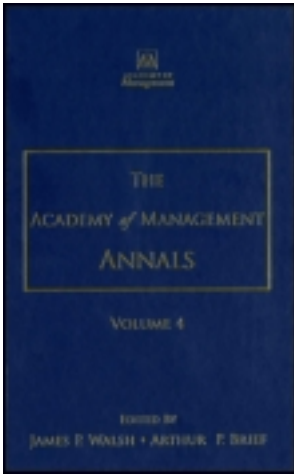


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### 5 Public Administration and Organization Studies

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# 5

## Public Administration and Organization Studies

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### Abstract

The study of public organizations has withered over time in mainstream organization studies research, as scholars in the field have migrated to business schools. This is so even though government organizations are an important part of the universe of organizations—the largest organizations in the world are agencies of the U.S. government. At the same time, the study of public administration, once in the mainstream of organization studies, has moved into a ghetto, separate and unequal. Centered in business schools, mainstream organization research became isomorphic to its environment—coming to focus on performance issues, which are what firms care about. Since separation, the dominant current in public administration has become isomorphic with *its* environment. In this case, however, this meant the field moved backward from the central reformist concern of its founders with improving government performance, and developed instead a focus on managing constraints (i.e., avoiding bad things, such as corruption or misuse of power, from occurring) in a public organization environment. Insufficient concern about performance among public administration scholars is particularly unfortunate because over the past 15 years, there has occurred a significant growth of interest among practitioners in improving government performance. The origins and consequences of these developments are discussed, and a research agenda for organization studies research that takes the public sector seriously is proposed.

### Introduction

U.S. government organizations are an important part of the universe of organizations. The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest organization in the

U.S. government: Its budget (\$410 billion in 2006) is noticeably larger than sales of ExxonMobil (\$339.9 billion) and of Wal-Mart (\$315.7 billion), the world's two largest corporations by sales (U.S. Office of Management & Budget, 2007, p. 314; Fortune, 2006a). The Department of Defense has about 3.3 million employees (2.6 million uniformed and 700,000 civilian), compared to 84,000 for ExxonMobil and 1.8 million for Wal-Mart (Department of Defense, 2002; Fortune, 2006b; Wal-Mart, 2006). If the cabinet department with the smallest budget, the Commerce Department, were a *Fortune 500* company, it would rank 367th. Beyond its size, the U.S. government has main responsibility for important problems such as protecting the environment, educating children, and finding terrorists—and for protection of values and individuals that the market undervalues or neglects (Mintzberg, 1996). Finally, the U.S. government creates the very foundation for civilized life through providing individual security and the ground rules for operation of the market. (Oliver Wendall Holmes once observed, “Taxes are the price I pay for civilization.”)

The U.S. government also has serious performance problems. To be sure, government performs better than its reputation. In a survey, a sample of 1,000 professors teaching American government and modern American history courses identified rebuilding Europe after World War II, expanding the right to vote, strengthening the highway system, containing communism, and promoting equal access to public accommodations as the “government’s greatest achievements” in the 20th century (Light, 2002)—no paltry collection. There is nonetheless enough truth to stereotypes of incompetent delivery and indifferent service for any but the most dyed-in-the-wool apologist to agree that in domains ranging from public education to emergency management to foreign policy decision making, government underperforms. In rich democracies, no question about government is more important than underperformance.

The argument of this review is straightforward. Improving government performance is a topic worthy of significant research attention, yet dramatically insufficient scholarly firepower is directed at it. The separation of public management research from mainstream organization studies that has appeared over past decades is the main reason such firepower has been absent. What has happened? Most obviously, mainstream researchers largely disengaged from studying government, depriving research on government performance of its largest natural source of sustenance. In addition, the smaller group of scholars who study government organizations has largely isolated itself from mainstream organization studies. This has made them less interested and less able to contribute to producing research about government performance. Because of its location mainly in business schools, mainstream research is centrally concerned with performance. With separation, pressure on those studying government to study performance has dwindled. Thus, in recent decades, public administration scholars, often proudly, have paid little attention to researching performance. With separation, public administration has

also been cut off from methodological advances, particularly increased use of econometrics, lab experimentation, and computational analysis, in social psychology, sociology, and political science. Thus, methods have generally been primitive, excessively relying on case studies, using selection on the dependent variable, and producing discursive “conceptual” frameworks with weak empirical grounding or theoretical rigor—what Rainey (personal communication, August 25, 2006) has called “essayism.”<sup>1</sup> This means research on agencies often lacks sophistication, which inhibits the ability to draw conclusions strong enough to use for improving performance.<sup>2</sup> It also promotes a general view that anything having to do with government organizations—including research about them—is second rate.

Given these problems, bringing the two traditions together again is a priority. With those whose work I will review, I share the idea that government should be seen as a positive force, in theory and often in practice. Government is too important not to propel the goal of improving its performance to a front rank of research attention. Insufficient concern about performance among public administration scholars is particularly unfortunate because, over the past 15 years, particularly in the Anglo-American world, there has occurred an astounding, heartening growth of interest in improving government performance among practitioners and a lively interest in techniques for how to do so. The field is therefore betraying practitioners who could use help for their efforts.

### Constraints and Goals

Government underperformance is overdetermined. One explanation, which economists favor, is that agencies are protected monopolies, and thus, they lead an easy life without performance pressures (Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976; Savas, 1982). Savas (1982) wrote that monopolies produce a situation where citizens are “subject to endless exploitation and victimization” and where “so-called public servants have a captive market and little incentive to heed their putative customers” (pp. 134–135). The universality of popular obloquy regarding government performance across time and place suggests that the monopoly criticism is not entirely groundless, since agencies’ most obvious common feature is monopoly status. To state, however, that agencies generally lead an easy life without outside pressures is inaccurate. Pressures come from the political system and the media, not the marketplace, but that does not make them innocuous: If one asked people whether they would rather be attacked on the front page of *The Washington Post* or subjected to the punishment that firms typically mete out for poor performance, it is not obvious most would choose the former. Another explanation is that few of the best people choosing government careers do so because of an interest in managing organization performance, but rather, to influence formulation of policies such as those for AIDS or terrorism. A third explanation is that, compared with the profit metric for firms, agencies often have a hard time developing good metrics to achieve performance improvement (e.g., What should the State Department’s metrics be?), or

agencies have controversies about goals (e.g., Should the Forest Service cut down trees for economic use or preserve them for wilderness lovers?).

In this review, I focus on a different account, not necessarily because it has the largest effect size (researchers do not know) but because it relates to the nature of research in public administration and its relationship to mainstream organization studies. This explanation is that government underperforms because, compared with firms, government pays less attention to performance in the first place. All organizations have both goals, and constraints that put boundaries around what they may legitimately do to achieve their goals. Traditionally, in government, the tail wags the dog—constraints loom larger than goals, inhibiting good performance.

Central to understanding both government organizations and the challenge for public administration research and practice is the distinction between goals an organization has and constraints under which it operates (Simons, 1995; Wilson, 1989, chapter 7<sup>3</sup>). Goals are the results that an organization seeks—for firms, goals are profit, market share, or customer satisfaction; for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a goal is improved air quality; and for the National Cancer Institute, a goal is better understanding of cancer. Constraints are the limits of acceptable behavior, even to meet goals,<sup>4</sup> for organizations and their members. For firms, constraints include respecting accounting rules, not dumping toxic wastes, and not kidnapping competitors. For agencies, constraints include officials not accepting bribes, not lying to the public, treating citizens fairly, respecting due process, and ensuring accountability to the public for agency actions.

Since constraints often embody important ethical values, such as respect, honesty, and integrity, they should be important for all organizations. Simons (1995) argued, “Every business needs [boundary systems], and, like racing cars, the fastest and most performance-oriented companies need the best brakes” (p. 84). This is particularly so in the government, where behaviors often communicate signals about societal values: Equal treatment of citizens signals the social importance of equality, and dishonesty lowers the moral tone in society (Kelman, 1993). Furthermore, an important line of research (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Thibault & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1990) argues that procedural fairness encourages people to accept decisions that are contrary to their personal interests. In service production, the process used to produce the service is often seen as “part of the product” (Lovelock, 1992); to this extent, a fair process may be seen as a goal, not a constraint (even here, this cannot be considered a mission goal).

At the same time, one cannot typically judge organizations (or individuals) that have only respected constraints as successful. Imagine a journalist who, during a long career, never revealed a source or fabricated evidence but who also never covered a good story. Imagine also a company that never cooked its books but that never made a sale. Furthermore, an organization (or individual) is not normally successful when it focuses significant energy on assuring that

constraints are respected, because that energy is unavailable for goal attainment. If an individual spends hours each day worrying about how he or she will avoid murdering others, the person is unlikely to be successful at achieving substantive goals. Instead, a healthy organization (or individual) is one that takes constraints for granted. Firms seldom think that not kidnapping competitors is a constraint because they take the constraint for granted. (Consider, however, Russia in the early 1990s. This could not be taken for granted, and that was a reason the society was in bad shape.<sup>5</sup>)

In the world of practice, firms usually focus in the first instance on achieving their goals: A business that does not cannot stay in business. Parsons (1960) argued that a firm is indeed an organization whose “defining characteristic is the attainment of a specific goal” (p. 63). A central fact, however, about the practice of government, across most times and places, is that, in the environment in which government operates, the opposite is closer to the truth—failure to pay attention to constraints often inflicts more pain (Wilson, 1989). This is so because, first, in government, goals are often controversial (e.g., Should affirmative action be required or free trade pursued?); everybody agrees, however, that it is wrong to lie or show favoritism. Constraint violation is therefore an easier story for media or opposing politicians to expose. Second, goal achievement is not fully under agency control and occurs over time, while constraint violation is immediate. Third, pursuing goals is about “maximizing good government,” while respecting constraints is about “minimizing misgovernment” (Uhr, as cited in Gregory, 2003, p. 564); many have such limited aspirations for government that they ask only for reducing misgovernment—a standard for success that firms would find incomprehensible.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, agency accountability is a central value in a democracy, but this focus is a constraint because it refers not to results but only to process.<sup>7</sup>

All organizations should seek to maximize attainment of goals while respecting constraints. For firms, goal focus increases the probability that they will perform well and the risk that they will ignore constraints (e.g., the Enron problem; Schweitzer, Ordonez, & Douma, 2004). For government, the problem is less that constraints are violated (although the way the media cover government may produce the misimpression of common misbehavior) and more that they perform poorly (e.g., the Katrina problem).

