40 years," conclude two scholars after an exhaustive summary of the literature.[3] "The present review provides little evidence to support the postulated existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expression and his actions," concludes another scholar after finishing his review of the available studies.[4] And in one of the most dramatic tests of a social science prediction, the fears of the Labour party and of J. Donald Kingsley turned out to be unfounded: The Labourites came to power, passed laws enlarging the welfare state and nationalizing industries, and the supposedly reactionary British civil servants faithfully carried out the new policies.

Why do these common beliefs about the power of attitudes seem to be so wrong? An attitude is a person's evaluation of some entity (a policy, an object, another person) in his or her environment. The assumption that attitudes explain behavior is equivalent to saying, for example, that how we behave toward our job depends on how we evaluate it (whether we like or dislike it). But our behavior toward an object will be influenced not only by our evaluation of it but by the rewards and penalties associated with alternative courses of action. These influences include not only those controlled by persons in authority (our parents, our boss) but also those controlled by co-workers (for example, their approval or disapproval). When we realize that attitudes must compete with incentives for influence over our behavior, it is not surprising that attitudes often lose out to the rewards we seek or the penalties we try to avoid.

Consider intake workers in welfare offices. They interview applicants for Aid to Families with Dependent Children or General Relief and determine their eligibility. Many observers believe that what welfare workers do is governed by their attitude toward welfare recipients: Liberals often think the workers are nosy skinflints; conservatives often suppose them to be mush-headed do-gooders. To judge from the working atmosphere in welfare offices, one might infer that the liberals are right. The offices are unattractive, even intimidating. Jeffrey Prottas, who spent many months observing work in several local offices of the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, described them this way:

> Welfare applicants frequently have to wait several hours before they are seen by a worker. The surroundings are not congenial. Waiting areas are always crowded and dismal. No one can (or will) provide the least clue to the probable length of the wait or what will happen next. There are always some applicants who leave before seeing a worker.[5]

But if we conclude from these facts that welfare workers handle clients in this way because the former have a negative attitude toward the latter, we shall be very much mistaken. For one thing, the people hired as welfare workers are not substantially different from those hired to work in hotels, insurance companies, and real estate offices, where one encounters a very different atmosphere—typically, one that is bright, cheery, and helpful. The reason has little to do with attitudes and almost everything to do with incentives. In the welfare office, workers are trying to ration scarce resources among needy clients seeking a "free" good (a welfare check); the business firms, by contrast, are trying to induce customers to make a voluntary purchase.

For another thing, differences in the way affairs are conducted among different welfare officers are largely unrelated to the attitudes of the workers. Tana Pesso compared two welfare offices in Massachusetts and found that in one, the intake clerks treated the clients with more respect and consideration than in the other. In the first office, the workers met with the clients behind closed doors, spoke to them in friendlier terms, and gave them a bit more help as they struggled to understand the document they were about to sign; in the second, there was little privacy, fewer explanations, and no extra assistance. The offices had workers with similar backgrounds. The differences were the result of how the offices were managed: in the first, supervisors stressed that workers be considerate; in the second they did not.[6]

But the differences between the two offices were much less significant than their similarities. All workers valued convenience and equity over accommodation and responsiveness. That is to say, the welfare workers acted so as to minimize both the burdens of handling a clientele that was often complicated, demanding, and uncooperative and the likelihood that their decisions would later be described as unfair or unjustified. The price of convenience and equity (or justifiability) was unresponsiveness to individual wants.[7] This is fully in accord with what Prottas found. The more amenable and deferential the client, the more helpful the worker. The more aggressive, demanding, and knowledgeable the client, the less helpful was the worker. Put another way, when the client cooperated with the worker so as to minimize the latter's costs, the latter provided better service; when the client refused to cooperate and thus raised the worker's costs, the latter provided less service.[8]

In short, the imperatives of the situation more than the attitudes of the worker shape the way tasks are performed in welfare offices. The key imperative is to reconcile the wants of a variegated and somewhat suspect group of petitioners with the organizational need for achieving equity and managing the large case load.

Welfare workers, of course, must labor under the eyes of their supervisors, and accordingly we might expect their attitudes to have only a modest influence on their behavior. But many public employees work alone or in pairs outside the purview of supervisors. Surely in these cases individual attitudes will shape behavior. Consider police officers on patrol in a racially mixed city. In 1966, sociologists Donald Black and Albert Reiss interviewed such officers in three large northern cities about their racial attitudes. Most white officers expressed critical views of blacks. Some of these officers were, by any standard, bigoted. Black and Reiss also arranged to have these officers observed while on patrol. Despite their views, the officers arrested black and white suspects in comparable circumstances at about the same rate.[9] Here, an important aspect of task definition—deciding whether to use an arrest to handle a situation—was made on grounds having little to do with the race of the suspect, and thus presumably little to do with the racial attitudes of the officers. Attitudes may have affected how the police spoke to citizens (Black and Reiss had no data on that), but they did not define the job itself, i.e., the circumstances under which an arrest was appropriate. That seemed to be defined by the circumstances of the moment (for example, whether there was a victim present who wanted an arrest) and by some shared understanding among the officers as to what constituted grounds for an arrest.

Individual attitudes may not even determine whether in the heat and fright of a tense moment the police shoot their guns at citizens. James Fyfe studied police shootings in New York City. He compared the rate at which blacks were shot by black officers and white officers, and found that black officers were about twice as likely to shoot at black civilians as were white officers. When the duty assignment of these officers (e.g., what kind of precinct they worked in) was held constant, black and white officers were about equally likely to use deadly force.[10] Given this finding, it is hard to believe that racial attitudes were the sole or even the most important determinant of police behavior.

Even when attitudes do make a difference, it is possible for organizations to change behavior without changing attitudes. In the early 1970s, the rate at which police officers shot civilians (who were disproportionately black) in Birmingham, Alabama, was over four times greater than the rate at which they shot them in Washington, D.C., even though the crime rate in Washington was more than twice as high as in Birmingham. In Detroit, police used deadly force (again, disproportionately against blacks) at a rate twice that of the police in Oakland, California, even though the two cities had comparable crime rates and populations. But when new police administrators took office in Birmingham and Detroit, the rate at which the police used deadly force dropped dramatically even though the crime rates were increasing.[11] It is hard to imagine that these sharp differences and dramatic changes in behavior were the result of great differences or sudden changes in attitudes. It is more likely that they were the result of managing rewards and penalties.

Similar findings by the dozen have come from the inquiries of industrial psychologists and sociologists. If attitudes determine behavior, then employees with poor morale or little job satisfaction would display higher rates of absenteeism and lower rates of productivity then those with high morale and much job satisfaction. In fact, there seems to be little, if any, relationship between satisfaction and absenteeism or productivity.[12] This is not to say that there are no individual differences related to productivity; as we shall see in chapter 8, some traits *do* predict job performance, but these do not include generalized attitudes.

Attitudes (and ideology) will influence how a job is performed if the job is weakly defined—that is, there are few clear rules specifying how it should be done and few strong incentives enforcing those rules. Voting in any election is a weakly defined "job" (or role, to use the sociologists' term). As a result, people are free to vote their beliefs. Playing second base for the Boston Red Sox is a tightly defined job. The position and moves of that man are shaped by very precise rules and understandings and reinforced by powerful incentives—an umpire's call, a manager's fine, an owner's contract, a crowd's applause. No serious baseball fan would waste much time trying to learn about the attitudes or political opinions of second basemen.

The roles that can be played in a government agency range from those that are almost as highly defined as that of a second baseman to those that are only slightly more structured than that of a voter. People who sit at computers all day and type in data on social security earnings are performing tasks so mechanical that one can imagine their being replaced some day by a machine. But other tasks, like those of a police officer or schoolteacher, are quite unroutinized. What these people do importantly depends on varying and unpredictable circumstances. The role of an antitrust lawyer or a foreign service officer lies somewhere in between. Personal beliefs can have a large effect on how tasks are defined when the role to be played is not highly specified by laws, rules, and circumstances and when the operator playing that role receives relatively weak rewards from the organization itself.

Many government agencies are filled with operators performing loosely

defined roles—lawyers, scientists, engineers, diplomats, physicians, criminal investigators, forest rangers, and administrative law judges, to name but a few. Some of these people also receive money wages from their agencies that are less than what they could receive doing similar tasks for private firms. To varying degrees, all of these operators bring to their work predispositions about how the job ought to be done. These predispositions come from their prior experiences, their sensitivity to professional standards, their political ideology, and perhaps their personality characteristics. When such operators play a role that is weakly defined, they will tend to play it in ways consistent with these predispositions.

Defining Tasks: Prior Experiences

When a government agency is created, it is not assembled out of people who are blank slates on which the organization can write at will. Except for young employees getting their first jobs, the operators will have worked for other organizations, often other government agencies. Indeed, most new agencies are formed out of bits and pieces of old ones—the Department of Energy absorbed employees from the Interior Department, the Federal Power Commission, and the Atomic Energy Commission; the Department of Education acquired former members of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the Drug Enforcement Administration inherited investigators from the Customs Service and the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. These people had learned certain ways of doing things. If a new agency has ambiguous goals, the employees' prior experiences will influence how its tasks get defined.

When the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) was created in 1948 to implement the program of assistance to Europe popularly known as the Marshall Plan, it had, in Herbert A. Simon's phrase, a "prenatal history."[13] Determined to get off to a fast start, the first administrator, Paul Hoffman, borrowed personnel from other government agencies. But he did not borrow them to perform tasks that were already well understood; the nation had never run a Marshall Plan before, and no one was quite certain how to do so.

As a consequence, the tasks of the ECA were defined, at least at the outset, by people who had learned how to do things in other agencies. In the State Department there already existed a group providing interim aid to France, Greece, and a few other countries. There were also people in the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior who knew how to find commodities and ship them overseas. These people brought with them to the ECA a conception of foreign aid that involved figuring out what kinds of commodities (wheat, oil, and so on) were needed by what countries and in what amounts and then approving or disapproving particular shipments.[14] Because *something* had to be done, and quickly, these people were allowed to decide, without much supervision or direction from the executives of the ECA, what to do and how.

But there were other ways of running a foreign aid program. One was to encourage economic cooperation among European nations so as to rationalize its war-torn industry and open up larger, continent-wide markets. Some people from the State Department brought this conception with them. Another was to loan money to these countries on the basis of the estimated economic value of particular projects and then let the Europeans use this capital to produce their own commodities and services. People entering ECA from the Export-Import Bank brought this approach with them. A third was to use American money to help improve the European balance of trade. Estimates would be made of what Europe would consume and produce and of the shortfall, if any, between consumption needs and production possibilities. Economists brought this methodology with them.