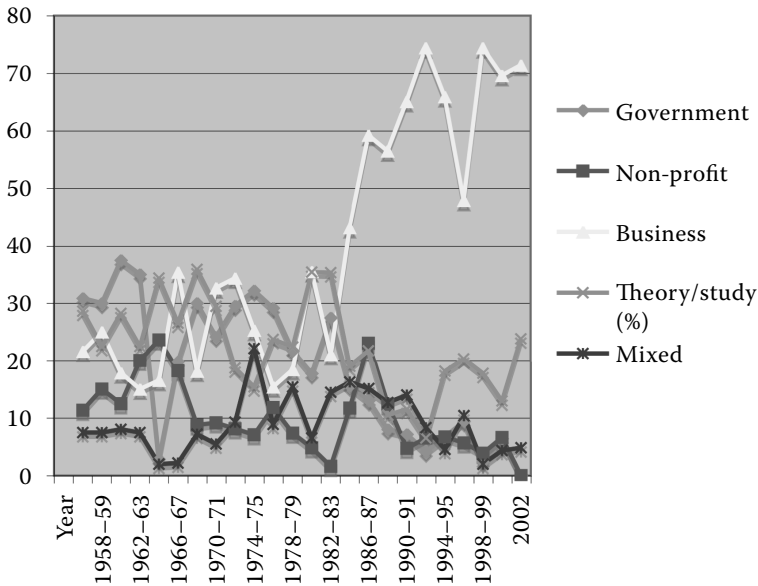
The importance of constraints is tied to dominance of bureaucratic organizational forms in government, since rules and hierarchy are important control tools.<sup>8</sup> As Kaufman (1977) famously noted, “One person’s ‘red tape’ may be another’s treasured procedural safeguard” (p. 4). Combined with rules developed at the top, where those lower down are merely executing directives, hierarchy fits into the desire to subordinate unelected officials to political control (Warwick, 1975). If one cares about minimizing misgovernment rather than maximizing good government, one will be disinclined to grant officials discretion. As Theodore Roosevelt stated, “You cannot give an official power to

do right without at the same time giving him power to do wrong” (Roosevelt, as cited in White, 1926, p. 144).

### Public Administration and Organization Studies: From Colleagues to Strangers

The founders of public administration<sup>9</sup> in the first decades of the 20th century saw the field as closely tied to the general study of management. Woodrow Wilson (1887), then a young political science professor, wrote in *The Study of Administration*, the first scholarly work calling attention to public administration, “The field of administration is a field of business” (p. 209). In the field’s first textbook, *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*, White (1926) wrote that “conduct of government business” was similar to “conduct of the affairs of any other social organization, commercial, philanthropic, religious, or educational, in all of which good management is recognized as an element essential to success” (p. 5). Another early text referred to the legislature as an agency’s “board of directors” and its director as its “general manager” (Willoughby, 1927). The most influential collection of essays on public administration during the 1930s, *Papers on the Science of Administration* (Gulick & Urwick, 1937), is an important collection for the history of organization studies in general. Gulick (1937b), the most influential public administration scholar of the era (and one of three members of the panel proposing a plan for executive branch reorganization to Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937), wrote, in his essay *Science, Values and Public Administration*, “There are principles...which should govern arrangements for human association of any kind...irrespective of the purpose of the enterprise...or any constitutional, political or social theory underlying its creation” (p. 49). Fayol (1937), who worked mostly on business management, argued, “We are no longer confronted with several administrative sciences but with one alone, which can be applied equally well to public and to private affairs” (p. 101). Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson’s (1950) textbook *Public Administration* stated, “Large-scale public and private organizations have many more similarities than they have differences” (p. 8). At this time, studies of public organizations were important for organization studies, tied in with Tayloristic industrial engineering and contributing to the study of organization design. Frank Goodnow, the first president of the American Political Science Association (APSA), was a public administration scholar. “In the 1930s, public administration dominated the fields of both political science and management” (Henry, 1990, p. 4). The prominence of public administration also reflected the lack of business school research at the time.

Modern organization studies grew out of industrial psychology at the beginning of the 20th century (Baritz, 1960). Industrial psychology initially addressed issues in mostly an individual context (e.g., personality tests for job applicants), but with the Hawthorne studies, it turned attention to small groups and grew within sociology after World War II. Although they did not



**Figure 5.1** Evolution in Research on Government, Topics in *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Note: Percentages Represent Articles Where the Source of Empirical Data and/or the Theory Involved the Sector in Question. Because Not All Articles Were about Some Sector, but Rather about Organizations in General, Percentages Do Not Add up to 100%. (Material Developed by Author.)

consider themselves public administration scholars, early postwar organization studies scholars, particularly sociologists, situated important research in government, both because agencies were seen as worth studying and because access was often easier than for firms. Selznick (1953) began his scholarly career writing about the New Deal Tennessee Valley Authority. Two other classics, Blau's (1955) *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy* and Crozier's (1954) *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, were empirically located in government.<sup>10</sup>

In 1956 *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ) was founded as an outlet for scholars from sociology, political science, and social psychology engaged in organization studies. Figure 5.1 displays changes in percentages of ASQ field-based empirical articles situated in government, nonprofits, and firms. In almost every year of its first decade, the percentage situated in government exceeded that in firms. Until the early 1980s, ASQ published significant research situated in government. In recent years, such research has vanished.

This transformation reflects the overwhelming migration of organization research into business schools, which in turn reflects larger social trends. Since the 1980s, the salary gap for professional/managerial work between government and industry has dramatically increased (Donahue, 2008). During this



time, business was also culturally “hot.” In 2003 about 125,000 students in the United States were studying for MBAs compared to one fifth that number studying for master’s degrees in public administration or public policy (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).<sup>11</sup> The enormous growth of wealth in the business community provided business schools funding sources unavailable to others. At the same time, ideological attacks on the desirability of government playing an active role in society and on the idea of public service, spread in academia (especially economics; e.g., Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Tullock, 1976, 1979) and politics.<sup>12</sup> Business schools thus became a gold mine for organization scholars, offering abundant well-paying jobs and a benign funding environment.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly (though, I would suggest, not honorably), mainstream organization studies thus by and large forgot government. To be sure, the bulk of organizational behavior empirical research—most obviously lab experiments—is “ainstitutional” in setting. However, in situating field research or considering topics for theorizing, organization studies directed attention to the world of business that was its new home, and large swathes of the field (e.g., strategy research) was squarely located in the business world.

While mainstream scholars were abandoning government, public administration scholars were administering a self-inflicted wound by isolating themselves from the mainstream. Mosher (1956) noted few connections between public administration and social psychologists studying small groups, and no use of lab studies, while also noting that, conversely, organization studies scholars (e.g., Blau and Selznick) did not cite public administration literature, although they researched government. The emergence of organization studies in social psychology and sociology created a need and an opportunity for public administration scholars to reach out (the traditional disciplinary home for public administration was political science). The field failed to do this; instead, it retreated inward. An examination of the most cited public administration research showed that in 1972 60% of citations “came from fields of study that held no particular distinction between business administration, public administration, or any other type of administration,” but by 1985, this had declined to 30% (McCurdy, 1985, pp. 4–5).

#### *The Public Administration Ghetto*

Separation of public administration from mainstream organization studies has resulted in creation of a modestly sized public-sector research ghetto. The Academy of Management (2006) had almost 17,000 members. By contrast, in 2005 the Public Administration Research Section of the American Society for Public Administration (APSA, 2006) had 355 members, and the Public Administration Section of the APSA (2006) had 515 members.<sup>14</sup>

The ghetto is separate. In a published survey of the field, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management* (2006), a section called “disciplinary perspectives”

included law, ethics, and economics but not organization behavior/theory, social psychology, sociology, or political science.<sup>15</sup> One sees the result in the author index. DiMaggio is cited three times, Kramer twice, Pfeffer twice, Weick twice, and high-profile names such as Argote, Bazerman, Dutton, Hackman, Neale, Staw, and Tushman not once—even though a number of them, such as Weick, Staw, and Bazerman, situate some of their research in government. By contrast, the index is full of names that are unfamiliar in mainstream organization studies and political science—Pollitt is cited 80 times, Bouckaert 32 times, and Frederickson 17 times.