As Simon makes clear, no one thought through in advance what the tasks ought to be and the organization that was created to house these tasks was designed with little regard for the work that would be done in it. "If the name of the agency had been taken off the [Budget Bureau's] proposed organization chart, it would have been extremely difficult to determine whether the organization was to engage in foreign assistance, salt mining, or the practice of law."[15]

As time passed and experience was gained, some definitions of the task prospered and others waned. The key factors that determined the survival of a given task definition was, first, how workable it was (could people in fact get the job done) and how strongly it was supported by external allies (other agencies and groups in Congress). Initially, the commodity approach prevailed—there were people at their desks who knew how to ship goods abroad and they had allies in other agencies. The economic cooperation approach did not make much headway. No one knew how to produce "cooperation," and if it were produced at all it would have to be done overseas, in the Paris office of the ECA, rather than in Washington. Thus, this approach was not likely to dominate thinking at agency headquarters. In time, the economists working on the balance-of-trade approach began to win out over the pure commodity specialists.

Experiences in other agencies also helped define what tasks the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) would perform. When it was created (first by executive order in 1946, then by statute in 1947), the CIA was intended to be a coordinating mechanism that would synthesize the foreign intelligence produced by other agencies, in particular the State Department and the military services. Its tasks were supposed to be "coordination, planning, evaluation, and dissemination."[16] Today people for-

get that the Director of Central Intelligence has two functions: he directs the CIA and also makes recommendations for the coordination of the *entire* intelligence community.

But what does one do when one "recommends ways to coordinate"? That is a question to which we shall return in later chapters; it suffices for now to say that given the realities of turf wars among government agencies the answer is not much, and that only with great difficulty. What the CIA in fact would do was powerfully influenced by the people it hired. Some of these people were specialists in writing intelligence reports—something akin to the synthesizing and coordinating roles the agency was supposed to perform. But once the government decided to have a clandestine service capable of gathering information and carrying out covert operations, there was no other obvious bureaucratic home for it but the CIA. It was a momentous change, for it brought into the agency many people who had formerly worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the wartime agency that had not only done research but managed spies and conducted covert operations behind enemy lines.

The OSS alumni transferred to the CIA a conception of intelligence work that they had learned in an activist, highly secret, can-do organization: produce your own intelligence by clandestine information gathering and advance U.S. interests by taking covert actions on behalf of friends and against enemies. By 1947, possibly one-third of the CIA's employees had come from the OSS.[17] Their influence was even greater than their numbers might suggest. A history of the agency prepared for a Senate committee investigating its activities in 1976 concluded that "in large part, CIA's functions, structure, and expertise were drawn from the OSS."[18] In particular, "although the Agency was established primarily for the purpose of providing intelligence analysis to senior policymakers, within three years clandestine operations became and continued to be the Agency's preeminent activity."[19]

This shift did not occur surreptitiously nor was it the case of the tail wagging the dog. The OSS operational veterans brought to the CIA experiences that constituted an alternative definition of that organization's central task. The choice confronting the agency was (in oversimplified form) "to coordinate" and "to act." Nobody was quite certain what the first meant but everybody was aware that, if done at all, this task would make the CIA a rival of other intelligence organizations that would naturally resent and resist being guided, interpreted, or synthesized by some upstart bureau. OSS veterans knew exactly what the second task involved, because they had done it for many years.[20] Other intelligence agencies might resent a rival clandestine collection effort, but that was easier to tolerate than a coordinating effort. And the other groups, especially State, were not eager to take on one kind of secret work—covert operations—abroad.

The OSS alumni brought with them a clear, workable task; the Agency soon saw that this task helped it solve its organizational maintenance problem. The Agency's political superiors, deeply worried about Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe and Soviet-sponsored civil wars in Western Europe, were delighted to have at their disposal an agency that could do something about these things.[21] And do it they did: The CIA helped finance elections in Italy, organize revolution in Guatemala, and direct counterrevolution in Iran.

The impact of organizational experience on the definition of tasks is perhaps most vivid in the joint military commands that bring together officers from the army, navy, and air force. Everyone recognizes, of course, that members of a military service, or any organization, will try to defend and advance the interests of their parent organizations whenever they are placed in an interorganizational setting. That is a matter to be explored more fully in the chapter on autonomy and turf. I am here arguing a different point: that prior organizational experiences affect how new organizational tasks are defined even when there is no desire to engage in turf wars.

Arthur T. Hadley, a journalist with extensive military experience, has remarked on how a military service, especially in wartime, gives to its members a distinctive way of looking at new tasks.[22] An army officer learns to be part of an organization that can do nothing without extensive coördination of human efforts. The smallest self-contained fighting unit is a division (or a reinforced regiment) consisting of thousands of personnel performing a myriad of specialized tasks. Tanks, artillery, infantry, antiaircraft, signals, engineering, and intelligence must operate on the basis of a common plan. But even this unit can only survive if it moves in concert with other regiments and divisions. Moreover, army officers are open to constant inspection by higher-ranking officers. The army experience produces people who can accept, more easily than representatives of other services, the coordinating tasks that are the reason for existence of joint military commands and staffs.

The young naval officer has a different experience. A ship is a self-contained unit that can be maneuvered independently of other units. On board ship, hierarchy is powerful and actions are constantly monitored, but *among* ships there is a freedom of action and degree of isolation from the rest of the military (and society at large) that is much greater than what a typical army officer experiences. Air force pilots acquire the greatest tendencies toward independence. Flying a jet aircraft is a solitary and exuberant activity that requires exceptional physical skills. Those proficient at it tend, in Hadley's view, to be somewhat intolerant of those who are not, especially those who haven't even tried. Hadley's characterization of the consequences of military experience, which he admits is overdrawn, may help explain why navy and air force officers may *tend* to do less well in managing interservice coordinating tasks than their army counterparts.

Defining Tasks: Professional Norms

During a typical week, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in downtown Washington, D.C., receives several dozen letters from individuals and firms complaining about what the writers believe are the unfair business practices of certain enterprises. These letters are screened by an Office of Evaluation consisting of several attorneys. Many of the letters are simply gripes about behavior that does not violate any federal law; others contain accusations that may involve a violation; and still others call attention to what appear to be clear cases of wrongdoing. While these letters are being reviewed, the Office also learns from newspaper stories about planned corporate mergers. If the merger is a large one, the firms involved must notify the FTC directly. Meanwhile, economists in the FTC make recommendations for the investigation of certain industries that seem to be dominated by a small number of large firms or that appear to be making abnormally high profits. All of these sources of information go to an Evaluation Committee that recommends to the top officials of the FTC which cases should be investigated and which should not.

In reaching these decisions, the FTC gets rather little guidance from the statutes. These are the Federal Trade Commission Act and the Clayton Act. They make it illegal for firms to engage in "unfair" or "deceptive" methods of competition, practice certain forms of price discrimination, or buy (or merge with) other firms if the effect of this "may be to substantially lessen competition or tend to create a monopoly." As political scientist Robert A. Katzmann and others have pointed out, these words are too vague to provide clear guidelines for deciding what to do. The FTC has produced an *Operating Manual*, but it does not tell the Evaluation Committee exactly what these statutory words are supposed to mean or how to decide what cases to bring.[23] Yet cases are brought and lawyers go to work on them. Somehow, the tasks of the FTC get defined with sufficient clarity to enable its staff to know what to do.

What does tell the employees of the FTC what to do is, to a significant degree, the professional norms that they have learned and the career opportunities those professions hold out to them.

Medicine, nursing, engineering, economics, the law—these and countless other occupations are popularly referred to as professions. People engaged in a profession often get more respect, income, and deference than do people who work at "ordinary" jobs. But a popular label is not a useful definition. What is distinctive about members of a profession, at least for purposes of explaining organizational behavior, is not how much status, income, or deference they receive but the sources of these rewards. A professional is someone who receives important occupational rewards from a reference group whose membership is limited to people who have undergone specialized formal education and have accepted a group-defined code of proper conduct. The more the individual allows his or her behavior to be influenced by the desire to obtain rewards from this reference group, the more professional is his or her orientation. Thus, not every member of an occupation whom we think of as a professional may in fact be a professional. An attorney who serves a client even when that service is likely to incur the displeasure of the bar association and law school professors is not a professional (though he or she may be an excellent attorney); by the same token, a physician who follows the procedures recommended by other physicians and by medical school professors even when it is not in the best interests of the doctor is highly professional.

In a bureaucracy, professionals are those employees who receive some significant portion of their incentives from organized groups of fellow practitioners located outside the agency. Thus, the behavior of a professional in a bureaucracy is not wholly determined by incentives controlled by the agency. (We might define a bureaucrat as someone whose occupational incentives come entirely from within the agency.) Because the behavior of a professional is not entirely shaped by organizational incentives, the way such a person defines his or her task may reflect more the standards of the external reference group than the preferences of the internal management.

The tasks performed by employees of the Federal Trade Commission crucially depend on whether they are lawyers or economists. As Robert Katzmann has shown, attorneys prefer to pursue a case in which there is clear evidence that the conduct of some firm violates the law. They are prosecution-minded. This orientation reflects both their training in the law and court procedures and (in many cases) their desire to use the skills they develop at the FTC to land a job with a well-paying, prestigious law firm. They evaluate potential cases on the basis of the strength of the evidence and the reigning interpretation of antitrust law. Economists, by contrast, are trained to evaluate potential cases in terms of their likely impact on consumer welfare. To them, an easily prosecuted case of business misconduct may have no impact on the prices consumers pay or the quality of goods they receive, and so economists argue against taking on these cases and in favor of finding cases that involve large concentrations of economic power that if broken up might unleash competitive forces which will make consumers substantially better off.[24] Moreover, the FTC economists are disproportionately drawn from among those who studied at or were influenced by the University of Chicago. "Chicago economics" emphasizes the social benefits of free markets.

The lawyers reply that economists, especially Chicago ones, are prone to pick cases on the basis of economic theory rather than legal reality, cases that are difficult to investigate and may find little support in the courts. At the extremes, a lawyer is happiest with an allegation that two companies have illegally conspired to fix prices, while an economist is happiest with the discovery that the size and market power of the Exxon corporation may reduce competition in the oil industry.