The ghetto is unequal, having only now begun to undertake a transition to modern social science methodologies that became common elsewhere after the field became ghettoized.<sup>16</sup> Public administration has roots in prescription and close ties to practitioners. *Public Administration Review (PAR)*, traditionally the field's most important journal, began in 1940 as the organ of the American Society for Public Administration, an association with mostly practitioner members, and thus, the journal has always needed to appeal to practitioners, inhibiting methods advance.<sup>17</sup> An examination of dissertations for 1981 concluded that only 42% “tested a theory or a causal statement” and that 21% had research designs even “potentially valid”; fewer than one fourth of the articles in *PAR* between 1975 and 1984 discussed relationships among variables (Perry & Kraemer, 1986). More recently, few efforts have been made empirically to evaluate the wave of public management reform, something, an empirically oriented researcher lamented, that “the academic community has not taken seriously” (Boyne, 2003, p. 2). Lynn (1996), a senior scholar critical of the field's standards, wrote that public administration failed to “develop habits of reasoning, intellectual exchange, and criticism appropriate to a scholarly field” (p. 7).

#### *Public Administration Separatism*

Public organizations are, of course, both “public” and “organizations.” In its ghetto, public administration has taken a separatist turn. Like ethnic separatisms, public administration separatism defines itself by emphasizing how it differs from the larger world. This means fixating on the unique “public” part of public organizations and neglecting, even proudly, the “organization” part connecting the field to a larger world. Thus, the central separatist theme is opposition to what is designated (e.g., Peters & Pierre, 2003; Pollitt, 1990; Wamsley et al., 1990) as “generic management”—the view that organizations share enough common features about which generalizations may be made to make it useful to study agencies and firms together.<sup>18</sup>

A number of public administration scholars (e.g., Allison, 1986; Bozeman, 1987; Perry & Rainey, 1988; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976) have written about differences and similarities between public and private organizations. Obviously, the two are alike in some ways and different in others. Which

aspect one emphasizes is not ontological but normative. This is partly because one may attach different value to ways organizations are alike or different. If one cares about performance, this directs attention to similarities, since performance drivers (e.g., determinants of successful teams or design of coordination mechanisms) are often similar. In addition, emphasizing similarity or difference is partly normative because one may criticize (and advocate reform of) some ways agencies are empirically different, if these differences impede good performance in government.

Mainstream research, centered in business schools, became isomorphic to its environment—coming to focus on performance issues, which is what firms care about. Walsh, Weber, and Margolis (2003) found individual or organization performance was far more likely to be the dependent variable in empirical papers in the *Academy of Management Journal* than institutional or societal welfare.<sup>19</sup> One thinks of research on determinants of team performance and successful negotiation outcomes, or of all strategy literature, which deals in various ways with determinants of firms' economic success. In addition, research on topics such as cognitive biases, organizational citizenship behavior, and escalation of commitment all involve phenomena linked to organization performance. As human resources management research has become more “strategic,” it has become more associated with the impact of human resources policies on organization performance.<sup>20</sup>

Since separation, the dominant current in public administration has also become isomorphic with its environment. In this case, however, this meant the field moved backward from the central reformist concern of its founders with improving government performance and, instead, developed a focus on constraints. Had public administration been part of the mainstream, such isomorphism would have been tempered by exposure to a larger universe of organizations.

### Development of Public Administration: A History and Synthesis

This section presents a synthesizing account of the field's development, discussing (a) the founding decades, (b) the separation from mainstream organization studies, (c) practitioner-led reforms of the last decades and reactions to them, and (d) the rise of a “public management” current. The unifying theme will be the changing relation of public administration research to performance improvement in government.

#### *The Founding Decades*

At the beginning, there was performance—or, to use that era's idiom, promotion of “economy and efficiency.”<sup>21</sup> White's (1926) early text stated, “The objective of public administration is the most efficient utilization of the resources at the disposal of officials and employees” (p. 2). Gulick (1937) wrote, “In the

science of administration, whether public or private, the basic ‘good’ is efficiency” (pp. 191–192). The founders of public administration were reformers, promoting good management as a means to improve government performance. White argued that growth of the state’s role in society had increased interest in “the business side of government.” He continued, “More and more clearly it is being understood that the promise of American life will never be realized until American administration has been lifted out of the ruts in which it has been left by a century of neglect” (White, 1926, pp. 9, 13; see also Wilson, 1887).

The founders specifically established the field in distinction to public law, which emphasized constraints. White (1926) stated “the study of administration should start from the base of management rather than the foundation of law, and is therefore more absorbed in the affairs of the American Management Association than in the decisions of the courts” (p. 2). While public law’s major objective was “protection of private rights,” public administration’s main objective was “efficient conduct of public business” (White, 1926, pp. 4–5). Three chapters in White’s text discussed legislative and judicial control of agencies, the other 28 organization design and personnel management.

*Herbert Simon and Dwight Waldo: The Road Not Taken*<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after World War II, two young scholars each published widely noted books: Herbert Simon (1947) published *Administrative Behavior*, and Dwight Waldo (1948) published *The Administrative State*. At the time, Simon was clearly a public administration scholar. His first published article (Simon, 1937) was about municipal performance measures. One cannot read *Administrative Behavior* without noticing that it is written from a public administration perspective. And three years later, Simon (Simon et al., 1950) coauthored *Public Administration*. Waldo, by contrast, received his Ph.D. (on which he based his book) in political philosophy. Each, with the iconoclasm of youth, criticized the field’s founders. Each, however, urged the field in different directions, and they argued with each other over the next few years (Simon, 1952; Waldo, 1952).

The two had different subsequent histories. Simon became an icon of social science and won the Nobel Prize for economics. Waldo became an icon of public administration: The American Society of Public Administration’s highest scholarly award is named after him, and 60 years later, his book was the subject of a retrospective collection titled *Revisiting Waldo’s Administrative State* (Rosenbloom & McCurdy, 2006).<sup>23</sup> One continued an astonishingly productive career, while the other wrote little but elucidations of his first book.<sup>24</sup> Waldo’s *The Administrative State* helped set public administration on a separatist path. Simon’s *Administrative Behavior* represented a road not taken.

Simon began his book with a blistering attack on existing public administration, exemplified by Gulick, for promulgating “proverbs” regarding

organization design that suffered from the double flaw of poor logic (some contradicted each other) and lack of empirical testing. Methodologically, Simon called on public administration, as a science of human behavior, to associate itself with social psychology and, more generally, to test propositions about organizations in a more scientific way. Substantively, Simon endorsed the founders' support for "efficiency" as the criterion to judge organizations, although adding a focus on making good organizational decisions was not present in the founding literature. As Bertelli and Lynn (2006) have noted, Waldo later argued—correctly, I think—that, although his attack on the founders is remembered, Simon, with his interest in science and efficiency, actually had much in common with them (p. 50). As noted earlier in this chapter, Simon also endorsed the founders' interest in common elements across organizations. Simon pointed public administration on a path that would have reached out to the emerging field of organization studies.

Waldo's critique of the founders was the opposite of Simon's. Waldo denounced the founders' preoccupation with efficiency. He also rejected their aspirations to science, not for poor execution (as with Simon) but rather for ignoring values, particularly the importance of democracy. He argued that the founders sought expert administration, questionable from a democratic perspective, and centralized hierarchy, violating democracy at work. Waldo believed the field needed to redirect attention toward the creation of "democratic administration"—greater popular participation in setting direction for agencies and greater employee participation inside them. Seen from the perspective of this review, Waldo disparaged the field's attention to how well agencies performed and urged focus instead on process—perhaps the most important constraints that government organizations face, but constraints nonetheless. Waldo's style also displayed great literary flair—a style the field sought to imitate—, but one that Simon (1952) distained as "loose, literary, [and] metaphorical" (p. 496).

In the early 1950s, Simon left public administration to transform the Carnegie Institute of Technology's business school into a research-oriented institution. March and Simon's (1958) *Organizations* was about organizations in general, with no particular government orientation. (March went to Carnegie after getting a degree in political science.) Cyert and March's (1963) *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, specifically dealing with business, followed. Simon's departure was a tragic loss. The field was small enough that the departure of one young, prominent figure actually made a difference, especially at a crucial time when organization studies was growing rapidly in disciplines not traditionally connected to public administration and, thus, when building new links was crucial. One may also speculate that Waldo's approach was attractive for a field traditionally close to political science but now distained by that discipline for preoccupation with "manhole covers"; that by turning to political philosophy, public administration might regain its esteem.

*The Political Turn in the Road*

In the view of public administration founders, a dividing line existed between “politics,” where elected officials decide, and “administration,” where unelected officials should hold sway (Goodnow, 1914; Wilson, 1887). In Goodnow’s classic formulation, politics “has to do with policies or expressions of the state will,” while administration “with the execution of these policies” (p. 1). The founders erected this separation to give unelected officials breathing room from interference from politicians who cared about patronage rather than performance.

Such a line is empirically unrealistic and normatively debatable. Empirically, career officials are strongly involved in policy formulation, as sources of substantive policy ideas and judgments about whether proposals make sense and (often) as advocates for a point of view (generally one consistent with values their agency’s mission embodies). After laws are passed, political decision making by unelected officials continues. Administrative discretion is inevitable in determining specifics of regulations (Kelman, 1981)—How many parts per million of sulfur dioxide should be allowed in the air? Should auto safety regulations require airbags?—as well as for frontline “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003) deciding how to apply policies and, generally, how to treat the public. It is easy, however, to see why a policymaking role for unelected officials might be seen as problematic in a democracy. Finer (1941) proposed, as a normative matter, that the proper role of administrators toward elected officials was “subservience;” this is the most straightforward form of the democratic accountability of unelected officials. There, however, would appear to be nothing undemocratic about a congressional decision to give discretion to such officials—based on the substantive advantages this brings—as long as the decision is itself democratically made.