Differences within the FTC over what the agency's job should be are not simply professional preferences about policy choices; they are competing visions, sometimes invested with a good deal of emotion, as to how best to discharge a public responsibility. Lawyers sometimes refer to economists as "case killers," "dogmatic" people engaged in "God-playing." For their part, economists see themselves as social scientists—as "dispassionate searchers for truth"; lawyers, on the other hand, are seen as people less interested in truth than in finding facts to support a predetermined case.[25]

The government lawyers' professional orientation toward prosecution was also noted by Arthur Maass in his study of federal investigations of state and local political corruption. Federal law provides no clear justification for the many heavily publicized cases brought by U.S. attorneys against mayors, judges, city councilmen, and state legislators. Nor can the desire for partisan advantage explain the sharp growth in such cases since the mid-1970s: prosecutors in both Republican and Democratic administrations have pressed these investigations. What drives the program, Maass concludes, "is the prosecutorial mentality" coupled with the personal career benefits that come from having sent some corrupt local official to prison.[26]

But lawyers are not wholly professional in their outlook. They are, after all, trained to serve the interests of a client and may do this with little regard for what other lawyers think. Even in the FTC, some lawyers endorsed the shift toward investigating large structural cases of the sort that, beginning in the 1970s, many FTC commissioners favored. And personal advantage, such as getting a job in a big firm or laying the groundwork for a campaign for governor, reinforces their occupational bias toward vigorous prosecution.

Engineers, on the other hand, rarely benefit personally from bringing the norms of the engineering profession into government service. When they define vague or ambiguous tasks in ways that conform to engineering predilections, it is usually without the added incentive of enhanced opportunities for winning elective office. This strong professional orientation helps explain why the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

(NHTSA) has acted as it has in discharging its responsibility to reduce death and injury on the highways. By law, NHTSA could have chosen to improve the skills and habits of drivers, enhance the design of roads, or eliminate the defects in the autos; to some extent, it has done all three. But to a remarkable degree, it has favored changing the automobile rather than the driver or the highway. Charles Pruitt explains this as the result of the decision to staff the agency predominantly with engineers. In part this decision was made knowing—and wanting—its consequences.

Born in a crisis atmosphere after a bruising congressional attack on the auto manufacturers, NHTSA felt it had to take immediate, highly visible action to improve auto safety. Educating people to drive more safely was a policy that would have taken years to produce results (if in fact it would have produced any results at all); redesigning the car to meet federal standards could be done much more quickly. The redesign that could be made the fastest was one intended to make the car more "crashworthy"—for example, less likely to impale a driver on a steering column or light switch. No doubt cars have become more crashworthy in part as a result of NHTSA rules, thereby vindicating the initial hiring decisions. But the decision to staff the agency with crash engineers (instead of specialists in driver education, alcohol abuse, or highway design) had long-term consequences that may not have been intended.* These engineers worked persistently and enthusiastically to require the installation of air bags (devices that, in the event of a crash, deploy automatically to protect the occupants), despite the intense political controversy engendered by this proposal. Moreover, NHTSA resisted demands from other federal agencies that it devote more attention to human and environmental factors in highway safety.[27]

The impact of the engineering profession on the work of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has been frequently remarked. When the space shuttle Challenger exploded, killing its crew, there was a review to find out what happened. The engineers in NASA and the firms supplying NASA were a gifted and dedicated group that had accomplished extraordinary feats. But their approach to their work may have created blind spots. Engineers value quantitative data and distrust personal opinions. Thus, the anxieties that some may have felt about the readiness of the shuttle to be launched were not as forcefully expressed as they might have been or attended to as seriously as they should have been because they were perceived as hunches, not facts or numbers. One engineer working on Challenger put it this way: "I have been personally chastised in flight readiness reviews at Marshall [Space Flight Center] from using the words 'I feel' or 'I think,' and I have been cruci-

*Hiring scientists and engineers shapes private firms as well as public agencies. For an early insightful account, see Tom Burns and George M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation* (London: Tavistock, 1961), 174–76.

fied . . . because 'I feel' and 'I think' are not engineering-supported statements, but they are just judgmental."[28]

Even in a highly bureaucratic welfare office, some of the intake workers have acquired, by virtue of their training and experience, a quasi-professional attitude toward their clients. As a consequence, though the situation presses them to treat clients equally and distantly (as explained previously), a few operators whom Prottas observed tried to think of themselves not as intake clerks but as social workers. Contrary to the views of those who believe that welfare workers seek to degrade or punish applicants, many of these bureaucrats wished to use what little discretion they had to help clients, or at least those who seem to be "deserving." To the extent circumstances permitted (which given the case loads and organizational requirements was not much), "they look[ed] forward to opportunities to behave as social workers, which means an opportunity to do something more than the routine processing of simple cases."[29]

Nowhere is the influence of professional norms more evident than in the contrasting histories of two otherwise similar agencies: the Forest Service and the Park Service. The former, created in 1905, and the latter, created in 1916, each manage vast tracts of public lands, many of which are so similar as to be indistinguishable. The two agencies, with roughly comparable functions, often have been bitter bureaucratic rivals. But the Forest Service from the first committed itself to develop and be guided by a doctrine of "professional" forestry, by which was meant the scientific management of forests in order to produce a sustained yield of timber and other natural resources. Though this utilitarian focus was later modified, the commitment to professional education and research never changed. By the time Herbert Kaufman studied it in the 1950s, 90 percent of all rangers were trained foresters, meaning that they had at least a bachelor's and sometimes a master's degree in forestry or some related subject.[30] Most are members of the Society of American Foresters.[31] The Forest Service provided the impetus for much of this professional education and, in turn, is now molded by the doctrines developed in those schools and societies. In recent years, many Forest Service practices, such as clear-cutting and below-market timber sales, have become controversial. However, right or wrong, these policies are not the result of having caved in to economic interests; they reflect beliefs about what good forest management requires. To change the way Forest Service tasks are performed today would require equivalent changes in forestry doctrine that is probably beyond the capacity of the Forest Service to dictate: the parent has become hostage of the child.