Following World War II, attacking the politics/administration dichotomy became a major theme in public administration, perhaps as some scholars received government experience and became involved in policymaking. Unelected officials’ participation in the political process was a major element in Appleby’s (1949) work and in Gaus’ (1950) widely noted essay, included in the 10th anniversary edition of *PAR*, called “Trends in the Theory of Public Administration,” which concluded with the flourish, “A theory of public administration means in our time a theory of politics also” (p. 168). Most importantly, a version of this theme—increasing democratic participation in administration—was central to Waldo’s alternative to the founders.<sup>25</sup>

As public administration followed Waldo, these issues became central to the field. An analysis of public administration theory (Denhardt, 1990) concluded that the main change between the 1950s and the 1980s was a shift from “positivist” organizational research to “subjective” discussions about the relationship between administration and politics. The analysis reviewed theory

articles in *PAR* between 1980 and 1985 and classified the major topics as “the role of the public bureaucracy in the governance process,” “the ethics of public service” (identified as “one striking shift in the priorities of public administration theorists in the 1980s”), “citizenship and civic education,” “alternative epistemologies” (mainly questioning positivism, which, some may argue, never established a firm foothold in the field in the first place), contributions “to organization theory generally,” and public choice theory (Denhardt, 1990). Of these, only contributions “to organization theory generally” tied the field to mainstream organization studies.

Discussions during the 1970s and 1980s combined interest in this topic with an emerging separatism. The so-called “new public administration” (Marini, 1971) was a movement of young, politically left-of-center scholars who were influenced by the turbulence of the 1960s and who argued that agencies and the field needed to pay more attention to social equity and Waldo’s “democratic administration.” The new public administration was “less ‘generic’ and more ‘public’ than its forebear” (Frederickson, 1971, p. 316). The so-called “Blacksburg Manifesto” scholars of the 1980s mixed separatism with strong support for an active political role for career officials. Wamsley (1990), in the lead essay in a “Blacksburg” volume, referred to “debilitatingly irrelevant intellectual baggage” inherited from the field’s founders—“(borrowing) heavily from private-sector management techniques” rather than developing “its own theories, concepts, norms, or techniques” (p. 24). The “own theories” sought mostly involved justifying officials’ wide participation in policymaking:

The popular will does not reside solely in elected officials but in a constitutional order that envisions a remarkable variety of legitimate titles to participate in governance. The Public Administration, created by statutes based on this constitutional order, holds one of these titles. Its role, therefore, is not to cower before a sovereign legislative assembly or a sovereign elected executive [but rather] to share in governing wisely and well the constitutional order. (Wamsley et al., 1990, p. 47)

Both empirical and normative inquiries regarding administrators’ roles in policymaking and the public’s role in administration are legitimate, and there is no reason to criticize the field’s initial postwar engagement, especially given the oversimplified view that the founders had articulated. Over the decades, however, pragmatic accommodations have been made between the principle of subordination of unelected officials to democratic control and the reality of a far less passive role for them. Many of these work better in practice than in theory. Democratic participation is also, of course, a problem in our societies, but except to observe the problem needs attention, the outpouring from public administration has not generated much theoretical or empirical progress, compared to work by those formally trained as political philosophers, which few public administration scholars are. This problem, therefore, seems to represent a

gigantic exercise in what Freudians call “work avoidance”—looking for things to occupy oneself other than the difficult-to-solve performance problems that the government actually faces. Moreover, this turn created ghettoization, because these issues are unique rather than shared with organization studies.

The political turn also moved the field closer to concern about constraints (especially when emphasizing limits on actions of unelected officials); public law (e.g., Davis, 1969, 1978) is preoccupied with control of administrative discretion, which is considered a grave danger. Waldo (1968) urged public administration to move away from its hostility to administrative law. Cooper (1990) noted that public law had “experienced a resurgence in public administration” during the 1970s and 1980s, another move in the wrong direction, away from performance.

*Enter the “New Public Management”*

Over the past 20 years, what Kettl (2005) called “a remarkable movement to reform public management has swept the globe” (p. 1; see also Peters, 2001). Hood (1991) labeled this the “new public management”; in the United States, it came to be known as “reinventing government.” The movement came from practitioners and sought public sector self-renewal—a break from the preoccupation with constraints in favor of a drive to improve performance.

Public management reform began in the early 1980s in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Kettl, 2005). In all cases, senior politicians initiated reform. In the background of all three countries was slow growth, fiscal crisis, and a widespread view that government was trying to do more than it could afford and not doing it well enough. In the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher initiated management reforms as part of an antigovernment, conservative ideology, though Tony Blair continued and deepened reform after the Labour party came to power in 1997. In New Zealand and Australia, left-of-center governments introduced management reforms. In the United States, reform grew from President Clinton and Vice President Gore’s effort to reposition Democrats from traditional defense of “big government,” while endorsing a positive government role.

In both New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the first reform measures involved efforts to reduce government spending—New Zealand introduced accrual accounting (to account for the full budgetary cost of programs upfront), and the United Kingdom introduced the “financial management initiative” to reduce waste.<sup>26</sup> In all these countries, the effort then expanded to include the use of performance measurement to establish a new context for public management, whereby managers would be freed from many process rules (e.g., for hiring or budgeting) in exchange for producing improved service/cost performance—a mixture of what became called “let managers manage” and “make managers manage.” Public management reform also included a new attention to the importance of agencies providing good “customer service.” Finally, all



three countries had significant, state-owned infrastructure (e.g., power, railroads, and water), and reform also included privatization, as well as increased “contestability” for other services to competition between in-house and out-sourced production.

In the United States, Osborne and Gaebler (1992), a journalist and a former city manager, published *Reinventing Government*, which, amazingly for a book about public management, became a bestseller and then the basis for the Clinton–Gore administration’s “reinventing government” initiative—formally known, tellingly, as the National *Performance Review*. In the book, the authors argued for government that was “mission driven” rather than rules driven and for using results-oriented performance measures. The authors quoted Patton: “Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what you want them to achieve and they will surprise you with their ingenuity” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, p. 108). They argued that government should “steer not row” or, said differently, should set policy for service delivery but have services delivered through nongovernment parties. “Reinventing government” mixed management reform with workforce downsizing. Reformers attached themselves to a law that Congress passed to begin pushing performance measurement (Kettl, 2005). An effort was made to learn from business, as in the 1997 report *Businesslike Government: Lessons Learned from America’s Best Companies* (Kettl & DiIulio, 1995).<sup>28</sup>

Politicians’ promotion of management reform was quite visible. Less visibly, however, many career officials supported or promoted the efforts. In Sweden, career officials promoted management reform as early as the 1960s (Sundstrom, 2006), and in the United States, career officials promoted introducing total quality management into agencies at the end of the 1980s (Kaboolian, 2000). Teams of civil servants making suggestions for agency improvements produced most of the 1993 Gore reinventing government report (see also Kelman, 2005).

One central theme in reform efforts has been debureaucratization. For the founders, no trade-off existed between bureaucracy’s constraint-promoting role and its impact on performance. White (1926) referred approvingly to Taylor’s influence on public administration (p. 12). Classic discussions of organization design recommended centralized, hierarchical, and rule-driven organizations.<sup>29</sup> More recent reformers, however, have seen bureaucracy as an enemy of performance for reasons similar to Mintzberg’s (1979) criticism of “machine bureaucracy” and Ouchi’s (2003) analysis of public school management (undertaken without awareness of its relationship to new public management).

### *The Empire Strikes Back*

Some public administration scholars embraced reform and aligned themselves with the performance movement. A new current, calling itself “public

management” in conscious self-distinction to public administration, arose with its own version of performance orientation. Particularly in the United Kingdom, a disturbing proportion of the field, however, reacted with cranky skepticism or downright hostility, often displaying nostalgia for good old days of the public sector not needing to concern itself with pesky performance demands.<sup>30</sup> *PAR*’s three editors who served when new public management emerged were all negative. The field’s two most recent handbooks (Ferlie, Lynn, & Pollitt, 2005; Peters & Pierre, 2003) were predominantly critical. A major theme of the essays in *Revisiting Waldo’s Administrative State* was skepticism about new public management, something the book’s introduction noted. The sad result has been that, “unlike in the transition to the twentieth century,” when public sector reform was “led by the Progressives and orthodox public administration,” current transformation efforts have proceeded “largely without intellectual or moral support from academia” (Kettl, 2002, p. 21).

In reacting to reform, public administration’s separatist chickens came home to roost. Practitioners had unwittingly challenged the separatist turn. Thus, new public management caused separatism to become more self-conscious and to develop a theoretical defense of the primacy of constraints over goals in government going beyond any articulated before. Perhaps the most influential in the British torrent of attack was Pollitt’s (1990) *Managerialism and the Public Service*, which popularized the phrase “managerialism” in public administration discourse.<sup>31</sup> Pollitt initially defined this as a belief “that better management will prove an effective solvent for a wide range of economic and social ills,” which, absent the overdramatization, might not appear to be an “-ism” but just the unexceptional claim that good management improves performance.<sup>32</sup> Pollitt did not like the implication of generic management—“the transfer...of managerialism from private-sector corporations to welfare-state services represents the injection of an ideological ‘foreign body’ into a sector previously characterized by quite different traditions of thought” (pp. 1–2, 11). Rhodes (2002) stated, “The coming of the New Right with its love of markets heralded lean times for Public Administration...It found its prescriptions roundly rejected for private sector management skills and marketization” (p. 107). Frederickson (1997) worried about an “excessive and uncritical reliance upon the value assumptions of business administration” (p. 194) in government. Radin (2006) saw generic management as a major flaw of the “performance movement.”

British critics associated new public management with the hostility of Thatcherite Conservatism to the public sector. “Managerialism has become a steadily more prominent component in the policies adopted by right-wing governments towards their public services...[It] is the ‘acceptable face’ of new-right thinking concerning the state” (Pollitt, 1990, p. 11). New public management has also been linked (e.g., Ferlie, Lynn, & Pollitt, 2005) with “public choice” theory, the application of microeconomics to the analysis of government. More broadly, the critics are ideologically skeptical of business.

Pollitt (1990) complained about new public management's "favourable analysis of the achievements of the corporate sector during the last half century" (p. 7). Savoie (1994) objected to "enthusiasm...for the merits of private enterprise" (p. 146). This antibusiness tone was illustrated by an aside that Peters (2001) appended in a footnote to his comment that supporters of the "customer" metaphor see it as trying to provide "the same expectations of quality that they have when dealing with a private-sector firm": "Those of us who deal regularly with airlines and Blue Cross-Blue Shield may consider being treated like the customer of a private concern to be a threat" (pp. 45, 206).

The critics disapproved of importing business terms into government, even those that one might regard in a positive light. An example is enmity against the word *customer*, as in *customer service* (e.g., du Gay, 2000, pp. 108–111; Peters, 2001, p. 45; Pollitt, 1990, pp. 45, 139).<sup>33</sup> Critics have gone beyond observations (Moore, 1995, pp. 36–38) that government "delivers" not just services but also obligations (e.g., to pay taxes or to obey laws), and beyond the observation that those who may be concerned about how a service is delivered often include more than the service's immediate recipients (e.g., consumers as well as farmers are affected by farm subsidies). Instead, critics have anxieties that are more sweeping about the word *customer* as a replacement for *citizen*—that it presents an image of a passive recipient rather than an active agent or an image of one as a selfish monad receiving personal benefits rather than as a participant in a collective enterprise.

Fretting about business metaphors has occasioned resurrection of the politics/administration dichotomy in the context of concern about introduction of the idea from business that public managers should behave as "entrepreneurs" (Doig & Hargrove, 1987). Terry (1993) called a *PAR* article, "Why We Should Abandon the Misconceived Quest to Reconcile Public Entrepreneurship with Democracy," concluding that "the concept is dangerous and thus, public administration scholars should avoid using it if at all possible" (p. 393). In an unfortunate passage, Peters (2001) maintained, "It is not clear that in systems of democratic accountability we really want civil servants to be extremely creative" (p. 113). Savoie (1994) stated, "Bureaucracy is designed to administer the laws and policies set by elected politicians, and as a result, authority delegated to career officials must be handled bureaucratically in order to accept direction" (p. 330).<sup>34</sup>

What should one make of this? Particularly in New Zealand, some of the intellectual underpinning of reform used principal-agent and public-choice theory (though, oddly, the Labour Party instituted reforms). It is legitimate to question public choice analysis for reasons similar to those appearing in mainstream organization theory criticizing principal-agent models and other import of microeconomics into organization studies (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005; Ghoshal & Insead, 1996). People also, of course, legitimately hold

different views on the overall role of business in society. It, however, is flawed to elide the concern that health care will become a for-profit enterprise, available only to those able to pay for it, using management tools to improve performance, simply because for-profit firms use those tools. As for the customer idea, it works better in practice than in theory. In reality, the alternative to treating people as customers is not typically treating them like citizens but treating them like dirt. Since frontline staffs easily understand its meaning, the word “customer” provides a powerful metaphor for driving performance improvement.

A conscious defense of the primacy of constraints over goals emerged in embrace of what frequently became referred to as “traditional” public administration values.<sup>35</sup> Savoie (1994) worried about “rejecting traditional public-administration concerns with accountability and control, and giving way to the business-management emphasis on productivity, performance, and service to clients” (p. 283). Peters (2001) used the phrase “cherished traditions of personnel and financial management” (p. 36) to refer to bureaucratic rules; Peters’ references to “traditional” values (e.g., probity, impartiality, etc.) appear in at least six places (pp. 88, 108, 121, 125, 129, 200). Thus, the bane of government is presented as a virtue. “Performance” is also presented as a negative word. Radin (2006) boldly called a book *Challenging the Performance Movement*. Lynn (2006) characterized a salutary, if innocuous, statutory change in the legal purpose of government training that the reinventing government program promoted—changing it from providing “training related to official duties” to “training to improve individual and organizational performance”—as supporting a “darker view of reinvention” (p. 113).

The critics rejected reformers’ attacks on bureaucracy and embraced constraints. Du Gay’s (2000) *In Praise of Bureaucracy* lauded bureaucracy for promoting constraints, while demeaning the significance of performance goals that the bureaucracy might harm. In DuGay’s book, phrases such as “probity” and “reliability” abounded. Du Gay praised bureaucracy for being “ordered, cautious,” while new public management judged agencies for “failure to achieve objectives which enterprise alone has set for it” (p. 87), presumably performance and cost consciousness. “If the rule of law is to be upheld and there is to be a system of accountability within government the hierarchy becomes the crucial link between ministers and the decisions taken in their name by their numerous subordinates in the field” (Peters & Wright, 1996, p. 632). Peters (2001) mused about “a return to the bureaucratic Garden of Eden” (p. 200).

Sometimes, the tone is lackadaisical, displaying the opposite of the urgency about performance that reformers sought and evoking the atmosphere of a gentleman’s club. Du Gay (2000) belittled “a ‘can do’ approach to the business of government” and the “dangers that the demand for enthusiasm pose” (pp. 92–93) to the traditional role of civil servants as advisors who, without displaying commitment, present ministers with options and emphasize

pitfalls of proposals.<sup>36</sup> The literature on “public service motivation,” to be discussed in the following section, argues that commitment to agency mission is an important source of motivation for good performance in government, counteracting the more meager economic incentives agencies can offer. Du Gay, however, mocked the effort of one senior civil servant “to ensure that her staff were infused with a discernible sense of ‘mission’” (p. 129). Similarly, though others believe fresh blood often invigorates organizations, du Gay was skeptical of recruiting outsiders. He quoted a business manager brought in to run an agency who stated, “I don’t expect to become a ‘civil servant,’” and said, “Quite what benefits are meant to accrue from having someone occupying a senior position within the Civil Service who doesn’t want to be a civil servant are not at all clear” (pp. 128–129).

Although many critics of new public management come from the political left, this emphasis suggests traditionalist conservatism as well. Terry (1990) cited Burke’s worry about subjecting “our valuable institutions” to the “mercy of untried speculations” (p. 401). Radin (2006) fretted about “unintended consequences” of using performance measures to improve performance (pp. 16–19), which, as Hirschman (1991) noted in *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, is a classic conservative argument against change—the “perversity thesis” that “everything backfires” (chapter 2).<sup>37</sup>

Contemporary bureaucracy advocates should take pause that Austrian economists such as von Mises and Hayek, who advocated a very limited government role in society, favored a bureaucratic form of government organization because it promoted impartial treatment and consistency over time, which they saw as important ways that government allowed markets to work (Armbruster, 2005). For these economists, constraints loomed large because they believed government’s goals should be modest. For those envisioning a more active government role, this should be disquieting.

In their defense, critics were correct to note that issues with the special contexts of government often make performance improvement efforts harder than in firms. It is also easy to sympathize with the sarcastic dismissal of guru nostrums, often taken from business bestsellers, which have formed part of public management reform. Furthermore, the bark in the critiques is often worse than the bite. Pollitt (1990) softened his antimanagerialist message considerably in his last chapters, though this is not what is generally remembered. The “alternatives” to managerialism that he presented all “place performance and quality (as defined by consumers) above unreflective rule-following or conformity to precedent”; Pollitt agreed that it might be argued that all the major alternatives point in roughly the same direction as managerialism (p. 175). Radin (2006) stated in her last chapter that the “performance movement” needed to change its ways and democratically “involve a range of actors” in establishing performance goals, but few performance measurement advocates would disagree. Du Gay (2000) stated, “The function of officials...

cannot be exhaustively defined in terms of achieving results with maximum 'economic efficiency,' 'value for money' or 'best value.' There is [sic] a host of other obligations and responsibilities imposed on state officials" (p. 144); this is not exceptional, except that earlier pages were confined to belittling concern with results. None of all this added up to the animus that animates these attacks.