By contrast, the Park Service inherited many of its lands, including Yellowstone, from the army, and saw its job as balancing the need to preserve the wilderness with the popular desire to enjoy it.[32] These goals seemed to require law-enforcement and engineering skills—law enforcement to set down and apply rules for campers, engineering to build facilities for them. The task became defined as managing *people* more than managing parks. There was never an effort to develop a park ranger profession that was rooted in science and higher education. Even today, the main career track in the Park Service is the "ranger" track, by which is meant experience in visitor protection and safety, and not the naturalist track, which includes research. The ranger track, reports Alston Chase, a Park Service critic, is officially classified as nonprofessional, with no educational prerequisites beyond a high-school diploma.[33] The few scientists in the service have little influence.[34] In 1985 the Park Service, which manages over three hundred parks, spent about $16 million on research, less than the budget of one Forest Service experiment station.[35]

One consequence of these differences in operator values can be found in how the two services manage visitors. Craig W. Allin found that even in comparable areas attracting comparable visitors, the Forest Service gives less emphasis to regulating visitor use than does the Park Service.[36] The Park Service, like the Forest Service, has been deeply embroiled in controversy, especially since a vast brush fire ravaged Yellowstone Park in 1988. At issue are the age-old questions of popular access versus wilderness preservation; managing the wildlife versus deferring to natural forces; and fighting fires by "letting them burn" versus practicing controlled burning.[37] Each agency handles its controversies in characteristic ways: the Forest Service engages in extraordinarily detailed planning and research activities designed to defend its view of correct forest management;[38] the Park Service searches for external allies and engages in periodic changes of direction.*

Politicians and interest groups know that professionals can define tasks in ways that are hard for administrators to alter, and so one strategy for changing an organization is to induce it to recruit a professional cadre whose values are congenial to those desiring the change. We have seen already how the supporters of highway safety worked to insure that crash engineers were hired by NHTSA, thereby giving that agency at birth a distinctive focus. By the same token, the tendency (explained in chapter 3) of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to work harder on improving safety than on health standards began to give way to a greater concern for health matters as OSHA began to hire more and more research scientists and public health experts. These professionals were less concerned with finding the bureaucratically easiest task and more concerned with focusing agency efforts on what their professional techniques identified as hazards and their professional norms taught them to take seriously.[39]

*That I have described the Forest Service as a professional organization and the Park Service as a nonprofessional one does not mean that I think the former is good and the latter bad. Professionalism and nonprofessionalism each can lead to good or bad outcomes.

Even established bureaucracies with strong professional traditions already in place can be altered by inserting a new profession. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Forest Service both have changed the way in which they approach certain tasks because they were obliged to hire a large number of persons who identify with the emerging environmentalist professions. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to take into account the environmental impact of their projects. To do this they must prepare (among other things) environmental impact statements (EIS), and therefore must hire people skilled at preparing such reports—biologists, ecologists, biochemists, and the like. In 1984, when Serge Taylor published his account of the EIS process, the two agencies employed between them several hundred of these new professionals.[40] In this way, attention to different values was institutionalized in ongoing organizations, but at a price: having tasks defined by rival professions weakened the ability of the agencies to develop and maintain a shared sense of mission.

The Forest Service, for example, was an organization dominated by a single professional culture when Herbert Kaufman studied it in the 1950s. By the 1980s it had become divided into many different professional cultures. Today foresters have to contend with engineers, biologists, and economists, among others. The foresters dislike the tendency of engineers to elevate mechanical soundness over natural beauty, of biologists to worry more about endangered species than about big game, and of economists to put a price on things foresters regard as priceless.[41] This is a topic to which we shall return when we discuss the sense of mission in agencies (chapter 6).

Political Ideology

In the United States the higher levels of the federal government are staffed by bureaucrats who are more liberal than the population at large and certainly more liberal than business executives. Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter interviewed two hundred top-level career administrators in a variety of federal agencies. Over half described themselves as politically liberal and said they had voted for George McGovern for president in 1972; nearly two-thirds voted for Jimmy Carter in 1976. Overwhelmingly they supported a woman's right to an abortion and agreed that environmental problems are serious. On the other hand, they displayed no generalized antipathy toward American society: the great majority believed that private enterprise is fair to workers and that less regulation of business would be good for the country; only a tiny fraction thought the nation should move toward socialism.[42]

There were important differences among senior bureaucrats depending on the kind of agency for which they worked. Those employed by "activist" agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Products Safety Commission, and the Department of Health and Human Services) were significantly more liberal than those employed by "traditional" agencies (such as the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Treasury). In the activist agencies, bureaucrats were more likely than their counterparts in traditional agencies to say that women and blacks should get preference in hiring, that poor people are the victims of circumstances, and that U.S. foreign policy has aimed at protecting business.[43]

Essentially the same conclusions were reached by Joel Aberbach and Bert Rockman in their survey of senior bureaucrats holding office at the time Richard Nixon was president. They found evidence that Nixon was correct in his perception of bureaucratic ideology—that the officials were more liberal than he—and that the most liberal of all were in the social service agencies. Over 90 percent of the Democrats in these activist agencies were classified by Aberbach and Rockman as on the left. By contrast, only 25 percent of the Democrats in traditional agencies were leftists.[44]

These findings show that liberals who worry that high-level bureaucrats will have conservative opinions are wrong. In retrospect, it is clear that Kingsley was mistaken to think that because they are unrepresentative of the public at large, bureaucrats will prefer the status quo. Conservatives who fear the liberalism of bureaucrats do have grounds for concern, but exactly how much concern is not at all clear. We really don't care what bureaucrats think, we care what they do. Does ideology determine behavior? There is no systematic evidence bearing on this question.