#### *Performance-Oriented Scholarship in Public Administration*

Public administration has a minority performance-oriented contingent, many of them scholars at the University of Georgia and the University of Syracuse, two of the strongest U.S. public administration programs. Rainey's (2003) text *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations* took a performance-oriented approach and cited some mainstream organization literature.<sup>38</sup> In a lecture to the American Society of Public Administration, Ingraham (2005) stated, "Performance matters so much for government...that we *must* keep the fundamental performance promise: Our only choice is to use taxpayer and donor dollars in the very best way possible" (p. 391, emphasis in original). Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) reported on the Government *Performance* Project (for state governments) and the Federal *Performance* Project, both foundation-funded efforts designed to provide information to inform the public, rather than to constitute research.<sup>39</sup> The projects measured and rated management capacity, which the authors defined as "government's intrinsic ability to marshal, develop, direct, and control its financial, human, physical, and information resources" (Ingraham et al., 2003, p. 15). Unfortunately, measurement was limited to management systems (though these included a capacity to "manage for results" by developing and using performance measures) rather than to substantive performance. To explain senior federal government manager performance, Selden and Brewer (2000) used a structural equation model with employee survey data to test Locke and Latham's (1990a; 1990b) "high performance cycle." Perry and colleagues (e.g., Angle & Perry, 1981; Lee & Perry, 2002) empirically examined issues, such as employee motivation in the public sector and the impact of information technology investments on government productivity. In a series of papers, Meier and O'Toole (2002, 2003; O'Toole & Meier, 2003) examined the influence of various managerial and organizational practices on variance in school-level performance on Texas educational tests. In the United Kingdom, a group at Cardiff University (e.g., Boyne, 2006; Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2006) studied local government performance using variance across them for quantitative empirical analysis.

#### *Public Management*

Scholars interested in government performance improvement usually come from public policy schools or think tanks. During the 1970s, several universities (e.g.,

Harvard, Berkeley, Duke, Michigan, Texas at Austin, and Minnesota) established master's degree programs in Public Policy as opposed to Public Administration. The distinction involved the greater attention that public policy programs gave to the substance of policies (e.g., health or national security policy), analyzed using microeconomics, prescriptive decision theory, and econometric evaluation research. Starting at Harvard, however, these programs also began a new current in studying public organizations called "public management."

Public management was defined two ways. First, it focused on the behavior of top executives rather than on issues that were of more interest to middle or functional managers (Rainey, 1990, p. 162).<sup>40</sup> Second, to many, the word *management* rather than *administration* sounded more muscular, implying "a decisiveness and proactiveness that appear to be lacking in government" (p. 171). Public policy programs sought to train people "able to *move* an agency" rather than train them to play just "a custodial role" (Stokes, as cited in Lynn, 2003, p. 16).<sup>41</sup> Public management thus offered a new emphasis on performance. Although many U.S.-centric public management scholars had never heard the phrase "new public management," some wrote with sympathy about its ideas.<sup>42</sup>

The most important work in the public management tradition is Moore's (1995) *Creating Public Value*. The central concept in the book is "public value," or creation of government outputs that citizens value more than these outputs cost to produce. "The aim of managerial work in the public sector is to create *public* value just as the aim of managerial work in the *private* sector is to create private value" (p. 28, emphasis in original).

Moore (1995) criticized the expectation, perpetuated by the political system, that public managers "be faithful agents of...mandates," which "produces a characteristic mindset...of administrators or bureaucrats rather than of entrepreneurs, leaders, or executives" (p. 17). This mindset "denies the public sector the key ingredient on which the private sector specifically relies to remain responsive, dynamic, and value creating: namely, the adaptability and efficiency that come from using the imaginations of people called managers to combine what they can sense of public demands with access to resources and control over operational capacity to produce value" (p. 17).

*Creating Public Value* sought to promote "strategic management" in government. Broadly, this meant that "instead of simply devising the means for achieving mandated purposes, [managers] become important agents in helping to discover and define what is valuable to do. Instead of being responsible only for guaranteeing continuity, they become important innovators in changing what public organizations do and how they do it" (p. 20). Moore saw managerial discretion as "an opportunity for leadership." He specifically stated that business schools' work on corporate strategy was relevant to thinking about strategy for a public manager. A public manager's strategy, Moore argued, should have three elements—goals reflecting the public value that

agencies seek to create; an account of how one can achieve support for these goals in the “authorizing environment;” and a plan to create operating capacity to achieve the goals. Since all of these jobs are in service of creating public value, Moore’s greatest contribution may be expanding demands on the manager for what he or she needs to achieve good performance—not only to create operating capacity but also to participate in the political process.

Another influential book is Barzelay’s (1992) *Breaking Through Bureaucracy*. The book is based on a case study of the transformation of an overhead organization in Minnesota, responsible for personnel, purchasing, information technology, and other administrative functions, into two separate organizations: (a) a fee-for-service voluntary source of purchasing and information technology services and (b) an oversight function responsible for regulatory control of these areas. Barzelay characterized public management reform as a break from the “bureaucratic paradigm” of the Progressive era in favor of a “postbureaucratic paradigm.” He presented a number of contrasts between the two—the former “defines itself both by the amount of resources it controls and by the tasks it performs” and the latter “by the results it achieves for its customers” (p. 8).

Other scholars at public policy schools embraced a performance orientation that focused, more than Moore, on internal operations instead of the agency’s external environment. Bardach’s (1998) *Getting Agencies to Work Together* is a study of cross-agency collaborations in which agencies took joint responsibility for delivering a service (e.g., social services for people with multiple problems). His book was methodologically and prescriptively the strongest of the growing but generally weak literature on this topic. Bardach’s first chapter is straightforwardly called “Creating Value Through Collaboration,” and it endorses “managing for results” and managerial “purposiveness” (“a combination of public spiritedness and creativity;” p. 6). Behn’s (1991) *Leadership Counts*, a case study of a successful state program training disadvantaged workers, sought to explain, in a guru-like style, management practices that help explain successful performance. Behn’s (2001) *Rethinking Democratic Accountability*, an important theoretical work, argued that government agencies’ accountability should change from accountability for process and rule-following—respecting constraints—to results (performance) accountability. Behn was also the most prolific of the public management scholars who wrote about nonfinancial performance measurement (e.g., 1991, 2003, 2006). Kelman’s (1990) *Procurement and Public Management* had an anti-bureaucracy thrust similar to Barzelay. Kelman’s (2005) *Unleashing Change* was a quantitative empirical study that analyzed a survey of 1,600 frontline civil servants, studying a change process in the procurement system that was part of “reinventing government” and that sought to implement ideas from Kelman’s (1990) earlier book.

To this list one should also add scholars at think tanks, most prominently Kettl and Light, then of the Brookings Institution. Kettl, Ingraham,



Sanders, and Horner (1996) wrote a study on civil service reform that was subtitled “Building a Government that Works.” They noted, “Government’s performance can only be as good as the people who do its work,” and they called to debureaucratize a system that created inflexibility and insufficiently rewarded good performance and to build a “culture of performance” along with “a culture of public service” (pp. 3–5).<sup>43</sup> Light’s (2005) *Four Pillars of High Performance* presented research by RAND about organizational performance, although the book’s orientation was not limited to government agencies.<sup>44</sup> Using an interesting methodology, Light asked RAND researchers to think about the organization they knew best, inquired about practices at the organization, and then used regression to develop predictors of high performance, such as delegating authority for routine decisions, investing in new ideas, and managing using performance measures, three of the seven strongest predictors. Altshuler and Behn (1997) and Borins (1998), university-based academics, wrote about determinants of government innovation using applications to the Ford Foundation/Kennedy School of Government, Innovations in American Government award program as their data source.

What should one make of the public management current? One of its remarkable features is that it has created a wedge between preoccupation with the political role of unelected officials and public administration separatism: It incorporates participation of unelected officials in the political process, but in service of better agency performance.

More generally, public management is often seen as radically departing from public administration tradition; however, I believe one should see it as the heir of the field’s founders. This is an unconventional view. True, the founders advocated separating politics and administration; indeed, Moore (1995) saw this as the essence of “traditional doctrines of public administration” that he was criticizing (pp. 21, 74–76). However, their actual purpose was to argue for the *importance* of public administration: Politics and administration were to be kept separate so agencies could perform effectively, without political interference that was likely to be indifferent to competence. Furthermore, as stated earlier in this chapter, it is unfair to suggest that more recent public administration scholarship accepted this dichotomy. Second, the founders used different language, such as “economy and efficiency” rather than “performance.” Barzelay (1992) contrasted “efficiency” from the bureaucratic paradigm with “quality and value” in postbureaucracy (pp. 118–121). I would argue that, although the words do indeed suggest different emphases, both worry about goals rather than constraints. Finally, the founders advocated the bureaucratic form and “scientific management,” while contemporary performance advocates seek to “break through bureaucracy.” However, the founders would have argued that bureaucracy would best produce the “results” that Barzelay favors—though they would not have used that language.

Lastly, virtually all public management literature uses case studies—with few using quantitative or experimental work—making it methodologically

weaker than the best work coming from public administration, from both younger and older scholars. This is partly because of the focus on top leader behavior, which drives one-off accounts and partly because of Harvard Business School's influence on Harvard's Kennedy School. The literature also heavily focuses on "best practice" studies, which Lynn (1996) rightly criticized for selection on the dependent variable. The public management turn, therefore, has produced no *methodological* renewal.

### Public Management: A Research Agenda for Organization Studies

A number of issues are more important in a government than in a business context because they involve organizational phenomena that are more central to agencies than to firms. For this reason, these issues have been underresearched in mainstream organization studies, though they fit comfortably into a mainstream sensibility. An organization studies research agenda that took public management seriously—and a public administration research agenda that took goals and, hence, performance, seriously—would thus increase attention to the following.