From what already has been said about attitudes and behavior, we would expect ideology to make little difference in routinized or highly structured roles. There is no liberal or conservative way to deliver the mail or issue a driver's license. The example of police arrest and shooting practices suggests that there are even limits to how much difference personal beliefs can make in relatively ambiguous roles. But that still leaves a lot of ground to cover.

What some of that ground may look like is suggested by Jeremy Rabkin's account of the development of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR).[45] Created in 1965 to implement various civil rights laws, the OCR had a great deal of latitude in defining its own task. It is charged with insuring that no "program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" shall practice discrimination with regard to race, color, sex, handicap, or national origin. If discrimination were shown, the guilty organization could lose its federal funding. It was left to OCR to decide what constituted a "program

or activity," whether the federal assistance had to be received directly or need only be received indirectly in order to bring the entity under the law, and what constituted evidence of discrimination.

After some initial fumbling and uncertainty, the OCR staff began to issue regulations that took an expansive view of the reach and force of the law. Discrimination was forbidden in any part of a school or other organization receiving federal aid, not merely in those parts that were directly supported. For example, if a school library bought books with federal aid, the cafeteria staff and the sports programs could not discriminate, even if they received no money. Discrimination was broadly defined to include any case in which a school district employed (for example) blacks in a lesser proportion than their representation in the community, whether or not anyone had produced evidence of discrimination. In perhaps its most controversial decision, OCR issued orders banning father-son and mother-daughter banquets at schools, orders later reversed by Congress in response to a public outcry.

There were several reasons for OCR taking this expansive view of its powers. Civil rights and feminist organizations often attacked it for "dragging its feet." Schools and universities were not effective in lobbying against the regulations. Cabinet officials and congressional committees did rather little to restrain OCR. But in part the agency acted as it did because it attracted people who had "considerable enthusiasm for its mission."[46]

The OCR is not alone in this regard. When the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was created in 1935, it attracted pro-labor lawyers to its staff who gave that agency a distinctive ideology until later events muted or ended the ideological enthusiasms of the staff.[47] The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM), an agency created to regulate strip-mining in the coal fields, attracted dedicated environmentalists to its staff who went well beyond the letter of the law in drawing up mining regulations.[48]

Why did ideology seem to influence the behavior of the staff of OCR, the lawyers in the NLRB, and the environmentalists in OSM, but not the arrest decisions of police officers? The answer, I conjecture, is to be found in the differing environments in which these bureaucrats work. The OCR, NLRB, and OSM were newly created policy-making bodies operating in a political environment shaped (if not dominated) by like-minded partisans in Congress and the supporting interest groups. Attitudes—whether ideology in the OCR, prior experiences in the ECA, or professional norms in the FTC—are most likely to influence the performance of weakly defined roles, especially when the attitudes are reinforced by other incentives. The jobs in a new agency charged with designing new policies are about as vaguely defined as one can imagine; moreover, a newborn agency is surrounded by its political parents—people and groups eager to applaud behavior that is consistent with the zeal of those who won the fight to create the agency.

Police officers have a great deal of discretion, but that does not mean that their tasks are vaguely defined. It only means that what they do is not clearly defined by formal organizational rules. Their work is shaped by informal understandings that are the product of daily, street-level contact with clients and years of on-the-job experience. These contacts and experiences tell police officers how to handle unruly citizens, when to use deadly force, what demeanor will win the approval of more senior colleagues, and which arrests will both stand up in court and be rewarded by promotion boards. The outside observer may not notice these sources of task definition and thus suppose that officers are free to do whatever they want; but that conclusion is wrong—and when it leads to ill-considered efforts to change behavior by writing rules, it is mischievous.

This perspective on ideology suggests that the formative years of a policy-making agency are of crucial importance in determining its behavior. As with people, so with organizations: Childhood experiences affect adult conduct. This means, as will be argued at length in chapter 6, that one must study history.

Agencies, like adults, learn from experience, and so the formative childhood years are only part of the story. Bureaucracies will in time acquire a distinctive personality or culture that will shape the attitudes of people who join these organizations; this also is discussed in chapter 6. When critics of an older agency complain that bureaucrats with the "wrong attitude" are determining its behavior, they are often reversing the causal process. The agency is in fact producing certain attitudes in its members.