*Bureaucratic organization forms.* This issue has virtually disappeared from the mainstream screen since Mintzberg (1979), except for interesting work about how routines evolve (e.g., Feldman, 2000; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Pentland & Feldman, 2003). Bureaucratic organizations' impacts on performance and on alternatives to bureaucracy remain important to government. Research questions might, for example, include (a) interaction effects between bureaucratic structure and dispositions or between internal rules and the nature of external (e.g., media) oversight in explaining behavioral reactions to a bureaucratic environment; (b) field experiments examining performance impacts of differentially rule-bound or hierarchical environments in different decision situations and for different employees; and (c) techniques that managers might use to counteract the signal a rule-bound environment sends that one's job consists of nothing beyond following rules.

*Nonfinancial performance measurement.* New public management has promoted use of nonfinancial performance measures as the public sector's counterpart to profit. Some theoretical and empirical literature on the topic from public administration and economics exists (e.g., Hatry, 1999; Propper & Wilson, 2003), as does significant mainstream literature on goal setting's impact on performance (Latham, 2007). The topic needs considerable additional theoretical and empirical work (particularly fieldwork in agencies) about performance measurement as a performance-enhancing intervention in the absence of financial incentives for employees to meet goals.<sup>45</sup>

*Public service motivation.* There is evidence (e.g., Brehm & Gates, 1999; Crewson, 1997; Frank & Lewis, 2004; Houston, 2000; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998)

that better performance, which is elicited by extrinsic incentives in firms, can be elicited by intrinsic rewards in government service. The general topic of motivating good performance using noncash incentives, and the specific question of how managers can encourage public service motivation (Grant, 2007), needs better empirical/theoretical work.

*Rare events: Emergency management, finding terrorists.* Government agencies must frequently prepare for the unusual, seek out needles in haystacks, and display high-reliability performance. Performing well in such situations requires a mix of operational (e.g., managing surge capacity) and cognitive (e.g., noticing the unusual in the first place) capabilities. Much of the existing literature about “situational awareness” has an individual cognition, engineering flavor (e.g., Endsley, Bolte, & Jones, 2003). Snook (2000) discussed situation awareness in an organization context and, indeed, a government context (F-15 fighters accidentally shooting down Army helicopters over northern Iraq in 1994).<sup>46</sup> A small body of literature also exists about high-reliability organizations, from both public administration (e.g., LaPorte & Consolini, 1991; Rochlin, 1996) and organization studies (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Weick and Sutcliffe’s research program, I believe, should be more rigorously empirical in its examination of mindfulness and of whether trade-offs exist between routine performance and mindfulness. Tushman and O’Reilly’s (1996) “ambidexterity” construct, both for emergency management and for detecting weak environmental change signals (e.g., new terrorist tactics), may be relevant here as well but needs operationalization in a government context.

*Interorganizational production and governance.* In recent years, it has become common to speak of a shift from “government” to “governance” in delivering public performance. Governance involves “the processes and institutions, both formal and informal, that guide and restrain the collective activities of a group,” while government is “the subset that acts with authority and creates formal obligations” (Keohane & Nye, 2000, p. 12). Kettl (2002) noted, “‘Governance’ is a way of describing the links between government and its broader environment” (p. 119). To some extent, this literature parallels that of organization studies about cross-firm alliances (e.g., Powell, 1990; Podolny & Page, 1998).

The overwhelming bulk of cross-boundary production occurs through contracting and other indirect policy tools that Salamon (1981; 2002) discusses, as well as through collaboration within government across agency boundaries (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Bardach, 1998; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Thomas, 2003). Enough examples, however, exist—from mundane “adopt a highway” programs, to momentous public-private collaboration against terrorism—that newer forms of “collaborative governance” should not be ignored (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Contracting is a crucial way that public services are delivered (Kettl, 1988; Kelman, 2002), and is more important in agencies than in firms. Determinants of contractor performance have received some attention in organization studies, often from a transaction-cost economics perspective (e.g., Mayer & Argyres, 2004; Mayer & Nickerson, 2005; Srinivasan & Brush, 2006). There are also a few empirical articles about this topic in a government context (Brown & Potoski, 2003, 2006; Milward & Provan, 2003; Provan & Milward, 1995). Compared to its importance in government, this domain is underresearched. For contracting, the main question is about predictors of contractor performance; in particular, more work that is empirical and that tests the performance impact of relational/trust-based models versus principal-agent models is needed for contract management (Van Slyke, 2007), including possible impacts of moderator variables. For cross-agency collaboration, questions involve incentives for collaboration and evolution of collaborative institutions absent (in contrast to cross-firm alliances) a profit incentive, as well as collaborations' impact on performance, about which researchers know virtually nothing. Important questions about "governance" fall outside of the areas that mainstream organization theory has hitherto studied. In a world where organization studies took government seriously, however, that would be an opportunity, not a problem.

### Conclusion

The agendas of those researching government and business will never be identical. Both kinds of organizations have important, unique issues. Those interested in public management, for example, care little about corporate strategy research. It is possible, however, to mix questions from mainstream organization theory creatively with the special political context of government; examples are Hammond and Thomas' (1989) work about departmentalization design decisions and broader work (e.g., Moe, 1993) about the impact of political choices regarding agency location on agency decisions.

Greater involvement in public management problems would be good for mainstream organization studies. Research access to agencies is relatively easy. Rich presence of archival and memoir data makes agencies a fruitful research location, an opportunity that some who study decision making, leadership, escalation of commitment, social loafing, and sense making (e.g., Eden, 2004; Snook, 2000; Staw, 1981) already use. Greater public sector involvement can be good for organization studies for another reason. Isolating public administration from organization studies encouraged the former to pay too much attention to constraints; it also discouraged the latter from paying enough attention to ethical issues for firms. Exposure to a public environment may encourage rebalancing. Scholars studying business may furthermore be able to adapt material that public administration scholars have developed about managing constraints to a business context.<sup>47</sup>

Most importantly, the public sector needs help with its performance problems. Mainstream organization studies can provide help by having mainstream scholars engage these problems and by providing public administration exposure to the mainstream to give public administration a greater dose of the performance orientation that the government needs, as well as of the contemporary methods that can generate research that is useful to help the government.

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### Endnotes

1. It should be noted that many outside of the field have rightly criticized the casualness about causality in regression-based analysis that marks much of mainstream organization research.
2. To be sure, mainstream organization studies have suffered ongoing bouts of anxiety (e.g., Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001) that its research is insufficiently useful to practitioners. Furthermore, of course, one should not, of course, exaggerate the successes of mainstream research in generating results conclusive enough to be used for performance improvement, though the nihilist view that we have learned nothing would also be wrong.
3. Wilson (1989) used the word *tasks* to describe what I call “goals,” and Simons used the phrase “boundary systems” to describe what I call “constraints.”
4. In linear programming or economics, one often speaks of maximizing goals subject to constraints.
5. A helpful way to think about the difference between goals and constraints, although it does not apply perfectly, is in terms of the common distinction in moral philosophy between “negative” and “positive” duties (Russell, 1980; Tooley, 1980). Negative duties are those that require one to refrain from some action (e.g., do not kill), and positive duties are those that require one to undertake some action (e.g., save people who are dying). Constraints can generally be respected if an organization does nothing—if an agency lets no contracts, it will not violate the constraint that contracting officials should not award contracts to relatives; if it has no program to combat terrorism, it will not risk violating the due process rights of terrorist suspects. Meeting goals almost always requires action. Simons (1995) stated, “If I want my employees to be creative and entrepreneurial, am I better off telling them what to do or telling them what not to do? The answer is the latter. Telling people what to do by establishing standard operating procedures and rule books discourages the initiative and creativity unleashed by empowered, entrepreneurial employees. Telling them what not to do allows innovation, but within clearly defined limits...Boundary systems are stated in negative terms or as minimum standards” (p. 84). One should also distinguish between constraints

and multiple goals. If the U.S. government seeks good relations with India and Pakistan (where improving relations with one may hurt relations with the other), the State Department faces multiple goals. These are not the same as constraints. Those arguing for a “stakeholder” rather than a “shareholder” view of the firm are typically arguing for the importance of goals other than shareholder wealth maximization, although sometimes they are also arguing that greater attention should be paid to constraints (e.g., accounting ethics). Thus, Freeman and McVey (as cited in Sundaram & Inkpen, 2004) argued, “The stakeholder framework does not rely on a single overriding management objective for all decisions,” and Clarkson (1995, p. 112) argued, “The economic and social purpose of the corporation is to create and distribute wealth and value to all its primary stakeholder groups.” In both cases, the corporation is pursuing goals—creating value that then must be distributed—not merely respecting constraints.

6. More broadly, greater attention is paid in government to mistakes than to achievements. White (1926) observed that public officials perceive that “whenever we make a mistake, some one jumps on us for it, but whenever we do something well nobody pays any attention to us. We never get any recognition except when we get ‘bawled out’” (p. 243–244). Half a century later, Derek Rayner, the CEO of Marks and Spencer brought into the British government under Thatcher, noted that, in government, “Failure is always noted and success is forgotten” (Rayner, as cited in Hennessy, 1989, p. 595).
7. These are long-standing facts about government. In an earlier era (and still in many countries, especially in the developing world), constraints were often violated (e.g., by corruption or political favoritism), making respect for constraints a more natural part of the political agenda. White (1926) noted that government needed to apply a standard of consistent treatment of cases in a way unnecessary in business. The long-standing focus on constraints explains the lack of attention, until recent decades, to development of nonfinancial performance measures in government—agencies’ most important counterparts to firms’ profit measure—including issues of measurement and standardization (a counterpart to GAAP for nonfinancial government performance metrics).
8. The bureaucratic form has become so associated with government that, for example, Wilson’s (1989) classic book on government agencies was simply titled *Bureaucracy*, and political scientists generally refer to government agencies generically by the name “the bureaucracy.”
9. Over the last 30 years, a distinction has developed between those who call the field “public management” and those who continue to use the older phrase “public administration.” The significance of this terminological pluralism will be discussed in a later section.
10. Lewin’s (1958) early research about attitude change in groups, while not involving small groups inside government, was about how agencies might persuade people to eat odd cuts of meat during wartime rationing.
11. The second number includes students studying social work, so the real contrast is larger. The number of MBA students has more than doubled since 1980, while the number of MPA/social work students has increased by about half.

12. In 1986 one conservative columnist wrote, “We should be eternally grateful that government is stupid and bungling,” and added, “I want a government that is stupid, lethargic, and low-performing.” Barry Goldwater expressed a similar sentiment in *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Behn, 2005, pp. 1–2).
13. Although this will not be a major theme in this chapter because it centers on organization studies, parallel to the separation of public administration from organization studies, a separation from political science, the other discipline to which the field was traditionally connected, has also occurred. The reasons were somewhat different. During the 1950s, political science began using more sophisticated, quantitative methods; in the 1980s, the field became interested in formal modeling. This favored research on individual voting behavior or congressional roll call votes over studies of organizations because large sample sizes made them more amenable to quantitative analysis. The new political science also had little sympathy for public administration’s practical approach; in their view, “public administration concerns the lower things of government, details for lesser minds”—frequently ridiculed as obsession with “manhole covers” (Waldo, 1990, p. 74; see also Fesler, 1990; Kettl, 2002). Political science, therefore, began, in effect, to shun public administration. By 1962 the American Political Science Association (APSA) report, “Political Science as a Discipline,” mentioned public administration “only in passing,” and the 1983 APSA compendium did not even include it as a subfield (Henry, 1990; Kettl, 2002, p. 84). Currently, most of the meager body of political science research on organizations is written in a principal-agent tradition and discusses relations between legislatures and agencies (for summaries, see Bendor, 1990; Bendor, Glazer, & Hammond, 2001). A small body of work is closer to mainstream organization studies (e.g., Miller, 1992; Hammond, 1993). Carpenter’s (2001) work about the efforts of senior public managers a century ago to build operating capacity and political support has an extraordinarily modern ring, although it involved managers working long ago.
14. The Public and Nonprofit division of the Academy of Management had 497 academic members as of 2006.
15. *The Handbook of Public Administration* (Peters & Pierre, 2003) had a section called “Organization Theory and Public Administration,” although the topics discussed were idiosyncratic enough to suggest lack of broad familiarity with the field.
16. Younger scholars (e.g., Heinrich, 2000; Heinrich & Fournier, 2004; Bertelli, 2006; Hill, 2006) have tried to move the field toward mainstream social science. As this chapter proceeds, the reader may note the dominance of books over articles in citations. This is because the academic culture of emphasizing papers over books—reflecting a methodological shift to bounded empirical work—is just beginning in public management.
17. Mosher (1956) noted that, for this reason, the journal was “not itself an adequate or appropriate outlet for more than a very few research reports” (p. 272).
18. The phrase “generic” is negative, suggesting bland inferiority (e.g., to call wine “generic” is an insult).

19. For research about firms, the danger—and the worry the Walsh et al. paper expresses—is that constraints are underresearched (consider the somewhat orphan status of business ethics research). I will return to this toward the end of this chapter.
20. Some organization theory literature (e.g., Meyer & Gupta, 1994) has sought to problematize the concept of “performance” in organizations.
21. The phrases do not have the same connotation: “Economy and efficiency” suggested strong emphasis on saving money, i.e., treating performance as a constant, while reducing the cost of producing it (e.g., White, 1926; Gulick, 1937), while “performance” suggests emphasis on quality as a variable. However, one early author did argue, “When we say efficiency, we think of homes saved from disease, of boys and girls in school prepared for life, of ships and mines protected against disaster” (as cited in Waldo, 1948, p. 196). Both the words “efficiency” and “performance” are alternatives to emphasis on constraints.
22. Bertelli and Lynn’s (2006) work was extremely helpful in preparing this section of the review (chapters 2–3).
23. Simon received the Waldo Award in 1999, a surreal event for many reasons, including their earlier hostility. The public administration section of the APSA actually conducted a formal debate at its 2005 meeting about whether *Administrative Behavior* or *The Administrative State* was the most influential public administration book of the previous 50 years (Rosenbloom & McCurdy, 2006b).
24. Bertelli and Lynn (2006, p. 179) noted the closing sentence in Waldo (1952) stating that Simon might become a major figure “if he can resist the temptation to make a career of defense of his first book” (p. 503) and then noting that this “is the fate that awaited Waldo.”
25. Somewhat later, this became a theme in political science as well (e.g., Lowi, 1969; Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981; Gruber, 1987).
26. The United States went through a similar effort around the same time with the Reagan-era “Grace Commission,” named after a corporate CEO who headed an effort led by private sector managers to identify wasteful spending produced by poor management.
27. The spread of reform might be analyzed through a neo-institutionalist lens as a fad, but the reinventing government program was launched with nary any foreign influence, and it is hard to imagine that Thatcher received her ideas from New Zealand.
28. By contrast, business managers brought in as volunteers had been responsible for the Reagan-era Grace Commission.
29. A contemporary descendent of this view is the argument for rules/standard operating procedures in terms of their roles in creating organizational capabilities (e.g., Nelson & Winter, 1982, chapter 6; March, Schulz, & Zhou, 2000).
30. The U.K. hostility is noteworthy in that these efforts have gone on long and visibly. The lack of empirical research is particularly unfortunate given the plethora of government-generated data that could be analyzed.
31. The expression recurs endlessly in the chapters in Ferlie, Lynn, and Pollitt (2005). This word occasionally appears in critical management studies theory (e.g., Clegg & Hardy, 1996), generally to mean a mainstream approach centering on managers in organizations rather than on workers or other constituencies.



32. Adding “-ism” to a common word typically warns of something ominous being hinted.
33. Another example is hostility to the idea of “entrepreneurship” among non-elected officials, a topic to which I will return in a slightly different context in the following section.
34. Other critics (e.g., Peters & Wright, 1996), however, expressed the opposite worry, that the distinction between “steering” and “rowing” in Osborne and Gaebler (1992), and hence in new public management, recreates the politics/administration divide, reducing the ability of nonelected officials to participate in policymaking.
35. The previous discussion of the founding decades of academic public administration suggests that, at least for the United States, the reference should be to traditional values in public-sector *practice* rather than to public administration *theory*.
36. The mainstream literatures on cognitive biases, groupthink, and escalation of commitment (e.g., Bazerman, 2005; Janis, 1982; Staw, 1981) indeed warns of dangers of premature commitment and inappropriate failure to consider disconfirmatory evidence. One should seek, however, to create ability for managers and organizations to reduce these problems in decision making while still taking advantage of the performance-enhancing impacts of belief in a goal. Minimally, why there should be a division of labor between career officials and politicians whereby the latter specializes in enthusiasm while the former specializes in warding it off is not clear.
37. Perverse consequences of course occur, but the appropriate comparison is not between a perfect change, without such consequences, and an imperfect one where they are found, but between an imperfect change and the status quo.
38. Rainey’s master’s degree is in psychology and his Ph.D. is from a public administration program housed within a business school.
39. The projects were undertaken in cooperation with *Governing* and *Government Executive* magazines respectively, both publications aimed at senior government managers.
40. An academic pecking order phenomenon was also at play here because public policy programs were generally at universities with higher standing than those with public administration programs; faculty at public policy schools occasionally stated with arrogance that public administration graduates would work for their graduates.
41. Looking back to an earlier era, Savoie (1994), a public administration separatist, wrote, “The term administration rather than management best described government operations...The role of administrator involved the applying of formalized procedures” (p. 172).
42. A new journal, broadly supporting public management reform, was revealingly called the *International Public Management Journal*; it contained a number of papers defending new public management (e.g., Behn, 1998; Gruening, 2001).
43. They therefore saw a public service culture in the service of performance not as a justification for separatism.
44. RAND also published its own collection *High-Performance Government* (Klitgaard & Light, 2005), focusing specifically on government.

45. The business literature on stakeholder management and the balanced scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) also discusses nonfinancial performance issues, but certainly for the latter, and mostly for the former (Walsh, 2005), the nonfinancial performance measures are seen as being at the service of a superordinate goal of financial performance. For public organizations, no such subordination exists; nonfinancial and financial (in a public-sector context, cost control and/or efficiency) performance measures have independent status.
46. Currently a business school academic, Snook was an Army officer and West Point instructor before writing the dissertation forming the basis for the book.
47. Public administration literature is less relevant to questions of stakeholder management and conflict resolution than one might imagine because this literature (e.g., on political management, Moore, 1995; Heymann, 1987; on public deliberation, Reich, 1990) assumes a context of decision making in a democratic political system that does not apply to firms.

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