There is a good deal of evidence that the political views of bureaucrats tend to correspond to their agency affiliation more than they reflect their social status. Kenneth Meier and Lloyd Nigro looked at the beliefs of a sample of higher-level federal civil servants and found that the social origins of these officials explained only about 5 percent of variance in their opinions; agency affiliations, on the other hand, explained much more.[49] Bernard Mennis compared foreign service officers and military officers performing similar jobs, mostly having to do with managing foreign political and international-security affairs. He found that their policy views differed sharply in the way one would expect: The foreign service officers were more liberal, the military officers more conservative. But these differences existed despite the fact that the social backgrounds of the two groups of officials were about the same.[50] As Charles Goodsell summarized these studies, "the agency positions in which bureaucrats 'sit' have much to do with where they 'stand.'"[51]

Defining Tasks: Bureaucratic Personality

Even if specific attitudes do not always determine bureaucratic behavior, many people think that those who work for government agencies have a distinctive personality. As with attitudes, opinions differ along political lines as to what that distinctive personality is. Liberals sometimes describe bureaucrats as cautious, conformist individuals loath to take risks. Conservatives sometimes describe them as zealous empire-builders determined to expand their power at the expense of the public. And there are probably some who think that bureaucrats are both conformists and zealots, simultaneously.

Robert K. Merton, a sociologist, was the foremost exponent of the view that a bureaucratic personality exists. He did not assert that bureaucrats are born with such a disposition, only that the logic of work in a bureaucratic organization tends to foster—or perhaps create—such an outlook. In a large, complex organization, operators tend to value means over ends: That is, they worry more about following the right rule than about achieving the ultimate goal. Merton called this "goal displacement," a process by which, as he put it, instrumental values become terminal values.[52]

There are aspects of organizational life that make people risk averse. Indeed, it would be surprising if they did not, since organizations are created in the first place to reduce uncertainty and risk. All organizations by design are the enemies of change, at least up to a point; government organizations are especially risk averse because they are caught up in a web of constraints so complex that any change is likely to rouse the ire of some important constituency. But political and organizational pressures for conformity are very different from the presumed tendency of bureaucracies to either recruit or be especially attractive to individuals with risk-averse, conformist personalities. Insofar as we can tell from the few studies that have been done, the presumption is untrue.

In 1963, W. Lloyd Warner and his collaborators published a study of nearly thirteen thousand career federal civil servants, mostly in civilian agencies, holding the rank of GS-14 and higher. As part of the survey, the authors administered a Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) to 257 of the federal managers. The TAT, as many readers will know, consists of a series of pictures of commonplace scenes (e.g., an older man talking to a younger man in an office) for which the interviewee must supply a story. These stories are then scored in accordance with rather well-established criteria. The bureaucrats revealed a personality disposition that on the whole was idealistic and strongly oriented toward achievement. There were individual differences, of course, but as a group the civil servants did not turn out to be conformist or cautious.[53]

A similar study was carried out by Melvin Kohn in the 1960s and published in 1971. The data in this research came from answers to interview questions rather than from the interpretation of TAT stories, and the subjects were drawn from a somewhat different sample—about three thousand men employed in a variety of civilian occupations. The degree to which their employing organization was bureaucratic was scored by counting the number of hierarchical levels in it. The results suggest that men employed in the more bureaucratic organizations were more likely to display intellectual flexibility and value self-direction and new experiences than was the case of men employed in less bureaucratic organizations. One reason for this finding may be that the employees of bureaucratic organizations tended to have more schooling than those of other kinds of organizations, and education (or the individual traits that correlate with education, such as intelligence) may produce those qualities detected in the survey.[54]

Charles Goodsell has reviewed a number of studies of the same sort as Kohn's, and most produce the same results.[55] There are exceptions. An experiment in which business managers and public-school administrators played a game involving choices between big payoffs with high risk and low payoffs with small risk revealed that the businessmen were more likely to accept risk than the school officials.[56] Given the greater rewards in a successful business career and the greater security in many (but not all) government careers, it would be surprising if there were no differences in the kinds of people found in each. But there is as yet no strong, consistent evidence that the two careers attract different personalities.

Conclusions

Prior experiences and professional norms (and their attendant career opportunities) certainly influence the behavior of rank-and-file bureaucrats; political ideology may have an effect, but we do not have enough evidence to speak confidently about this. Experience, professionalism, and ideology are likely to have their greatest influence when laws, rules, and circumstances do not precisely define operator tasks.

For decades, the number of agencies conferring broad discretion on operators steadily increased. Driven by an optimistic belief in the ability of nonpartisan experts effectively to manage complex economic affairs, Congress told many regulatory agencies with respect to some problem to do whatever would serve "the public interest." In these cases, the powers of the state were turned over, at least initially, to appointed officials who could make choices based on their beliefs and professional norms. Moreover, more professionals were hired to staff the government partly because

agencies were now performing more complex tasks for which special training was thought to be necessary, partly because the work force came to consist of a higher proportion of people with some professional training, and partly because the employment of professionals seemed to lend credibility and legitimacy to agency activities. The FTC in 1914, the NLRB in 1935, the CIA in 1947, the ECA in 1948, the OCR in 1965, and OSHA in 1970 would have offered opportunities for personal beliefs to shape tasks simply because they were new; the agencies had choices to make and little in their statute specified what choices should be made. In addition, these agencies reflected the Progressive confidence that good people would define tasks in the right way, even without statutory guidance. But the "right way" is a matter of some dispute about which lawyers, economists, diplomats, engineers, spies, and civil rights activists have very different views.

As we shall see, an effort began in the 1970s to avoid making these broad grants of discretionary power to the new agencies that were then being created. This change was not, however, prompted by a desire to reduce the power of the professionals or the ideologues but rather by the belief that agencies having wide discretion were more likely to be captured by outside interest groups. It is important, therefore, to assess the extent to which professional norms (and possibly political ideology) can withstand external pressure. It is to that subject that we now turn.